



AGENCY OVERSIGHT

Cuts loom for agency funding libraries and museums, as Trump installs new leader

Institute of Museum and Library Services, the primary source of federal support for U.S. libraries and museums, faces major cuts to its staffing and funding.



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The largest source of federal funding for libraries and museums across the country is facing major cuts to its operations.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a small, independent agency with approximately 75 employees, is expected to soon lose more than about half its workforce, and will be reduced to only core statutory functions.

President Donald Trump [signed an executive order last week](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/) (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/continuing-the-reduction-of-the-federal-bureaucracy/>) eliminating IMLS “to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law.”

The executive order also targets six other small agencies and programs — the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, U.S. Agency for Global Media, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in the Smithsonian Institution, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, Community Development Financial Institutions Fund and the Minority Business Development Agency.

“Such entities shall reduce the performance of their statutory functions and associated personnel to the minimum presence and function required by law,” the executive order states.

IMLS is the primary source of federal support for U.S. libraries and museums. The agency supports them through grants, research and policy development. The agency has about 75 employees. As of fiscal 2024, it had an [annual budget of nearly \\$295 million](https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/ims-budget-table-fy-2023-2025.pdf). (<https://www.ims.gov/sites/default/files/2024-05/ims-budget-table-fy-2023-2025.pdf>)

An IMLS employee, who requested anonymity to avoid retaliation, said the agency could be cut down to 30 people, and that some remaining staff may be moving to the Labor Department.

According to the employees, IMLS staffers were told in a March 17 town hall that the agency would soon look very different under Trump's executive order, and "could be down to the studs," in terms of overall staffing.

IMLS employees had until March 19 to apply for Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA) or Voluntary Separation Incentive Payments (VSIP). Many agencies across the federal government are making the same offer to employees, before proceeding with layoffs through a Reduction in Force.

The IMLS employee said staff may receive RIF notices as soon as next week.

"It's devastating to the communities that we serve, the libraries and museums across this country," the employee said.

Among its services, IMLS issues library grants to each state and territory, based on population.

"That money is given directly to state agencies, and those agencies can use that money however they think is best," the employee said.

Those grants go toward a variety of state and local services — including workforce development, digital literacy, after-school programs for children, and field trips for students to visit museums and historical sites. The employee said IMLS is also a major source of funding for internet connectivity programs in rural areas.

"That's important, out in rural areas of the country where there is no internet. They can check out a hotspot or visit a location where they can get free internet. Maybe a bookmobile will come by in their area, and they can use the WiFi that's hooked up to the bookmobile," the employee said.

An employee of a state library agency told Federal News Network that cuts to IMLS would have a ripple effect on her state's library spending.

“We have no idea if we will continue to receive our federal funding after today. We have to regularly draw down the funds, so we don’t already have all of the money upfront. Since we are about halfway through the federal fiscal year, this will have a devastating impact on my agency. We will lose staff and a lot of services,” the employee said.

Deputy Labor Secretary Keith Sonderling was sworn in as the acting IMLS director on Thursday morning, after Trump designated him to serve in the role.

Sonderling said in a statement he is “committed to steering this organization in lockstep with this administration to enhance efficiency and foster innovation.”

“We will revitalize IMLS and restore focus on patriotism, ensuring we preserve our country’s core values, promote American exceptionalism and cultivate love of country in future generations,” Sonderling said.

Sonderling will take over for Cyndee Landrum, who served as the agency’s interim director. Landrum will stay on as the agency’s deputy director.

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