

# Architectural Record

## America's Cultural Infrastructure Crippled by Trump Cuts to National Endowment for the Humanities

*By Matt Hickman*



The Los Angeles County Museum of Art was one of numerous institutions and programs to have NEH grant funding rescinded earlier this month, as reported by *the Los Angeles Times*. *Photo by Carol M. Highsmith, the Jon B. Lovelace Collection of California Photographs in Carol M. Highsmith's America Project, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division/Wikimedia Commons*

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Immediately following the recent gutting of Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), a more well-known federal agency in the cultural sphere has also been kneecapped by the Trump administration: the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH).

Beginning late in the evening on April 2, all 56 of the NEH's state and jurisdictional councils as well as direct grant recipients received grim word from acting agency chair Michael McDonald. All awarded grants were terminated, effective immediately. The move, per McDonald's letter, will enable the NEH to "repurpose its funding allocations in a new direction in furtherance of President Trump's agenda." As reported by the [\*Washington Post\*](#), an estimated 1,200 congressionally approved grants supporting cultural and history programs have been revoked.

As of April 4, 145 NEH staffers—roughly 80 percent of the agency's workforce—have been put on administrative leave by the administration's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE). The staff reduction follows the late March announcement that all roughly 75 IMLS employees had been put on leave.

The actions, [referred to](#) by the American Historical Association as an "evisceration," are potentially ruinous to countless institutions and initiatives across the country, including historic preservation and architectural conservation efforts. But the news was somewhat buried as it came just hours after Trump's "Liberation Day" tariff announcement, which set into motion a global market freefall.

The NEH was created in 1965 as a sub-agency of the National Foundation on the Arts and Humanities alongside the National Endowment for the Arts, itself in a perilous position following the dismantling of the IMLS and now the NEH. Over the past six decades, the agency has awarded more than \$65 billion in grants.

In 2024, the NEH received \$207 million in funding from Congress. Per [NPR](#), roughly half of the agency's budget funds the now-cancelled state grants, which go directly to a nationwide network of councils. Museums, historic sites, libraries, research institutions, universities, and public media outlets are among the organizations that also receive direct NEH grant-funding, which is awarded through a highly competitive application process.

In January, the NEH announced that 219 humanities projects across the country would share \$22.6 million in grant funding—money that has now been rescinded. The list of programs impacted is diverse and vast. To help track the damage, the Federation of State Humanity Councils has compiled a [state-by-state "what will be lost" survey](#) categorized by region. (Northeastern states and U.S. territories are coming soon.)

"Federal funding is the cornerstone of our work at PA Humanities," Laurie Zierer, executive director of PA Humanities, the official humanities council of Pennsylvania, said in a statement. "It provides not just program dollars, but stability, credibility, and leverage—the kind of sustained support that makes long-term community investment and transformation possible." Impacted programs in Pennsylvania include education initiatives around the 250th anniversary of the

signing of the Declaration of Independence and Voices of History, “a statewide effort to collect and celebrate the stories, family histories, struggles, and triumphs of Black Pennsylvanians in the 20th and 21st centuries.”

On the West Coast, California Humanities president and CEO Rick Noguchi stated that without federal support, the state’s “museums, libraries, historical societies, and grassroots community organizations would be further challenged to serve their communities, and California residents would be less connected to one another, less civically engaged, would have less trust and empathy, and less hopeful about the future.” Cuts would impact programs like the Documentary Film Project, Library Innovation Lab, and Emerging Journalist Fellowships.

“With more than 90 percent of our funds coming from the NEH, California Humanities could not serve the state of 40 million people effectively,” Noguchi said.

In Texas, the executive director of the state’s humanities council, Eric Lupfer, says that NEH-supported programs “contribute to Texas’s thriving economy, culture, and civic life.” Just a few that could be lost without federal support include professional development workshops for teachers, cultural initiatives in rural communities, traveling exhibitions, family reading programs, and a film and lecture series celebrating Texan history and culture.

One institution to have a direct NEH award terminated, per the *Los Angeles Times*, is the Japanese American National Museum, a Smithsonian affiliate museum in L.A.'s Little Tokyo partially housed in a Gyo Obata–designed pavilion. It is considering “all options,” including a possible class action lawsuit, after losing a \$175,000 NEH grant. It is also resisting the removal of language and programs relating to diversity and inclusion under the Trump administration’s sweeping anti-DEI orders. “We will “scrub nothing,” Bill Fujioka, chair of the museum’s board of trustees, told the *Times*. “Our community is based on diversity, equity is guaranteed to us in the Constitution, and inclusion is what we believe in.” Elsewhere in L.A., the Los Angeles County Museum of Art also had a grant terminated, although the museum declined to comment on the issue to the *Times*.

Other legal actions have been taken by a coalition of 21 attorneys general, who have sued the Trump administration over the dismantling of the IMLS. “The coalition argues that the president cannot decide to unilaterally override laws governing federal spending, and that this Executive Order unconstitutionally overrides Congress’s power to decide how federal funds are spent,” reads a [statement](#) from the office of New York Attorney General Letitia James.

The Federation of State Humanities Council has provided a resource guide for citizens looking to [take action](#) and help protect humanities programs in their area.

RECORD has contacted organizations impacted by the hobbling of the NEH, including those supporting architecture and design initiatives. We will update this article as we learn more.

KEYWORDS: [politics](#) [Trump](#)

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