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What does the Institute of Museum and Library Services do for local libraries?

WXPR | By [Katie Thoresen](#)

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Katie Thoresen / WXPR

At the end of March, all roughly 70 federal employees of the Institute of Museum and Library Services were placed on [administrative leave](#).

It followed an [executive order](#) from President Trump to dismantle the small federal agency.

The Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) was created in 1996 to provide funding and support to museums and libraries in the U.S.

This year, about 9% of the funding the Wisconsin Valley Library Service is expected to receive through the [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction](#) are federal dollars. That comes out to about \$127 000 for libraries in the region



Rhineland District Library Director Virginia Roberts says the direct funding it gets through grants helps pay for things like summer reading programs.

“If you go to a program in the summer with your kids or your grandkids and you see a performer, that performer may not be there otherwise, because that grant didn't exist, because it's gone,” said Roberts.

More than the direct grants, Roberts says much of the funding Wisconsin gets through the Institute of Museum and Library Services stays at the state level.

In 2024, Wisconsin received \$3.23 million.

It has supported things like Overdrive and Libby which is where people can get ebooks, BadgerLink which is a database of resources open to people, and WISCAT, the inter-library loan system.

“The way this has worked is the IMLS, Institute of Museum and Library Services, sends grants to the state in the form of LSTA grants, which are Library Services and Technology Act Grants and those bank roll a program and the people to run it, and as the program grows, it just bankrolls the people,” Roberts explained. “We might still have access to some of these things, but we won't have the employees available, because that's what IMLS is paying for.”

LSTA funding has also supported workforce development, all-age literacy, civic engagement, and Tribal history preservation in Wisconsin.

Roberts describes IMLS as a kind of humming in the background that helps the library system.

She's concerned small and rural libraries are going to feel its loss harder.

“Our patrons are going to feel it harder up here, because we don't have the access to everything you would in an urban area or a suburban area,” said Roberts.

Rhineland District Library through the Department of Public Instruction is encouraging people to [share what their library means](#) to them to DPI and federal lawmakers.



The budget for the IMLS in 2024 was just about \$295 million which is about .003% of the federal budget.

The American Library Association filed a lawsuit challenging the dismantling of the IMLS.

Wisconsin joined that lawsuit.

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Katie Thoresen is WXP's News Director/Vice President.

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The staff of the Institute of Museum and Library Services was placed on administrative leave Monday morning, following a meeting between IMLS leadership and DOGE staff.



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Keith E. Sonderling is the new acting head of The Institute of Museum and Library Services, the main source of federal funding for libraries and museums across the country. President Trump issued an executive order last week saying he aims to close the agency.

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