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Executive Order Targets the Institute for Museum and Library Services

The IMLS and six other federal agencies are the latest to be threatened with reduction and elimination under the GOP plan

By Nathalie op de Beeck | Mar 17, 2025

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Photo: Nico Kaiser

In a March 14 executive order, the Trump Administration announced its plans to eliminate the Institute for Museum and Library Services “to the maximum extent consistent with applicable law.” The order states that the IMLS—along with six additional entities including the U.S. Agency for Global Media and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars at the Smithsonian Institution—“shall reduce the performance of their statutory functions and associated personnel to the minimum presence and function required by law.”

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The IMLS is an independent federal agency that plays a key role in distributing congressionally approved funds to libraries, museums, and archives in all 50 states plus five U.S. territories and three sovereign countries. In 2024, it awarded \$266.7 million to advance and support libraries, museums, and related organizations. Its acting director is Cyndee Landrum, who could not be reached for comment.

The American Library Association published a ringing defense of the IMLS on March 15, condemning “the White House assault” on the agency. “By eliminating the only federal agency dedicated to funding library services, the Trump administration’s executive order is cutting off at the knees the most beloved and trusted of American institutions and the staff and services they offer,” the ALA wrote, further asserting that “our nation’s 125,000 public, school,



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academic, and special libraries deserve more, not less support. Libraries translate 0.003% of the federal budget into programs and services used by more than 1.2 billion people every year.”

This is not the first time Trump has sought to eliminate IMLS. During Trump's first term, his administration proposed cutting the agency every year. In each instance, the library community was able to block those efforts.

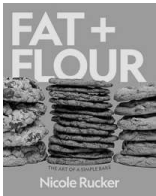
EveryLibrary, a nonpartisan, pro-library organization, has already begun looking to rally support by circulating a petition in support of the agency. The petition had garnered about 17,000 signatures as of Monday morning and has a goal of reaching 20,000 signatures. John Chrastka, EveryLibrary’s executive director, noted that the order did not call for the full closure of the IMLS or the firing of all personnel, but did require enormous reductions to IMLS’s services.

Chrastka told *PW* that the order challenged IMLS obligations that are mandated by Congress—such as funding annual and multi-year grants—which means that the question for library advocates should be. “ ‘How do we fight for those requirements?’ Right now, we’re talking about the integrity of congressional obligations through IMLS to the American people in our states and our state libraries.”

Chrastka cautioned that advocates should pay attention to the terms “shall” and “may” in executive orders. “There are two big ‘shall’ backbone issues” to be rolled back, Chrastka said. The first is the Grants to States program, U.S. Code 9141, a federal block grant program that funds state libraries. “It includes collection development funds, interlibrary loan, and delivery,” Chrastka said. “It’s got state database contracts and other learning supplements. Plus, it helps support smaller state libraries” and addresses equity issues by supporting Native American, Native Hawaiian, Latin American, and other inclusive library projects. The other IMLS programs that “shall” be eliminated, per the order, are the National Leadership Grants for Libraries and Museums.

An interactive map shows how IMLS funding has been distributed to projects nationwide with both red and blue districts receiving financial support. Densely populated California, New York, Texas, Florida, and Illinois received the largest amounts of funding in 2024, with libraries and museums in states including Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Washington also seeing a significant amount of IMLS grants.

The IMLS serves libraries and patrons from all walks of life. Grant recipients in 2024 included the Motown Historical Museum (Detroit) and Virginia Union University’s Center for African American History and Culture (Richmond, Va.). Numerous Native and Indigenous groups won funding for needs such as acquisition of books and equipment, digitization of historical documents, language preservation, and special exhibits.



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It is not clear at this time whether the IMLS’s awards programming will be affected. Annually, the IMLS partners with the nonprofit Alliance for Young Artists and Writers to administer the National Student Poets Program, which presents the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. In 2024, U.S. students in grades 10 and 11 submitted more than 30,000 pieces of work, and the five winners—representing five regions of the U.S.—each received a \$5,000 academic award.

Yet the order has the potential to undermine popular projects that have demonstrated nonpartisan buy-in from public and private entities. In August 2024, the IMLS partnered with the National Park Service, National Endowment for the Arts, and National Endowment for the Humanities to announce \$25.7 million in grants to Save America’s Treasures. At the time, the promise to preserve historic sites and collections was matched by almost \$50 million in public and private investment.

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