

LOCAL

'Devastating': Federal funding cuts hit NE Botanic Garden, American Antiquarian Society

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Worcester Telegram & Gazette

April 22, 2025 | Updated April 23, 2025, 12:03 p.m. ET

Key Points

The Trump administration cut \$250,000 in funding to the botanic garden and \$380,000 to the Antiquarian Society.

The cuts are part of a larger trend of funding reductions by the Institute of Museum and Library Services and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Massachusetts officials are seeking explanations for the cuts.

Funding cuts by the Trump administration are extending into Central Massachusetts.

The New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill said a \$250,000 grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services was canceled.

Meanwhile, reports indicate the state's congressional delegation sent a [letter](#) to the National Endowment for the Humanities, demanding an explanation for why it cut grant funds nationwide that had been awarded by the Biden administration including more than \$380,000 to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester.

A request for comment from U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern was not immediately returned.

The botanic garden funds were intended for three years to expand "essential" curatorial practices, according the nonprofit.

"The loss of this grant is devastating," said Grace Elton, the botanic garden's chief executive officer, in a prepared statement. She added the organization will appeal the termination and called on the area's elected officials for support.

Funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services represents 0.0046% of the federal budget, according to the American Alliance for Museums.

The botanic garden said it has been virtually impossible getting answers from the Institute of Museum and Library Services since the agency's entire staff was put on leave last month by President Trump's executive order.

The \$250,000 grant would have paid for a full-time employee to inventory plant collections, make records available online and interact with visitors.

Nationwide, \$22 million in grants were awarded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services in fiscal 2024 including \$8.5 million in Massachusetts, according to the botanic garden.

The \$381,000 cancelled grant at the Antiquarian Society was for three years and pays for fellowships in the humanities, said Scott Casper, the society's president. Those fellows research materials that often result in books that deepen the nation's understanding of American history, said Casper.

"That work will now be set back," said Casper.

He added that an existing grant was also cancelled, but much of the funds had already been spent.

Formulaic is how Casper described the letter from the federal government that announced the \$381,000 cut. He said that letter and others received by cultural organizations nationwide mention projects and initiatives that don't align with the Trump administration's priorities.

Roughly 2% of the society's budget comes from federal dollars, said Casper. He hopes the congressional delegation's letter to the National Endowment for the Humanities will move the needle, noting those lawmakers have long supported the humanities.

The letter from the Massachusetts congressional delegation to Michael McDonald, acting director of the National Endowment for the Humanities, said the agency put the majority of its staff on administrative leave and canceled hundreds of grants on recommendation from the Department of Government Efficiency created by President Trump and headed by Elon Musk.

Those steps are a "shortsighted action" that will have "devastating impacts" on the nation's cultural institutions and scholarship, said the letter, to save an amount of money that amounts to a miniscule portion of the federal budget.

Cancellation notices mentioned furthering the president's agenda, according to the congressional letter. It also mentioned that McDonald was quoted saying the National Endowment for the Humanities plans to focus on "patriotic programming."

From fiscal year 2019 through 2023, the National Endowment for the Humanities issued over \$46 million in grants to organizations and individuals that supported more than 300 projects in Massachusetts, according to the congressional letter. One grant to Old Sturbridge Village Museum prevented the loss of papers, business accounts, town records and diaries related to daily life in rural New England from the eighteenth through 20th centuries.

Beyond demanding an explanation for the grant cuts, the letter wants to know if the Trump administration wants repayment for grants already disbursed; whether any grants will be awarded in 2025 by the National Endowment for the Humanities; and whether future grants will focus on patriotic programming and, if so, what constitutes that programming.

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