

Trump Administration Actions Impacting Nonprofits

Information compiled by [Merrill Sovner](#)

Last updated March 31 at 2:19 pm EST

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To stay updated faster than my notes here, the [New York Times has a day-by-day timeline of Trump Administration actions](#). [Devex has full coverage](#) on the latest on USAID. [Just Security has a litigation tracker](#) of all the cases filed against the Trump Administration.

Beyond the headlines in mainstream newspapers, there is good in-depth reporting by [WIRED magazine](#), [ProPublica](#), and [the Chronicle on Philanthropy](#).

What happened

On Monday, January 20, in a live event right after the inauguration, Trump signed roughly [200 Executive Orders](#). ([The Guardian](#) and the [Washington Post](#) provide easy to understand overviews of all of them.) The National Council of Nonprofits compiled a chart of [all Executive Orders impacting nonprofits](#).

The federal funding freeze

On Monday, January 27, the White House Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued [a memo](#) that would [freeze all federal funding](#), which is massive and includes many nonprofits, hospitals, universities (which are nonprofits in the US). Also, the website where the US states track federal funding was briefly down, which includes funding for infrastructure, health insurance, children's preschools, etc.

Two legal cases were immediately filed in courts to block the freeze, one from the attorneys general of 22 US states and the District of Columbia, and another from a consortium that included the National Council for Nonprofits. Apparently there was [pushback from Republican senators](#) and representatives. On Tuesday, January 28, in the [second case, the judge decided on a stay of the freeze until February 3](#) when the case could be heard.

The White House [issued guidance to clarify what the pause included](#) and the new press secretary defended the pause in her first press conference. On Wednesday, January 29, the White House Office of Management and Budget [rescinded the memo about the federal funding freeze](#). [NPR summarized the three days of confusion](#). Laura Barron-Lopez of the PBS News Hour had [very good](#)

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[reporting of these decisions](#), including details about whether the legal cases will continue to go forward.

On February 3, [the judge extended a temporary restraining order and blocked federal agencies](#) “from implementing, giving effect to, or reinstating under a different name the directives” of the OMB memo and mandated agencies “release any disbursements” they previously froze.

The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), a task force headed by Elon Musk, gained access to US Treasury payment systems and personnel files across the federal government. On Tuesday, February 4, the [NYTimes reported that nonprofits are still awaiting payments from Health and Human Services](#). On Thursday, February 6, the PBS News Hour reported that [Health and Human Services payments to community health clinics and Head Start programs had not yet resumed](#).

[The 19th reported that gender-based violence nonprofits had begun to self-censor](#) the language on their website to avoid terms related to LGBTQ victims out of fear of losing federal funding.

On Monday, February 10, [a judge in Rhode Island granted a “motion for enforcement” in the case brought forward by 22 state attorneys general](#). The states claimed that the White House had defied the judge’s order to unfreeze federal funds.

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration tried to reduce or control federal funding to nonprofits in other ways:

- Late on Thursday, February 6, [President Trump issued a memo requiring executive departments and agencies](#) to review all funding to NGOs. It states, “It is the policy of my Administration to stop funding NGOs that undermine the national interest”. [Americans Against Government Censorship](#), a coalition of progressive organizations, denounced the politicization of funding to nonprofits, according to [reporting by the Chronicle on Philanthropy](#).
- On Friday, February 7, [the National Institutes of Health announced a reduction of indirect costs](#) it would pay to universities to the minimum 15% (from as much as 28%). [The Washington Post reported how it would impact](#) the support universities can give to biomedical research. On March 8, [the Guardian reported the changes in research funding were already causing “chaos on campuses”](#).
- Also on Friday, February 7, [Trump announced in a post to social media](#) that he would dismiss the board of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and appoint himself chair. The Kennedy Center is a federally-funded nonprofit that has a board of 36 members appointed to 6-year terms by the President. Currently, it is evenly divided between Republican and Democrat appointees. On Monday, February 10, [Richard Grenell was appointed interim director](#), even though the Kennedy Center does not have an executive director position. [On Wednesday, February 12, a new board fired the previous president](#), installed Grenell as interim president, and elected Trump as its chairman. The [Washington Post reported about the legal case](#) by Sean Spicer that made this move possible.
- On Monday, February 10, [the Institute of Education Sciences terminated contracts](#) for research on how students learn, NPR reported.
- On Wednesday, February 12, Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin announced his intention [to rescind grants made by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund](#). On Tuesday, February 18, a [Department of Justice official resigned](#) rather than comply with the demand to investigate and freeze these grants. On March 12, it emerged that [Citibank had frozen funding to nonprofits from this Fund](#) claiming they were potentially liable for fraud.

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- The Environmental Protection Agency also [closed a grantmaking program by the Climate Justice Alliance](#).

The [New York Times analyzed the various ways the Trump Administration was exploiting loopholes](#) to get around restraining orders against the federal funding freeze.

On Friday, February 28, Elon Musk commented on Joe Rogan's podcast [that US-funded NGOs were the "biggest scam ever"](#) and other disparaging comments.

Other Trump Administration executive actions continue to harm nonprofit organizations and universities in particular:

- On Friday, March 7, [Trump signed an executive action](#) directing the Department of Education to make student loan borrowers ineligible from the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program that work for organizations that have "substantial illegal purpose". This program allowed for student loan forgiveness of people who went to work in public sector and nonprofit jobs.
- On Friday, March 7, [the Department of Education announced it had cancelled \\$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University](#) citing its failure to protect students from anti-semitic harassment around the Gaza-related protests in 2024. The article stated that Columbia has over \$5 billion in federal funding and it was not clear which programs were cancelled. It later emerged that the [Trump Administration required Columbia to make changes to its discipline and admissions policies to restore funding](#), as well as to [put its Middle East Studies Program in receivership](#), an unprecedented demand of a private (nonprofit) university.
- Changes to the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program, which relieves student debt of people who go into public service, for the US government or nonprofits, [was changed by executive order](#) to instruct the Department of Education to deny loan relief to people whose work is tied to illegal immigration, foreign terrorist groups or other illegal activity.

On Thursday, March 13, [the National Council of Nonprofits and partners filed a lawsuit against the Trump Administration's freeze of funds](#) allocated by two key pieces of legislation under Biden: the Inflation Reduction Act and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

[Johns Hopkins University announced it was laying off more than 2000 workers](#) due to the Trump Administration's cuts in research funding and international aid programs. On Wednesday, March 19, the Trump Administration said [it would suspend federal funding to the University of Pennsylvania over its approach to transgender athletes](#).

On Friday, March 14, Trump issued [an executive order to eliminate](#) seven more independent agencies with [far-reaching ramifications on nonprofits](#):

- the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
- United States Agency for Global Media, which supports Voice of America, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, and Radio Free Asia.
 - [RFE/RL sued the US Agency for Global Media](#) to block the attempted termination. Here is [the filing](#). It [won a temporary restraining order](#) until March 28. On March 26, USAGM [rescinded the letter terminating the grant](#). Two days later, RFE/RL was still awaiting the funds and continued with the court case.
 - [Voice of America also sued](#).
- Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,

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- Institute of Museum and Library Services [which supports libraries, archives, and museums of all kinds](#) across the US and its territories. On March 31, [it placed all its 70 staff on administrative leave](#) for 90 days after a meeting with DOGE.
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness,
- Community Development Financial Institutions Fund, and
- Minority Business Development Agency.

The fallout on nonprofits from the hollowing out of federal government programs has ramifications for its financial sustainability.

On March 25, an executive order dealing with elections and election assistance also barred nonprofits with federal grants from lobbying the federal government. According to this analysis, [the lobbying prohibition never existed](#).

On March 27, [an executive order instructed the Department of the Interior to remove language](#) from national monuments, parks and museums - including the Smithsonian Institution - that questioned the positive legacy of American history.

On March 28, [Politico reported that the Federal Emergency Management Agency also froze \\$10 billion in disaster aid to support nonprofit organizations](#) - including hospitals - to rebuild after disasters or provide short-term housing. Ostensibly it was part of a review to determine whether they were not helping undocumented immigrants. This freeze was documented in memos by the FEMA acting Administrator on March 20.

The pause on foreign aid and attempted closure of USAID

An Executive Order issued [a pause on all foreign aid](#), which impacts many US nonprofits working abroad that receive funding from USAID and the State Dept. It includes disbursements on already signed grant contracts. The first paragraph outlines a rationale that current aid may be “antithetical to American values”.

On Friday, Marco Rubio, newly sworn in as Secretary of State, issued a [memo to the State Department that was leaked](#) about the pause on foreign aid and it made new headlines. On Tuesday, January 28, Rubio issued [a new memo in an attempt to more clearly define what is humanitarian aid vs. what, exactly, is being paused](#). A [directive](#) was also issued on that day to all USAID implementing partners to immediately cease work on USAID-funded projects, and [a memo threatened disciplinary action](#) against employees who did not stop work.

[Politico reported on how Marco Rubio's actions directly contravene](#) his past steadfast support for foreign aid as a senator and seems rather ineffective as Secretary of State.

On top of all of this, USAID's top administrators were put on administrative leave. On Thursday, January 30, USAID's director of employee and labor relations refused to issue termination notices to employees, as it violated USAID's due process, and then [he himself was put on administrative leave](#).

The [Guardian reported comments from career officials about Peter Marocco](#), Trump's appointee to oversee USAID. [ProPublica reported about Marocco's previous forays into international affairs](#) during the first Trump presidency.

Over the weekend of February 1-2, it became clear that the Trump Administration is intent on closing down USAID, as per reporting by [the Washington Post](#) and [the Financial Times](#), among others.

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USAID's website was taken down, and [USAID's building was closed](#) on Monday, February 3. Democratic Senators staged [a press conference outside USAID's offices](#) to point out, among other things, that Congress created USAID and only Congress can close it down. Secretary of State Marco Rubio claimed he is the Acting Administrator of USAID.

According to comments by Elon Musk on Monday, February 3, [closure of USAID was a priority for DOGE's task force](#) and he gloated about "[feeding USAID into the wood chipper](#)". [Two more senior USAID officials were put on administrative leave](#) for refusing to grant DOGE access to its systems.

The allegations against USAID made by President Trump, Elon Musk, and Marco Rubio in various statements were that it was run by radical leftists, it was a "criminal organization" that was committing fraud, the staff were insubordinate and that the billions being spent on foreign aid were better spent at home. [Politico reported on the payments by USAID](#) that might have set off the incoming Trump administration. [The New York Times chronicled the right-wing disinformation](#) that prompted actions against USAID.

On Tuesday evening, February 4, it was announced that [almost all personnel of USAID would be put on administrative leave](#) as of Friday, February 7. At USAID missions, staff working on "mission critical" functions would remain but all other staff would be sent home. Also, [the human resources chief and staff were put on administrative leave](#). Also, USAID blocked [1000 personal service contractors out of its payment systems](#), and the NY Times reported that the [State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Rights and Labor \(DRL\) fired 60 contractors](#).

On Wednesday, February 5, Sec. of State Rubio commented from Guatemala City that [his office was reaching out to USAID missions to identify which programs would continue](#). Furthermore, Rubio's plans for waivers for lifesaving aid were not implemented; both [ProPublica](#) and [Devex reported that lifesaving aid had not continued](#), in part because USAID staff still did not have access to payment systems as of February 17.

On Thursday, February 6, the American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees [filed a lawsuit](#) against the Stop Work Order and attempted closure of USAID. [The Guardian reported on the lawsuit and misinformation efforts by Musk's team](#).

Also, [Representative Greg Steube \(R-Florida\) introduced a bill](#) in the House of Representatives to abolish USAID.

On Friday, February 7, 95% of USAID staff were to be placed on administrative leave. [Devex reported on the 294 positions remaining in place](#). The USAID website [was updated to say staff could stay at their posts](#) while on administrative leave. By Friday morning, [the number of staff to be retained was 611](#).

Also on Friday, February 7, [a judge issued a temporary pause against the attempted closure of USAID](#), including reinstating 500 staff and halting the recall of mission staff. The [NYTimes reported](#) that the judge was a 2019 Trump appointee. This temporary restraining order was extended on February 13.

On Monday, February 10, [two nonprofits funding filed a legal case to ask for reprieve of the pause on foreign funding](#). On Tuesday, February 11, a group of consulting companies with USAID contracts also [filed a legal case, claiming that the Trump Administration lacked the legal authority](#) to shut down a federal agency and use funds Congress had allocated to it. On Wednesday, February 12, it emerged that [USAID had cancelled 800 contracts](#), as [a list was made available through the court filings](#) in the legal cases listed above. [USAID employees in Kinshasa, directly harmed by the order](#), have also pursued a legal case.

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On Monday, February 10, [USAID's Inspector General warned the agency](#) was unable to track \$8.2 billion in unspent humanitarian aid. [Devex reported that the Inspector General was fired](#) on Tuesday night, February 11.

Other federally-funded independent nonprofits that provide foreign aid, the National Democratic Institute, the International Republican Institute, and the National Endowment of Democracy are also facing cutbacks. [The Free Press detailed how NED's Republican beginnings and bipartisan support have not spared it.](#)

On Wednesday, February 12, Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, [held a hearing on the national security implications of halting foreign assistance](#), attended only by Democrats. [Representative Sarah Jacobs introduced the "Protect US National Security Act"](#) to prohibit the dismantling of USAID. The [U.S. House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing on "the USAID Betrayal"](#) on Thursday, February 13, in which [Republicans and Democrats sparred over who had been betrayed.](#)

On late Thursday, February 13, [a federal judge ordered the Trump Administration to reverse the pause on foreign aid](#) that had already been allocated funds from Congress, but allowed the 90-day review and pause on new funding to go forward.

The Washington Post reported that [Republican legislators were trying to move the Food for Peace Program to the US Department of Agriculture](#) to protect it (and its funding to US farmers) from cuts.

On February 19, Devex reported that [USAID was still cancelling contracts](#) despite a court order to stop. The Guardian reported on how [the loss of USAID funding has impacted international humanitarian aid organizations](#) around the world.

On Friday, February 21, a federal judge [lifted the block on cutting USAID staff](#) in the legal case filed by the American Foreign Service Association and the American Federation of Government Employees. The judge had issued two previous temporary restraining orders but, after two weeks of testimony, decided that USAID staff weren't facing irreparable harm.

On Sunday, February 23, USAID placed almost all direct hire staff globally on administrative leave, according to [an announcement on its main website](#). It was also announced that it was implementing a reduction-in-force of 1600 personnel in the US. The announcement stated that USAID intended to give staff overseas voluntary travel packages to return home and they would maintain diplomatic status while overseas. Staff were [informed of their firings by email](#) and [remained confused.](#)

While most of the USAID website remained unavailable, there was a new link to [the Inspector General's office](#), which continued to detail its audit reports and fraud cases. The Washington Post reported on Thursday, February 27, that the Inspector General's office was delaying release of [two reports detailing the damage from the foreign funding pause in Gaza and in Africa](#), detailing hunger, desperation, security dangers, and fears of widespread looting.

On February 25, the federal judge in the case brought by nonprofit organizations [ordered the Trump Administration to release millions of dollars in foreign aid](#), updating his February 13 decision. On February 26, Supreme Court chief justice [John Roberts intervened to pause the order to pay out funds](#) issued by the district judge a day earlier.

Also on February 26, the Trump Administration [claimed Secretary of State Marco Rubio had completed its review and cancelled nearly 10,000 foreign assistance awards.](#) The NY Times reported that [the cancelled awards included public health and nutrition projects](#) around the world. It

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also included [a program that provided demographic and health surveys](#) for key health indicators for many low and middle income countries. In fact, [USAID staff did not know which projects had been cut and had to ask the funded partners](#).

On Sunday, March 2, Nicholas Enrich, the acting Assistant Administrator for Global Health at USAID was placed on administrative leave, and [he released a series of memos outlining the projected human suffering caused by the withdrawal of aid](#). Despite the promise of waivers for lifesaving humanitarian assistance, the memos make clear that due to blocked payment systems and changing processes that the Trump Administration never intended to pay out these aid projects. Enrich also filed a declaration in the lawsuit brought by the Global Health Council and other key USAID partners.

On March 4, [the Supreme Court rejected the Trump Administration's appeal and left in place the district court order](#) to release \$2 billion in payments in foreign aid to contractors that had already been completed. It also requested the District Court clarify the actions the Trump Administration needed to take to comply with its previous ruling. The decision was split 5-4, with four conservative judges dissenting, very critical of the district court's ruling. On Thursday, March 6, [Judge Amir Ali ordered the Trump administration to pay the organizations that sued by Monday night](#), March 10, for work completed before February 13.

Also, [700 diplomats within the Department of State anonymously signed a cable](#) to protest the dismantling of USAID.

Meanwhile, the Trump Administration and DOGE moved on to independent agencies that work on international development. On Wednesday, February 19, [the Trump Administration issued an executive order to drastically shrink](#) the Presidio Trust, the Inter-American Foundation, the US African Development Foundation and the US Institute of Peace.

[Peter Marocco was put in charge of the Inter-American Foundation](#), an independent international development agency established by Congress in 1969, on Monday, March 3, projects were cancelled and the staff was put on administrative leave. On March 7, [Devex reported that IAF had been gutted](#).

On Wednesday, March 5, Marocco and DOGE also attempted to enter the offices of the African Development Foundation, but [was met with a letter from ADF's President stating Marocco had no authority](#) unless nominated as a board member and approved by the US Senate. [Marocco and DOGE returned the next day with US Marshals](#). The agency also [filed a lawsuit stating DOGE and Marocco stating it was in breach of the African Development Foundation Act](#), which created the agency, and asked a federal judge to issue a temporary restraining order. [The temporary restraining order was later overturned](#) but parties to the lawsuit were asked to request an injunction. Russell Voght, head of the White House's budget office and Project 2025 architect, [was named to ADF's board](#). On Tuesday, March 18, [ADF staff received letters from Pete Marocco](#) placing them on administrative leave.

On Wednesday, March 5, [it was reported that Peter Marocco told a closed-door meeting with legislators that he and his staff were considering referring USAID staff and grantees to the Dept of Justice for criminal cases](#) involving the misuse of foreign assistance.

On the same day, the [National Endowment for Democracy filed a lawsuit about unlawfully withholding its funding](#), which was frozen on February 25. On Monday, March 10, [NED regained access to congressionally-appropriated funding](#).

On Monday, March 10, [Marco Rubio announced that 83% of USAID's programming](#), or 5200 projects, had been closed. The announcement on X thanked DOGE for its assistance. [The New York Times reported that on Thursday there had been an argument between Marco Rubio and Elon Musk](#)

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at a cabinet meeting and Trump signalled a lighter approach for Musk's DOGE team afterwards (cutting with "a scalpel" rather than a chainsaw.) [USAID staff were asked to review awards](#) to make sure the cancelled awards matched Rubio's tweet.

On March 11, [Devex reported that USAID staff had been instructed to shred and burn classified documents](#); Public Citizen and Democracy Forward filed a motion for a temporary restraining order to stop destruction of federal records.

While Congress passed a continuing resolution of the budget on Friday, March 14, [it was unclear what keeping 2024 budget levels would mean for the pause on foreign funding](#). 10 Democratic senators voted for the bill along with Republicans. [Democratic representatives sent sternly worded letters to USAID partners](#) to find out the risks of the foreign aid pause.

On Monday, March 17, [DOGE tried to enter the offices of the US Institute of Peace](#), another independent agency funded by Congress, but they were rebuffed. DOGE called the DC police and escorted USIP staff out. The Trump Administration had tried to replace all but three of its board members, and on Monday it replaced the acting president with a State Department official.

On Tuesday, March 18, Judge Theodore Chuang, in [a case brought by USAID employees](#) against Elon Musk and DOGE, [found that the attempted closure of USAID had likely violated the US constitution](#) and ordered email service for employees, the USAID offices, and other operations to be restored. [Judge Chuang had been involved in several high profile cases during Trump's first term](#).

Also on Tuesday, [Pete Marocco stepped down from USAID](#) but stayed on at the State Department as head of foreign aid. [New plans for the structure of USAID](#), to become the US Agency for International Humanitarian Assistance, and other programs, were also reported by Politico.

[Originally reported by Politico, plans](#) from [a closed door meeting on March 16](#) about the future of USAID were leaked. The [Center for Global Development analyzed](#) what, exactly, was cancelled vs. retained of USAID's funding.

On Friday, March 28, the Trump Administration notified Congress of its [plans to close USAID](#) and fold it into the Department of State. The plans keep humanitarian assistance programs, global health, strategic investment, and "limited national security programs", and all remaining USAID staff are to be rehired by the Department of State. Congress can weigh in on this notification and will need to pass a law to make it official.

Beyond USAID, cuts in foreign aid continue across the federal government. On Wednesday, March 26, [the Labor Department terminated grants from the Bureau of International Labor Affairs](#) that combat child labor, forced labor and human trafficking and enforce labor standards in more than 40 countries.

Delegitimizing and defunding DEI initiatives

The Executive Order on ending federal government programs [that promote diversity, equity and inclusion \(DEI\)](#) has far reaching implications for foundations and nonprofits. [The Chronicle of Philanthropy reported](#) that it could be extended to nonprofit contractors and universities and foundations with large endowments. ([The Philanthropy Roundtable seems to think this is an acceptable action](#) because it views DEI as a form of discrimination.)

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On Wednesday, February 5, [the Department of Justice issued a memo stating the Civil Rights Division will “investigate, eliminate, and penalize illegal DEI and DEIA preferences](#), mandates, policies, programs, and activities in the private sector and in educational institutions that receive federal funds”.

On the same day, a [legal case against the DEI executive order was filed](#) on behalf of the City of Baltimore, American Association of University Professors, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education and other nonprofit groups. On February 21, a federal judge in Maryland granted [a preliminary injunction to block the administration from terminating or changing federal contracts they consider equity-related](#).

While not directly related to nonprofits, federal employees were offered retirement/severance packages, in addition to being sent directives to stop using DEI language and to report on colleagues who were still working on DEI initiatives under other names. The American Federation of Government Employees and others filed [a lawsuit](#) on Wednesday, January 29, against efforts to politicize the federal workforce. The NYTimes reported that [the American Accountability Foundation created a “watchlist” of federal workers](#) with DEI sympathies based on social media posts.

The remodeling of the federal workforce was outlined last year by [Project2025](#) by the Heritage Foundation (itself a nonprofit), and its architects have joined the Trump Administration, including the incoming head of the OMB. Devex [interviewed the writer of the Project 2025 section on USAID](#) in June 2024.

The Trump Administration’s animosity towards diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives had ramifications in the field of philanthropy. The [Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative ended its DEI efforts and social advocacy funding](#), while [the Chronicle on Philanthropy reported that other foundations were “silent, defiant, private”](#) in their responses.

On Friday, March 14, [the Department of Education announced it was investigating more than 50 universities participating in the PhD project](#), a nonprofit that helps underrepresented groups get degrees in business as part of its anti-DEI efforts.

Defunding nonprofits serving undocumented immigrants and refugees

Executive orders on Monday, January 20, [paused the US Refugee Admissions Program](#), closed the app used to request asylum and militarized the US border, and increased enforcement and deportations of undocumented immigrants. [Global Refuge provides an explanation of the orders impacting immigration](#). These orders also have consequences for nonprofits.

DOGE also halted the [Department of Health and Human Services payments to large social services contractors like Lutheran Family Services](#), a faith-based charity that works with refugees. [The Associated Press reported that the Department of Justice had restored funding](#) to educate people about their rights in detention centers and immigration courts.

On Wednesday, February 5, newly confirmed Attorney General Pam Bondi also [directed the Department of Justice to end funding to “sanctuary cities” and to evaluate agreements with nonprofit organizations serving undocumented immigrants](#).

On Monday, February 9, Church World Service, HIAS, and Lutheran Community Services Northwest, [three refugee resettlement organizations, filed a lawsuit to stop the end of the US Refugee Admissions Program](#). On February 25, [a federal judge in Seattle ruled that the Trump](#)

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[Administration's efforts to end this program exceeded the President's powers](#) and blocked the attempt to end the US RAP. On Wednesday, February 26, the [US Department of State terminated grant agreements with 10 refugee resettlement organizations](#) that it had worked with for four decades.

The [Chronicle of Philanthropy reported how public-private partnerships to resettle refugees](#) in communities were also now in limbo.

The Department of Homeland Security also froze funding to nonprofits supporting immigrants, including the Citizenship and Assimilation Program, which gives grants to organizations that assist immigrants with citizenship applications, English language instruction and civics education. On March 7, Representative Jimmy Gomez (D-California) [demanded answers](#). On March 17, [Democracy Forward](#), [Asian Americans Advancing Justice](#) and LatinoJustice PRLDEF filed a lawsuit and, on March 25, [a motion for a temporary restraining order](#).

Responses from the US nonprofit sector

The legal cases mentioned above have brought together many representative organizations as plaintiffs, from federal workers' unions, umbrella organizations, professional associations, public interest nonprofits, and lobbying organizations, in addition to those nonprofits directly impacted by the Executive Orders and subsequent actions.

The National Council of Nonprofits has created a single web page [to track the crisis, legal cases and the impact on US nonprofits](#) and is carefully tracking all actions that impact the sector. [Candid released data on how reliant the US nonprofit sector](#) is on government funding. The [Council on Foundations posted a statement](#) on January 28. On February 19, [more than 4500 charitable organizations sent an open letter to Congress](#) reminding them of the essential role they play in the US economy and society.

[The USAID Stop-Work website](#) is collecting data about the foreign aid pause. The International Council for Voluntary Actions started [a page to collect information](#) about the foreign aid pause and [published a report](#) on the survey findings.

Nonprofits are also leading responses on other areas of Trump Administration actions:

- On Monday, February 24, [environmental and organic farming nonprofit organizations filed a lawsuit against the US Department of Agriculture](#) and other agencies for deleting data related to climate change, citing it as in violation of laws on government transparency.
- On the same day, [a case against Greenpeace filed in 2017 began in a North Dakota court](#) to hold the nonprofit accountable for protestors against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Reporting by the New York Times cited it as a US example of a strategic lawsuit against public participation (SLAPP) and noted that the governor of North Dakota and executive of the energy company that filed the lawsuit are both active Trump supporters. On Wednesday, March 19, the [jury found Greenpeace liable for defamation](#) and other claims, and required it to pay \$660 million to the pipeline company.

Umbrella organizations offered statements:

- Independent Sector issued [a statement about the federal funding freeze](#).
- On the foreign aid pause, [a comment from InterAction](#), the umbrella for US NGOs working abroad.

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- On Friday, February 10, the American Bar Association [published a statement on its website](#) in support of the rule of law.

Support organizations have started offering practical advice to nonprofits and philanthropy on how to navigate this new environment:

- Humentum offered [this guidance document](#) for organizations trying to navigate the foreign funding pause and [other resources on its website](#).
- Stroika, Inc. [shared advice based on their experiences in Russia](#) in an opinion piece in *the Chronicle on Philanthropy*.
- NPQ shared an [article on legal compliance in difficult environments](#)
- Saskia Brechenmacher of the Carnegie Endowment shared [lessons for US civil society based on her research on closing space](#) around the world.
- Minnesota Nonprofits provided this [resource page for nonprofits to navigate uncertainty](#).
- The [Harvard Business Review offers advice on how to communicate DEI](#) on websites in the new legal environment.

Chronicle on Philanthropy reported that many of the efforts to track impacts of the funding pause [have been run by volunteers](#).

Why haven't there been more statements? According to [a survey by the Communications Network, 63% of nonprofit communications staff said they feared government retaliation or loss of funding by the Trump Administration](#), and around the same amount had not issued statements related to the Administration's actions.

On Monday, March 10, [CIVICUS added the US to its watchlist](#) of countries where civic freedoms are under attack

At the end of March, the Chronicle on Philanthropy reported that [progressive philanthropy has largely been silent](#) and on [the available emergency funds](#) for nonprofits thus far.

Analysis of the actions

Halting the world's biggest donor of development aid has far reaching ramifications in many countries of the world. People have been stranded on international exchanges, support for basic subsistence of refugees ended, critical humanitarian aid and medical interventions were stopped, and thousands of people around the world have lost their jobs.

Thomas Byrnes has given [an in-depth and very dire discussion \(in multiple LinkedIn posts\)](#) of what the international aid freeze means for existing programs and partners. [Charles Kojo Vandyck shared the dire view](#) from Ghana. [Samantha Power, Biden's USAID Administrator, went on Late Night with Stephen Colbert](#) to share stories about the impact of the foreign funding pause and [wrote an op-ed in the NYTimes](#). Politico published [an interview with a frontline USAID employee](#) detailing their experience. Vox reported on [the fallout of PEPFAR](#), a program to support HIV/AIDS medications abroad that had been widely seen as successful.

[The Washington Post reported that the US farming sector is also impacted](#) since 41% of USAID's food aid distributions are provided by American farms.

The [Guardian](#) reported that the United Nations will also be heavily impacted by the pause. Devex reported that [nearly 20 UN agencies have received stop work orders](#).

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Last updated March 31 at 2:19 pm EST

In response to the inflammatory rhetoric about USAID, read the interview with [former USAID director \(and Republican\) Andrew Natsios](#) and commentary by longtime aid observer [Thomas Carothers](#). The Washington Post detailed [how Marco Rubio, a longtime supporter of US foreign aid, came to oversee its destruction](#) in the Trump Administration.

Brookings [debunked myths about foreign aid](#). Glenn Kessler [analyzed the list of grants the White House claimed were wasteful USAID spending](#) and [a contract for \\$520 million that Trump frequently cites](#) in the Washington Post.

The [Center for Global Development conducted an analysis of cancelled contracts](#) based on word count, finding projects in Moldova and work around elections especially hard hit. The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists said [the funding freeze decimated investigative news outlets in fragile democracies, reporting echoed by the New York Times](#).

The [foreign funding pause has also hurt decades of US-funded pro-democracy work](#) and emboldened autocrats to persecute pro-democracy groups on the rationale that they had USAID funding, such as [in Serbia](#). Thomas Carothers, a longtime expert on democracy promotion aid, [provided context and future possibilities](#) for the field.

Another argument centers around how international development aid has a security purpose, and without it the US cedes space to other geopolitical actors like Russia and China. Read [commentary from Just Security on this point](#). The [NYTimes reported on authoritarian leaders celebrating the end of pro-democracy support](#). Politico reported on how [China is moving into the vacuum](#) created by USAID's withdrawal. The Washington Post reported on [how the pause on foreign aid has impacted anti-terrorism programs](#).

Science magazine profiled [the impact on scientific research around the world](#). The [Washington Post reported on the impact to university research](#) by the NIH indirect cost policy change, and the NYTimes reported that it would put medical research at risk.

Candid, which provides data on nonprofit organizations and foundations, [shared data analyzing the reliance of the US nonprofit sector on government funding](#). The Urban Institute also [analyzed the impact of federal funding on US nonprofits](#), showing how federal funding provides three times the estimates of foundation giving. The [Center for Effective Philanthropy shared results of its survey on how the first month of the Trump Administration's actions impacted nonprofit organizations](#).

Lucy Bernholz, longtime prognosticator of the nonprofit sector, [sees far worse coming](#). Read her [Blueprint 2025](#). The [Washington Post has suggested that Elon Musk's real aim](#) is to replace the federal workforce with his own AI tools.

Political theorist Judith Butler explains [how Trump is "unleashing sadism"](#). Jamelle Bouie, NY Times columnist, [outlined how Trump's attack on DEI aims to subvert the civil rights movement](#) and restore white men to the top of the US' hierarchy.

John Miles Branch explained [the anti-civil society rationale within US right-wing politics](#) for the HistPhil blog.

This [NYTimes Op-Ed speculates on what universities would need, financially](#), to stand up to the Trump Administration's politically motivated withholding of federal funds.

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Wider legal ramifications

Can the US President freeze/pause funding to nonprofits under approved programs and signed contracts? Congress has the “power of the purse” to allocate funding in the US constitution, and efforts by the executive to block is a blurring of the separation of powers between the three branches of government. It may be worthwhile for the court case to go forward in order to debate this question.

The practice of Presidents stopping federal funding is called impoundment. After President Nixon tried to use it to an extreme, Congress passed a law to restrict its use. Forbes magazine has [a good background analysis on the question of impoundment in this case](#). The Trump Administration has claimed the temporary pauses are not impoundment.

Read the [background by Just Security](#) including whether USAID can be legally dissolved, as well as [a brief report from the Congressional Research Service](#). ProPublica conducted [in-depth reporting on illegal acts in the attempted closure](#).

On NPR’s “On the Media” on January 31, [Dahlia Lithwick provided an analysis](#) of the legality of executive orders and the possibility of a constitutional crisis. Executive Orders are [basically instructions for executive branch offices to act](#), which is why the memos from OMB and Secretary of State Marco Rubio were needed for them to take effect. The president’s [authority to issue them must come from either Congress or the Constitution](#) itself.

Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, political scientists (one of which is an author of [How Democracies Die](#)), [commented in Foreign Affairs](#) that the US will become a competitive authoritarian regime under Trump, like Turkey or Hungary. Anne Applebaum maintains that [DOGE’s purges of the federal workforce are regime change](#).

Analysis on the future of international development aid

Can philanthropy step in to help fill the gap left by USAID funding? Nathaniel Heller commented on [the gap filling](#) argument for philanthropy. Benjamin Bellegy, Director of WINGS, [called for philanthropy to help fill the gap](#), as did [CIVICUS](#). Kellea Miller of the Human Rights Funders Network [outlined next steps for foundations in the Chronicle of Philanthropy](#).

At least initially, [the philanthropic response was minimal](#). [Rodri Davies commented](#) on philanthropy’s capacity and ethics to fill the gap. (Last summer, [Forbes reported on what Vice President JD Vance really thinks about big philanthropy](#).) The [MacArthur Foundation later announced it would be stepping up its giving](#) in response to the crisis. Devex [reported on some of the big foundations’ responses](#). Vu Le, whose critical opinions are shared on the Nonprofit AF website, [commented that the endowment payout increases wouldn’t be nearly enough](#).

ODI Global (formerly Overseas Development Institute) is gathering its commentary on what Northern donors in [post-aid development](#) might look like. It is also an argument on forging ahead [on localization](#), as argued by a senior advisor at Humentum. The community foundation [Nguzo Africa argues that localization was long overdue](#).

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Tammam Aloudat, writing in *the New Humanitarian*, suggests that [the international humanitarian aid system was already broken](#) before Trump's actions. [Janet Mawiyoo shares her experience](#) when the Norwegian development agency was shut down in Kenya in 1990 and what she learned from it.

This [LinkedIn post speculates what a future USAID/State Dept.](#) might look like. There may be lessons to be learned from [when DFID in the UK was folded into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) (becoming the FCDO), which also happened in Canada and Australia.

What can I do?

The US system depends on the other branches of government - legislative and judiciary - to provide a check on the executive. Mass mobilization helps to create pressure on elected officials and political openings for others to act.

- 1) If you know of global or US organizations impacted by these actions, please let advocates or press know. Here are online forms to fill out:

For US nonprofits:

- a) Chronicle on Philanthropy wants to hear about impacts to nonprofit organizations; they ask NPO staff [to fill out this online form](#).
- b) The National Council of Nonprofits has [a survey for nonprofits impacted by the Executive Orders](#) (which is shared with state chapters)
- c) There is a separate survey for Minnesota nonprofits impacted by the funding freeze: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/8L5CSB9>
- d) And for California nonprofits: <https://calnonprofits.org/update-omb-memo-rescinded/>

For global civil society organizations:

- e) TechChange asks groups impacted by the aid freeze to fill out this form: <https://www.globalaidfreeze.com/>
- f) Outright International has [a survey of global LGBTIQ organizations](#) impacted by the USAID pause.
- g) CIVICUS also has [a survey to track impacts on its global civil society](#) members (and [it's easy to join](#)).

If the organization doesn't fit into these categories, consider advocating to your relevant umbrella organization or professional association to start a survey. Documenting impacts across US states, sectors, and countries can be used in advocacy efforts. Sharing stories of impact with elected representatives, state governments, and national governments can increase pressure on the US federal government.

- 2) In the US, call your Senators and Representatives, especially if they are Republicans. The [USAID Stop Work website](#) has details and scripts to use on that topic.
 - a) The Republican party currently controls both houses of Congress and tends to defer to Donald Trump and the MAGA movement, and they really need to hear how these orders have hurt voters in their constituencies.
 - b) Democrats also need to be sounding the alarm louder. Letters and press conferences are a first step. Also, the calls are mostly coming from those representing Maryland and Virginia, where USAID staff live, but the impact is wider.

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- 3) Donate to support the [huge response of legal cases](#) against the Trump Administration's actions.
 - a) Many of the court cases mentioned above include [Democracy Forward](#) as a plaintiff. They are a tax-exempt 501c3 that uses legal advocacy to push back against the erosion of the rule of law, and are accepting donations on their website.
 - b) [Public Citizen](#) is a membership organization that lobbies Congress on government accountability. They are also closely involved in litigation (through a separate arm). They have [non-tax deductible and tax-deductible ways to donate](#).
 - c) [State Democracy Defenders Fund](#), chaired by Obama's ethics chief Norm Eisen, works to prosecute anti-democratic actors and protect free and fair elections.
- 4) You can also donate to the [Foreign Aid Bridge Fund](#) to provide emergency funding to projects impacted by the foreign aid pause and [the Fund Our Futures](#) Campaign to support global LGBTI movements. The [Chronicle on Philanthropy reported on similar emergency fundraising](#) efforts.
- 5) Academics and researchers should be collecting and archiving data, especially on topics that received past federal funding or involved DEI, transgender rights, or immigration. Here are some places to look:
 - a) Here is an [archive of the USAID website from 2017-2020](#) and
 - b) [Publish What You Fund has links to other USAID data](#).
 - c) Annual reports of USAID's Civil Society Organization Sustainability Index (through 2022) can be found on [FHI360's website](#) and through [a separate dashboard, csosi.org](#)
- 6) Attend a rally. There have been rallies outside USAID and other federal offices, in state capitals, and elsewhere.

Getting accurate information

There wasn't much in the US mainstream press about the foreign aid pause in the days afterwards, as the news headlines focused on many more egregious Executive Orders. (I learned about it on Wednesday, January 25, from a colleague whose project was impacted.) A couple of other international relations academics I spoke with in the days afterwards were not aware of it. International colleagues were more immediately aware of it.

Furthermore, it was difficult, at least initially, to find good articles that comprehensively explain the proposed measures and the arguments of nonprofits. Many of the organizations that usually provide oversight had little information beyond statements on their websites early on in the news cycle, hopefully because they were too busy filing court cases and lobbying Congress to write something more comprehensively. Only later did the National Council of Nonprofits collect all the statements, cases, and actions and relevant reporting to their website with a link from the home page.