Washington: The Local Impact of Federal Cuts

A reporter's field guide to the Trump administration's cuts to the federal workforce, federal funding and federal infrastructure that touch Washington communities.

How To Use This Brief

This brief covers cuts made by the Trump administration through executive action since Jan. 20, 2025, including grant terminations, contract cancellations, Office of Financial Management and Department of Government Efficiency-driven freezes, agency reorganizations, reductions in force and rule recessions that slashed funding flows. This brief excludes provisions that took effect through the congressional voting and budgetary process. It focuses primarily on cuts that have had the greatest impact on Washington communities and received less local media coverage in Washington's media markets.

Each sector entry below includes (1) what happened and the executive action behind it, (2) Washington-specific impact, identifying affected institutions, (3) story angles that support human-impact ledes and (4) sourcing pointers.

***Note:** This guide is a compilation of publicly available reporting and primary source documents and does not reflect original data collection or research conducted by the Partnership for Public Service. Numbers and named institutions are drawn from cited reporting and primary documents available as of July 2026. Reporters should be diligent about verifying any funding restorations triggered by ongoing litigation, as the lawsuit landscape changes frequently.

Washington at a Glance

- $212 million in Environmental Protection Agency grants canceled, including $156 million in Solar for All funding, eliminating a clean-energy equity program before most of its benefits reached low-income households. This cut is currently being challenged in court.
- $18 million in National Science Foundation grants terminated, threatening graduate student stipends, postdoctoral positions and university research programs at the University of Washington, Washington State University and smaller institutions.
- 58,000 federal employees in Washington, a decline of 11.4% compared with 2024, with $29.8 billion in allocated federal assistance—down 4.89%—and $14.1 billion in federal contracts—down 8.42%, according to research from the Partnership for Public Service.
- Public lands nonprofits losing funding amid state budget cuts, with impacts compounded by reductions in federal land management staff—National Park Service employees fell from 515 permanent employees in December 2024 to 396 in May 2026.[1]

[1] In the Office of Personnel Management's "Table Builder," apply the following filters and elements to access data for both the National Park Service and the U.S. Forest Service: Rows = Subagency, Appointment Type; Columns = Snapshot date; Metrics = Employee count; Subagency = IN10 - NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, AG11 - FOREST SERVICE; Duty station = WASHINGTON. Combine totals for permanent employees.

Clean Energy: Solar for All

The What

The EPA's $156 million in Solar for All program funding to Washington was designed specifically for low-income households that cannot participate in the private solar market. The program contracts local developers and solar installers to carry out installations, and partners with community organizations on outreach and workforce development. The Trump administration canceled the program before most of its benefits reached recipients, eliminating clean-energy access for low-income families and widening the gap between who does and does not benefit from the clean energy transition. This cut is currently being challenged in court.

Impact on Washington

The cancellation primarily affects low-income homeowners and renters, environmental justice communities, solar installers and contractors, and rural cooperative utility members. The program targeted the intersection of income-qualified households, high-energy costs relative to income and census tracts flagged as disadvantaged under a federal mapping tool known as CEJST, with a separate funding track dedicated to tribal solar projects.

Solar for All sought to help low- and moderate-income households who otherwise couldn't access the savings solar provides. Washington's highest energy burdens are concentrated in counties like Ferry, where 41% of all households are both low-income and energy burdened, and Okanogan, where the figure is 33%.

Story Angles

Story Angle 1

Interview a low-income household enrolled in or awaiting Solar for All and calculate the estimated utility savings they would have received over the life of a planned installation. Contrast the program's intended scale with what was actually delivered before the cancellation.

Story Angle 2

Profile a solar installation business or contractor whose contracted Solar for All work was terminated. Report on immediate revenue loss and explore whether any state or local clean-energy funding could fill the gap.

Story Angle 3

Examine how the Solar for All cancellation affects Washington's broader clean energy transition goals, particularly in environmental justice communities. Report on whether the state's Department of Commerce has any plans to replace the lost federal funding.

Research Funding: National Science Foundation Grant Terminations

The What

The Trump administration has terminated $18.7 million in National Science Foundation grants, disrupting university research programs and cutting income for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers mid-degree or mid-project. Washington's research universities are major economic engines—contraction in federal research funding affects technology transfer, startup pipelines and healthcare innovation that takes years to rebuild.

Impact on Washington

Grant terminations have left doctorate students at the University of Washington facing uncertainty around the future of their research. Research universities generally rely on federal grants both to conduct research and to train future scientists, and the cuts leave UW without a clear plan to absorb the loss.

Kate Starbird, co-founder of the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public, noted in 2025 that junior researchers and Ph.D. students, lacking the job security of tenured faculty, are bearing the brunt, losing funding that would have launched their careers. Left unchecked, the cuts threaten a slow erosion of UW's capacity to develop new technologies and innovations.

Story Angles

Story Angle 1

Find a graduate student or postdoctoral researcher whose stipend was eliminated by an NSF grant termination. Report on what options exist—if any—and what the researcher plans to do next. Explore the short- and long-term economic and innovation consequences of losing out on research as other countries like China and those in the European Union seek to recruit researchers who lost their funding.

Story Angle 2

Report on a research study that was terminated and what discoveries may not happen as a result. Examine what the long-term STEM cost of paused or abandoned research may be, including the potential departure of researchers to other countries willing to fund their research.

Story Angle 3

Calculate the economic ripple effect of Washington's $18 million in NSF cuts on the state's innovation economy. Quantify how many startup companies or technology-transfer agreements trace back to federally funded university research that is now at risk.

Public Lands: Nonprofit Dissolution and Outdoor Economy

The What

Federal land agencies have relied on nonprofit partners for decades to fill staffing and programming gaps on public lands. As state funding disappears and the Trump administration proposes major cuts to the National Park Service budget, organizations built over decades are dissolving, trails are going unmaintained and tribal comanagement relationships are fraying.

That loss is made worse by deep staffing and funding cuts within the agencies themselves: The National Park Service's Washington workforce dropped from 515 permanent employees in December 2024 to 396 in May 2026, and the agency overall lost out on hundreds of millions in funding for ecosystem restoration projects, climate resilience work, deferred maintenance projects and hiring when the Trump administration stopped all funding under the Inflation Reduction Act.

U.S. Forest Service employees rose from 1,269 permanent employees to 1,373 over the same period, while the agency as a whole experienced $75 million in funding cuts for urban forestry and a freeze on the disbursement of $1.5 billion under the Inflation Reduction Act.[2] Washington's outdoor recreation economy—and the rural gateway communities that depend on it—are taking a significant hit.

Impact on Washington

A dissolving nonprofit, Mt. Adams Institute, served multiple functions: training military veterans for public lands careers, leading career development programs for young adults, providing lodging support, maintaining trails, restoring forests and protecting watersheds. This loss of services means reduced federal-lands maintenance capacity and fewer pathways for veterans and young adults into public lands careers.

Separately, Washington's own state budget cuts are forcing state land agencies to reduce services, leading to unmaintained state parks and increased safety risks there as well. Together, cuts at both the federal and state level are straining rural tourism-dependent communities and outdoor recreation business.

Story Angles

Story Angle 1

Report on a public lands nonprofit that has dissolved or significantly reduced staff as a result of federal funding cuts. Follow the specific programs—veteran career training, youth summer camps, trail maintenance—that have ended and identify the communities left without those services.

Story Angle 2

Investigate the impact of unmaintained trails and reduced fire prevention on rural tourism in a gateway community. Calculate estimated revenue loss for local businesses and explore whether the community has any capacity to fill the gap left by departing nonprofits.

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Public Sector Fallout

The What

Washington state's public sector workforce depends significantly on federal reimbursements and contracts. Some Washington state agency positions tied to federal funding have been eliminated amid a combination of federal funding losses and state budget reductions. The Department of Health cut more than 40 positions—through layoffs and expiring roles as of June 30, 2025—attributing the reductions to a mix of state budget cuts and lost federal funding.

Impact on Washington

Washington's federal contract value fell to $14.1 billion in 2025, down 8.42% from 2024, while allocated federal assistance dropped to $29.8 billion, down 4.89%. County and city budget officials, tribal government leaders and Washington State Office of Financial Management budget staff are navigating significant shortfalls as well.

Story Angles

Story Angle 1

Even where funding hasn't been cut, the mechanisms that deliver funding are breaking down. Following staff losses, Indian Health Service grants managers saw their portfolios double from roughly 100 to 200 grants each, and the agency's grant program has been described by a former staff member as "in limbo," leaving tribes unable to get answers about money they're owed.

Tribal leaders also report that billions in other federal funding streams they rely on, including Environmental Protection Agency grants, have been frozen. The damage to tribes is in delayed reimbursements, stalled drawdowns and unanswered questions, as the executive branch slow-walks already allocated funding. Explore how long Washington tribes are waiting on grant drawdowns now compared with 2024 and what this means for the services and operations they rely on and provide.

Story Angle 2

Washington's 29 federally recognized tribes depend on federal funding for services the government is legally obligated to provide under treaty. Unlike states or counties, tribes can't build a comparable tax base because tribal trust land generally can't be taxed, and they face steeper barriers to issuing tax-exempt debt than state and local governments do—leaving fewer tools to backfill federal losses.

A Portland State University analysis of federal energy and environment spending found nearly half of that funding to Northwest tribes in 2024 is now at risk. Profile a tribe and the executive-driven program cuts it has faced across health, housing, fisheries or environmental services.