

DOGE Cut Off Small Town America's 250th Birthday Money

Then Trump redirected the money for his own beautification projects.



The Great American State Fair's Ohio booth in Washington D.C. promoted tourism to the state. (AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster) Carolyn Kaster/AP

By [Anna Kramer](#)

July 1, 2026

A local Ohio historical society had hoped to go big for America's 250th anniversary. It settled on what it could afford: a limited "passport" project to encourage people to visit and engage with local history sites.

President Donald Trump wanted a splashy, ambitious and unparalleled semiquincentennial. Local libraries and historical associations across the country were instead forced to abandon planning for ambitious history and civics initiatives when his administration axed federal funding for state and local humanities projects last year.

"There's certainly things that we could have done for America 250 if the funding was available. That just didn't work out how we thought it could have," said Meghan Reed, the executive director of the Trumbull County Historical Society.

In Trumbull County, Ohio, even the "passport" project had to be kept small because the historical society did not get the funds to print more booklets.

Ohio Humanities, the council that distributes federal small-dollar grants to the states' local historical societies and community groups, was just embarking on funding history projects for the 250th when DOGE axed its funding last year. So too were the humanities councils in West Virginia, Alabama and Washington state, the leaders of all three told NOTUS.

In nearly every state and territory across the country, the official humanities nonprofits created by a congressional mandate to help make history and literature accessible to all Americans had to give up their anniversary planning when DOGE pulled their federal funding, according to people involved with the councils at both the federal and state level.

"It means that we are not able to do things that are extra, things that are bigger projects. A lot of humanities organizations would have had some incredible projects that none of us have been able to complete," said Jessica Cyders, the executive director of the Southeast Ohio History Center, another group that could have been a candidate for a 250th anniversary Ohio Humanities grant.

"This is a pretty significant national event," Cyders said. "Look, I'm probably not going to be alive for the 300th anniversary."

By the time Elon Musk walked away from DOGE last year, state humanities councils were left with just enough cash to keep them from going under. Then, the Trump administration redirected tens of millions of dollars from the DOGE cuts toward the president's [plans for a triumphal arch](#) and a statutory [garden of "American heroes"](#) in Washington, D.C. In the end, Trump's focus on the nation's landmark birthday made it harder for local groups across the country to plan their own celebratory projects.

"As the director of Ohio Humanities, I don't take any sort of position about those particular projects. But what I do think is important is that Americans have access to funding and have access to history and humanities experiences in their own communities," said Rebecca Brown Asmo, the executive director of Ohio Humanities. "And we're missing that as a result of now a second year of this funding being held back."

"These are taxpayer dollars that are intended to go to local communities. And right now, they're being held back and funneled to projects in Washington, D.C.," she said.

The state humanities councils find themselves in a situation strikingly similar to the one facing the bipartisan America250 commission created by Congress. When the Trump administration took money Congress originally intended for America250 and redirected it toward Trump's Freedom 250 pet projects, the America250 commission [had to shrink its plans](#) and adapt to a new funding reality.

The critical difference between the two situations? While America250 is now asking Congress for more money to fill a funding shortfall, Congress has already responded to last year's DOGE cuts by funding state humanities councils at their normal levels for the 2026 fiscal year.

The Trump administration just hasn't dispersed those funds. As of June, the administration has only given the councils less than half of what Congress appropriated — and told them not to expect the rest, council leaders told NOTUS.

Now with the 250th anniversary just days away, the councils have been unable to fund anniversary projects. The Federation of State Humanities Councils, after a year of litigation against the Trump administration, [just asked a federal judge in Oregon](#) to declare that Trump is in violation of basic constitutional separation of powers rules by refusing to fully distribute what Congress intended.

Meanwhile, Trump's plans for the redirected humanities funding have only grown more extravagant, expensive and time-consuming. In some cases, his projects haven't even started.

No organization has publicly received public dollars to build statues for the "Garden of American Heroes," a NOTUS review of federal spending and financial-assistance databases found. Several statue projects were supposed to start in October of last year and wrap up in time for the semiquincentennial.

The National Endowment for the Humanities did not respond to a request for comment. The Trump administration's budget request for the next fiscal year claims that [some grants for statues were awarded in 2026](#) and that more will be awarded in 2027. The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

At the local level, projects of a much smaller — and less glitzy — scale have been put on ice.

"There's not really a lot of cultural infrastructure in West Virginia. Where most of the cultural work is done is in regional centers, community centers, small museums, county historical associations. So the people who really got hurt were those small organizations across the state," said Eric Waggoner, the head of the West Virginia Humanities Council.

The West Virginia council had planned to set aside 250th project funding for organizations of every size, from small regional museums to local libraries to West Virginia University.

"I'm sad to say we had to scrap it," Waggoner said. "Since we're the only organization that does this kind of grant-making in West Virginia, without us, there's really not much."

Congress created the humanities councils around the time of the American bicentennial in the 1970s, as one piece of the larger National Endowment for the Humanities. While the national-level NEH funds bigger civics, history and philosophy projects, the state-level councils were designed to distribute federal money to smaller-scale efforts.

"Ninety percent of our grantees tell us that we are the only place they could have gone for funding," said Chuck Holmes, the executive director of the Alabama Humanities Alliance.

While both the state of Alabama and private donors are distributing money for Fourth of July celebrations in a range of communities, Holmes worries that very little funding has been directed

toward the “deep-dive discussions about democracy and history” that he had hoped to be able to foster this year.

The Trump administration’s federal-level NEH is still funding 84 semiquincentennial projects across the country, [costing \\$75 million](#). Those funds are both separate from what state councils are supposed to receive and are for significantly larger projects than any of the local community work, multiple community and state leaders told NOTUS.

And the competition for that money is steep. “Anybody and everybody” is asking the same question, Cyders said: “How do we get funding for anything related to July 4?”