

Public safety groups face an uncertain future months after federal grant cuts

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Attorney General Pam Bondi testifies before the House Committee on Appropriations on June 23 about the 2026 Fiscal Year budget request for the Department of Justice.

Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images

Six months after the Justice Department cancelled [more than \\$800 million](#) in federal grant money, many groups on the receiving end are still reeling.

The cuts, focused on community safety initiatives, affected hundreds of organizations around the country and were far-reaching in scope: school violence programs, training for rural police officers, resources for domestic violence victims and hate crime prevention.

At the time, Attorney General Pam Bondi [said the department](#) was cutting millions of dollars in "wasteful grants," highlighting efforts geared toward transgender and LGBTQ communities.

NPR spoke with 10 affected organizations to see how they've fared. A few said their grants were reactivated, but most said they have had to lay off employees, dip into reserve funds, or shrink the services they offer.

"These cuts are significant and unprecedented," says Amy Solomon, a senior fellow at the Council on Criminal Justice and former head of the DOJ's Office of Justice Programs, the office responsible for the cuts.

"When an administration gives a grant to an organization, that is a promise for the full amount. And so organizations plan, they budget, they hire," she says.

Instead, the DOJ cancelled these grants in the middle of their cycle.

At Washington Technology High School in St. Paul, Minn., Principal Elias Oguz was shocked when a grant-funded position at his school was suddenly cut last spring.

"This was named the 'Stop The Violence' grant," he says. "Who would want to cut the 'Stop The Violence' grant?"

The money had allowed him to hire Robyn Strowder as a restorative practices coordinator, to resolve conflicts between students and build community at the school.

"It was very nerve wracking," Strowder says. "There was definitely a time that I was like, 'Hey, I have a whole family to provide for and I'm not sure if I have a job.'"

Oguz ended up putting \$50,000 toward the position using money dedicated to school supplies, as well as other funds from the school district and community donations. Even so, he's not sure where the money will come from in future years.

Oguz and Strowder are not the only ones grappling with that uncertainty.

"We have three other federal grants and know they could be terminated at any time without cause. If that happens, we will have to lay off staff and end services for participants," Nicky Fadley, executive director of the Virginia nonprofit Strength In Peers, told NPR in a statement.

The organization, which supports people with substance use and mental health challenges, laid off two employees already. It had already spent about \$90,000 of the terminated grant and is still waiting to be reimbursed for more than half of that amount.

Many of the organizations NPR spoke with were in a similar situation, saying the DOJ has not reimbursed them for money already spent. Those that appealed the cancellations have not heard back. Several organizations [have sued the administration](#), saying the cancellations were unlawful and that they are owed thousands of dollars in outstanding expenses.

In a statement, the Justice Department told NPR the ongoing government shutdown is hindering its ability to consider appeals and reimburse organizations. However, the department cancelled the grants five months before the shutdown began.

Almost all the cuts were to nonprofits. Solomon, the former DOJ official, says that reveals how the Trump administration is thinking about public safety.

"The kind of old school thinking is that it's only police that can keep communities safe. And what we're seeing out in the field more and more is that community-based organizations work as a complement to law enforcement," she says.

In fact, after the grants were canceled, DOJ officials [sent a letter](#) to Senate Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley emphasizing that the cuts were mostly to nonprofits, and "not to states or local jurisdictions that directly serve our communities."

"That's flawed rationale because these organizations play a really important role in their communities," Solomon says.

"We got hit pretty hard," says Everette Penn, co-founder and former director of the Teen and Police Service Academy, a mentoring program in Houston that had to reduce its staff. He says federal grant funding has bolstered the nonprofit world for years.

"It's the government sector that funds things that often are not funded in the private sector because they're necessary to keep our society functioning," he says.

Dwight Robson, executive vice president of operations at the community violence intervention group Roca, said the DOJ told his organization that its work "no longer effectuates" the administration's priorities. Yet Robson says combatting violent crime and protecting children were among the DOJ's new listed priorities in its communications to his organization.

"Those are things we think we do very, very well. We're not of the mind that we're entitled to any funding. We're very happy to undergo any sort of merit-based, individualized review of our performance," says Robson. "We believe that such an examination would result in one concluding that there's actually very good alignment between what the Department of Justice's priorities are and our work."

Roca had to eliminate about 50 positions, Robson says. They're now looking for other funding streams. He says Roca will get through this challenge, but he worries about the future of other groups dedicated to community safety.

"I'm sure there are funders that are looking at organizations and saying 'Gosh, they're doing good work,'" he says. "But it's unclear whether they're going to be there in two or three, four, five years."