

# Local arts groups count losses as NEA cancels grants

With latest Trump cuts, local programs offering music education to underserved communities and expanded opportunities in schools are among those taking severe hits.

By **Malcolm Gay** Globe Staff, Updated May 6, 2025, 28 minutes ago



Students perform at Project STEP's 35th anniversary celebration in 2023. The organization received notice from the National Endowment for the Arts Friday that it had canceled its grants. PROJECT STEP

The National Endowment for the Arts began notifying arts groups in Boston and beyond that the agency was rescinding grants and grant offers, a development many in the cultural sector have been bracing for as the Trump administration seeks greater influence in the cultural sphere.

The emails, which began arriving just hours after President Donald J. Trump proposed abolishing the NEA in his next budget Friday, were sent to a variety of local arts organizations, including EdVestors, Project STEP, and ZUMIX.

Project STEP, which provides music instruction for children from backgrounds that are traditionally underrepresented in classical music, received two emails from the agency targeting a pair of grants totaling \$105,000.

Ian Saunders, the group's artistic and interim executive director, said the organization might still be able to receive partial reimbursement for one of the grants. But the other grant, a \$55,000 pledge, is lost.

"The consequence is clear: we are losing critical support we were promised," Saunders said in a letter to Project STEP supporters. He added that the cancellations represent more than a "reprioritization of national arts funding."

"It is an effort to delegitimize programs like ours and silence the very students we serve," he said. "The message is unmistakable: that diverse voices, diverse thinking, and any expression that challenges the administration's cultural comfort zone are no longer welcome in the American artistic narrative."

It remains unclear how many organizations have had their funding cut, but a crowd-sourced document circulating among arts administrators nationwide showed Tuesday morning that more than 150 organizations have reported losing nearly \$4.5 million in funding.

“It certainly does not seem as though it was a small concentrated group,” said Emily Ruddock, executive director of the arts advocacy group, MASSCreative. “This piece of federal money is a big deal. In some cases it is the decision of whether or not you’re going to do a project.”

The letters informed grantees that the NEA is updating its grant-making priorities to focus on “projects that reflect the nation’s rich artistic heritage and creativity as prioritized by the President.”

“Consequently, we are terminating awards that fall outside these new priorities,” read one of the letters reviewed by the Globe. “Funding is being allocated in a new direction in furtherance of the Administration’s agenda.”

Among the new directions cited by the agency are projects that “elevate” historically Black colleges and universities, 250th anniversary celebrations of American independence, fostering “AI competency,” and making “America healthy again.”

Saunders called the revocation of the already-approved grants “a betrayal.”

“It breaks faith with communities who were told their voices had a place,” he said, “and that their stories belonged in the national consciousness.”

The NEA did not respond to a request for comment.

The agency’s decision follows earlier grant cancellations from the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) and the [Institute of Museum and Library Services](#). On Friday, president Trump [suggested eliminating those three agencies](#), along with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, in his budget proposal.

Other Boston-based groups that received termination letters include Castle of our Skins, a Black-led performing arts group; Boston String Academy, which offers affordable musical instruction to kids; and Urbanity Dance, a professional company that also offers accessible lessons.

Madeleine Steczynski, co-founder and executive director of ZUMIX, a youth organization focused on music and technology, said they received a cancellation notice Friday.

“Ironically, we have already completed the project, and received our funding in full, so the letter is moot,” she said via email. “However, we have a grant pending for this year with the NEA, which we assume will not be granted, and we are not planning to apply for NEA funding for the coming year.”

EdVestors, which works closely with Boston Public Schools to provide enhanced educational opportunities, also received a letter saying the agency had cancelled its two-year, \$100,000 grant to help support arts education in BPS. Like ZUMIX, the organization had already been reimbursed for the full grant.

Ruddock said that the loss of federal funding goes far beyond the dollar amount, adding that federal grants often help organizations attract private support.

“The multiplier effect of public funding to arts and culture is significant,” she said. “It’s a signal to private funders and donors, to corporations and other potential sources of funding that your program has relevance”

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