



DISCOVERY RELEASED IN LAWSUIT BY HUMANITIES GROUPS REVEALS CHATGPT-POWERED PROCESS BY DOGE IN CANCELLING GRANTS FOR SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Motion Filed by Plaintiffs for Summary Judgment in Lawsuit to Restore National Endowment for the Humanities Previous Function and Funding

For immediate release / March 7, 2026 (New York, NY) — The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) used a flawed ChatGPT process to identify “DEI programs” and inform decisions to terminate grants awarded by the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) (NEH). This development was revealed in discovery documents made available as part of a motion for a summary judgment filed in the US District Court for the Southern District of New York on Friday, March 6, 2026.

The filing by the plaintiffs—the [American Council of Learned Societies](#) (ACLS), the [American Historical Association](#) (AHA), and the [Modern Language Association](#) (MLA)—included depositions by two key members of the DOGE team, as well as Adam Wolfson (NEH Assistant Chair for Programs) and Michael McDonald (NEH General Counsel and Acting Chair of the NEH from March 2025 to January 2026). Depositions reveal that DOGE team members made the decisions about funding—despite having no legal authority to do so; document the use of Signal by DOGE and NEH staff to communicate about their process in violation of the Federal Records Act; and make clear that some grants were terminated despite NEH staff concluding that they did not conflict with new policies coming from the Trump Administration.

Discovery in this lawsuit has uncovered egregious and illegal actions that affect organizations and residents in all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

- **The Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led the termination of previously awarded grants.** The acting chair, Michael McDonald, ceded his authority over this process to DOGE, writing to DOGE staffer Justin Fox, “as you’ve made clear, it’s your decision on whether to discontinue funding any of the projects on this list.”

- **Michael McDonald cut out any Congressional role and asserted the authority of the Executive Branch to end funding.** Grants representing hundreds of millions of dollars of congressionally appropriated funds were cancelled without statutory authority.
- **McDonald and key members of the DOGE team bypassed authorized record preservation requirements and violated the Federal Records Act by conducting official government business regarding the cuts using Signal,** a messaging application unauthorized for federal employees, and intentionally set to automatically delete messages.
- **DOGE fed grant descriptions into OpenAI's ChatGPT generative artificial intelligence chatbot, asking it to decide if grants were "DEI."** They then entered ChatGPT's responses into a spreadsheet compiling all NEH grants, including its "DEI rationale" and "Yes / No DEI?" replies. This ChatGPT-generated list was used in place of the list created by NEH staffers to identify which grants to cut. Projects Grants that were flagged as "DEI" and then terminated included a documentary sharing the story of Jewish women's slave labor during the Holocaust; an archival project on the lives of Italian Americans; a project to digitize photograph collections of Appalachian residents; and multiple projects to preserve endangered Native American languages and cultures.
- **DOGE staffers violated the Federal Equal Protection Clause of the 5th Amendment by flagging grant descriptions as "DEI" solely because they included "BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color)," "homosexual," "LGBTQ," and "Tribal," among other terms.**
- **DOGE staffers also flagged grants that NEH leaders concede had no connection to DEI,** including grants that had been awarded for collections management after a natural disaster, preservation training, and improving HVAC systems.
- **After the termination of previously awarded grants, Michael McDonald asked an NEH staff member to solicit the Tikvah Fund's application for a single-source award; the NEH ultimately granted it \$10 million.**

In the motion, the plaintiffs present three claims: violations of the First Amendment; violations of the Equal Protection Clause; and violation of the separation of powers, as DOGE carried out the termination of the grants, not the NEH Chair, and without approval from Congress.

Their case, which has been joined to a similar case brought by the Authors Guild, seeks a judgment restoring the unlawfully terminated funding to their constituents, whose research and livelihoods have been threatened by the cancellation of their grants.

"The principle that knowledge of history, literature, religion, philosophy, and the arts is necessary to sustain a strong and resilient nation drove Congress to establish the NEH," said ACLS President Joy Connolly. "Our lawsuit reveals this administration's contempt for that principle and for public investment in research for the common good. DOGE employees' use of ChatGPT to identify 'wasteful' grants is perhaps the biggest advertisement for the need for humanities education, which builds skills in critical thinking."

"The manner in which NEH grants were terminated is in direct opposition to the agency's founding legislation, which asserted that 'it is necessary and appropriate for the Federal Government to help create and sustain . . . a climate encouraging freedom of thought, imagination, and inquiry,'" said AHA Executive Director, Sarah Weickel. "Terminating the grants of scholars and institutions for reasons ranging from the nature of the questions posed to the race or gender of the historical figures they intended to study, quashes freedom of thought, stifles imagination, prevents inquiry, and thereby threatens the study of history and the humanities more broadly."

"The facts in this case have exposed the administration's total disregard for the democratic process and for the value of the humanities that the NEH exists to promote," said the MLA's executive director, Paula M. Krebs. "Through this lawsuit, we have been able to document in detail the haphazard and unlawful actions of DOGE as these unqualified agents undermined the separation of powers and denied the American people access to vital public programming and research."

Established in 1965, the NEH has been a cornerstone investor in the advancement and accessibility of humanities knowledge and programs, providing funding to museums, historic sites, colleges, universities, libraries, public television and radio stations, research institutions, and scholars. In April of 2025, the NEH eliminated grants, grant programs, much of its staff, and entire divisions. The ACLS, AHA, and MLA filed a lawsuit on May 1, 2025, seeking to reverse these actions, which affect access to humanities programming, resources, and research for millions of Americans across the United States.

The plaintiffs, represented by the Jacobson Lawyers Group, are associations represented on the [National Humanities Alliance](#) executive committee. The [Phi Beta Kappa Society](#) is also contributing to this effort.

More information about the lawsuit is available online. Visit the [ACLS](#), [AHA](#), and [MLA](#) websites to view the original complaint, FAQs about the case, and more.

About the American Council of Learned Societies

Formed a century ago, the [American Council of Learned Societies \(ACLS\)](#) is a nonprofit federation of 81 scholarly organizations. As the leading representative of American scholarship in the humanities and interpretive social sciences, ACLS upholds the core principle that knowledge is a public good. In supporting its member organizations, ACLS expands the forms, content, and flow of scholarly knowledge, reflecting its commitment to diversity of identity and experience. ACLS collaborates with institutions, associations, and individuals to strengthen the evolving infrastructure for scholarship.

About the American Historical Association

Founded in 1884 and incorporated by Congress in 1889 for the promotion of historical studies, the [American Historical Association](#) provides leadership for the discipline and promotes the critical role of historical thinking in public life. The association defends academic freedom, develops professional standards, supports innovative scholarship and teaching, and helps to sustain and enhance the work of historians. As the largest membership association of professional historians in the world (nearly 11,000 members), the AHA serves historians in a wide variety of professions and represents every historical era and geographical area. Learn more at [historians.org](#).

About the Modern Language Association

The [Modern Language Association of America](#) and its 20,000 members work to strengthen the study and teaching of languages and literature. Founded in 1883, the MLA provides opportunities for its members to share their scholarly findings and teaching experiences with colleagues and to discuss trends in the academy. The MLA sustains a wide-ranging print and electronic publishing program that includes books, journals, style guides, and an international bibliography. More information on MLA programs is available at [www.mla.org](#).

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