

# Federal Policy Newsletter

DECEMBER 2025



## Executive Summary

### Lasting Effects for Nonprofits due to Shutdown

After a lengthy government shutdown in 2025, a bipartisan agreement led to the reopening and funding of several federal agencies, which temporarily reinstated grant-making activities. However, the earlier disruptions, along with freezes and cancellations of grants, largely due to DOGE cuts, had already caused significant damage. Some nonprofit research organizations reported staff reductions, program suspensions, or even closures. According to data from the [Urban Institute](#), nonprofits impacted by funding disruptions were much more likely to cut staff (29% compared to 15%) and delay new hiring. The funding environment remains unstable for the nonprofit research community. Research nonprofits, particularly those focused on global health, social services, or community-based research, should prepare for potential future freezes or changes in grant issuance and maintenance. With the federal continuing resolution set to expire in January 2026, some organizations are bracing for possible cuts to grants and federal funding as the new federal budget approaches. Read more [here](#).

### Shrinking Budget, Growing Concerns for Medical Research

As the federal government seeks to shrink the annual budget, NIH and medical research funding continues to take a hit. Reflecting on February and Mid-August funding [updates](#), investigations found more than 74,000 patients enrolled in experiments or clinical drug trials to treat infectious diseases and serious medical conditions were negatively impacted. The cuts resulted in the suspension of 3.5% of all active clinical trials. Some trials were halted, leaving patients without medication or support for medical devices, while other trials were unable to commence, leaving patients in the dark. Read more on impacts of NIH Grant Terminations [here](#).

## Policy & Regulatory Updates

### Federal Discussions on Links Between Vaccines and Autism Continue

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has updated its webpage, revising its previous statement that "vaccines do not cause autism" to state that a link between childhood vaccines and autism "[cannot be ruled out](#)." The Autism Science Foundation released a press release refuting the new statements from the CDC and continue to support their evidence-backed claim that vaccines do not cause autism. Access the Autism Science Foundations press release [here](#).

Public health experts warn the change could erode trust in routine immunizations, fuel vaccine hesitancy, and further decrease already declining childhood vaccine rates. Health officials are monitoring trends in vaccine-preventable diseases, including measles and whooping cough. Read more from NPR [here](#).

### Potential Changes to the FDA's Vaccine Approval Process

Scientific American recently reported on internal FDA proposals that, if implemented, would substantially tighten the requirements for approving and recommending routine vaccines such as COVID-19 and influenza, particularly for children and healthy individuals. Proposed changes include requiring larger clinical trials for new or updated vaccines, including minor formulation changes, expanded subgroup testing before approval, and reevaluation of current policies allowing co-administration of vaccines such as flu and COVID shots. Public-health experts caution that these measures could slow vaccine development, increase costs, delay access, and potentially reduce overall uptake. Access the Scientific American article [here](#).

For medical research nonprofits, these proposed FDA changes could have wide-ranging implications leading to slower vaccine development to rising costs for vaccination research and trials to meet new federal requirements. Other concerns, as outlined in the [New England Journal of Medicine](#), note potential decline in vaccinations available for the public as they become more costly to produce and challenging to approve; nonprofits may pivot to other areas of work. For nonprofits focused on medical research, this moment could represent a chance to advocate for evidence-based, equitable vaccine policy by educating stakeholders, communities, and funders about the risks of over-regulation, and pushing for policies that balance scientific rigor with public health needs. Read more [here](#).

## Upcoming HRA Federal Policy Events and Resources

Stay connected through HRA's upcoming Federal policy focused programs and gatherings. These events are designed to spark collaboration, share knowledge, and strengthen our community. Please note that registration for most HRA-hosted events is open exclusively to members.

### Federal Policy Series:

#### Research!America – An Overview of the Federal Budget and Expectations for FY26

January 2026, TBD (Virtual)

- Stay tuned for registration information to join the next Federal Policy Series webinar!

### Federal Budget Guide

#### Available Now

- This newly created resource outlines the U.S. federal budget process and its impact on nonprofit biomedical research funders and their grantee institutions.

[LEARN MORE](#)

## Other Events of Interest

- **December 18:** [Greater Vancouver Chamber] [Future-Proof Your Nonprofit: Smart Funding & Planning](#)
- **February 5, 2026:** [Hedgeman Law Firm] [Nonprofit Leadership Academy: Legal aspects of Advocacy/Lobbying](#)
- **Webinar Recording:** [National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities] [The Senate Reconciliation Bill: What You Need to Know](#)
- **Training Recording:** [Axiell Training] [Navigating the Federal Funding Changes](#)



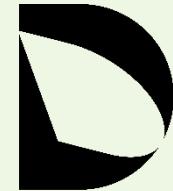
## Resources & Tools

- [National Council of Nonprofits Tracker] [The Impacts of the Recent Executive Orders on Nonprofits](#)
- [National Institute of Health Policy Changes] [Notices of NIH Policy Changes](#)
- [Association of American Universities] [Federal Research Cuts Threaten U.S. Innovation and Leadership](#)
- [Center for American Progress] [Federal Funding Cuts Map](#)
- [Alliance for Justice] [Being A Player: A Guide to the IRS Lobbying Regulations for Advocacy Charities](#)

## Research Organization Highlight

**This December, we are spotlighting the [Doris Duke Foundation](#) (DDF),** whose mission is: "to build a more creative, equitable and sustainable future." Their work spans across three areas: Arts & Culture; Nature; and Health and Well-being. In medical research, DDF is advancing bold ideas that challenge conventional thinking and open new paths – toward safe, accurate clinical algorithms and toward health research that improves outcomes.

In 2025, U.S. science faced historic threats—from deep federal budget cuts and data erasure to the sidelining of expert guidance. In response, the Doris Duke Foundation and the Dana Foundation launched two coordinated efforts: **Funders Action Collaborative Tracks for Science (FACTS)** and the **Portfolio to Protect Science**. FACTS, which launched this past March and is continuing into next year, serves as a fast-moving coordination hub that convenes 80+ science funders to share intelligence and track the evolving impacts of federal actions on U.S. science. The Portfolio, developed with input from 70+ experts and 14 scientific advisors, offers curated, funder-ready strategies to protect the scientific ecosystem. Since launching in August, the Portfolio has raised over \$67M for high-impact projects, with a goal of fully funding the first year of each project by June 2026. To learn more about FACTS or the Portfolio to Protect Science, please reach out to Sam Gill, [sgill@dorisduke.org](mailto:sgill@dorisduke.org).



**DORIS DUKE  
FOUNDATION**

### WE'RE HERE TO HELP

Have questions, suggestions, or need assistance? Dr. Christine Riordan is your primary point of contact for:

- Federal Policy Newsletter feedback and content suggestions
- Membership inquiries and support
- Event registration assistance
- General HRA questions and resources

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