

National Science Foundation Terminates Hundreds of Active Research Awards

The agency targeted grants focused on diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as research on misinformation.



Listen to this article · 8:10 min [Learn more](#)



By **Katrina Miller and Carl Zimmer**

Published April 22, 2025 Updated April 25, 2025

Casey Fiesler, an information science professor at the University of Colorado Boulder, learned late on Friday evening that one of the three grants she had been awarded by the National Science Foundation was being terminated.

“It was a total surprise,” Dr. Fiesler said. “This is the one that I thought was totally safe.”

The grant supported Dr. Fiesler’s research on building A.I. literacy. She received no official explanation for why the grant was being terminated more than a year ahead of its scheduled end. But Dr. Fiesler speculated that it had something to do with the word “misinformation” in the award’s abstract.

Dr. Fiesler was not alone. As of Monday, the National Science Foundation had canceled more than 400 active awards, according to a list obtained by The New York Times. The decision comes after months of scrutiny of the agency, including a report released by Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, last October and, in February, an internal review of awards containing words related to diversity, equity and inclusion, or D.E.I.

In January, the Trump administration attempted to freeze grant payments for existing awards at the N.S.F. A temporary restraining order lifted the freeze. The order also said that the agency could not terminate active awards to comply with President Trump's executive orders, one of which called for an end to "illegal and immoral discrimination programs" under the premise of D.E.I. across the federal government.

In a statement on Friday, the N.S.F. said that its grant cancellations were not in violation of the temporary restraining order. When asked by The Times to provide clarification on the legality of the grant cancellations, the agency declined to comment.

The National Science Foundation, established in 1950, finances much of the scientific research that takes place in the United States, ranging from astronomy and quantum computing to microbiology and education in science technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM.

In fiscal year 2024, the agency had a \$9 billion budget. But there have been worries about how much of that budget would survive under the Trump administration.

Last Wednesday, the magazine Science reported that all new research grants by the agency had been frozen, as ordered by the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE. The N.S.F. declined to confirm the freezing of new awards or what role, if any, DOGE had in the action.

On Friday, the N.S.F. went further, canceling grants supporting ongoing research. In a statement, the agency said it was terminating awards that were not in line with its priorities, including but not limited to awards focused on D.E.I. as well as misinformation and disinformation.

The agency also announced changes to how it evaluated the potential benefits of research. Previously, the agency factored in how well projects could draw underrepresented groups into science, including women, minorities and people with disabilities.



Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, had identified 3,483 “questionable projects” funded by the N.S.F. in a list he compiled in October. Haiyun Jiang for The New York Times

In its Friday statement, the agency announced it had shifted its priorities. Activities related to broader impacts “must aim to create opportunities for all Americans everywhere,” the agency said, adding that the efforts “should not preference some groups at the expense of others.”

In addition, the agency said it would no longer prioritize funding research on misinformation, which could “infringe on the constitutionally protected speech rights of American citizens,” and that it was canceling grants to “ensure that taxpayer dollars are spent in the most efficient way possible.”

A spokesman for the N.S.F. declined to comment on the number of awards terminated or any role played by DOGE in the cancellations. In a post on X on Friday, DOGE commended the agency for canceling 402 “wasteful” D.E.I. grants, amounting to \$233 million in savings.

According to a program director at the N.S.F., who asked not to be identified for fear of retribution, most of the awards that have been canceled so far are from the agency's divisions of research on learning and equity for excellence in STEM.

More than 100 of the canceled awards have been compiled into a public database by Noam Ross, executive director of a nonprofit called rOpenSci, and Scott Delaney, an epidemiologist at Harvard University. The database mirrors their ever-growing list of awards canceled by the National Institutes of Health, which has been ongoing since January.

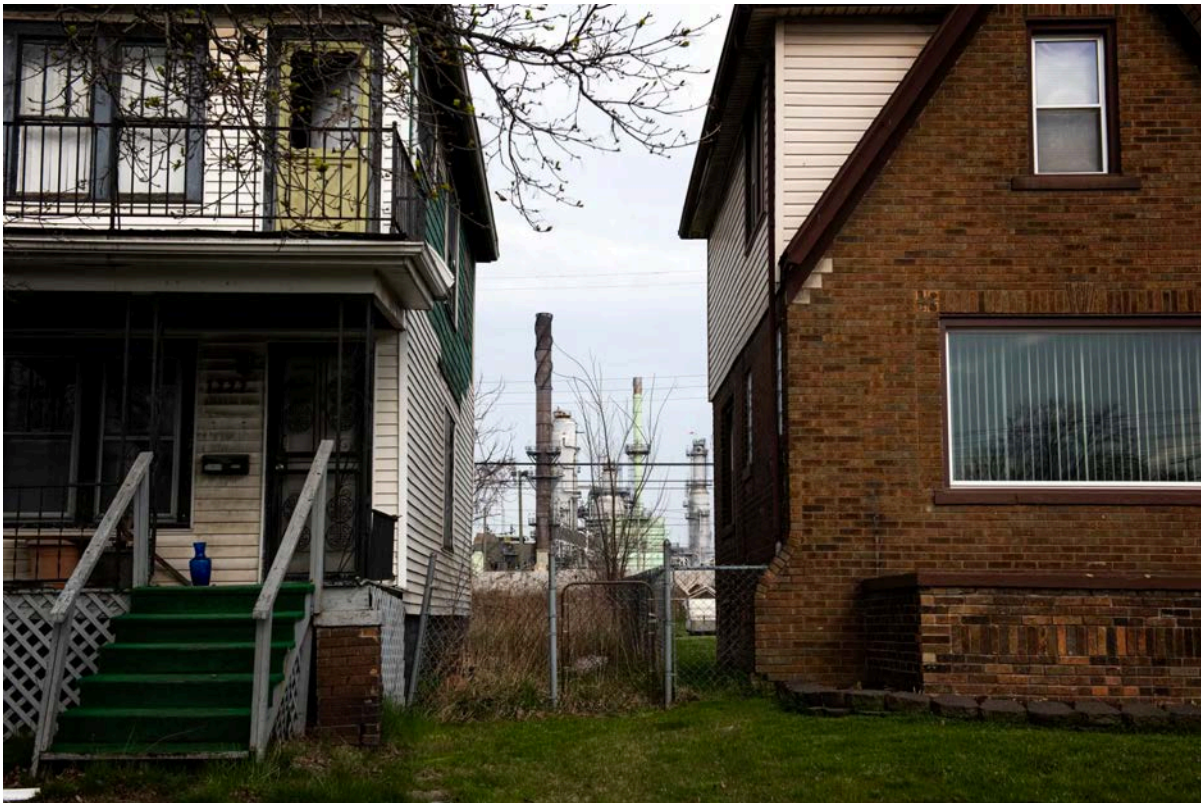
According to Dr. Ross, many of the awards submitted to the new database were mentioned in the list compiled by a committee led by Senator Cruz, which identified 3,483 "questionable projects" funded by the N.S.F. that the investigators described as promoting either D.E.I. or what they called "advanced neo-Marxist class warfare propaganda."

Democrats on the Committee on Science, Space and Technology in the House of Representatives released a rebuttal of Senator Cruz's October report last week, noting several flaws, including the misinterpretation of scientific terms, such as "biodiversity," as being related to D.E.I.

"Many people portray this as a war on the elite in higher education," Dr. Ross of rOpenSci said of the grant cancellations. But "so much of what is being taken away are the programs that make science look more like America."

Ember McCoy, a doctoral student at the University of Michigan who studies the politics of air pollution, found out on Monday that her N.S.F. grant was canceled. She did not receive an official reason for the cancellation. But she sensed it was coming, she said, because in the United States, the places with the highest rates of air pollution are low-income neighborhoods and communities of color.

Ms. McCoy was planning to use the rest of her grant money to pay community partners in southwest Detroit, with whom she collaborates to conduct research. She also hoped to use the funds to host a public presentation about her research for the community she studies.



A neighborhood in River Rouge, Mich. A doctoral student was studying low-income neighborhoods with high rates of air pollution, but her grant was canceled. Emily Rose Bennett for The New York Times

Terrell Morton, a STEM education researcher at the University of Illinois Chicago, found out about his grant cancellations on Friday afternoon.

Dr. Morton was funded by the N.S.F. to study the experiences of Black students in STEM, and how those experiences influence decisions to stay in or leave the field. Two of his grants were identified in Senator Cruz's October report, Dr. Morton said, so he was not surprised when they were terminated. What was unexpected, he said, was receiving the official notice late on Good Friday.

Critics of the cancellations say they run counter to existing laws.

"Congress has passed laws that require N.S.F. to conduct research into specific topics and in specific ways," said Dr. Delaney, who was an attorney before becoming an epidemiologist.

That could include the America COMPETES Reauthorization Act, which was passed into law in 2010 and requires the agency to support activities that expand the participation of women and people from other underrepresented groups in STEM.

In general, the agency provides scientists with the opportunity to dispute its decisions about funding. But researchers were informed that the decision to cancel their grants was final and not subject to appeal.

Scientists expressed fear about the growing disruptions to research and the harm it may do to both academia and the public at large.

“It’s shocking to see the government do this,” said Jon Freeman, a psychologist at Columbia University whose grant on studying facial perception was terminated. “It cedes American leadership in science and technology to China and to other countries. I think it is going to take at least 10 years for American scientific and biomedical research to recover from this.”

Katrina Miller is a science reporter for The Times based in Chicago. She earned a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Chicago.

Carl Zimmer covers news about science for The Times and writes the Origins column.

A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 19 of the New York edition with the headline: Over 400 Science Grants, Including D.E.I.-Backed, Are Canceled by Agency