The Cost of Disinvestment:

Understanding the Impacts of Defunding Federal Grants on Hispanic Serving Institutions

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Introduction

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On September 10, 2025, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced the cancellation of discretionary grant programs (Title III and Title V) for Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), terminating grants mid-cycle and closing the door to future awards. This decision resulted in a $507.9 million loss from canceled grants to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), a group of mostly open-access colleges and universities that represent the majority of MSIs (Perdomo, 2025). ED justified its decision by denouncing these programs as racially discriminatory and exclusionary, despite evidence that Title III and Title V grants strengthen HSIs' institutional capacities and increase educational access and academic opportunities for all students (Excelencia in Education, 2026; Aguilar-Smith, 2021).

HSIs serve students from diverse backgrounds. For example, the 5 million students currently attending HSIs represent 68% of all undergraduate Latine students, 45% of all Asian students, 26% of all Black/African American students, 32% of all Pacific Islander students, and a quarter of all white students, as well as 38% of all Pell-eligible (low-income) students (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities [HACU], 2026). HSIs also enroll large numbers of first-generation college goers (Santiago et al., 2024) and military veterans (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System [IPEDS], 2024).

The cancellation of these grant programs and rescinding of these funds marked a radical departure from the broad bipartisan support that HSIs have experienced for decades. Since the late 1990s, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle have recognized that HSIs (and MSIs generally) are crucial in broadening access to higher education but are underfunded compared to other colleges and universities (Padilla et al., 2026). Additionally, despite their resource disparities, HSIs increase student completion in high-need workforce sectors, such as nursing, teaching, and technical programs (Aguilar-Smith, 2024), and demonstrate outcomes comparable to those of better-resourced institutions in terms of their graduates' economic mobility (Perdomo et al., 2024). For these reasons, grants to HSIs are a high-value investment in improving the socio-economic status of students from a wide range of backgrounds nationwide.

Study Problem and Purpose

Recognizing HSIs' importance within the higher education landscape and the many benefits of these federal capacity-building programs, we set out to catalog and understand the consequences of this abrupt shift in federal support away from HSIs and the students they serve. Without a formal mechanism in place, we designed and administered a survey to document the effects of these grant cancellations on the people and programs they funded. We sought to answer the following questions:

- Who was directly affected by the termination of these grants? How did the impact of these grant terminations vary by employee role and status?
- When did students, faculty, and administrators at HSIs experience the impact of these grant terminations?
- What programs were terminated or reduced due to the loss of grant funding?
- What, if any, conditions shaped the impact of these grant terminations?
- How have these grant terminations affected HSIs' ability to support Latine and other underserved students moving forward?

In pursuing these questions, our goal was to elucidate the impact of this sudden policy change on people and programs, documenting what ensues when presidential directives circumvent Congressional allocations. Specifically, we aimed to document what these terminations cost, not in dollars, but more holistically for these campuses. The report also aims to close the gap between policymakers and those who live the consequences of their choices: grant program directors, faculty, staff, and student employees who translate funding decisions into the supports that help students succeed.

Background

Following decades of advocacy, Congress legally recognized HSIs in 1992, with bipartisan support (Valdez, 2015). A few years later, in 1998, Congress established Title V, specifically the Developing HSIs Program. In 2008, it expanded Title V to include Part B—the Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA) Program (Aguilar-Smith & Doran, 2024). Congress created and funded this two-part grant program to build HSIs' institutional capacity, given their systemic underfunding. Relatedly, in 2008, Congress also enacted Title III Part F, establishing the HSI Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Articulation Program to improve STEM degree attainment and transfer pathways. Altogether, through these strategic capacity-building investments, Congress aimed to expand educational opportunities and improve the educational attainment of Latine and low-income students (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008).

To advance these goals, ED funded an average of 53 new Title V awards annually from 2016 to 2023, issuing between 20 and 118 awards per year, according to public records. Since Title III and V grants were 5-year awards, ED also funded continuation grants for ongoing projects. In 2021, for example, ED supported 254 total Title V awards across 219 HSIs (MSI Data Project, 2023).

Miami Dade College, Miami Florida

Common Uses of Title V and III Grant Funds

To add substance to these numbers, in line with the respective aims of Title III and V grants, HSIs invested these federal dollars in multi-pronged capacity-building projects. Most Title V beneficiaries used this money to develop faculty competencies, academic programs, and student support services (Santiago et al., 2016; 2020), with Hispanic Serving Community Colleges often directing this funding toward their transfer mission (Doran & Aguilar-Smith, 2025). HSIs leveraged Title III funds similarly, though with special attention to building pathways to STEM degrees and careers.

As suggested, HSIs heavily invested these dollars in faculty and staff professional development, often focused on culturally responsive/relevant curricula and pedagogy (e.g., Griffin-Fennell & Lerner, 2020). Relatedly, many, if not most, Title V and III awardees leveraged this federal funding for curricular redesign and innovation efforts (e.g., Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Carpi et al., 2013; Cramblet Alvarez et al., 2023; Reguerín et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). For example, with a now-terminated Title III grant, the University of Arizona launched Project CREAR, training faculty to develop course-based undergraduate research experiences, among other strategies (Mittan, 2022).

To further ease students' transition into college and their overall success, awardees embedded peer mentoring into first-year courses (e.g., Moschetti et al., 2018) and established learning communities (e.g., Kato & Marinez, 2020) and summer bridge programs (e.g., Reguerín et al., 2020; Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). Toward similar ends, HSIs directed Title III and V dollars toward hosting academic skills and financial literacy workshops, (e.g., Espinoza & Genna, 2024) and adopting embedded/intrusive advising (e.g., Bhattacharya et al., 2020; Hernandez, 2020) or racially conscious advising practices (e.g., Ordaz et al., 2020). Furthermore, with these funds, HSIs established holistic student support centers that typically provide tech-equipped study spaces; services, such as tutoring and printing; and tailored programming like faculty–student socials and resume-building workshops (e.g., Amaro-Jiménez et al., 2023; Roberts & Lucas, 2022; Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). Even more, numerous HSIs established or expanded academic centers to support students in STEM classes and majors (e.g., Carpi et al., 2013; Davila & Montelongo, 2020).

Beyond such efforts, these capacity-building grants also enabled HSIs to address infrastructure needs. For instance, Del Mar College, a public Hispanic Serving Community College in Texas, used this money for much-needed digital infrastructure upgrades (Davila & Montelongo, 2020). Ultimately, HSIs across the country relied on Title III and V funds to implement multi-layered strategies to better serve students' retention and success.

Evidence-based Benefits of Federal HSI Grants

Again, intended to counterbalance HSIs' systemic underfunding, these federal grants provided needed financial resources to hundreds of HSIs over the last several decades. This federal investment yielded numerous benefits, including enabling HSIs to pilot, launch, and expand evidence-based programs and practices designed to promote student success (Aguilar-Smith, 2021) and expanded access to postsecondary education, including graduate education. Using a longitudinal dataset spanning 2005 to 2018, Murphy (2025) showed that full-time Latine postbaccalaureate enrollment increased by more than 11% following the receipt of a HSI-PPOHA grant.

In addition, HSI grant funding improved student outcomes, particularly traditional academic success measures. In her analysis of 4-year HSIs from 1999 to 2012, Perez (2020) determined that Title V grants, particularly expenditures on instruction, academic support, and student services, were positively associated with Latine students' educational attainment. Specifically, compared with HSIs without this funding, awardees conferred a higher share of bachelor's degrees to Latine students on average. Supporting these findings, Lacagnino (2019) found that students who participated in Title V-funded programming at a Hispanic Serving Community College earned higher cumulative grade point averages and had higher persistence and completion rates than non-participants.

Ultimately, given all the capacity-building efforts this funding has made possible and its many demonstrated benefits, the abrupt cancellation of these grants puts much at risk, jeopardizing the educational opportunities, experiences, and outcomes of thousands of students.

Study Design

With the need to document the effects of these grant terminations quickly, we designed a survey using QuestionPro and distributed it to current and former Title III and Title V program directors at HSIs. The initial email requested that they not only complete it but also forward it to grant-funded personnel at their institutions and broader networks. Given the urgency of the situation and the rapidly evolving context, our primary goal was to catalog the scope of impacts rather than test hypotheses.

We structured the survey into four main sections containing 25 total questions. The first part focused on contextual background, helping situate participants' responses within their roles and particular grant(s). The next set of questions helped capture the immediate consequences of these grant cancellations for people and programs at HSIs. The third segment delved into the personal impact of these grant terminations on the respondents.

After piloting the survey, we released it online in December 2025 and accepted responses until the end of February 2026. During this time, we worked to maximize the survey response rate among our target population: Title V or Title III grant-funded personnel, including administrators, faculty, and staff at HSIs. We reached participants through our professional networks and used snowball sampling to expand our reach, sharing the survey via email and social media. Ultimately, we contacted more than 150 individuals directly. As prefaced, program directors were asked to distribute the survey to others on their campus. HSI-related organizations also shared the survey with their professional networks.

Through these tactics, we obtained 135 total responses. Before the analysis, we reviewed all submissions for validity. Since open-access surveys are susceptible to bot-generated or otherwise unreliable responses, we employed multiple measures to identify and remove such responses. Specifically, we closely reviewed respondents' email addresses, time-to-completion, IP addresses, and open-ended answers for any discrepancies or inconsistencies. For instance, given the study topic and our target population, we flagged surveys completed outside the United States for further inspection and ultimately removed them. We also screened the responses for completeness, removing incomplete or inconsistent entries. Our final analytic sample included 73 responses that met our criteria for validity and completeness.

After cleaning the data, we conducted basic descriptive analyses to summarize and identify general patterns across the 73 included survey responses. Given the categorical nature of the data, findings are reported as frequencies and percentages, excluding the two open-ended items. Because several survey questions allowed participants to select more than one response, totals for those items may exceed 73 responses or 100%. We did not conduct inferential statistical tests or subgroup analyses by role or state due to sample size constraints. Qualitative responses were reviewed and thematically coded to identify patterns across participant experiences.

Limitations

Regarding limitations, the sample is small and partly generated through snowball sampling via professional networks, meaning it likely reflects the experiences of more engaged and networked individuals. It may, therefore, underrepresent more isolated workers, contingent staff, and students. Respondents also self-selected into the survey, meaning those most motivated to share their experiences, whether because of the severity of the impact or their professional investment in the issue, were more likely to participate. Additionally, 55% of respondents addressed the impact of these grant cancellations on HSIs in California, while the impact on HSIs in other states is less well represented. As noted in the findings, although this partly reflects where funding losses were largest, it still limits the analysis. As such, the findings are not statistically generalizable across all states or all individuals affected by the termination of federal MSI grants. Finally, data collection occurred only a few months after the grant cancellation notices while conditions at many institutions were shifting. As a result, some respondents were, for example, unsure about their employment status when completing the survey.

Sample

Among the 73 final respondents, most were responsible for implementing Title III and V grants, primarily program directors, administrators, and staff whose professional lives were built around ensuring that these grant programs and their missions flourished. As indicated in Table 1, the majority (n = 51, 70%) served as program, project, or activity directors. An additional 21 (29%) respondents worked as staff or administrators supporting grant operations, 14 held faculty positions, and four identified as students (two undergraduate and two graduate). Students were underrepresented in the sample, reflecting that the survey primarily reached grant-funded personnel rather than program participants.

Among respondents, 51 (70%) reported working on DHSI grants, 24 (33%) on Title III Part F[1] grants, eight worked on PPOHA grants, and five on Title III Part E, which is unsurprising given that the DHSI Program was the largest among these funding streams.

These grants funded a range of employee types. Sixty-two respondents reported funding for administrators and staff salaries, 58 for program directors, 54 for undergraduate students, 48 for faculty, and 16 for graduate students on their campuses.

1 The funding termination notice stated that it only applied to discretionary MSI grants (i.e., Title V Parts A and B and Title III Part E), not mandatory MSI programs (i.e., Title III Part F). We included Title III Part F grants, however, because we learned that various Title III Part F grants were still canceled, with institutions receiving individual notices from ED stating that their grants were discriminatory in nature. They were, therefore, impacted by the sweeping funding cuts affecting MSIs.

Table 1. Respondent and Grantee Characteristics

Characteristic	n	Percent
Position*		
Program/Project/Activity Director	51	70%
Administrator/Staff	21	29%
Faculty	14	19%
Undergraduate student employee	2	3%
Graduate student employee	2	3%
Respondent Grant*		
Title V Part A (DHSI)	51	70%
Title III Part F (HSI STEM and Articulation)	24	33%
Title V Part B (PPOHA)	8	11%
Title III Part E (MSEIP)	5	7%
Types of Grant Funded Employees*		
Administrators and staff	62	85%
Program/Project directors	58	79%
Undergraduate student workers	54	74%
Faculty	48	66%
Graduate student workers	16	22%
Unsure	3	4%
Prior Experience with Title III/V Grants		
No prior experience	35	48%
1 to < 3 years	9	12%
3 to < 5 years	4	5%
5 to < 10 years	14	19%
10+ years	9	12%
Prefer not to say	2	3%
Supervised Grant-Funded Personnel		
Yes	57	78%
No	16	22%
Number of Grant-Funded Personnel		
1–5	21	29%
6–10	16	22%

11–20	9	13%
21+	20	28%
Unsure	6	8%
Portion of Salary Funded by Grant		
All (100%)	35	48%
Most (75–99%)	2	3%
At least half (50–74%)	8	11%
Some (25–49%)	2	3%
A small portion (less than 25%)	12	16%
Prefer not to say	3	4%

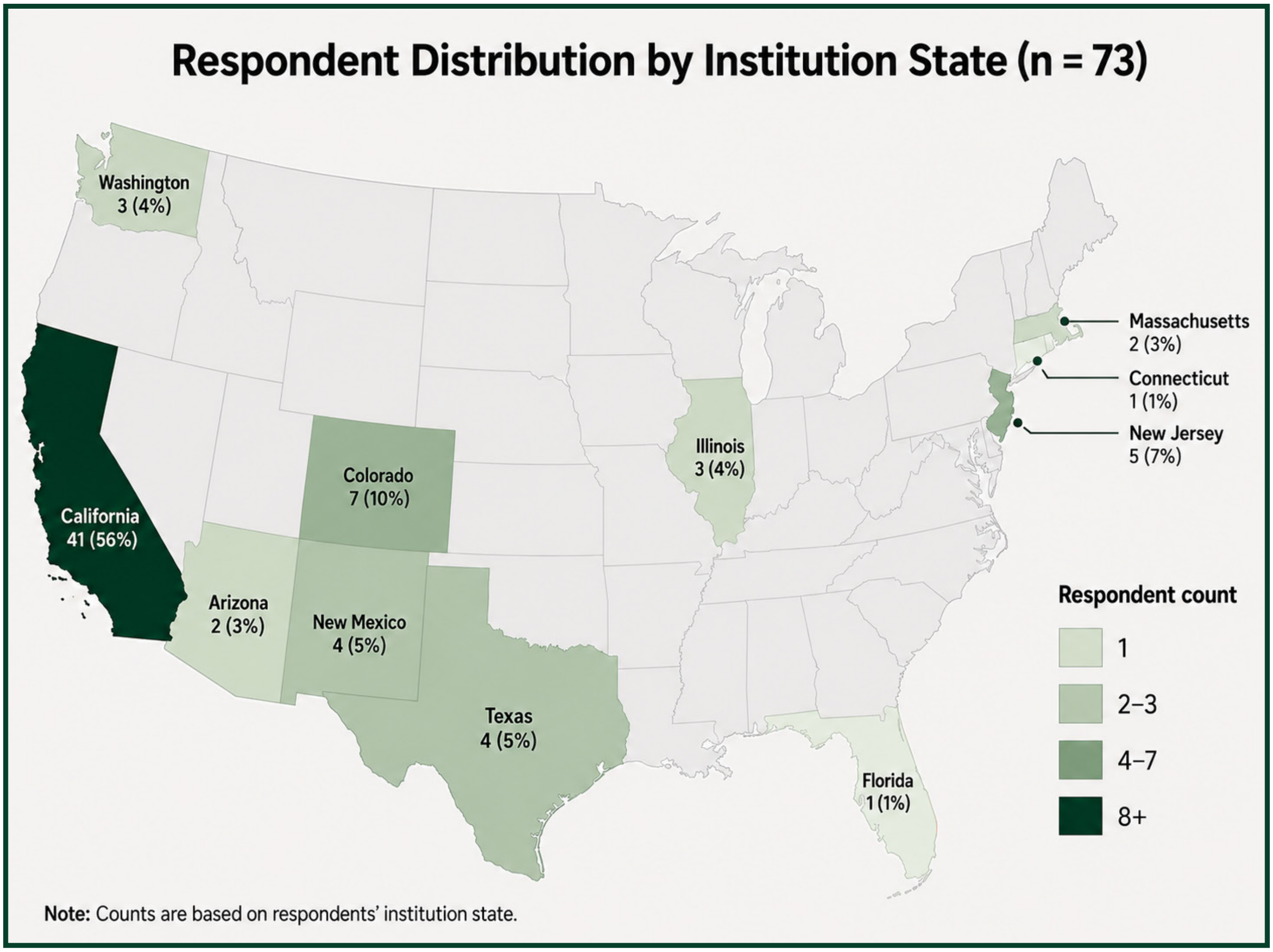
*Indicates questions that allowed multi-select, totals add up to more than 73.
**Percentages are based on the full analytical sample (n=73). Totals may not equal 100 due to missing or unavailable data.

Respondents' ties to this work were both enduring and extensive. Nearly one-third (n = 23, 32%) had five or more years of experience working with Title III or Title V grant programs, including nine with at least a decade. Fifty-seven respondents (78%) supervised grant-funded personnel, which tracks with their self-identified roles and the reported size of most campuses' grant teams. Regarding these teams, these grants supported anywhere from a few to over 20 employees: 21 respondents reported between 1-5 grant-funded personnel, 16 reported 6-10, nine reported 11–20, and 20 reported more than 21 employees. Six respondents were unsure of the total number of employees supported by their grant.

Nearly half (n = 35, 48%) had their entire salaries funded by grants terminated by ED, while nearly two-thirds (n = 45, 62%) indicated these funds supported at least half of their salaries. Of those whose entire salary was grant-funded, 30 supervised staff and 27 were program, project, or activity directors. In other words, those most financially exposed or vulnerable were often the same people responsible for running these programs.

Turning to institutional representation, respondents were concentrated in states with the highest proportion of HSIs. Over half (n = 41, 56%) were based at California institutions, followed by smaller shares in Colorado (n = 7, 10%) and New Jersey (n = 5, 7%). Overall, respondents represented institutions across 12 states. The concentration of California respondents reflects the current concentration of Title III and V awardees in California, per public data. California HSIs experienced the largest funding losses, both in total dollars and the number of affected grants.

In all, the respondents offer a descriptive snapshot of the multi-pronged impact of this policy choice.


Respondent Distribution by Institution State (n = 73)
Washington
3 (4%)
California
41 (56%)
Arizona
2 (3%)
Colorado
7 (10%)
New Mexico
4 (5%)
Texas
4 (5%)
Illinois
3 (4%)
Florida
1 (1%)
Massachusetts
2 (3%)
Connecticut
1 (1%)
New Jersey
5 (7%)
Respondent count
1
2–3
4–7
8+
Note: Counts are based on respondents' institution state.

Findings

The Expediency and Disruptiveness of the Cancellations

The suddenness of ED's announcement and the mid-cycle cancellation of expected funding left institutions with little time to respond. When asked how quickly the effects were felt on the ground, 12 (16%) respondents reported that grant activities stopped within the same week as ED's announcement, and 17 (23%) stated that they stopped within a few months. Altogether, 46 (63%) respondents stated that grant activities at their institutions were ongoing but would stop within 12 months, and 31 (42%) indicated that activities had substantially scaled down but remained ongoing. Together, these responses revealed that the timing of the announcement limited institutions' ability to sustain grant activities, protect personnel, or create transition plans.

"Giving students resources should never be controversial for the wealthiest nation in the world. These grants were transformational for institutions, and now nothing is in place for all of us to continue to work forward."

To better understand the extent of this policy change's impact, we asked participants to rank the disruptiveness of these grant cancellations for themselves and others. Over half stated that it was majorly disruptive to them (n = 50, 68%), their colleagues (n = 48, 66%), and their institution (n = 37, 51%). Just under half (n = 32, 44%) reported that it was majorly disruptive to students on their campus. One participant captured the overall disruptiveness of these funding losses by sharing, "Giving students resources should never be controversial for the wealthiest nation in the world. These grants were transformational for institutions, and now nothing is in place for all of us to continue to work forward."

Another respondent highlighted the disruptive impact to multi-year programming, indicating: "It has been devastating to lose 3 years of support."

The (Uneven) Impact on People

Beyond job consequences, the defunding of federal MSI grants also destabilized people's professional, emotional, and financial well-being. The most frequently reported effect was emotional strain, with 51 (70%) respondents stating that this policy change had a major impact on their mental health, followed by 34 (47%) who reported experiencing professional derailment or uncertainty as a major impact, and 28 (38%) who reported a loss of professional development opportunities as a major impact. While fewer respondents cited economic hardship (n = 11, 15%), loss of employer-funded healthcare (n = 10, 14%), and housing insecurity (n = 5, 7%) as major impacts, these reports underscore that for some, the defunding of these programs rattled the foundations of their financial stability.

While the above reflects respondents' experiences, the financial toll was widespread. Fifty-one (70%) reported that people at their institutions lost a source of income. Even those who did not personally experience economic hardship saw their colleagues adversely affected by it.

The funding terminations unfolded differently across institutions. Some campuses were unable or unwilling to retain grant-funded employees, resulting in harsher consequences, such as layoffs and furloughs. Specifically, 24 (33%) respondents stated that personnel were given notice and then laid off, allowing for some transition time, while seven (10%) reported that personnel were laid off immediately. Three (4%) reported furloughs. An additional 17 (23%) said that personnel had already left the institution, and 13 (18%) reported a reduction in hours.

Table 2. Personnel Effects

After the defunding of federal MSI grants, which of these has occurred to personnel funded by the grant at your institution?		
	n	**Percent**
Moved to another unit or role within the institution	30	41%
Retained employment but paid by institutional funding	28	38%
Given notice, then laid off	24	33%
Status unclear	23	32%
Left the institution	17	23%
Reduction in hours	13	18%
Laid off immediately	7	10%
Furloughed	3	4%

*Multiple select, total is greater than total respondents (n=73).
**Percent is out of total respondents.

In some instances, HSIs moved or shifted grant-funded staff to other positions to retain them. Thirty (41%) respondents stated that personnel on the grant were moved to another unit or role within the institution, and 28 (38%) indicated that personnel were now being paid by institutional funding.

While this offers a broad picture of the human toll, respondents revealed that the distribution of these effects was uneven across employee types, with 43 (59%) respondents indicating that the impacts varied by employee type. Also, among the 53 qualitative responses about these effects, 31 described some variation by employee type. In some cases, they described variation by termination dates, with some institutions letting employees go immediately and others at later points in time. Others described differences wherein some employees' (e.g., PIs) hours were reduced, while others, such as faculty, had to stop grant work immediately. For instance, one person explained:

> Some employees were terminated immediately, such as part-time employees and student helpers. Our financial literacy coordinator was let go on 10/10/25, and everyone else's last day was on 12/19/25, including our project director, STEM coaches, academic advisors, and the transfer advisor.

Another participant noted that unions played a role in this uneven layoff structure, stating, "The classified staff have union rights (bumping, seniority, etc.), [but] the administrators do not have any of these rights."

Among the 16 individuals who reported no variation by employee type, they typically described similar consequences across positions, including layoffs or non-renewed contracts. Importantly, a lack of variation by employee type did not mean everyone's jobs were protected. As one respondent stated, "All staff paid by Title V grants were given the same layoff date. Some have moved to institutional roles, some have left the college already, and some are waiting until the layoff date."

The Impact on Students

These terminations especially impacted student workers, revealing the vulnerability of student employment. Nearly 60% of respondents (n = 43) indicated that the job losses were inequitable, with students and frontline staff being hit fastest and hardest. Respondents who referenced students in their qualitative answers described a range of outcomes. Per their responses, some students were funded by other sources, some lost contract renewals or saw reduced hours, and some were in limbo, as their campus had not yet determined how to proceed.

> Students…feel there are no options.

As one participant explained, “Grad students were not offered alternatives” and “student positions were terminated within six months.” One respondent captured their vulnerability, saying, “Students…feel there are no options.” And another respondent underscored how their vulnerability persisted beyond the initial loss, saying, “Student staff were shifted to other funding sources, or this is the last year for their position when they should have existed for another 4 years.”

The Impact on Program Directors

While these grant terminations had an outsized and more immediate toll on student workers, program directors were also hit hard. They confronted instability, albeit later than student workers and often others on their teams, while assuming responsibility for managing the fallout. As one program director explained:

> My job security is the most prominent consequence of the removal of grant funding. I had my contract extended through the end of the grant, September 20th, 2026, but nothing further. I had to discontinue community programming and step back from funding promises made a year ago. We had to work with partners and withdraw from many community programs. I had to move student tutor funding to general funds. I had to move personnel to general funds. I had to engage in passive-aggressive leadership, meeting questions about the HSI work because it was too expensive. I had to hear folks question my performance as an administrator now that I had to seek a lateral promotion.

At the same time, program directors who stayed also had to navigate close-out logistics, funding gaps, staffing losses, and the withdrawal of partnerships or promised activities. Altogether, these unexpected changes to their jobs had rippling effects across their lives. For example, one respondent described how the burden of all this extended into their personal life:

> In the fall, I had planned to take a reduced load to deal with family issues. I ended up taking over the tutoring program for the semester, working 55–60 hours a week between running the tutoring program and having no staff to close out the grant.

This increased burden was especially severe for those who remained, as they took on additional labor while knowing their positions would likely end.

As with other grant personnel, the consequences of these grant terminations varied across institutions: some program directors’ contracts extended through the closeout period, some made lateral moves, or took lower-paying positions, and some departed the institution altogether. That said, opportunities for displaced HSI program directors tended to be limited, with few leadership roles available. For instance, one respondent shared:

> The impact varied by [position] type because the available positions within the institution were all at entry to mid-level experience levels. There were little to no director positions. This required the directors to look externally or apply for a lower paying position within the same institution.

Even when retention was possible, institutional conditions made it difficult to continue student-centered work at HSIs. As one participant stated, "Despite employees being retained, all HSI work came to a halt, in which the project director decided to leave the institution due to misalignment of personal values and institutional values." Ultimately, these grant cancellations did not just destabilize program directors' jobs; they dismantled the leadership infrastructure that sustained key HSI work at these institutions.

"Ultimately, these grant cancellations did not just destabilize program directors' jobs; they dismantled the leadership infrastructure that sustained key HSI work at these institutions."

Uncertainty and Uneasiness

While some of the consequences of these grant cancellations for people were clear-cut, many participants did not know how these funding cuts affected different employees. Others explicitly stated that the institutional response had not yet been communicated to them. One participant said, "Our administration is up in the air," underscoring the pervasive uncertainty many campuses and individuals faced amid these cancellations. Some remained at their institutions despite looming questions about their next step: "All of us are still here, but it is uncertain if we will stay after September 30th, 2026." In some cases, there were mixed results within a single institution, with clarity regarding some positions and continued ambiguity around others. For example, one respondent addressed how these grant terminations played out differently among employees at their institution, saying:

> It varied…some employees were given a few months before they were going to be laid off, some transferred to open positions, and some are unsure what is going to happen to them because there are no open positions available right now in their field.

Tied to the widespread uncertainty participants reported, many felt a sense of placelessness as career paths they had spent years building toward suddenly came to a halt. The ambiguity extended beyond individual job security into larger questions about the future of HSI work. As one respondent explained, "The sense of uncertainty, and regular news of how the Department of Education does not support HSI or MSI efforts, leaves staff with an uneasy feeling."

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The Impact on the Institutions and Programs

Title III and Title V grants supported HSIs at every level, from direct student services to broad institutional capacity building. Their terminations severed these efforts, leaving both newer and developing programs without a clear path forward. One respondent addressed this well:

> Beyond the immediate financial impact, the defunding of federal MSI grants introduces significant instability into long-term institutional planning and undermines years of progress in building capacity to serve historically underrepresented students. These grants are not ancillary funding; they support core infrastructure such as personnel, data systems, student services, and outreach pipelines that institutions rely on to improve retention, completion, and workforce alignment.

Divestment in Student and Academic Supports

Although impacted programs varied in focus and scope, each represented a commitment to supporting students and improving their experiences and academic outcomes. Nearly 70% of respondents indicated that their grant funds were used for academic support programs (n = 50, 68%) or success coaching/mentorship programs (n = 49, 67%). Over half of respondents reported using Title V/III funds for students' career development, internships, or externships (n = 42, 58%) or curriculum development or redesign (n = 39, 53%). Grants additionally supported activities such as transfer student support (n = 33, 45%), undergraduate research opportunities (n = 30, 41%), tutoring or supplemental instruction (n = 28, 38%), STEM collaboration projects (n = 23, 32%), STEM pathway programs (n = 21, 29%), financial literacy programming (n = 20, 27%), graduate student support (n = 17, 23%), and teacher education (n = 14, 19%). Together, these programs shaped students' experiences and opportunities across HSIs and strengthened their pathways into critical workforce areas, such as K-12 teaching and healthcare.

Defunding also affected student opportunities: over half of respondents indicated that students lost academic supports or other services (n = 53, 73%) and employment opportunities (n = 43, 59%). As one participant put it, "Students are hearing the message, 'you don't matter.'"

"These grants are not ancillary funding; they support core infrastructure such as personnel, data systems, student services, and outreach pipelines that institutions rely on to improve retention, completion, and workforce alignment."

Divestment in Building Institutional Capacity to Serve

Title III and Title V grant programs also provided financial support to address important campus-wide needs. Three-fourths (n = 55, 75%) indicated that their institutions had used these grants to support faculty professional development, and just over half (n = 40, 55%) used them to improve campus climate and student engagement. In addition, these grants supported institutional infrastructure, such as community partnerships, strategic planning, and endowment matching. Some grants also supported campus improvements by purchasing laboratory equipment and educational materials, as well as upgrading systems management, including financial and data systems. The defunding of these programs, therefore, raises concerns about future capacity-building at institutions that already grapple with infrastructure gaps and deferred maintenance burdens (GAO, 2024).

Some respondents worried about longer-term consequences. For instance, one participant described how these grants offered a foundation for crucial efforts to serve students:

> The short- and long-term impact is so hard to articulate or measure. These grants were never enough to begin with, but they provided a structure and process to measure Latine student success on our campus. Who will pay attention to the issues now? Who will bring campus partners together to address equity gaps? How will this work continue?

Depressed Momentum and Morale

Beyond the immediate losses of programs and personnel, respondents described broader institutional consequences tied to these grant terminations. Among the most noteworthy institutional-level impacts were a loss of momentum in institutions' Hispanic serving initiatives (n = 65, 89%), a decline in morale (n = 59, 81%), and de-prioritization of servingness efforts (n = 49, 67%). One respondent described how the decline in morale impacted students, specifying: "The impact on morale in the institution… has been noticeable…While people are committed to the work, it is hard to keep a smile for students knowing that roles are being cut." Finally, operational disruptions, such as moving staff into roles outside their expertise, changing faculty workloads, and losing institutional knowledge as faculty and staff left their roles, also accompanied these broader shifts.

Exacerbating Conditions

Amid a reported lack of communication and support from ED, institutions were left to navigate this disruptive policy directive without guidance, further worsening the impact of these grant terminations. When asked to describe ED's communication following this decision, respondents painted a clear, damning picture: ED gave institutions little time to prepare and act. Most (n = 46, 63%) disagreed that ED effectively communicated its decision to defund these grants. Just over half (n = 37, 51%) disagreed that ED helped institutions close out their grants. Overall, the respondents largely thought that ED should have taken greater steps to ensure students were not affected, and that it should not have fallen on institutions or the individuals who work there to keep programs going with no time to plan how to continue programs and seek other funds. As one respondent put it, the "U.S. Department of Education should thoughtfully strategize to support students impacted by their decisions. They are here to serve the people."

Some respondents also cited their institutions' poor communication as a factor that magnified the fallout from these grant terminations. When it came to the institutional perspective, roughly equal shares agreed and disagreed on whether their institutions effectively communicated the implications to people across campus and to their work and employment. However, respondents were somewhat more likely to strongly disagree on the latter.

The nearly equal divide in perceptions around institutional response further underscores how institutions were differently positioned, with some better prepared to respond than others. For instance, one respondent suggested that their institution was somewhat prepared to respond, noting, "Employees were retained through college budget. They were on a sustainability plan since the inception of the grant. Without that plan, they likely would have been terminated." Even so, they later clarified that HSI work still ended on their campus. In contrast, another respondent explained:

> This sweeping pull of resources exposed the scattered approach and fractured system of practices serving HSI institutions. Many college leaders were caught flat-footed and have not yet figured out how to respond. As I said, serving our students and employees requires a multi-prong strategic approach. My institution is saying the right things, but its actions are unclear and have no progressive development.

This reveals not just the contrast in institutional preparedness but also the lack of clarity institutions faced due to the swiftness of these mid-cycle terminations.

"Our institution had made so much momentum with HSI work. It is completely nerve-racking to know that there is so much uncertainty moving forward."

In thinking about the future of HSI work on their campuses, respondents' outlook was bleak, with only two stating that HSI efforts at their institutions would continue as-is. At the same time, 23 indicated that they were unsure. Meanwhile, 12 respondents stated that their campuses have ended or will end HSI-related efforts. However, the most common response (n = 28, 38%) was that HSI efforts at their institution would be reduced but continue.

Yet what that continuation looks like remains in question. A primary concern is that HSI work will fall more on individuals with little institutional response, as illustrated by a respondent who said, "The servingness framework will continue to be implemented by key invested individuals on campus. All grant activities have concluded and will not continue." Moreover, another participant surmised, "Our institution had made so much momentum with HSI work. It is completely nerve-racking to know that there is so much uncertainty moving forward."

Discussion

HSIs are a growing group of colleges and universities that enroll high proportions of Latine, low-income, first-generation, and veteran students (IPEDS, 2025; Santiago et al., 2024). Although HSIs remain historically underfunded, they use their limited resources effectively. They open doors to higher education for many communities and promote upward mobility at rates similar to those of better-resourced institutions, making them a strong investment in the future. From enabling mentoring and tutoring programs and curriculum development to desperately needed infrastructural investments, Title III and V grants served as an essential source of support, and their termination harmed the campuses, faculty, staff, and students who benefited from them.

Despite the substantial benefits of these capacity-building grant programs, they were limited in reach and scope. DHSI grants, for example, provided up to $600,000 per year for up to five years, were competitive, did not reach all high-need institutions, and did not always support Latine students directly (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Perdomo & Guajardo, 2024). Scholars have urged Congress to invest further in these programs and in HSIs overall (Aguilar-Smith, 2021; Garcia & Hernandez-Reyes, 2023a, 2023b). Although imperfect, these grants still mattered.

Downstream Effects

The mid-cycle termination of Title III and Title V grants was a disruption that affected HSIs at every level at once. Jobs were lost, programs ended, institutional momentum stalled, and individuals and campuses were left to absorb these compounding consequences.

HSI grants directly supported people, including staff, faculty, and student salaries, as well as grant-specific positions. This policy choice jeopardized people's professional and financial footing, with some losing their jobs or part of their wages and others forced to take lower-paying positions. Beyond material losses, our results revealed the destabilization these abrupt cancellations prompted, engendering emotional strain, professional derailment, and a sense of uncertainty that reached across people's professional and personal lives.

These losses extended beyond individual programs, foreclosing employment opportunities, shuttering student support services, and destabilizing institutional infrastructure. The damage came from the simultaneous collapse of supports, staffing, programs, and the capacity that took years to build.

> **"The decision to cut these grants was, in effect, a betrayal of institutional trust."**

Broken Trust

The damage and shock of the cancellations stemmed from their mid-cycle timing, especially given that ED had just issued and accepted a new round of applications (ED, 2025). HSI practitioners were making plans around these promised funds, counting on the opportunity for continued support. The rug was pulled out from under them. The decision to cut these grants was, in effect, a betrayal of trust. A system that supported HSIs and the students they served for decades, even if that support was limited, was suddenly withdrawn in a way that did not allow for proper planning or effective institutional response. As a result, the HSI community received the message that they, the work they do, their personal and professional well-being, and their students do not matter.

> **HSI practitioners were making plans around these promised funds, counting on the opportunity for continued support. The rug was pulled out from under them.**

The sudden and mid-cycle nature of these terminations raises concerns about how the decision was made and whether the outcomes for institutions and the students they serve were adequately considered. If the goal of these terminations was to destabilize HSI-serving infrastructure, then they were successful, as evidenced by the far-reaching consequences documented in our findings.

Lasting Consequences

People spent their careers investing in HSI work only to have the support they relied on suddenly removed. The path forward now falls on individuals to shoulder the responsibility of student-centered work without the structural support these grants once provided. That so many faculty, administrators, and staff at HSIs across the country continue engaging in student-centered work speaks to their steadfast commitment to supporting underserved communities.

Countless personal stories and case studies demonstrate how these individuals have spent years providing students with the tools, resources, encouragement, connections, and institutional knowledge necessary to persist and graduate (Garcia, 2020). The departure of many of these institutional actors means HSIs are losing those who carried out the unseen labor that, in many cases, was pivotal to students' experiences and ultimately determined whether students dropped out or persisted to completion. As these individuals lose their jobs and programs disappear, so do the benefits that HSIs have provided to students and the nation for years.

In the end, our findings help move the conversation beyond anecdote by systematically documenting the effects of MSI grant cancellations at HSIs. This project offers a platform of evidence to highlight what those invested in HSIs and their students already know: the consequences are layered and still unfolding.

Recommendations

Our findings point to several recommendations aimed at public policy officials. Grounded in the survey results, these recommendations aim to improve policy processes, reduce harm, and better support institutions of higher education and the students they serve.

1. **Eliminate Mid-Cycle Terminations:** Federal grant programs typically operate as multi-year commitments to institutions, personnel, and students. Terminating them before the end of the cycle does not leave time to protect people or maintain services, wasting funds that had established successful programs.

   Action: Prohibit mid-cycle terminations except under extraordinary circumstances. In cases where this is unavoidable, funding agencies must provide transition plans, closeout guidance, continued funding through cycle end, and clear timelines and communication.

2. **Replace Before Removing:** The benefits that federal capacity-building grant programs at HSIs and MSIs offer low-income, transfer, and other underserved student populations are well documented. Sunsetting these programs without alternatives in place not only leaves these benefits unrealized but also has long-lasting negative effects.

   Action: Create and implement alternative funding streams to fill gaps and support students before removing programs.

3. **Create Non-Competitive Support:** Historically underserved students are more likely to attend under-resourced institutions (Garcia, 2018; Institute for College Access & Success, 2019; Taylor & Cantwell, 2019), yet support is often competitive and inaccessible.

   Action: Establish and fund stable, mandatory, non-competitive grants for institutions enrolling high concentrations of underserved students to support degree completion and workforce participation.

4. **Work Across Levels:** Higher education decision-making lies largely in the hands of states, yet federal decisions affect how colleges and universities operate.

   Action: Strengthen coordination between federal and state governments when making higher education funding decisions.

5. **Invest in Tracking:** Systematic data collection is critical to determining the benefits and costs of policy decisions.

   Action: Track the effects of federal higher education funding policy changes on staffing, student services, completion morale, and institutional capacity.

The terminations documented in this report demonstrate how the consequences of funding decisions extend beyond dollar amounts, reducing institutional capacity and disrupting the lives of both students and those most invested in student success at HSIs. The recommended actions aim to ensure that future policy decisions better protect people and prevent this institutional and human harm from recurring.

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