

How DOGE cuts have devastated Bay Area nonprofits, schools and agencies

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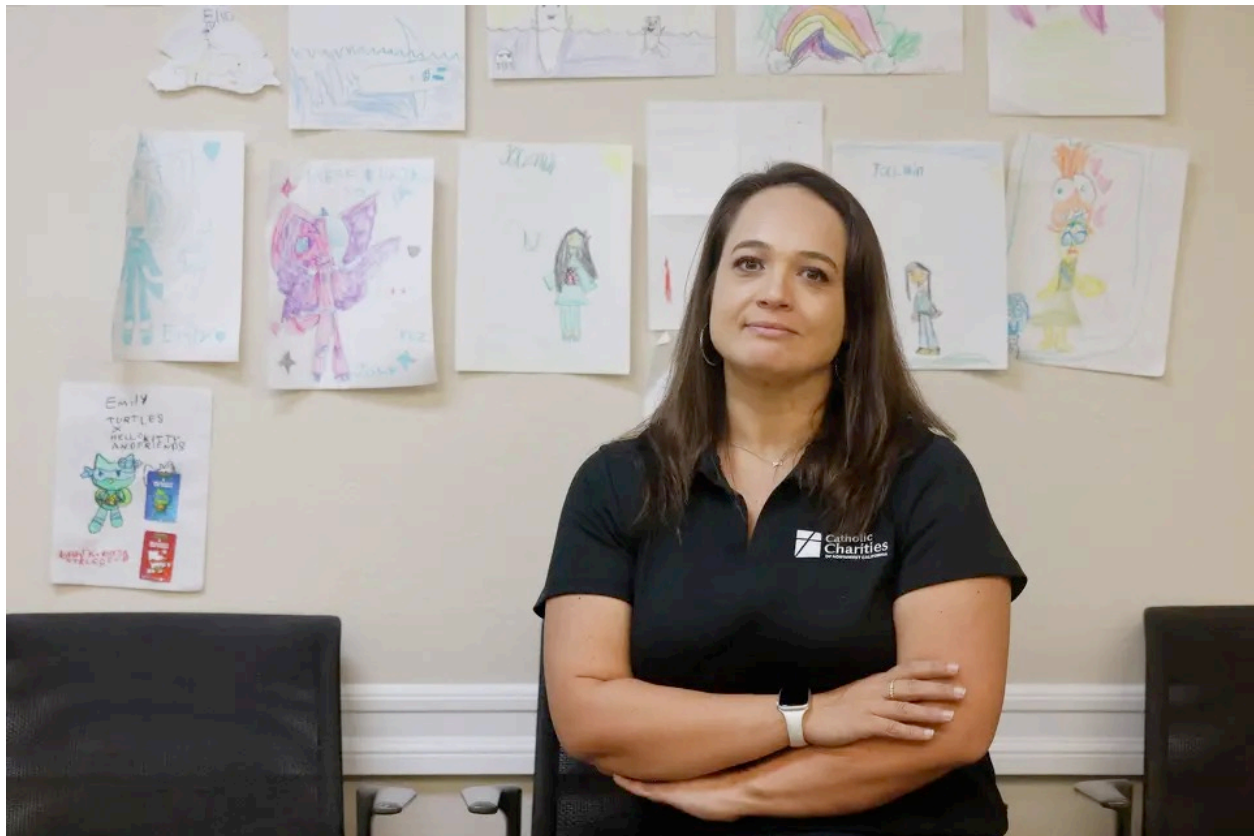
Mary Lowe works with a client at Catholic Charities of Northwest California on Nov. 26 in Santa Rosa. The nonprofit, which provides citizenship services to immigrants, had a half-million-dollar grant canceled this spring. *Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle*

Catholic Charities of Northwest California found out only eight hours before the federal government canceled a half-million dollar citizenship training grant that it had received annually for 15 years.

On March 27, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security informed the Santa Rosa-based nonprofit that it should end all of its work funded by the grant – helping legal immigrants navigate the complex pathway to American citizenship – by the end of the day, because it no longer aligned with the department’s priorities. More than \$300,000 in remaining funding was terminated.

For the Department of Government Efficiency, the Elon Musk-led initiative to shrink federal spending also known as DOGE, it was another small line item on its [“wall of receipts”](#) tallying savings. For Catholic Charities, it was an existential threat to its ability to provide citizenship exam preparation classes, legal guidance and fee stipends to hundreds of immigrants each year.

"It was completely unexpected and completely out of the norm," CEO Jennielynn Holmes said. "We shouldn't be in a place where people don't feel welcomed and don't feel like they belong here when they've done everything right and they've contributed so much to our community."



Jennielynn Holmes, CEO of Catholic Charities of Northwest California in Santa Rosa, is pictured in the waiting room that was moved from the public lobby to a private area requiring a warrant for ICE officers to enter. *Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle*

DOGE, and its ethos that the U.S. government is burdened by wasteful services and excessive regulation, has been a driving force of President Donald Trump's second term – clawing back billions of dollars from canceled contracts and grants, pushing out hundreds of thousands of federal Even as federal courts have found many of DOGE's actions to be illegal and paused them or ordered them to be reversed, the Bay Area, like many communities, was transformed by its mission. It has touched everything from the services that local residents can access to academic research at the region's prestigious universities to the physical landscape.

An 18-acre corporate campus in Menlo Park that once housed the U.S. Geological Survey [was sold in August](#), while IRS tax assistance centers in San Mateo and Walnut Creek are closed or poised to shutter, as DOGE sheds federal real estate holdings. A Livermore school district [halted its plans](#) to hire more counselors and social workers, an environmental nonprofit [pulled staff off a project](#) to distribute air purifiers to East Palo Alto families, and San Francisco arts

organizations scrambled to [keep performances on track](#) after their grants were swept up in DOGE-related purges.

But DOGE's place within the Trump administration is more uncertain [since Musk left in May](#), following intense public blowback to the initiative that damaged his business holdings such as Tesla. Reuters [reported this week](#) that DOGE had been dissolved as a "centralized entity" before its planned July 2026 sunset and absorbed throughout the administration, though top officials later disputed that characterization.



Elon Musk leaves after meeting with Senate Republicans at the Capitol in Washington on March 5. *Ben Curtis/Associated Press*

"As usual, this is fake news," a DOGE social media account [posted](#) on Monday evening, announcing that it terminated another 78 contracts worth \$335 million last week. "President Trump was given a mandate by the American people to modernize the federal government and reduce waste, fraud and abuse."

Hundreds of millions of dollars yanked

When the dust does ultimately settle on DOGE, it will be difficult to fully appraise the repercussions in the Bay Area.

By late May, DOGE claimed nearly \$480 million in savings from more than 240 canceled contracts and leases in the region, according to a Chronicle analysis using a [tool created by the Center for American Progress](#) that catalogued the “wall of receipts” by geography. An [NBC Bay Area investigation](#) from that time found another 118 terminated federal contracts, worth at least \$117 million, with local businesses and nonprofits, which disrupted their work and forced employee layoffs.

More DOGE cuts followed in the six months since, including the [cancellation of billions of dollars](#) for California clean energy projects in October. But many have been reversed in court, creating a hazy picture of the financial impact.

Researchers at UCSF, for example, had 97 National Institutes of Health grants worth more than \$240 million canceled between March and August, including for projects to reduce racial disparities in chronic diseases, increase health equity for Black youth and study a herpes vaccine. The university said in a statement that the vast majority were reinstated through litigation, but it does not know how much money has been recovered and whether some of the funding was permanently lost during the interruption.



From left: Signe, Aaron and Magdalena Hilla talk with Rebecca Novick, an immigration education supervisor, after the Hillas arrived to pick up Signe's citizenship class certificate at Catholic Charities of Northwest California in Santa Rosa. *Lea Suzuki/S.F. Chronicle*

Other decisions with profound ramifications for the regional economy – such as the April shuttering of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' San Francisco office, where more than 300 people worked – were not explicitly touted as part of DOGE, but align with its objectives.

"We're working our way through a very, very difficult period," said Rep. John Garamendi, D-Fairfield, who slammed Musk for using a chainsaw to "decimate the American government" without a thoughtful analysis. "The chaos that was created in education, energy, food programs, all of those things are still ricocheting."

His district took a hit this spring when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency revoked a \$19 million grant for a climate resilience and environmental justice project in North Richmond that included energy-efficient home upgrades and new affordable housing, the expansion of a creek trail, an e-bike lending program, a community garden, an emergency shelter and planting trees to shield an elementary school playground from pollution from a nearby distribution center.

'It was heartbreaking'

DOGE also targeted government employment, with more than 300,000 people, amounting to more than 10% of the federal civilian workforce, leaving through layoffs or buyouts this year. There is no publicly available breakdown of how many of those jobs were in the Bay Area, however, and even members of Congress say they've had a hard time getting answers from the Trump administration about the effects in their districts. Some, including three layoffs at the National Weather Service office that provides forecasts for most of the Bay Area, garnered media attention.

Local workers who had their lives upended were suddenly faced with the financial stress of unemployment in an expensive region, shrinking job opportunities in their often highly specialized fields and isolation from other affected employees in Washington, D.C., who could understand what they were going through.

"It was a very interesting experience, feeling like I was living in two different worlds," said Katie Hawn, a former contractor for the U.S. Agency for International Development, who said she had to explain to friends in the Bay Area this spring that the headlines they were seeing about DOGE dismantling the agency were real.



Supporters cheer USAID workers as they carry their personal belongings out of the agency's headquarters in Washington on Feb. 27. *Jose Luis Magana/Associated Press*

Hawn, who lives in Berkeley, rejoined USAID in November 2024 for a remote position on a team that collaborated with the U.S. Forest Service International Programs to train foreign governments on disaster response. Then in February, her job was frozen as the Trump administration rapidly shut down USAID, arguing it was a waste of resources. By April, when it became clear the work would not return in any capacity, the contractor ended Hawn's employment.

She was lucky to have a partner who could support her, and she found a new job relatively quickly with a Bay Area transit agency. But Hawn said it was shattering to have a career that she had built because of her dedication to public service tossed aside by the federal government.

"It was heartbreaking. It still is heartbreaking," said Hawn, who got teary talking about the experience. "The work is so deeply rooted for me in my values."

Services diminished by DOGE

Many of the organizations that lost grants through DOGE are now figuring out how to carry on, often in a reduced capacity.

In May, after DOGE cut hundreds of millions of dollars for the national volunteer program AmeriCorps, the environmental nonprofit SEI wasn't sure it could retain its 29 AmeriCorps-supported fellows, who provided garden education in San Francisco and San Mateo schools.

A successful lawsuit and alternate sources of funding allowed the fellows to stay through the end of the school year, but SEI opted to scale back the program this year "because of the instability of federal programs, and wanting to avoid the potential harm that could be caused by future unexpected disruptions," Dru Marion, the program's director, wrote in an email. The new version, funded by a grant from the San Francisco Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, focuses instead on training workshops for teachers and parents and gardening curricula.

Holmes, the CEO of Catholic Charities of Northwest California, said some of her colleagues across the country who also lost funding for citizenship training gave up after DOGE canceled their grants. But she felt that her organization couldn't stop, because more people than ever, feeling uncertain about their future in the country despite having legal immigrant status, are seeking their assistance.

Catholic Charities started a campaign called "fund a future citizen," asking for donations of \$1,400 to sponsor the cost of filing fees, legal services and citizenship classes for one person. Holmes said it has raised about \$250,000 so far – not as much as the nonprofit lost in federal funding, but enough to help hundreds of clients.

"We've really been getting the message out about why our immigrant community is so important," she said. "Just because they took our money doesn't mean they can make us stop."

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Alexei Koseff is the Washington, D.C., correspondent for the San Francisco Chronicle, chronicling President Donald Trump's policies targeting California and the tension between the state and the federal government, as well as how powerful Bay Area figures are shaping – or thwarting – solutions in Washington.

He is rejoining the Chronicle from CalMatters, where he covered Gov. Gavin Newsom and state government. Previously, he previously served as a Capitol reporter for the Chronicle and spent five years in the Capitol bureau of the Sacramento Bee. Alexei is a Bay Area native and attended Stanford University. He speaks fluent Spanish.