

Layoffs loom as Trump administration orders federal DEI workers on leave

Employees of diversity, equity and inclusion programs are to be placed on administrative leave by 5 p.m. Wednesday. Agencies were told to make plans for layoffs.

By Frances Vinall
Washington Post

President Donald Trump's administration took aim at government DEI programs, ordering federal diversity, equity and inclusion employees to be placed on leave no later than Wednesday and for DEI offices to be closed down, according to a memorandum sent Tuesday by the Office of Personnel Management.

The directive will eventually lead to these employees being laid off or reassigned, and followed executive [orders](#) on [Monday](#) in which Trump directed an end to what he called "radical and wasteful" federal government DEI programs.

OPM acting director Charles Ezell sent the memorandum to federal department and agency heads, instructing them to inform all employees of DEI offices by 5 p.m. Wednesday that they were being placed on paid administrative leave effective immediately.

By next Friday, agency heads must provide OPM with a written plan for "executing a reduction-in-force action" of DEI office employees, he said, using the federal government's [term](#) for layoffs.

Agency heads must ask employees "if they know of any efforts to disguise these programs by using coded or imprecise language," the memorandum said. DEI-related websites, social media accounts and other media must be taken down, it said.

OPM provided boilerplate language to be emailed to employees that said DEI programs had "divided Americans by race, wasted taxpayer dollars, and resulted in shameful discrimination." There would be "adverse consequences" for failing within 10 days to report any attempts to disguise DEI-related contracts and personnel, OPM added.

Trump's directives explicitly undid executive orders from the previous Biden administration, which instructed federal agencies to promote diversity [among their workforces](#) and for [people accessing their programs](#), with a stated goal of "advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality."

The Biden orders instructed federal agencies to review their programs and policies searching for structural barriers to full and equal access by people from different backgrounds, among other strategies, which Trump called "illegal and immoral discrimination."

Campaigning against DEI programs has been a focus of conservatives in recent years. Republicans introduced a bill in June, which has not passed, that [would have](#) ended federal funding for agencies, schools and other organizations that have DEI policies.

In December, Trump tapped attorney and conservative activist Harmeet K. Dhillon to lead the Justice Department's civil rights office, touting Dhillon's record of "suing corporations who use 'woke' policies to discriminate against their workers."

In the private sector, companies including [Meta](#) — which owns Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram — [McDonald's](#) and Walmart have scrapped DEI programs in recent months, following a 2023 Supreme Court ruling that overturned affirmative action in college admissions.

It is also a priority of the "Department of Government Efficiency," a body established by Trump and led by tech billionaire Elon Musk to identify ways to cut federal government spending.

DOGE [is reviewing](#) a 19-page report from the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, a right-wing civil rights nonprofit, that identified more than \$120 billion annually in what it said was "diversity, equity and inclusion" spending, according to two people familiar with the conversations and a copy of the report that was obtained by The Washington Post.

The dollar figure refers to DEI spending in federal programs and largely not on federal employees.