



'Thank you for your service': Trump administration puts USAID staff on leave

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A USAID and American flag outside of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) headquarters in Washington, DC, on Feb. 3, 2025.

Mandel Ngan/AFP via Getty Images

The Trump administration is putting all staff at the [United States Agency for International Development](#) on administrative leave as of 11:59pm on Friday, according to a new directive sent to all agency staff and posted on the USAID [website](#).

The message, which was unsigned, said there would be exceptions for designated people "responsible for mission-critical functions, core leadership and specially designated programs." It said agency leadership would notify "essential personnel expected to continue working" by Thursday afternoon.

The note ended with the words "Thank you for your service."



WORLD

What is USAID, the U.S. Agency for International Development?

A senior USAID official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because they fear retribution, said it was "essentially a shutdown of USAID."

The latest move caps more than two weeks of chaos at the agency, which President Trump and his advisor [Elon Musk](#) have said they are in the process of [dismantling](#). The agency's website had been taken offline last weekend.

"Truly they have made America weaker tonight," said another USAID official, who requested anonymity because they are not authorized to speak on behalf of the agency. "We may not see it tomorrow but we will see it eventually, people in Beijing and Moscow are smiling tonight."

The White House and the State Department did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Earlier on Tuesday, the State Department started the process to withdraw all USAID personnel stationed overseas, according to three sources with knowledge of internal planning.

"We are being tasked to assist the Department in recalling USAID employees to the United States by Saturday," Seth Green, the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Global Operations, wrote in an email to State Department staff on Tuesday afternoon.



POLITICS

Musk and Trump aim to shut down USAID, leaving humanitarian work in doubt

It continued: "I understand the feasibility concerns as well as the emotional toll this will take on those impacted as well as the team assisting. We've been asked to staff a 24/7 Coordination Support Team in the Ops Center's Taskforce space beginning immediately."

The email went on to say another State Department official would reach out to seek volunteers and coordinate scheduling.

The note to all agency staff later on Tuesday extended that timeline. It said "the Agency, in coordination with missions and the Department of State, is currently preparing a plan, in accordance with all applicable requirements and laws, under which the Agency would arrange and pay for return travel to the United States within 30 days."

For USAID overseas staff, the agency will consider case-by-case extensions based on hardship, the message said, including "the timing of dependents' school term, personal or familial medical needs, pregnancy, and other reasons."

Contracted staff determined to be unessential would be terminated, the note said.

"Logistically challenging, tremendously expensive"

USAID staff protested outside the agency's Washington headquarters on Monday. They were joined by Democratic lawmakers who railed against the influence of Musk and his cost-cutting team, DOGE, which has been exercising control across a swath of federal agencies. Musk has called USAID a "criminal organization" and has been posting on his platform X for days about shutting the agency down.



Employees and supporters gather to protest outside of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) headquarters on Feb. 03, 2025 in Washington, DC. Elon Musk, tech billionaire and head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), said in a social media post that he and U.S. President Donald Trump will shut down the foreign assistance agency.

Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images

Late Monday night, a memo went out to State Department employees asking that overseas missions provide the number of USAID employees and dependent family members at their locations.

About two-thirds of USAID's 10,000 employees serve overseas in more than 60 country and regional missions, according to a [January 2025 report](#) by the Congressional Research Service.



GOATS AND SODA

Why does Musk want USAID 'to die'? And why did its website disappear?

The abrupt recall of overseas staff will leave employees with just weeks to figure out where to go, how to arrange pet care, take children out of school, allow their spouses to make arrangements, and plan for their belongings to be sent behind them, for example. Meanwhile, withdrawing over a thousand foreign service officers and their families will likely be extremely costly, multiple diplomatic sources tell NPR.

"It will be logistically challenging, tremendously expensive and undignified," said one USAID employee who was not authorized to speak publicly. "Many folks have kids in school, for example."

"The last time we tried to do this was during COVID, and it was impossible to do that

quickly," said Susan Reichle, a retired senior USAID official.

In countries where USAID pays for the operational cost of the U.S. mission, such as Egypt and South Africa, the Trump administration's funding freeze is already preventing use of USAID funds. That has led employees both within and outside USAID to fear that soon they'll lose access to electricity, communications, security backups, trash pickups, medical evacuations, and other services.

President Trump delegated Musk and DOGE to review [USAID programs](#) and downsize the agency, potentially moving it inside the State Department. Trump has accused the agency, which distributes billions of dollars in humanitarian aid worldwide, of corruption and fraud. He gave a list of global outreach programs he disagreed with as illustrations of those claims, without providing concrete evidence of misuse or illegal activity.



GOATS AND SODA

Trump administration puts senior USAID officials on leave

Even before Tuesday's action, a large number of [USAID employees](#) had already been put on leave, restricting their access to their workspace and ordering them to stop all work. Hundreds of [independent contractors](#) have been laid off or furloughed. Guidance to employees has been inconsistent and unclear, stoking fear and chaos amongst staff worldwide.

"It's just so stupid and dangerous," one USAID employee told NPR. "We have [never] destroyed more goodwill and trust in such a short period of time."

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