



Impact of Federal Policy Changes on Associations

Overview

ASAE's Insight-as-a-Service project was created to provide associations with the data and community feedback needed to shape their organizational strategies for now and the future. This is done through several channels including benchmarking, just-in-time webinars, open forums, and pulse surveys. This insight update reflects our community's response on the impact of current federal policy changes.

ASAE is committed to understanding how federal policy and funding changes impact the association community. While ASAE remains an apolitical and non-partisan organization, our mission requires us to serve, support, and advocate on behalf of associations. To do this effectively, we must gain a deeper understanding of how large-scale policy and funding shifts affect organizations across the sector.

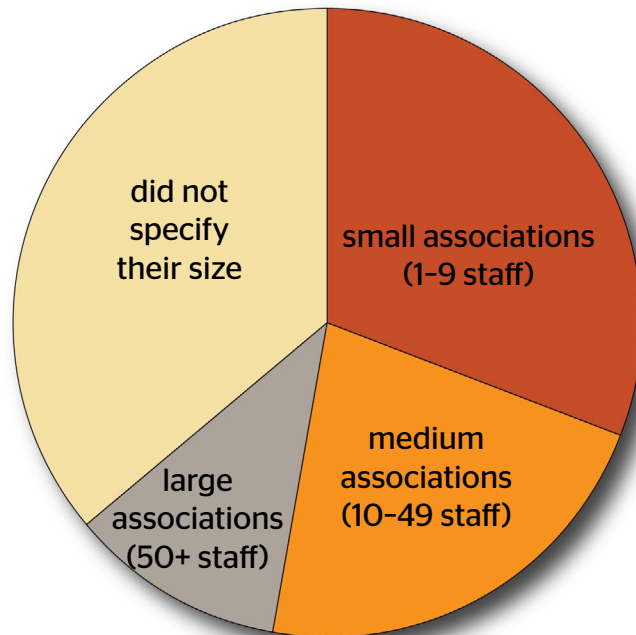
We also recognize that association leaders want to stay informed about what is happening across the community. To provide timely insights, ASAE launched a pulse poll on March 5, 2025, the first in a series designed to track the evolving impact of these changes. We understand that every association is unique and that policies may affect different organizations in different ways.

Our goal in conducting these polls is not political; it is to serve the association community to the best of our ability. By gathering data directly from association leaders, we aim to make informed decisions, provide valuable resources, and help organizations navigate these shifts while continuing to advance their missions.

The results from this first survey reveal a complex landscape of challenges, with many organizations reporting financial strain, operational disruptions, and strategic uncertainties. Key areas of concern include reduced funding, decreased conference attendance, and complications surrounding diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. While the majority of associations are grappling with negative consequences, a subset of respondents reported neutral or even positive impacts from certain policy shifts. This diverse range of experiences underscores the varied nature of the association landscape and highlights the need for tailored strategies to navigate the current political and regulatory environment.

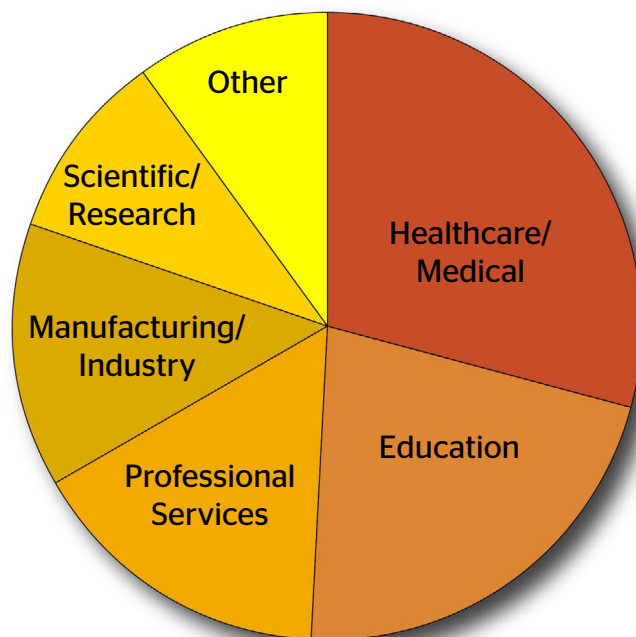
Response Demographics

- Total population survey was sent to 3,207 association CEOs/Executive Directors
- Total responses analyzed: **319**
 - 31% (99) were from small associations (1-9 staff)
 - 22% (70) were from medium associations (10-49 staff)
 - 11% (35) were from large associations (50+ staff)
 - 36% (115) did not specify their size



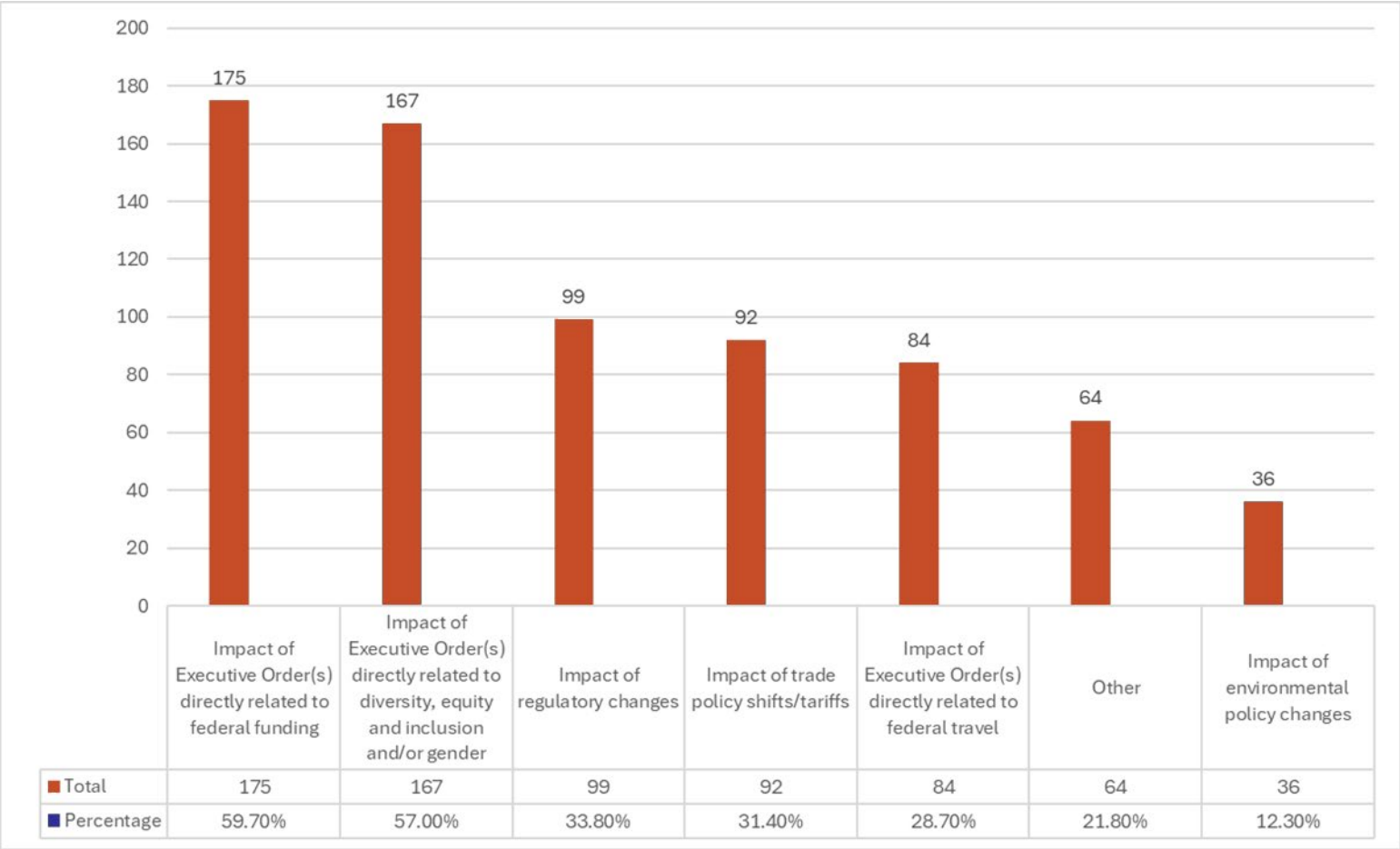
Industry Representation

- Healthcare/Medical: 15% (48 responses)
- Education: 11% (35 responses)
- Professional Services (Legal, Accounting, etc.): 8% (26 responses)
- Manufacturing/Industry: 7% (22 responses)
- Scientific/Research: 5% (16 responses)
- Other industries each represented less than 5% of responses



Top Federal Policy Changes Impacting Associations

Total open-ended respondents: **293**



Combination Analysis

The most frequently mentioned topic combination pertains to the impact of Executive Orders on funding, travel, and DEI, occurring 36 times. The second most common combination highlights the impact of Executive Orders on funding, DEI, and regulatory changes, with 24 mentions. The third most prevalent combination, similar to the most common, focuses on the impact of Executive Orders on funding and DEI, occurring 16 times.

Mentions of travel impacts are a third (33%) more likely to appear in conjunction with the top two issues—funding and DEI impacts from Executive Orders—compared to regulatory changes.

Thematic Insights on Federal Policy Changes Impact to Associations

Total open-ended respondents: **257**

Analysis generated by AI and reviewed/edited by ASAE.

Note: The percentages below represent the proportion of respondents who mentioned the associated issue unprompted. They do not reflect how often respondents selected it from a predefined list, which may under-represent the issue.

This data highlights concerns significant enough for members to write in voluntarily.

Theme 1: Financial and Operational Impacts (Mentioned by 154 respondents, 60%)

Funding Disruptions

- 39 respondents (15%) reported loss or freezing of federal grants and contracts
- 51 respondents (20%) expressed uncertainty about future funding availability
- 26 respondents (10%) mentioned potential staff reductions due to budget cuts
- 13 respondents (5%) raised concerns about potential changes to nonprofit tax status

Event and Membership Impacts

- 64 respondents (25%) reported decreased conference attendance, with federal employee attendance most affected
- 39 respondents (15%) noted reduced membership renewals and engagement
- 51 respondents (20%) mentioned loss of federal speakers and exhibitors at events
- 13 respondents (5%) reported potential boycotts from international members, particularly Canadians

Operational Challenges

- 77 respondents (30%) indicated need to revise programs, policies, and communications
- 64 respondents (25%) reported difficulty in planning and forecasting due to uncertainty
- 39 respondents (15%) mentioned increased time spent on member support and guidance
- 26 respondents (10%) cited legal and compliance concerns requiring additional resources

Theme 2: DEI and Social Justice Concerns **(Mentioned by 129 respondents, 50%)**

DEI Program Impacts

- 90 respondents (35%) reported rebranding or pausing DEI initiatives
- 64 respondents (25%) expressed uncertainty around permissible DEI activities
- 51 respondents (20%) voiced concern about losing progress on diversity and inclusion
- 39 respondents (15%) mentioned challenges to scholarship programs for underrepresented groups

Broader Social Implications

- 51 respondents (20%) expressed worries about backsliding on social progress and equity
- 39 respondents (15%) mentioned concerns about impacts on vulnerable populations served by members
- 64 respondents (25%) reported tensions between organizational values and new policy directions

Theme 3: Research and Scientific Community Impacts **(Mentioned by 103 respondents, 40%)**

Funding and Resource Constraints

- 77 respondents (30%) mentioned cuts to NIH, NSF and other research funding
- 64 respondents (25%) expressed concerns about impacts on academic institutions and research programs
- 39 respondents (15%) worried about potential loss of US leadership in scientific research
- 26 respondents (10%) mentioned concerns about long-term effects on innovation and discovery

Data and Information Access

- 26 respondents (10%) reported removal of data from federal websites
- 39 respondents (15%) noted reduced information sharing between agencies and associations
- 51 respondents (20%) expressed concerns about politicization of science and evidence-based policymaking

International Collaboration

- 64 respondents (25%) mentioned travel restrictions impacting scientific conferences and exchanges
- 39 respondents (15%) worried about US becoming less attractive for international researchers
- 26 respondents (10%) raised concerns about potential “brain drain” to other countries

Theme 4: Industry-Specific Impacts (Varied by sector)

Healthcare and Medical Fields (64 respondents, 25%)

- 51 respondents (20%) mentioned concerns about Medicaid/Medicare changes affecting members
- 39 respondents (15%) noted impacts on public health initiatives and disease prevention
- 64 respondents (25%) reported challenges to health equity efforts

Education Sector (51 respondents, 20%)

- 39 respondents (15%) expressed worries about Department of Education changes
- 26 respondents (10%) mentioned impacts on student loan programs and higher education funding
- 51 respondents (20%) reported challenges to campus diversity initiatives

Environmental and Energy Sectors (39 respondents, 15%)

- 26 respondents (10%) mentioned concerns about regulatory rollbacks
- 39 respondents (15%) noted impacts on climate change research and mitigation efforts
- 13 respondents (5%) reported challenges to renewable energy initiatives

Manufacturing and Trade (51 respondents, 20%)

- 64 respondents (25%) expressed concerns about tariffs and trade policy impacts
- 39 respondents (15%) mentioned supply chain disruptions
- 26 respondents (10%) noted potential job losses in affected industries

Theme 5: Advocacy and Government Relations Challenges (Mentioned by 90 respondents, 35%)

Reduced Access to Policymakers

- 77 respondents (30%) reported difficulty engaging with federal agencies due to staff cuts
- 64 respondents (25%) mentioned challenges in arranging meetings with government officials
- 51 respondents (20%) noted reduced opportunities for input on policy decisions

Shifting Policy Landscape

- 90 respondents (35%) expressed difficulty keeping up with rapid policy changes
- 77 respondents (30%) reported increased member demand for policy updates and guidance
- 64 respondents (25%) mentioned need for more proactive advocacy strategies

Coalition Building

- 51 respondents (20%) noted importance of cross-sector collaboration to address challenges
- 39 respondents (15%) mentioned efforts to build new alliances with like-minded organizations
- 26 respondents (10%) reported tensions within existing coalitions due to policy disagreements

Theme 6: Association Management Strategies (Mentioned by 116 respondents, 45%)

Financial Planning

- 90 respondents (35%) reported reevaluating budgets and financial forecasts
- 77 respondents (30%) mentioned exploring new revenue streams to offset potential losses
- 64 respondents (25%) noted building up reserves to weather uncertainty

Member Support

- 103 respondents (40%) reported increasing communication and guidance to members
- 90 respondents (35%) mentioned developing new resources to help members navigate changes
- 77 respondents (30%) noted offering additional professional development and training

Organizational Resilience

- 64 respondents (25%) reported reviewing strategic plans in light of new challenges
- 51 respondents (20%) mentioned efforts to diversify funding sources and reduce reliance on federal grants
- 39 respondents (15%) noted investing in technology and digital capabilities to enhance adaptability

Leadership and Governance

- 77 respondents (30%) reported increased board engagement on policy issues
- 64 respondents (25%) mentioned reviewing risk management strategies
- 51 respondents (20%) noted importance of clear crisis communication plans

Member and Staff Wellbeing

- 77 respondents (30%) reported anxiety and fear among members, especially minorities and federal employees
- 64 respondents (25%) mentioned concerns about job security and career prospects
- 39 respondents (15%) noted the emotional toll on association staff supporting distressed members
- 26 respondents (10%) raised concerns about potential “brain drain” as diverse talent leaves affected fields

Theme 7: Positive to Neutral Impact on Associations from Policy Changes (Mentioned by 35 respondents, 13.6%)

- **Positive impacts:** 7 respondents (2.7%) indicated that some policy changes could benefit their industry or members.
- **Neutral impacts:** 28 respondents (10.9%) stated that the policy changes had little to no direct impact on their association.
- **Mixed impacts:** A small number of associations reported experiencing both positive and negative effects from the policy changes.
- **Cautious optimism:** A few respondents expressed a wait-and-see approach, preferring to assess the actual implementation of policies rather than reacting to initial announcements.
- **Overall,** while a minority, these responses highlight that not all associations are experiencing negative impacts from the recent federal policy changes. Some see potential benefits or minimal disruption to their operations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the survey results reveal a complex landscape of impacts on associations stemming from recent federal policy changes. The majority of respondents reported significant challenges and concerns, with financial implications and operational disruptions emerging as primary issues. Many associations are grappling with reduced funding, decreased conference attendance, and uncertainties surrounding DEI initiatives, which are affecting their ability to serve members and fulfill their missions.

Despite the predominant negative sentiment, a notable minority of associations reported neutral or even positive impacts from the policy changes. Some respondents indicated that certain regulatory shifts could potentially benefit their industries or members. This diversity of experiences underscores the varied nature of the association landscape and the differential effects of federal policies across sectors.

The survey also highlighted a sense of uncertainty and apprehension among many association leaders. Respondents expressed concerns about the long-term implications of these policy changes, particularly regarding membership retention, future funding, and the ability to advocate effectively for their industries. As associations navigate this challenging environment, many are reassessing their strategies, seeking alternative funding sources, and looking to their peers in the association community to learn from and share experiences. ASAE's commitment is to provide opportunities for those connections even during a time when we may not have answers. We are increasing our Just in Time programs and have introduced an Open Forum conversation series focused on these issues.

