

- **Federal Administration Funding Updates** (EO on HBCUs, HSI funding cuts, MacKenzie Scott donations)
- **Federal Attacks & Concerns** (Anti-DEI, Free Speech, Tenure vs Non-Tenure impacts)
- **Union Implications**

What's happening

- On April 23 2025 the administration issued the “White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities” which:
 - Establishes a new “White House Initiative on HBCUs” housed in the Executive Office of the President.
 - Reconstitutes a President’s Board of Advisors on HBCUs under the U.S. Department of Education.
 - Emphasizes increased private-sector and philanthropic engagement for HBCUs, infrastructure upgrades (technology, planning, fiscal management), and preparing students for high-growth industries like technology, healthcare, manufacturing and finance.
 - The EO revokes the earlier EO 14041 (from 2021) which had focused explicitly on “advancing educational equity” for HBCUs.
 - However, the EO does *not* explicitly commit to increased or dedicated federal appropriations.

Concerns

- Lack of guarantee for *new* federal funding: the EO outlines policies and structures but doesn’t mandate increased appropriations. Some HBCU advocates note the order “did not require the federal government to spend more money supporting HBCUs.”
- The shift away from explicit equity language (e.g., terms like “diversity, equity and inclusion” are largely omitted) raises questions about whether equity-driven needs (such as historic under-funding, infrastructure gaps, faculty/staff diversity) will get the same emphasis.
- Implementation risk: The initiative’s success will depend heavily on how agencies follow through with the plan-process under the earlier HBCU PARTNERS Act and how the new Board of Advisors functions. The relationships, timelines, accountability mechanisms are still evolving.
- For your unions and campus organizing: while federal policy alignment is helpful, the real resources for staffing, organizing, member engagement may still rely on institutional budgets, philanthropic gifts, and state/chapter support. The federal move is a lever but not a full solution.

HSI / MSI Funding Cuts

What's happening

- The U.S. Department of Education announced that it will end discretionary federal grant funding for several Minority-Serving Institutions (MSI) programs, including those for Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HSIs). Examples: Title V Part A (Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions), Title III (Predominantly Black, Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native, etc.).
- Severe negative impact on HSIs: many campuses serving Hispanic/Latino students rely on Title V grants and other MSI funding for student support services, research capacity, faculty development, and infrastructure. Cuts could undermine these institutions' ability to serve Historically Under-Resourced Students (HUS).
- While some funds are reallocated to HBCUs/TCUs, this does *not* mean a net increased investment in MSIs overall—in fact for many HSIs the loss is immediate and significant. The equity implications for Latinx-serving institutions are substantial.
- From an organizing standpoint: HBCU unions may see positive institutional trends, but HSI unions and allied staff may face disinvestment—not a unified Higher Ed landscape. There's risk of fragmentation or competition for scarce dollars.
- These moves may reflect ideological shifts in federal policy (less emphasis on race-based program eligibility, more emphasis on “merit” or “student success”), which may reduce focus on historically racialized inequities in higher education—something your union work (with Black and Brown educators/staff) is trying to address.
- Implementation uncertainty: how exactly the re-programming will work, the timeline, and whether HBCUs/HSIs will meaningfully benefit is still in flux.
- The Department asserts these programs are racially discriminatory (e.g., because eligibility depends on student racial/ethnic enrollment thresholds) and thus will be shut down or re-programmed.
- In parallel, some of the freed up funds are being redirected toward one-time boosts for HBCUs and Tribal Colleges/Universities (TCUs). For example the reporting notes a roughly \$500 million reallocation toward HBCUs/TCUs in FY-2025.

What's happening

- MacKenzie Scott has made substantial, unrestricted philanthropic gifts to HBCUs. For example: in 2020 she gave approximately \$560 million to 23 HBCUs.
- In 2025: for instance, she donated \$63 million to Morgan State University (Maryland) which is the largest single private gift in the institution's history. Also recently she gave \$80 million to Howard University (DC) as an unrestricted gift.
- The donations are often unrestricted, giving institutions flexibility to invest in endowment, infrastructure, student support, workforce/technology initiatives.
- Research suggests HBCUs that received these gifts saw positive outcomes: e.g., the Rutgers report found on average +300 new students and higher retention rates at HBCUs receiving Scott's gift

Attacks on MSIs / HBCU landscape

- The U.S. Department of Education (ED) announced it will end discretionary grant funding for several MSI programs (including HSIs, Asian American & Pacific Islander-serving, Native American-serving) on the basis that the race/ethnicity-based eligibility constitutes unconstitutional “quotas”. For example, ED says that HSI eligibility thresholds (e.g., 25% Hispanic-enrollment) violate equal-protection/5th Amendment standards and will re-program roughly \$350 million in expected grants
- While HBCU-specific programs may be less directly cut in this move so far, the broader shift signals major risk for MSIs, and for HBCUs too via changing federal policy frameworks, competition for resources, and shrinking definitions of race-based institutional support.

Concerns for HBCU/MSI organising

- Institutions that serve historically under-resourced populations (HBCUs, HSIs, etc) may see reduced federal support, making staff, faculty, student-support programs, infrastructure, etc, more vulnerable.
- The shift away from race-based eligibility toward “students judged as individuals” or “merit/infrastructure” may disadvantage HBCUs and HSIs unless they pivot strategically.
- For union organizing: this means increased urgency for internal institutional support of staff/faculty and for collective power — relying solely on external federal grants may be less dependable.
- Also, the message from federal policy may trickle down to institutional behaviour: when MSIs are labelled as “discriminatory” because of race-based designations, institutional leadership may change priorities away from racial equity or mission-based support of historically excluded students.

Anti-DEI Measures & Free Speech / Academic Freedom Concerns

- The federal administration has issued Executive Orders directing federal agencies to terminate DEI (“diversity, equity, inclusion/DEIA”) programs, preferences, mandates or contracts that promote them.
- Advocates argue these moves threaten academic freedom, free speech on campus, and institutional autonomy. For example, the organization Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) notes that “orthodoxies of any kind run afoul of a university’s mission of free inquiry ... the particular combination of administrative bureaucracy and ideological orthodoxy dictated by DEI tends to result in free speech and academic freedom violations.”
- ED’s guidance also states that institutions cannot treat persons of different races differently in any context (including scholarships, housing, programming) because of race, extending the logic of the Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard ruling. Free speech advocates say that sweeping interpretation may inhibit campus dialogue and programming on race and equity.

Concerns for HBCUs/MSIs & higher-ed labor organizing

- HBCUs and MSIs often center DEI, race-equity, mission-based hiring and student programs in their institutional identity; federal policy shifts away from such frameworks may pressure these institutions to change their practices, which could impact staff/faculty whose roles are connected to equity, support, student success.
- Free speech and academic freedom risks: when external mandates or political/ideological pressures mount, faculty (especially at tenure-track) may feel constrained; non-tenure faculty/staff may feel even more vulnerable.
- For unions: this implies a need to safeguard faculty/staff rights, ensure institutional governance doesn’t discipline or sideline staff working in the areas of equity, programming, or activism.
- Also, the external framing of DEI as “discrimination” may create internal institutional tension, possibly reducing funding or support for roles that union members occupy (e.g., student success offices, equity offices, student-support professionals).

Tenure vs. Non-Tenure Faculty: Academic Freedom and Organizing Consequences

Tenure as safeguard for academic freedom

- The organization American Association of University Professors (AAUP) affirms that tenure is a key protection of academic freedom, giving faculty independence to research, teach, and express ideas without fear of reprisal.
- Tenured faculty are less vulnerable to termination for controversial teaching, research or public commentary; non-tenure track and adjunct faculty are generally more exposed.

Risks and concerns

- As some states propose legislation to weaken tenure (or to implement post-tenure review, limit tenure eligibility) this threatens the ability of faculty (especially of colour, historically excluded scholars) to engage in critical scholarship, teach race/gender/justice topics, or participate in organizing without reprisal. For example, in Florida recent laws tied tenure eligibility or reviews to “intellectual diversity” requirements, raising concerns that it penalizes faculty engaging in equity, race or gender studies.
- Non-tenure faculty (lecturers, adjuncts, contract staff) often lack academic freedom protections; this is significant because many HBCU faculty/staff or union-organised staff may be in those roles or might increasingly be pushed into those categories to reduce institutional costs.
- From an organizing perspective: if faculty and staff feel vulnerable (non-tenure, precarious contracts) they are less likely to engage in union building, activism, voice, or speak up about institutional policies or federal funding changes.

Implications for HBCU/union organizing

- Unions on HBCU campuses need to emphasize protections for non-tenure faculty and staff: establishing job security, voice in institutional governance, protections for research/teaching on equity topics, and compensation that reflects their contributions.
- For tenured faculty and staff, union leadership should monitor institutional changes making tenure harder to achieve, introducing political litmus tests (“free inquiry”, “intellectual diversity” language) or shaping contract/non-contract status downward.
- In the context of federal pressure around DEI and funding, HBCU unions have to be ready to defend academic freedom and institutional mission even as external policy shifts may push institutional leadership toward “merit only”, “non-race based” language and away from equity-based hiring or programming.
- Messaging for union member recruitment: highlight how collective representation protects academic freedom (for faculty) and job security (for staff), especially in times when federal and state policy is shifting rapidly and precariously.