Tor

Urgent:

Stop Work Order's Devastating Impact on Internet Freedom

Summary

- Thousands of U.S. and global organizations received unprecedented Stop Work Orders the week of January 20, 2025 after President Trump froze more than $58 billion in appropriated foreign assistance.

- The Tor Project received Stop Work Orders for five federal grant projects that immediately halted our work and the work of our seven sub-grantees and partners.

- This funding freeze leaves the Tor Project with a 22% budget shortfall for the year.

- Internet freedom projects keep hundreds of millions of people connected to the open Internet. We must act collectively to extend and protect this funding.

❗ A judge's January 29 decision to temporarily block one of Trump's funding freezes did not unfreeze foreign assistance — all foreign aid is still in peril.

Immediate impact

The Tor network ("Tor") is globally recognized, decentralized privacy infrastructure that enables secure, anonymous communication for millions of Internet users worldwide. Tor serves as the backbone to achieve privacy, anti-censorship, and security goals for a variety of applications, including browsers, operating systems, file sharing tools, and chat apps.

In 2019, the Tor Project developed a five-year strategic plan that set a clear goal: to diversify the organization's funding base. We successfully achieved that goal and have significantly reduced our reliance on U.S. government funding. As a result, we are in a stronger position to navigate this crisis. We are able to sustain operations during the 90-day evaluation period mandated by the Stop Work Order.

Need for action

Despite our position of strength in the immediate term, if the U.S government ultimately decides to revoke these already-awarded grants and discontinue funding Internet freedom initiatives, the Tor Project will suffer a sustained impact.

For the current fiscal year (ending in June 2025) this decision would create a 22% shortfall in our $8.5M budget. The longer it takes to replace these funds, the greater the disruption to Tor users and the Internet freedom community. Key projects aimed at helping people bypass censorship, protect their online privacy, and safeguard the Tor network from attacks will be affected. Our ability to maintain full operational capacity will be strained.

That is why it is extremely important to continue the efforts to protect Internet freedom funding and proactively identify alternative funding sources for the Tor Project and for the broader mission of Internet freedom. Diverse sources of income will be key to maintaining sustainability for Tor and for initiatives like it.

Projects directly impacted by Stop Work Orders

- Making the Tor network safer and easier to maintain by modernizing its aging codebase

- Ensuring the Tor network is healthy and safe by hardening it against attacks

- Developing a user-facing app that allows people to easily protect all of their mobile Internet traffic with Tor

- Enhancing the Open Observatory Of Network Interference's ability to detect and share live data about Internet censorship around the world

- Strengthening Tor for use in Iran, where the Internet is aggressively censored

Future projects at risk

In January, the Tor Project submitted four Statements of Interest to the U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor and a concept note to the National Science Foundation. Both agencies have now frozen new awards. If these proposals are unilaterally rejected due to funding constraints, critical work to ensure strong privacy protections online will be needlessly stalled. This includes:

- Increasing Tor's protections against supply-chain attacks

- Future-proofing Tor against attacks against its cryptography by quantum computers

- Transitioning Tor Browser and Tails to use the modernized Tor codebase

- Resolving underlying weaknesses of Tor's censorship circumvention mechanisms

- Improving the Tor Project's ability to detect and investigate malicious attacks against the Tor network