

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN GOVERNANCE

A FIELD GUIDE FOR NONPROFIT BOARD SERVICE



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Forward

Support Center first began as part of a national network of capacity building organizations, the Support Centers of America, established in 1971. In 1986, a local affiliate of the Support Center was started in Newark, New Jersey, and in 1996, the Support Center became a stand-alone local nonprofit serving organizations in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

In the last few years we have seen a significant increase in the amount of information available to nonprofit board members. There is information about state and federal laws for nonprofits and resources on just about every facet of nonprofit board work. As we embark upon a three year partnership with the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development to provide governance resources to DYCD-funded organizations, this review is intended to identify areas where there are significant resources available and where and how these resources can be most helpful.



Special thanks to the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development for underwriting this field review.

The Latest: A Look at New Governance Resources

As part of this field review, we examined a number of resources that are new to the field over the last two years that are valuable resources. Below are thumbnail sketches of a few resources that can help to support the development of a nonprofit's board.

NYC Nonprofit Board Development Coalition and the Good Governance Blueprint¹

The NYC Nonprofit Board Development Coalition—a group of 20 nonprofit and public organizations that support nonprofits—collaborated on the Good Governance Blueprint to compile in one place best practices, resources and tools for nonprofit boards. It focuses on five major areas: governance principles, strategic planning and management, financial management and oversight, board and staff roles and responsibilities, and board assessment. The Coalition also provides information about resources, trainings, and capacity building available at several local organizations².

BoardSource and the Leading with Intent Survey and Study (2017)³

As the leading organization focused on strengthening and supporting nonprofit board leadership, BoardSource has been tracking and analyzing trends in this area since 1994. *Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices* is the most recent in a series of studies. In total, 1,700 board chairs and executives from more than 1,300 nonprofit organizations shared data and insights about their boards' composition, practices, performance, and culture.

The preface to *Leading with Intent* (Page 4) describes how the survey results are organized into four broad categories:

1. People: Board Composition and Structure. Having the right people on a board makes higher performance

— in both the board's internal and external functions — more likely. This report therefore begins with who serves on the board and how they are composed and organized as a collective body.

2. Culture: Leadership Culture and Dynamics. How the board conducts its work — from group dynamics to its relationship with the chief executive — can help or hinder the board's ability to carry out its work. Likewise, board culture and dynamics are also affected by who serves on the board and the nature of the work that the board undertakes.

3. Work: Board Responsibilities. Boards are charged with many important responsibilities. This section explores how well boards are fulfilling their basic, strategic and adaptive, and external and ambassadorial leadership roles.

4. Impact: Perceptions of the Board's Impact on Organizational Performance. Ultimately, the most important measure of board performance is the impact that the board has on organizational performance. While *Leading with Intent* does not include objective measures of organizational effectiveness and the board's impact on them, it explores board chair and executive perceptions of the board's impact on organizational performance, and board characteristics that seem to be positively linked to these perceptions.

The report concludes with a section entitled Opportunities for Board Reflection and Action, which provides guidance on how boards can leverage *Leading with Intent's* findings as a part of ongoing board development work.

Voices of Board Chairs⁴

There are an estimated 1.57 million nonprofits in the U.S. that serve an important role in their communities, but very little research exists about the important role of board chair. In 2016, the Alliance for Nonprofit Management conducted a survey of 635 board chairs across the U.S. focusing on their preparation for the role, and their impressions of their role in relation to their boards, their Chief Executive Officers/Executive Directors, and

the communities they serve. The study was conducted by the Alliance's Governance Member Affinity Group, a network of nonprofit consultants, researchers, funders and capacity building organizations whose goal is to spur creative and innovative thinking, models, and practices in the field of governance and board development and promote research-based practice.

In light of the study's findings, the research team's recommendations included the following: a) develop an intentional practice of board chair preparation and succession planning; b) provide more accessible resources for board chairs, as well as training, coaching and mentoring; c) develop shared leadership models, rather than relying on one individual to fulfill all board leadership roles; d) build leadership capacity for many potential and emerging board leaders; and e) support and expect board chairs to be actively engaged with their organization's community and constituency, and in leading advocacy efforts.

Key Challenges and Opportunities Based on Current Research

"The organization that is not surrounded by a board comprised of supporters is a frail organization."

Ruth McCambridge, Editor-in-Chief, Nonprofit Quarterly Conference, November 17, 2017 in Grand Rapids, MI

Current research on nonprofit boards consistently points to three key areas where boards must function well in order to support their organization's operations. They are:

1. Organizational oversight and planning
2. Internal board leadership, culture, and functioning
3. External relations, including fundraising and advocacy

Unfortunately, many board members, and especially board chairs, do not receive the necessary preparation to fulfill their roles. Too often board members lack clarity about their roles and responsibilities, both individually and as a body.

Research also indicates that boards have struggled to diversify their membership to include people of color; Leading with Intent found that white board members comprise 84% of membership, on average. This is especially problematic given that many nonprofit organizations are charged with addressing social challenges and inequities that disproportionately affect people of color.

While writing this field review, we had a chance to chat with Dave Renz, the Beth K. Smith/Missouri Chair in Nonprofit Leadership and the Director of the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Dave is a leading authority on nonprofit governance and responded to questions on board trends with the following:

Redesigning the Board: Many organizations have come to a place where they are rethinking board design and structure in a fundamental way. One such related trend is toward shrinking the size of the board.

Building Board Teams that Work: Increasingly boards are paying attention to how boards work well as a team collectively and in smaller groups as part of committees or task forces.

Focus on Listening to Others: How can we bring the voice of stakeholders and partners into our board meetings? This is an increasingly common question as boards balance their oversight function with broader strategic questions.

Generational and Demographic Shifts: The vast majority of nonprofits need more board members and the vast majority of organizations are looking at how to engage new generations at the board level. Additionally, efforts are underway to diversify the composition and range of perspectives among board members.

Collaboration is Key: Nonprofits are at a new level of problem-solving and the need to connect the dots to address sophisticated problems. Boards are talking about how the substance of the discussions and board composition should reflect the increasing emphasis on collaboration.

According to BoardSource, nonprofit boards have ten basic responsibilities:

1. Determine mission and purposes, and advocate for them.
2. Select the chief executive.
3. Support and evaluate the chief executive.
4. Ensure effective planning.
5. Monitor and strengthen programs and services.
6. Ensure adequate financial resources.
7. Protect assets and provide financial oversight.
8. Build and sustain a competent board.
9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity.
10. Enhance the organization's public standing.

In recent national studies focused on nonprofit governance offered similar findings about how nonprofit boards are performing with regard to their roles and responsibilities. Voices of Board Chairs found that half of all chairs received no formal preparation for their role. This key role includes: designing and facilitating meetings and ensuring a positive culture of collaboration; being a thought partner and/or confidante for the organization's executive director, and taking a lead in helping organizations think strategically

The report, however, points out that there are several ways to help boards prepare to identify and cultivate new chairs. They include:

- Develop a board chair succession plan that identifies potential chairs in advance.
- Develop a plan for preparing board chairs, including training, mentoring, and coaching.
- Build a leadership pipeline by supporting board committee chairs in their development.

As mentioned previously, BoardSource's Leading with Intent study found that boards are no more diverse than they were two years ago. This is an alarming finding given that "a board's composition is reflective of an organization's values, including diversity, equity, and inclusion."

The authors of the study conclude, "A board that is homogenous in any way risks having blind spots that negatively impact its ability to make the best decisions

and plans for the organization. The blind spots created by a lack of racial and ethnic diversity are particularly concerning, as they may result in strategies and plans that ineffectively address societal challenges and inequities, or even reinforce them."

As a follow-up to the *Good Governance Blueprint*, the NYC Nonprofit Board Development Coalition, in partnership with the Nonprofit Coordinating Committee of New York and the Council of Urban Professionals, is currently undertaking a study examining nonprofit board diversity, equity and inclusion in New York City. Once completed, it will provide a deeper, more nuanced understanding about not only the composition of nonprofit board members and executive directors in New York City, but also insight into the degree to which board members value and provide training around diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, and the tools they use to recruit new board members.

In summary, these national and regional surveys indicate several areas where boards can use additional development and support:

Organizational mission, oversight, and strategic functions

- Ensure a strong understanding of an organization's programs without a focus on operations, which is the purview of staff
- Articulate organizational values with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Actively partner with financial auditors to understand the organization's finances and potential risksDevelop adaptive strategic thinking frameworks (rather than engaging in traditional long-term planning, reviewing, and monitoring)

Board leadership, culture, and membership functions

- Prepare for, design, and facilitate effective meetings
- Develop a shared leadership model of working together towards common goals
- Consider leadership by co-chairs
- Diversify board membership, particularly with regard to race and ethnicity
- Recruit board members in nontraditional ways (rather

- than relying on personal networking)
- Engage in regular practice of assessing board performance and
 - Cultivate trusting relationships among board members

Proactive community relationship development and outreach functions

- Engage in advocacy on behalf of the organization
- Interact with the media
- Cultivate current and potential donor relationships

The Role of the Board Self-Assessment

Boards should regularly revisit their own performance. But how can board members assess their own functioning. And how can boards identify areas for improvement or development?

To begin, board members can informally or formally reflect together on a few basic questions:

- What are our strengths? What's working well?
- What are our challenges? What's not going so well?
- What can we do better?

Board members may also want to think more concretely about how they are performing their roles and responsibilities:

- How are we doing in terms of providing organizational oversight and planning?
- How is our internal functioning? Our communications? Our meetings?
- How are we doing fundraising and with other outreach functions?
- Are we reflecting our organization's values, especially with regard to diversity, equity and inclusion?
- What areas of expertise are we missing?

It is important that boards are equipped with an ongoing, up-to-date sense of how they are functioning and supporting their organization. A formal self-assessment conducted on an annual or semi-annual basis can help identify gaps and areas needing further development.

There are many tools available for boards to use in their self-assessment, ranging from free resources to customizable options that offer additional consultation. Below, we highlight two.

The Board Check Up⁷

This free board development assessment service is part of a research project spearheaded in Canada by Professors Yvonne Harrison of Luther College at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan and Vic Murray of the University of Victoria in British Columbia. The goal of the project is to expand knowledge of how boards of directors of nonprofit organizations function and how they might be improved through performance assessment. The initial funding for the online board self-assessment research project came from The Institute of Nonprofit Studies at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta.

Overview:

- Free, not customizable, no open-ended questions
- Part of an academic research project
- Participating organizations will be asked for permission to have the data they provide used for research purposes; identities of the organizations and individuals will not be revealed

Who can participate:

- All board members
- Chief executive officer
- Additional senior members of the management team (e.g. program heads, chief financial officer)

Areas assessed:

- Role and responsibilities
- Formal structures and operating processes
- Composition and development of board members
- Informal culture
- Leadership issues

BoardSource Board Self-Assessment Tool⁸

In addition to conducting biennial board research, BoardSource provides several board development resources. Membership is required to access resources,

which are mostly self-guided. They offer a comprehensive board assessment, as well as post-assessment board facilitation. BoardSource also provides online tools, including webinars, Ask-an-Expert email consultation, and the BoardSource Exchange, a web-based community to share best practices.

Overview

Relevant assessments include:

- Nonprofit Board Self Assessment, customizable (\$549-\$1,475)
- Diversity and Inclusion Assessment (\$275-\$345)
- Open-ended questions provide an opportunity to reflect more deeply
- Can be augmented with additional consultation and retreat facilitation

Who can participate:

- All board members
- Chief executive officer

Areas assessed in Board Self-Assessment:

All board members and the CEO are asked questions in the following areas:

- Mission
- Strategy
- Funding and public image
- Board composition
- Program oversight
- Financial oversight
- CEO oversight
- Board structure
- Meetings
- Satisfaction with the board, board development needs, and organizational priorities

The CEO is also asked about the following:

- Organizational practices
- Oversight practices
- Board practices
- Chief executive supervision

Areas assessed in Diversity and Inclusion Assessment:

Note: This assessment focuses on age, gender, racial/ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity.

- Current status of board composition
- Perception and value of diversity
- Policies and practices
- Recruitment practices
- Board culture and dynamics

Appendix A: New York City Area Resources for Nonprofit Governance Support

Board Assist

<http://boardassist.org/>

Services: Board matching

Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits

BoardSource

<https://www.boardsource.org/>

Services: Training, strategic consulting

Eligibility: For member organizations

CariClub

<https://www.cariclub.com/>

Services: Board matching training for participating board candidates

Eligibility: Open to nonprofits looking for junior board members

Cause Effective

<http://www.causeeffective.org/>

Services: For nonprofits seeking board recruitment and placement, technical assistance in board governance, coach on call program.

Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits

charitySTRONG

<http://www.charitystrong.org/>

Services: Online recruitment, introductory and advanced board member training

Eligibility: Open to all New York State nonprofits, current and prospective nonprofit directors

Community Resource Exchange

<http://www.crenyc.org/>

Services: Executive search, leadership and management development, strategic consulting, governance and board development

Eligibility: Open to New York City nonprofits fighting poverty and advancing social justice

New York City Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dcla/index.page>

Services: Year-long capacity building program (Community arts leadership); DCLA and the Brooklyn Historical Society host a networking event for board chairs and board chairs-elect as an opportunity to meet other people who share their interests in effective nonprofit management

Eligibility: Open to organizations that receive DCLA Funding

New York City Department for the Aging (DFTA)

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dfta/index.page>

Services: Use of a consultant (CRE) to provide technical assistance on a variety of management and governance deficiencies within individual provider agencies

Eligibility: Open to organizations that receive DFTA funding

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD)

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/dycd/index.page>

Services: Trainings on key topics in youth and family services and organizational development consulting focusing on board development, financial planning and management, program design and implementation, and performance management.

Eligibility: Open to organizations that receive DYCD funding

Echoing Green

<http://www.echoinggreen.org/>

Services: Board matching, training, including board development

Eligibility: Board leadership training open to young corporate professionals

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

<http://fpwa.org/>

Services: Capacity building consulting and coaching

Eligibility: Open to FPWA members

Governance Matters

<http://governancemattersusa.org/>

Services: Board recruitment through search and www.boardnetusa.org roundtables, board advancement workshops, and board retreat trainings, board and organization consulting. Eligibility: Open to boards in need of assistance in operating more effectively and recruiting new members.

Lawyers Alliance for New York

<http://www.lany.org/>

Services: Webinars and seminars on legal issues, business and transactional legal services, legal services
Eligibility: Open to organizations serving low income individuals or communities in New York City

Mayor's Office of Contract Services

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/mocs/index.page>

Services: Training and management review
Eligibility: Open to organizations that receive city funding

Metro NY BBB Foundation -Charity Accountability Program

<http://www.bbb.org/new-york-city/>

Services: Training and educational resources
Eligibility: Open to all charities

New York City Council of Urban Professionals

<http://cupusa.org/>

Services: Board matching
Eligibility: Open to business and civic leaders

New York City Economic Development Corporation

<https://www.nycedc.com/>

Services: Full day workshops for non-profits to begin planning for capital projects
Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits

Nonprofit Boards Clearinghouse (New York Junior League)

<https://www.nyjl.org/>

Services: Board placement, training
Eligibility: Open to small to mid-size nonprofit organizations seeking board members

NYC Department of Small Business Services (SBS)

<http://www1.nyc.gov/site/sbs/index.page>

Services: Nonprofit management workshops and technical assistance, Neighborhood Legal Fellows
Eligibility: Open to organizations funded by Avenue NYC neighborhood development program

NYC Service

<http://www.nycservice.org/>

Services: Volunteer recruitment, engagement and matching effort underway
Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits

Pro Bono Partnership

<http://www.probonopartnership.org/>

Services: Seminars and legal services
Eligibility: Open to nonprofit organizations serving the disadvantaged and enhancing the quality of life in neighborhoods in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut

Robin Hood

<https://www.robinhood.org/>

Services: Board placement program, management and technical assistance, governance consulting
Eligibility: Open to existing grantee partner organizations

Support Center

<http://supportcenteronline.org/>

Services: Executive search and interim executive placements, board development and board self-assessments, workshops and customized trainings
Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits.

UJA Federation

<https://www.ujafedny.org/>

Services: Board placement, professional development and lay training capacity building consulting and coaching
Eligibility: Open to UJA Federation network affiliated agencies and grantees

United Way of New York City/BoardServeNYC

<https://www.uwnyc.com/boardservenyc/?pg=site>

Services: Board placement, governance training, customized board coaching

Eligibility: Open to nonprofits providing services in one or more of UWNyc's three impact areas

Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts

<http://www.vlany.org/>

Services: Legal services

Eligibility: Open to all nonprofits

Youth I.N.C.

<http://www.youthinc-usa.org/>

Services: Board matching, improving fundraising practices, funding infrastructure

Eligibility: Open to Youth Inc partner organizations.

Appendix B: Selected Articles and Books on Nonprofit Boards and Governance

Articles

Support Center asked leading authorities on nonprofit governance to identify their shortlist of key articles that explore this work. David Renz, Beth K. Smith/Missouri Chair in Nonprofit Leadership and the Director of the Midwest Center for Nonprofit Leadership at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, offers up the following articles as food for thought for both new and longstanding board members.

The Inclusive Nonprofit Boardroom: Leveraging the Transformative Potential of Diversity.

Patricia Bradshaw And Christopher Fredette

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2012/12/29/the-inclusive-nonprofit-boardroomleveraging-the-transformative-potential-of-diversity/>

The New Work of the Nonprofit Board.

Barbara E. Taylor, Richard P. Chait, Thomas P. Holland

<https://hbr.org/1996/09/the-new-work-of-the-nonprofit-board>

Reframing Governance.

David Renz

<https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2006/12/21/reframing-governance/>

Books

There is an increasing number of useful books available on nonprofit boards and nonprofit governance. This offer useful insights into the work and performance of boards and governance, reflecting a range of perspectives on these issues.

Wertheimer, M. (2012). *The Board Chair Handbook, Third Edition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This guide is a very useful resource for people who are about to assume the role of board chair and who want a reasonably complete and comprehensive guidance on what this unique and pivotal board role entails and how it can be accomplished. It also includes useful resources any chair can use in their work.

BoardSource. (2012). *Nonprofit Board Answer Book: A Practical Guide for Board Members and Chief Executives, Third Edition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book, initially developed by Andringa and Engstrom for BoardSource and updated to reflect many additional topics, offers brief and practical information on a wide range of practical questions about nonprofit boards and how they should work – topics such as how a board should be structured, the chief executive’s role in training a board, and more. Some answers are too generic to serve every kind of board, but the information is useful for the average board and its members.

BoardSource. (2010). *The Handbook of Nonprofit Governance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This is a relatively comprehensive reference and resource book that includes information on almost all aspects of nonprofit board design and development, including case studies and examples developed by BoardSource from their consulting experience.

Carver, J. (2006). *Boards that make a difference: a new design for leadership in nonprofit and public organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Carver’s revised book outlines a refined approach to his unique model of governance, which he labels “policy governance.” The approach focuses particularly on governing boards as policy makers whose responsibility is to establish boundaries and parameters within which the organization and its chief executive operate, and presents strategies for developing board policies and practices to strengthen role clarity and improve the board efficiency and effectiveness.

Carver, J., & Carver, M. (2006). *Reinventing your board: a step-by-step guide to implementing policy governance*. San Francisco, Calif: Jossey-Bass.

This book, is a useful companion and follow-up resource guide to the Boards That Make A Difference book, explains how to redevelop an existing board to effectively implement Carver’s “policy governance” model for board effectiveness.

Taylor, B. E., Ryan, W. P., & Chait, R. P. (2013). ***Governance as leadership: reframing the work of nonprofit boards***. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.

This is one of the newest books on nonprofit boards and governance. Building on nationwide research, the authors argue for understanding governance as three interrelated but distinct types: fiduciary, strategic, and a newly-explained category referred to as generative governance. Each type is defined, and the book explains how boards might best approach the work of each type and how board meetings might be organized to help a board successfully implement each type.

Cornforth, C., & Brown, W. A. (2014). ***Nonprofit governance innovative perspectives and approaches***. London: Routledge.

This book provides a compilation of chapters that, as a whole, provide an extensive and comprehensive review of the research and literature on nonprofit boards and governance as of 2012, covering essentially all aspects of board design, development, and functioning.

Gazley, B., & Kissman, K. (2015). ***Transformational governance how boards achieve extraordinary change***. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Gazley and Kissman offer a thoughtful and practical discussion of a unique approach to developing and leading governing boards, particularly boards of membership organizations, based on their research on associations.

Heimovics, R. D. (2010). ***Executive leadership in nonprofit organizations: new strategies for shaping executive-board dynamics***. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

This classic book is considered a seminal work on the description of "real-life" dynamics of boards and their leadership, with particular emphasis on the importance of effective executive-chair and executive-board relationships, and its key themes remain relevant to effective executive leadership. The book offers a practical model for executives to employ in helping boards be effective.

Houle, C. O. (1989). ***Governing boards: their Nature and Nurture***. London: Jossey-Bass.

Houle presents a classic perspective on governance, boards, and the roles and functions of boards and their members. The book is readable and relevant, although its perspective is more prescriptive and focused on "what should be" versus "what really is" practiced in typical boards.

Pointer, D. D., & Orlikoff, J. E. (2002). ***The high-performance board: principles of nonprofit organization governance***. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

This book provides a model for understanding the practice of governance in nonprofits, and provides a comprehensive set of principles that articulates the design and operation of an effective governance system. Their very complete model applies best to the boards of nonprofits with staff, and provides excellent self-assessment exercises and development strategies.

Scott, K. T. (2000). ***Creating caring and capable boards: reclaiming the passion for active trusteeship***. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Scott presents a model of board leadership and development that focuses on the spirit and practice of leadership and trusteeship, and their roles in the practices and development of effective boards. The book includes useful assessment forms, and explains the operational steps for using them in a special board development approach they refer to as PLANT.

Trower, C. A. (2013). ***The practitioners guide to governance as leadership: building high-performing nonprofit boards***. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This book serves as a practical resource guide to help board leaders and consultants understand and employ strategies that focus on implementing the pathbreaking model of boards and board development developed and presented by Chait et al. in their book, *Governance as Leadership*.

Widmer, C. H., & Houchin, S. (2000). *The art of trusteeship: the nonprofit board members guide to effective governance*. San Francisco, Ca.: Jossey-Bass.

This book is a readable and relatively comprehensive basic guide to board service and the challenges of nonprofit board effectiveness, with an accessible explanation of the organization and work of boards and their members, and how to enhance board performance.

Endnotes

1. http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/nonprofits/downloads/pdf/nyc_good_governance_blueprint.pdf
2. <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/nonprofits/resources/get-board-training.page>
3. Introduction to Leading with Intent, Page 4
https://leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/LWI-2017.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fleadingwithintent.org%2F
4. <http://boardresearch.strikingly.com/>
5. https://leadingwithintent.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/LWI-2017.pdf?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fleadingwithintent.org%2F
6. <https://www.bridgespan.org/insights/library/boards/basic-responsibilities-nonprofit-boards>
7. www.boardcheckup.com
8. <https://boardsource.org/board-support/assessing-performance/>



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