

A large, stylized graphic of a tree with a central trunk and several large, rounded branches, rendered in a light brown color. It is centered in the background of the upper half of the page.

ROOTS, RECOVERY, AND REGENERATION:  
**CULTIVATING A  
CREATIVE LEGACY**

**2025 – 2027  
POLICY AND ADVOCACY AGENDA**

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# INTRODUCTION

Arts for LA (AFLA) is the only cross-sector and cross-discipline arts advocacy organization in Los Angeles County. We lead communities, artists, and organizations to advocate for an equitable, healthy, and vibrant LA through the arts. Our powerful community includes 75,000 supporters, 400 Member Advocates, and over 180 Member Organizations.

The creative economy in Los Angeles County stands at a critical juncture, shaped by long standing challenges and a series of recent crises. For decades, the nonprofit arts sector has struggled with historic undercapitalization, perpetuating a cycle of instability that disproportionately impacts artists and arts workers. Low wages and evasive employment have left many creatives without the financial security to sustain their practice or their livelihood. These systemic issues were further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which devastated the arts and culture landscape, forcing the closure of venues, job losses, and an unprecedented decline in public engagement with the arts.

Today, the crisis has deepened. Recent wildfires across Los Angeles County have left a trail of destruction, burning homes, schools, and arts organizations to the ground. Families have been displaced, income has become more unpredictable, and the recovery process—already daunting—is expected to take years. The wildfires have compounded the already significant challenges faced by the creative economy, once again highlighting the urgent need for robust support.

Despite these challenges, there is reason for hope. Significant progress has been made between 2023 and 2025, including increased funding for LA County's Organizational Grant Program, support for the Performing Arts Equitable Payroll Fund, the passage of local digital equity measures, groundbreaking research on Prop 28, and historic labor victories achieved through artist-led strikes. These milestones serve as a testament to what is possible when we come together in solidarity.

Looking ahead, Arts for LA (AFLA) has worked hard to develop a comprehensive agenda in collaboration with the arts and culture community. This agenda aims to (1) deepen connections that strengthen capacity, (2) share knowledge and learnings from the field that build regional preparedness, and (3) lead grassroots and grasstops organizing to drive policy change for equity and recovery in the sector.

A thriving arts sector is not just essential—it is a powerful catalyst for transformation and resilience across Los Angeles County. The road to recovery is long, but this is a moment to reconnect with our roots and rediscover our collective strength. Together, through mutual support and bold, visionary actions that reimagine the future, we can transform crisis into opportunity.

# PROGRESS FROM THE PRIOR AGENDA

When AFLA set out to build a thriving creative infrastructure as envisioned in the 2023-25 Agenda, Los Angeles ranked #1 in arts providers per capita and #259 in total government support. We knew that this deficit in public and private support and logjams in distribution were disproportionately impacting historically underrepresented and under-resourced communities (they still are).

The past two years have tested the resilience of the creative economy like never before. From pandemic recovery and the closures of cherished venues to audience attrition, labor strikes, inflationary pressures, and an alarming exodus of philanthropic funders compounded by cuts to public arts funding. The challenges have been unrelenting. Still, we've made significant progress:

## 2023

- ▶ In April, the County Board of Supervisors passed a motion championed by AFLA directing the Departments of Arts and Culture and Economic Opportunity to participate in a cross sectoral steering committee led by AFLA that includes individual artists, entertainment studios, nonprofits, foundations, higher education, and research partners to develop recommendations for the Board on increasing creative job opportunities in the region as part of AFLA's Creative Jobs Collective.
- ▶ In June, LA County awarded over \$31M to arts and cultural organizations, following extensive advocacy efforts by the Arts for LA community, including nearly 4,000 letters to the County Board of Supervisors, public testimonies, and a dozen action alerts to secure American Rescue Plan funds for pandemic-impacted organizations.
- ▶ AFLA joined the LA28 Local Hiring Work Group to ensure that arts and culture are included in their strategic plan for community outreach, job access, and business development.
- ▶ AFLA joined Austin Beutner's Prop 28 Implementation Advisory Council to address the field's top concerns, such as misappropriated funds and the unintentional decrease in community partnerships.
- ▶ AFLA developed an overview of FAQs and existing resources to support nonprofits navigating Prop 28 in partnership with Arts Ed Alliance of the Bay Area.
- ▶ AFLA helped mobilize a Coalition of over 30 Statewide and Regional Networks with our partners at CA for the Arts, Association of CA Symphony Orchestras, and Ink People to prevent the termination of this critical grant program at the CA Arts Council.
- ▶ AFLA co-authored a letter with LA Commons, Community Arts Resources, and Center Theatre Group to LA City Councilwoman Traci Park (Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on the 2028 Olympics and Paralympic Games) to highlight results from our community survey, which emphasized the need for increased awareness around the Cultural Olympiad, timely information and updates, access to opportunities and funding, and leveraging the opportunity to build a lasting legacy for LA's cultural institutions.



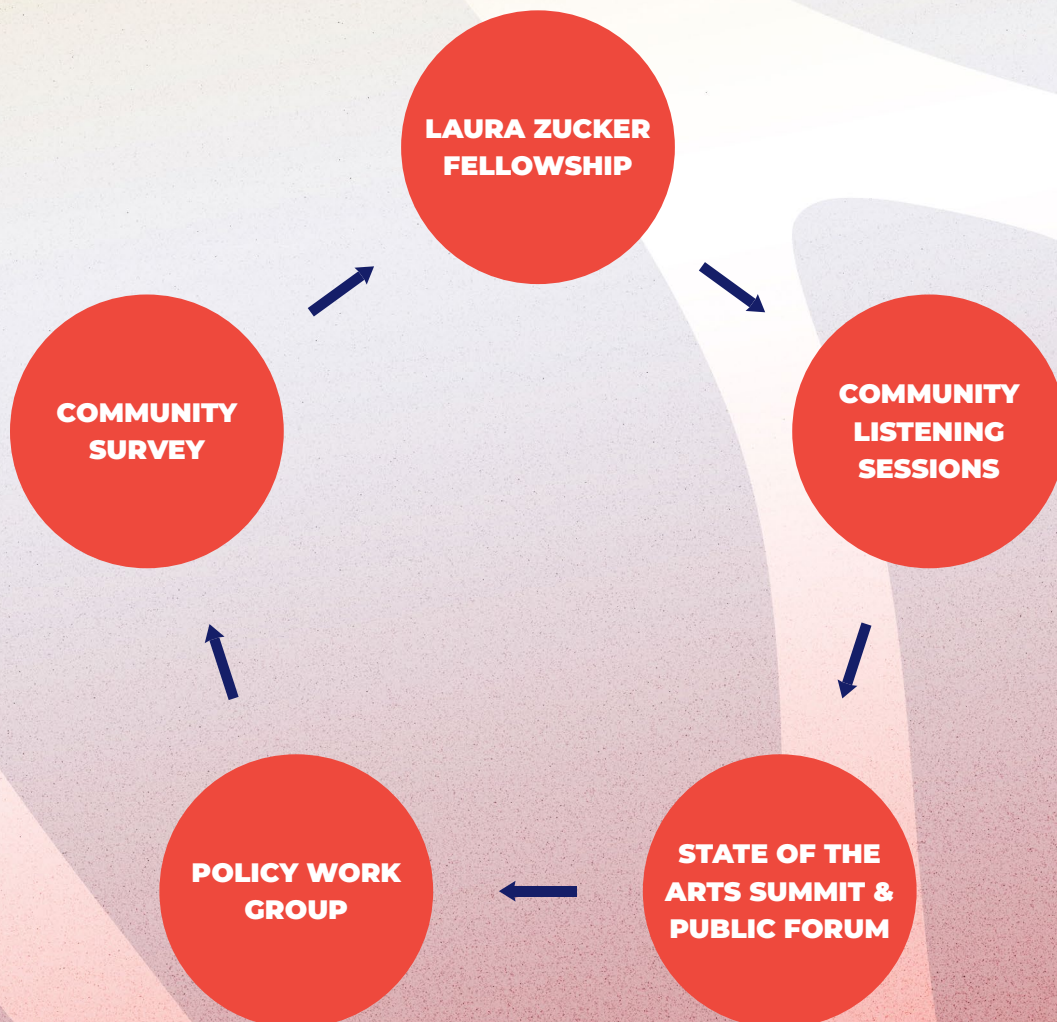
## 2024

- ▶ In partnership with the Digital Equity LA Coalition, AFLA helped make the City of LA the first in the nation to adopt a digital discrimination ordinance. Angelenos are now able to file grievances for disparities in internet pricing and have them investigated by the City.
- ▶ AFLA presented key recommendations to the Board of Supervisors in April, which included an increase for the County's Organizational Grant Program (OGP) and the state's Film Tax Credit.
- ▶ AFLA mobilized advocates to send over 4,000 letters to LA City Council to successfully preserve \$1M in funding for vacant positions at the Department of Cultural Affairs and keep venues like Barnsdall Art Park and Lankershim Arts Center open.
- ▶ In conjunction with Theatre Producers of SoCal, AFLA mobilized advocates to call every legislative office in Sacramento to successfully preserve \$5M in funding for the CA Arts Council and \$12.5M in funding for the Performing Arts Equitable Payroll Fund, which will directly reimburse small arts organizations for their payroll expenses.
- ▶ In response to growing concerns around the misuse of Prop 28 funds, AFLA worked with Create CA to send a joint letter (supported by 85 organizations) to key state leaders, including Governor Newsom and State Superintendent Tony Thurmond.
- ▶ AFLA released the 2024 Laura Zucker Fellowship Report by Lindsey T. Kunisaki, which is the first report to study Prop 28 implementation across LA County school districts and recommend how to better involve community voices for increased impact. It has been downloaded hundreds of times by schools, families, funders, and local governments.
- ▶ Arts for LA co-produced 11 cultural convenings with LA Commons and Community Arts Resources, hosted by the LA County Department of Arts and Culture, to increase regional preparedness and hear from arts and culture leaders about their priorities for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

# AGENDA DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

AFLA's four advocacy areas serve as pillars for year-round engagement and the development of strategic priorities. An equitable **ARTS EDUCATION** inspires young and emerging creatives to pursue careers in entertainment, the arts, and culture. These emerging creatives cannot access **AFFORDABLE SPACE** without equitable and sustainable employment which requires **CREATIVE JOBS** with a living wage, particularly for those from historically underrepresented communities. Small businesses and nonprofit arts organizations cannot support their workers effectively without the necessary **RESOURCES AND CAPITAL** to sustain operations.

To inform the ongoing advocacy in these four areas, AFLA utilizes a robust and inclusive engagement process to ground the bi-annual Policy & Advocacy Agenda in the diverse perspectives and needs of creative communities. This process includes cross sectoral knowledge sharing, targeted data collection, and expert collaboration.



# LEARNINGS FROM THE FIELD

THE CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SYSTEMIC ISSUES SHARED BY ARTISTS, ARTS WORKERS, AND ORGANIZATIONS DURING OUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS ARE CAPTURED IN THE KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED BELOW.

## COMMUNITY SURVEY

Over 200 members of our community responded to the survey, with 33% identifying as independent artists and nearly 20% identifying as arts organization leaders. A large segment of respondents are employed full-time with one organization or work as independent contractors. More than one-third (36%) reported earning less than \$30,000 annually from arts-related work. The top priorities for respondents were increased funding (47%), sustainable wages and benefits (43%), and affordable workspaces/venues (25%).

The top three funding challenges were (1) a lack of relationships with foundations and philanthropic partners, (2) a lack of multi-year funding opportunities, and (3) complex grant applications requiring extensive documentation. When asked to identify priorities for Arts for LA (AFLA), the following emerged:

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING GOALS SHOULD AFLA PRIORITIZE TO HELP CONNECT ARTISTS, ARTS WORKERS, AND ORGANIZATIONS?

- ▶ Bridge the divide between large, mid, and small-budget organizations.
- ▶ Encourage public-private partnerships.
- ▶ Increase access to existing affordable spaces.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING TOPICS WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT FROM AFLA?

- ▶ 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- ▶ Grant processes and requirements.
- ▶ Artist development fees and public funding.

### WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING POLICY AND ADVOCACY GOALS SHOULD AFLA PRIORITIZE TO HELP LEAD THE FIELD?

- ▶ Increased public/private funding.
- ▶ Expanded social services for freelance artists.
- ▶ Streamlined grant processes.



## LISTENING SESSION: AFFORDABLE SPACE

### HIGH COSTS

The prohibitive cost of renting public space prevents artists and arts organizations from accessing venues and providing impactful programming. Navigating tax requirements and negotiating affordable rental agreements with developers were identified as major barriers to maintaining affordable arts spaces.

### LEGAL BARRIERS

Zoning laws make it difficult for nonprofit arts organizations to operate. Additionally, limited access to community land trusts was identified as a concern.

### CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Smaller organizations often struggle to afford necessary capital improvements, leading many to close. Theatres, in particular, are moving between spaces.

### ACCESSIBILITY

The challenge of finding ADA-compliant spaces, coupled with the financial burden of retrofitting venues for accessibility—often without support from landlords or the city—was highlighted as a significant concern.





## LISTENING SESSION: ARTS EDUCATION

### KNOWLEDGE GAPS

School districts are unsure how to properly allocate resources from initiatives like Prop 28. Community members feel there is a lack of transparency around how funds are being spent and have concerns about the misuse of funds.

### CREDENTIALING

There is a shortage of credentialed arts educators. Teaching artists face difficulties in meeting complex credentialing requirements, particularly due to the cost of credentialing programs.

### DISCONNECT

There is tension between unions and teaching artists, with the former often being prioritized, leaving gaps in support for community-based organizations and arts professionals who have been the backbone of arts programming in schools. As a result, nonprofit partnerships with schools are dissolving.

### NONPROFIT CHALLENGES

Small arts organizations are struggling to adapt to changes in the funding landscape and find themselves competing with schools for resources. Strict and high cost insurance requirements make it difficult to partner.



## LISTENING SESSION: CREATIVE JOBS

### LIVING WAGE

Ensuring that arts-related jobs, particularly those that qualify as entry-level and/or freelance, offer living wages in alignment with the high cost of living. The difficulty of paying higher wages while grappling with budget deficits, staff layoffs, and undercapitalization was also mentioned.

### MID-LEVEL JOB AVAILABILITY

There is a perceived gap in mid-level job opportunities, particularly after pandemic-related job losses. While entry-level positions have received attention and pay improvements, concerns remain about the increasing qualifications and education requirements for mid-level roles, in addition to the scarcity of these roles. There is a need for centralized resources to help job seekers and employers connect.

### INCLUSION

Expanding diversity within arts organizations, particularly at higher administrative levels, remains a priority. Participants emphasized addressing the challenges faced by underrepresented workers, promoting meaningful cultural shifts, and avoiding tokenistic approaches to more inclusive hiring.

### WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Expanding programs without overburdening current staff is a significant challenge, especially for small organizations. There is a need for better training, not only for entry-level workers but also for organizational leaders, to help them foster environments that support staff retention, inclusive cultures, and growth. The need for a healthier work-life balance, especially for entry-level workers, was underscored. Teaching artists expressed a desire to work part-time while earning a living wage, allowing them to balance professional career development and the varied hours required for their artistic practice.



## LISTENING SESSION: RESOURCES & CAPITAL

### UNDER CAPITALIZATION

There is inconsistent funding in the arts sector, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organizations are facing undercapitalization, with cuts at local and state levels and foundations moving away from the arts.

### SUSTAINABILITY

A lack of multi-year, unrestricted funding poses significant challenges. Even when public funding is secured, the short-term nature of these agreements creates long-term sustainability issues.

### EQUITY IN FUNDING

Many organizations, especially small ones, are hindered by complex grant application processes that require an onerous amount of supporting documents, delayed funding disbursements, and administrative challenges. Limited staff, time, and resources exacerbate concerns that smaller and newer organizations are struggling to access the same opportunities as larger, more established ones. Nonprofit funding culture also prioritizes keeping staff spending significantly lower than program spending, which increases competition for local philanthropic support.

### NARRATIVE CHANGE

There is a need to re-evaluate how elected officials and philanthropists see arts organizations with regards to funding; a need to emphasize the arts as foundational to youth, community, and economic development.

# 2025 – 2027 POLICY AND ADVOCACY AGENDA

California is celebrated as a cultural mecca, home to approximately 16,000 arts nonprofits, yet it ranks an alarming 38th in the nation for per capita arts spending. This gap in funding is most striking in Los Angeles County, the nation’s top-ranking region for arts providers per capita. Despite its reputation as the creative capital of the world, Los Angeles falls short of matching that status with adequate public and private investment.

LA County’s 2020 needs assessment highlights that the region’s local arts agency (Department of Arts and Culture) only received \$17.5 million in funding, or \$1.77 per capita—dramatically lower than San Diego’s \$11.05 and San Francisco’s \$33.22.

An additional \$94.3 million was included in that year’s budget for 5 of the County’s largest cultural institutions, but that only increased the region’s per capita arts spending to \$9.45.

To match San Diego’s allocation, Los Angeles would require an additional \$16 million investment. It’s important to note that the County’s budget allocation slightly improved in the most recent fiscal year, but it still failed to improve our stature among comparable regions.

These disparities come as Los Angeles grapples with unprecedented challenges: pandemic recovery, historic undercapitalization, and devastating wildfires. Addressing these intersecting crises demands bold, coordinated action. The moment calls for a return to our roots—community, resilience, and innovation—to build an arts and culture sector that not only survives but thrives.

This Policy and Advocacy Agenda seeks to deepen connections across the sector, share knowledge to strengthen capacity and preparedness, and drive grassroots and grassroots organizing for equitable recovery and growth. The “roadmap” is designed to be measurable, actionable, and realistic. AFLA’s aim is to make progress on every item in collaboration with the community. Through strategic investment and collective action, we aim to ensure that the arts remain a cornerstone of Los Angeles’ economy, local communities, and shared humanity. Together, we can build a movement that elevates the arts and affirms their essential role in shaping a vibrant, equitable future.

2024 SMU Data Arts Vibrancy Index <https://culturaldata.org/arts-vibrancy-2024/executive-summary/>

Americans for the Arts’ Profile of Local Arts Agencies <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-program/networks-and-councils/local-arts-network/facts-and-figures/profile-of-local-arts-agencies/2020-profile-of-local-arts-agencies>



## CONNECT

### THE VISION

**ARTS FOR LA WILL FOSTER EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE CULTURES, AIMING TO BUILD CROSS-SECTORAL COLLABORATION THAT STRENGTHENS ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY AND RESILIENCE.**

### THE ROADMAP

- ▶ Re-introduce an annual Advocacy Day at Los Angeles City Hall where arts advocates can network, gain advocacy tools, and directly engage local elected officials.
- ▶ Coordinate collaborative networking channels where arts organizations of all budget sizes can connect to identify shared challenges, explore equitable funding strategies, and establish actionable outcomes for space-sharing, project development, and mutual aid support.
- ▶ Convene philanthropic partners and nonprofit arts organizations to address urgent recovery and capacity needs and build long-term financial and operational sustainability across the sector.



## LEARN

### THE VISION

**ARTS FOR LA WILL GROUND ITS ACTIONS IN LEARNINGS FROM THE FIELD AND SHARE THOSE LEARNINGS EXTERNALLY TO BUILD REGIONAL PREPAREDNESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE.**

### THE ROADMAP

- ▶ Develop an online community hub, where artists, arts workers, and organizations can interact, share mutual aid resources, and access educational materials on topics like tax deductions, digital equity, and permissible nonprofit advocacy (including rapid response tools for a changing political landscape).
- ▶ Disseminate critical information on the planning of the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games and connect arts organizations, artists, and arts workers to opportunities to participate.



## LEAD

### THE VISION

**ARTS FOR LA WILL ENGAGE IN ONGOING POLICY ADVOCACY AND GRASSROOTS AND GRASSTOPS ORGANIZING TO IMPLEMENT CRISIS-RESPONSE STRATEGIES AND BUILD SECTOR-WIDE MODELS THAT PRIORITIZE PEOPLE AND CREATE SUSTAINABLE ARTS CAREERS AND ORGANIZATIONS.**

### THE ROADMAP

- ▶ Advocate for increased and sustained County investment to: expand arts, media, and entertainment apprenticeships; introduce a permanent business interruption fund with robust \$25,000 grants for small businesses and nonprofits serving the entertainment sector; and elevate the Organizational Grant Program to match arts spending among comparable regions.
- ▶ Advocate for streamlined city grant applications that remove complex documentation requirements and provide up-front payments to build sustainability.
- ▶ Advocate for the development and enhancement of a countywide needs assessment map to catalog and maximize the use of public spaces (libraries, museums, parks, and community centers) for arts and cultural activities.

## THE ROADMAP

- ▶ Increase opportunities for arts educators by advocating for VAPA to be designated as a shortage field and by partnering with local agencies and funders to create subsidized credentialing pathways (including CTE and supplementary authorizations for those with a background in the arts).
- ▶ Strengthen Prop 28 implementation by advocating for a statewide oversight and advisory committee made up of students, families, practitioners, and other community stakeholders, while promoting meaningful inclusion of community-based organizations in funding allocation to sustain their school and district partnerships.
- ▶ Advocate at the state level to advance the goals of AFLA’s Creative Jobs Collective by extending health and safety protections, unemployment insurance, and paid leave to freelance arts and entertainment workers.
- ▶ Develop an employer toolkit that sets measurable standards for AFLA’s Creative Jobs Collective and centers inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. The toolkit should outline sustainable and transparent living wage criteria, inclusive hiring, culturally responsive organizational practices, and wellness programs.
- ▶ Secure commitments from a diverse group of employers to support AFLA’s Creative Jobs Collective, placing at least 1,500 arts and culture workers from historically underrepresented communities in jobs with a minimum living wage of \$26 per hour.





# GLOSSARY

- ▶ **AME-HRTP** - Arts, Media, and Entertainment - High Road Training Partnership, an initiative by the BRIC Foundation to bridge training and education programs with employment and drive economic mobility for underrepresented arts, media, and entertainment workers in California's creative economy.
- ▶ **Business Interruption Fund** - A financial pool set up by a government agency or organization to provide financial assistance to small businesses that experience a significant loss of revenue due to disruptions caused by construction projects, natural disasters, or other major events that temporarily halt their operations.
- ▶ **Community Listening Sessions** - Convenings hosted by Arts for LA for organizational members and ACTIVATE alumni to engage in open dialogue about current barriers and potential solutions.
- ▶ **Creative Jobs Collective** - A cross-sectoral effort led by Arts for LA aiming to build 10,000 living-wage creative job placements for historically underrepresented artists and creative workers in LA County by 2030.
- ▶ **CTE Credential** - The Designated Subjects Career Technical Education (CTE) Teaching Credential authorizes the holder to teach in grades twelve and below and in classes organized primarily for adults, in career technical, trade or vocational courses.
- ▶ **Laura Zucker Fellowship** - A program at Arts for LA in which one fellow conducts research into an under-explored topic of interest in one of four advocacy areas (E.g. Prop 28).
- ▶ **OGP** - LA County Department of Arts and Culture's Organizational Grant Program which provides two-year grant support to nonprofit arts organizations whose services positively impact residents, neighborhoods and communities by providing direct access and increased opportunities for quality arts activities and programming that is often free or low cost.
- ▶ **Prop 28** - The Arts and Music in Schools (AMS) initiative provides approximately \$1 billion in annual funding for arts education in California public schools. The funds must be used to hire new arts teachers and expand programming.
- ▶ **The Performing Arts Equitable Payroll Fund** - A new program to support small nonprofit performing arts organizations (SNPAOs) with adjusted gross revenue under \$2 million, in hiring and retaining employees. The Fund reimburses a portion of their payroll cost.
- ▶ **The 2028 Games** - Refers to the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The City of Los Angeles holds the official bid to host the Olympics and the contract with LA28 (the entity that will deliver the Games). The Cultural Olympiad is an integral part of the Olympic Games, required in the Olympic Charter and designed to promote the principles of peace, universal understanding, and the appreciation of culture.



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