



Dēmos: A Network for Ideas & Action

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Public Works: The Dēmos Center for the Public Sector Talking About Government - Findings and Recommendations -

State Arts Action Network

Americans for the Arts 2006 Annual Convention

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Dēmos:

A Network for Ideas & Action

- **Democracy**
- **Opportunity**
- **Public Purpose**
- **New Ideas**

Our Premise:

Decades of an anti-government movement

- + declining public faith in government**
- + inadequate defense by advocates**
- + government's own stumbles.**

Have resulted in:

- = A downward spiral in the capacity of and support for the public sector**
- = Steadily losing ground, even while we have some episodic successes.**

Urgency

Without direct attention to declining support for the public sector . . .

- **All policy and program solutions that require an active governmental role are at risk**
- **Budget and tax battles are fought on losing ground**
- **For the arts - making the case for governmental support and funding becomes even more difficult**

What comes to mind when you think of Government?

For most Americans, top of the mind associations are negative

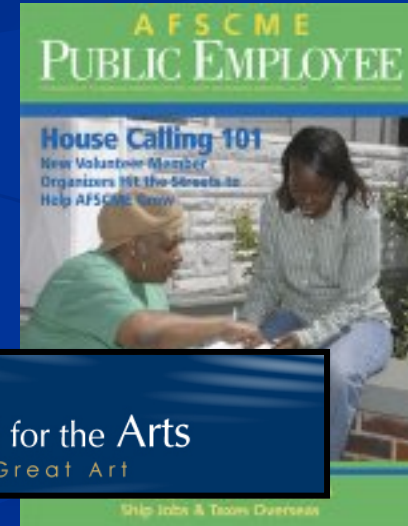
Big.....Inefficient.....Bureaucracy.....
.....Too controlled.....Corrupt.....
.....Controlling.....High Taxes.....Red Tape.....
Confusing..... Crooked.....Wasteful.....Cronies.....
.....Big and powerful.....Out of Touch.....Talking Heads....
.....Invasive.....Nanny.....Big Brother.....
.....Partisan bickering.....Polarized....
.....Grid-locked.....

What Doesn't Come to Mind

The day to day public systems, services and agencies all around us



Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention



Talking About Government

Our goals:

- Rebuilding awareness of and support for government's role in society
- Identifying ways to shift (reframe) public perception
- Creating concrete communications tools to make the case for government's capacity to address and solve social challenges.

Our method: a year and a half of multi-disciplinary research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute:

- How people perceive and think about government
- The "frames" that dominate their perceptions
- Why they think the way they do
- The implications of current frames/perceptions

Goals

This is about:

- Valuing a proactive role for government
- Engaging the public in improving government
- Being non-partisan

This is not about:

- “Liking” government
- Promoting satisfaction with government
- Being partisan or even bi-partisan

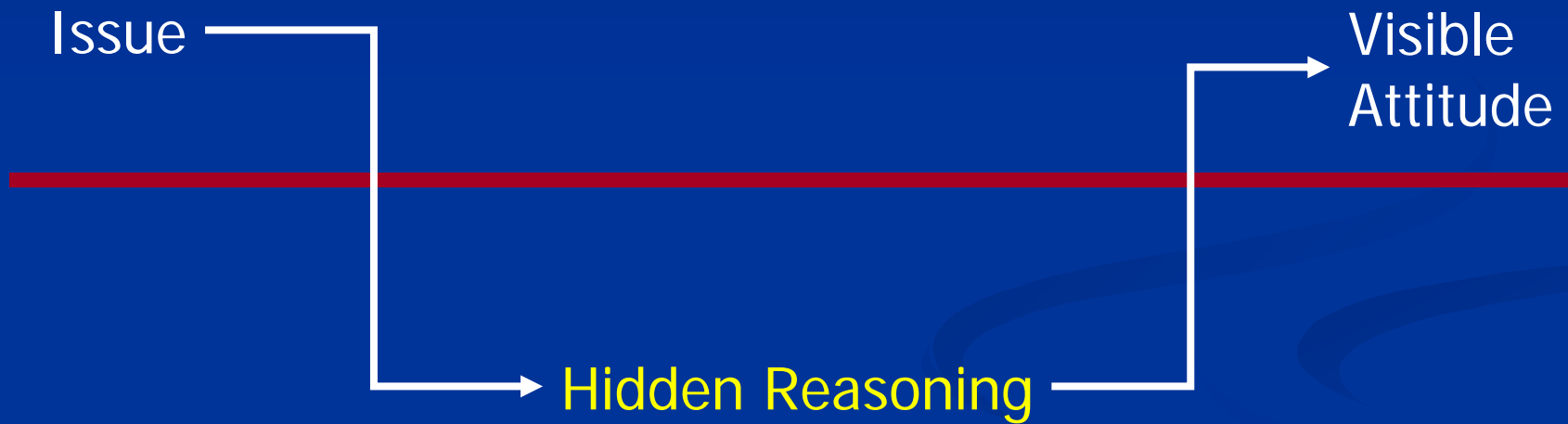
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What Research Suggests About How People Process Information

- People are not blank slates
- People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- Understanding is frame-based, not fact-based
- Incoming information provides cues that connect to the existing pictures in our heads
- People get most information about public affairs from the news media, which creates a framework of expectation, or dominant frame
- Over time, we develop habits of thought and expectation that configure incoming information to conform to this frame
- To change opinion, you must shift the frame

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What we are seeking to understand



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What Are Frames?

Big ideas - shared and durable cultural models that people use to make sense of their world. These **simplifying concepts** are 'triggered' by such readily available, familiar and highly charged vehicles as symbols, pictures, metaphors, and messengers – the grammar of storytelling. Once evoked, frames provide the **patterns of reasoning** necessary to process information, to direct opinions and to solve problems.

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Where We Get Our Cues: Elements of the Frame

- Values
- Visuals
- Messengers
- Context
- Numbers
- Metaphors
- Simplifying Models
- Stories
- Tone

Each of these helps to:

- Tell us what the communications is ABOUT
- Signal what counts, what can be ignored
- “Fill in” or infer missing information
- Influence decision outcomes

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Frames and Reframes

- When communications is inadequate, people default to the “pictures in their heads”
- When communications is effective, people can see an issue from a different perspective
- There are no frameless transactions: either you frame intentionally or the mind will fill in the blanks

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Therefore...

- Persuasive communications cannot depend on simply putting information in front of people
- It must change the lens through which they see the information
- If the facts don't fit the frame, it's the facts that are rejected, not the frame

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People Need Values Cues to sort, order, and understand

- **Level One:** Big ideas, like justice, prevention, family, community, equality and opportunity, creativity
- **Level Two:** Issue-types, like women's rights, the environment, children's issues, poverty, employment, arts
- **Level Three:** Specific issues, like pay equity, affordable housing, bycatch, SCHIP presumptive eligibility, EITC, public art funding

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The "Value" of Art

NEA Congressional Purpose *(excerpts)*:

The Congress finds and declares the following:

- (1) The arts and the humanities **belong to all the people** of the United States.
- (8) The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide **respect and admiration for the Nation's high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.**
- (11) To fulfill its educational mission, achieve an orderly continuation of free society, and provide models of excellence to the American people, the Federal Government must **transmit the achievement and values of civilization from the past via the present to the future, and make widely available the greatest achievements of art.**

Consistent Problems in Framing Social Policies for Public Consideration

1. No frame, no mental short-cut or organizing principle, or ineffective one.
2. Focusing first or exclusively on individuals.
3. Presenting problems as calamitous and unsolvable.
4. Over-reliance on numbers as tools of persuasion, especially as uninterpreted descriptors.
5. Under-reliance on values to prime perspective or a limited set of values (sympathy, charity, disparity, crisis).
6. Insufficient emphasis on problem-solving and solutions, or too little too late.

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Research Projects Completed

by the FrameWorks Institute for Dēmos

Reflecting the Strategic Frame Analysis Methodology

- A meta-analysis of existing public opinion research
- Cognitive elicitations (one-on-one open-ended interviews)
- Focus groups
- Development of a simplifying model
- A national priming survey

What we have learned

- **It's not as bad as we think it is.** Negative views are dominant but not as entrenched as many believe. In both qualitative and quantitative tests, Americans can respond quite positively to the idea, mission and role of government.
- **The word "government" is freighted with pejorative baggage.**
- **Strong, entrenched frames misdirect thinking about government.** Among the most damaging is a chronically available "default frame" that equates government with elected officials, the current administration and politics-as-usual, and suffers from parallel associations with corruption, partisanship, and elitism.

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What we have learned

- Distinctions between public and private hold little meaning.
- There is an expectation that government and business will be at odds, instead of working toward a common end.
- People want to think of their role as responsible citizens – but they must overcome the notion of corruption and money in politics to be able to do so.
- They want to engage in long-term problem-solving but they see the domain of government (confused with politics) as being about short-term and short-sighted decision-making that systematically excludes them.

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What we have learned

- Problematic perceptions of government are not solely driven by ideology. Democrats and Republicans share similar views of government.
- Without a beneficial understanding of what government is and what it stands for, the “solution” always sounds like a call for increased taxes.
- There is tension between individual and collective responsibility.
- A consumer stance underlies many of the problematic perceptions of government.

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Government as Mind: The Tip of the Iceberg

- Mind of the country: leadership and decision-making
- Government necessary but . . .
 - Spectator stance
 - Politics exaggerated
 - Government = current administration

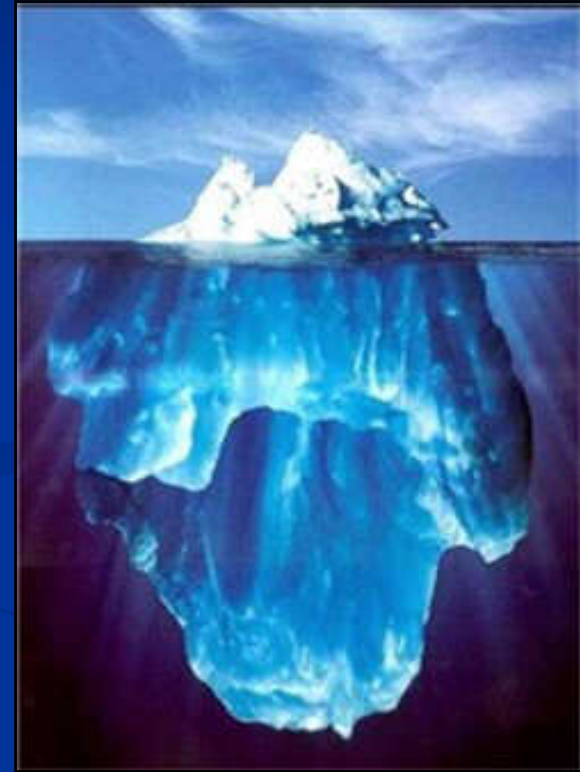


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Government as Monolith

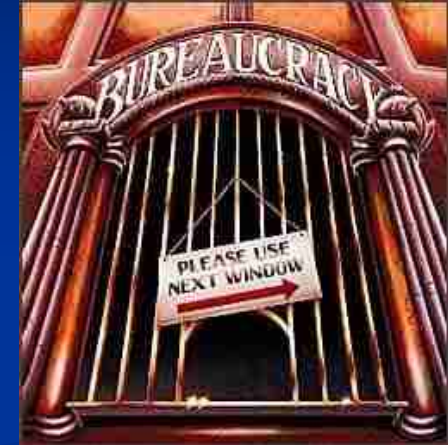
Everything below the surface

- Everything except elected leadership
- Huge, undifferentiated, bureaucratic
- Less visible
- Obscures public/private sector distinctions
- Exaggerates waste, bloat and inefficiency
- Confused about where tax money goes



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The Bureaucratic Blob



Another Overarching Challenge

The dominance of:

- Consumerism
- Capitalism
- Government as "them"

Is overtaking:

- Citizenship
- Democracy
- Government as "us"

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Citizen

Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

J.F. Kennedy

Consumer

"We're dealing with the people's money, not the government's money. And I want to give people their money back."

G.W. Bush

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Citizen

“A nation's creative community is a reflection of and necessary voice and window into its collective consciousness.”

Kay Bell

“It's Time For Government To Give The Artistic World Its Due”

“The Arts help us understand the human experience and in so doing build and nurture strong communities . . . arts are essential to the development of the human spirit and potential.”

Colorado Arts Consortium

Consumer

“Last week, the Colorado Council for the Arts asked the state legislature to start spending tax money to subsidize the arts in Colorado. Colorado doesn't support the arts: Coloradoans do. In fact, we support the arts vigorously, by spending millions of dollars every year on books, CDs, videos, framed reproductions, T-shirts, rock concerts, private and non-profit museums, and hundreds of other art-related resources that the market happily provides.

Barry Fagin, Independence Institute

Citizen

“A nation's creative community is a reflection of and necessary voice and window into its collective consciousness.”

Kay Bell

“It's Time For Government To Give The Artistic World Its Due”

“The Arts help us understand the human experience and in so doing build and nurture strong communities . . . arts are essential to the development of the human spirit and potential.”

Colorado Arts Consortium

Consumer

“What the advocates of government aid to the arts don't appreciate is that art . . . like language, is spontaneous and un-designed. Throughout history the arts have flourished when artists were at liberty to offer their products to the broad or narrow market of their choosing and when art consumers were at liberty to accept or reject those products.

Sheldon Richman, The Future of Freedom Foundation

Consider the Contrasts:

The Consumer Perspective

- Government takes money that people could use.
- Government redistributes income – think taxes
- Government is a drag on the economy and a barrier to business.
- Government services are for the lazy; those who work hard will succeed.
- Government is the problem.

The Citizen Perspective

- Government is a necessary agent in maximizing quality of life.
- Government redistributes risk – think Social Security.
- Government works with citizens and business to create economic opportunity.
- Government services offer protection and empowerment when needed.
- Government is our tool for solutions.

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Where Does Responsibility Lie?

- Consumer Stance – Responsible for **Me**
- Altruistic Stance – Responsible for **Them**
- Manager Stance – Responsible for **It/Us**

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The Questions We're Trying to Answer:

- How can we strengthen a "citizen" view of government?
- How can a citizen mindset become more dominant than a consumer mindset?
- How can we rebuild government as "us"?
- Can we reconnect to positive government personas?
 - Protector?
 - Manager?
 - Planner?
 - Consensus builder?
 - The voice of the people?
- How do we get from where we are to where we need to be?

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Missing frame ingredients in the discussion about government

- Its mission as distinct from, but not antithetical to, business.
- Clarity of purpose: what government is and does.
- A persona more in keeping with democratic ideals: protector, responsible manager, watchdog, long-term planner, the people's voice.
- Its connection to values that the country as a whole embraces such as future, stewardship, and the building and preservation of community.
- Reinforcement of the notion of shared fate, in the form of the common good or quality of life, which gives rise to government in the first place.

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Addressing the Challenge

Frames, Values and a Simplifying Model

Protection

- Early research clearly showed that government's role as "protector" (safe food, clean water, product safety, etc.) was broadly recognized and supported, and helped to trigger a more positive conversation about government in general.

Common Good

- Elevating a level one, or "values", conversation about government's role proved to be very important – and successful – in the focus group explorations.

Public Structures

- Finding a way to make government more vivid and real for people is a central challenge. Related to this is the need to get people out of the dominant "interpersonal" model of government and into one that elevates a bigger picture of what government is and does.

Other values, frames and models showed promise; but "protection," "common good" and "public structures" were the ones chosen for testing in order to determine if we are moving in the right direction.

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Sample Test Language

The Common Good Frame

“Our nation’s success is based upon the **power of people working together** and each in his own way. We all benefit **when citizens work with the public sector** to identify problems and come to consensus on a vision to address those problems. Whether it is revitalizing a crumbling downtown, restoring parkland, or determining health and safety regulations, **our nation’s quality of life** now and into the future depends upon citizens and public agencies **working for the common good.**”

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Sample Test Language

The Protection Frame

“We rely on our **public institutions** to set and enforce the regulations that will **protect us from physical and financial harm**. There are a variety of ways that federal, state and local agencies protect the public including: food quality standards, environmental controls, financial securities regulations, consumer fraud protections, workplace and product safety standards, to name a few. **With the support of citizens and business**, public sector institutions can set and enforce these protections **on behalf of the public good**.”

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Sample Test Language

The Simplifying Model

“**Economists** now agree that the main advantages that make America so successful come from what are called **Public Structures**. The Public Structures America has created include *physical* structures we need in order to get things done – like highways, airports, and communications grids – as well as the *organizational* structures we need, like a postal system for delivering mail and courts for settling business disagreements. Developing countries have many smart, hard working *individuals*, but they don't have the Public Structures that are essential for overall success. **Without continuing attention and support, America's Public Structures are at risk of decline.**”

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Public Structures Model

- Overcomes the dominant models of relationship between government and citizens
- Provides a more complete picture of what government is and does
- Avoids relying on individuals (civil servants, elected officials) to be the face of government
- Based on language that can slip into common use

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Priming Results - Values & Model

- More likely to say that people working together as a group can make "a great deal of difference" in solving problems (+10 points)
- A more positive view of the impact of government on people's lives (+7 points)
- More say that "keeping fully informed about news and public issues" and "protesting unjust public policies" are extremely important obligations of citizenship (+7 points each)
- View of government improves, with an increase in those reporting the government has a "somewhat positive" effect on people's lives (+7 points)
- More likely to say that state governments should "both" raise taxes and cut services to deal with state budgetary problems (+5 points)

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What We've Got

- Goal: specific Level 3 policy agenda
- Politics & Bureaucracy
- Actor: Government
- Ideological
- Individual
- Consumer
- Nanny
- It, the other
- Anti-business
- Programs and taxes

What We Need

- Mission: Common Good, Protection
- Essential Structures
- Actor: Citizens
- Pragmatic
- Collective
- Citizen, villager
- Protect & empowers
- Us, we
- Anti-rogue business
- Quality of life/community

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Don't

- Don't use the word "government" at the start of any communications.
- Don't equate government narrowly with electoral politics, or citizenship with voting; this leads to "Mind" confusion.
- Don't assume the public understands the difference between public and private sectors or that public is preferred to private.
- Don't buy into a Consumerist mind-set, encouraging Little Picture thinking about what government gives at what cost with what return.
- Don't focus in narrowly on public servants or particular public goods; rather show people coming together to resolve issues. We need ways to cue up "villager mode" and make "doing government" more cognitively available to people.

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Do

- Do begin communications by explaining government's **mission** - remind the public of the role of government in advancing **common interests**, protecting public welfare, working with citizens and business to improve **quality of life**.
- Do make government vivid by focusing on **structures** and systems, not people in power or public servants.
- Do remind people of **effective community action**, of people coming together to solve common problems through ongoing vehicles as city commissions, courts, neighborhood task forces, etc.
- Do identify the role for citizen action and citizen engagement as **long-term problem-solving** around a particular issue, not merely short-term decision-making; this is **governing as stewardship** and **responsible management**.
- Do encourage Big Picture Thinking.

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Implications for Arts Advocates

- Focus first on Level One values about art and government's role in supporting the arts:
 - Creativity, ingenuity, quality of life, culture and community, expression of values, etc.
- Highlight the public sector's unique role in ensuring our collective cultural and artistic legacy.
- Help make government support of the arts more vivid and real for the public, connected to their daily experience. What are the "structures" and systems all around us that help arts thrive.
- Use R.O.I. and economic impact claims cautiously, if at all – triggering "consumer" mode is a losing proposition.
- Don't rely on the "facts" alone – give context.
- Every public communications is an opportunity to reframe the "public's" role in support of arts and culture. Consistency and persistence will help change the public debate.

Debate over NEA Funding, PBS – July 23, 1997

JIM LEHRER: Senator, why should there continue to be a National Endowment for the Arts?

SEN. JIM JEFFORDS: Oh, **I think the federal government has a role to play with the arts.** It's been very successful over the years that the Endowments have been in place. **It's had its problems,** but those problems have been minuscule compared to the great good it has done by allowing states, in particular, endeavors through their councils, but just as importantly, the national level, **to allow different artists and different perspectives to come to the attention which wouldn't come otherwise,** except through the federal utilization of the Endowments, so I'm a big fan, and have seen it work very well, and I think **we have taken corrective action to take care of those problems that have created a controversy.**

What is this "about"?

Debate over NEA Funding, PBS – July 23, 1997

JIM LEHRER: All right, Congressman, you feel differently. Why?

REP. PETER HOEKSTRA: Well, I think the federal support for the arts is clear. The oversight work that we've done clearly indicate that the National Endowment for the Arts, that component of federal support for the arts, is **a small agency that really doesn't work**. It's inefficient. Twenty-five percent of every dollar that goes to the National Endowment for the Arts gets spent up in overhead, never makes it to the artist. About 30 percent of the money that they actually get to distributing goes to six cities. Another 25 percent goes just to the state in New York, so it's **an elite little organization**. **It doesn't foster arts throughout America**. It fosters arts in a very specific locale, and **it really doesn't make a difference**. The arts were thriving before the National Endowment for the Arts was established; they're thriving now, and **they will thrive if the National Endowment for the Arts goes away**.

What is this "about"?

Links to Our Project Team

- **Public Works**

- www.demos-usa.org/page283.cfm

- **The Council for Excellence in Government**

- www.excelgov.org

- **The FrameWorks Institute**

- www.frameworksinstitute.org

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