Open Pathway

Quality Initiative Institutional Proposal Template

The enclosed Quality Initiative proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the Improvement Process of the Open Pathway.

Signature of Institution’s President or Chancellor  
June 3, 2013

Dr. David Sam, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Elgin Community College

Name of Institution

Elgin, IL

City and State

The institution completes the Quality Initiative proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. The institution may choose to include a brief implementation plan that addresses many of the questions below and replaces portions of the outline. Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words.

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Purposeful Budgeting

The Purposeful Budgeting initiative is an important milestone for Elgin Community College (ECC) as the institution advances toward establishing a larger infrastructure of continuous improvement. The principal aim of the initiative is to make budgeting and budget planning more meaningfully aligned to overall college strategy. As a member institution of Achieving the Dream, the college is often encouraged to invest in scalable enterprises, and through the Purposeful Budgeting initiative, we plan to apply this advice to budgeting – that is, to scale budgeting from a localized department activity to an essential institutional operation, one that is integral to overall effectiveness. We plan to accomplish this initiative by standardizing reporting and tracking, fostering dialog, and improving processes of review. Designed to take place from 2013 to 2016, the Purposeful Budgeting initiative has already begun on our campus in large part. Recent activities include the adoption of a zero-based approach to budgeting; improvements in review processes including academic program review; standardizing requirements for department planning; and the creation of teams focused on quality improvement, such as the Equity Coordinating Council and the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee. The Purposeful Budgeting initiative aligns well to the ECC Strategic Plan FY2013 Through FY2017 (see Strategic Goal 4: Promote greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability in college processes and systems) as well as to quality standards of organizations of which we are members, such as Achieving the Dream.
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Sufficiency of the Initiative’s Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

Efforts in continuous improvement have been occurring at Elgin Community College for several years. Under its three most recent strategic plans, the college has successfully implemented the following process improvements:

- Expanded membership on the President’s Cabinet to strengthen areas critical for quality improvement (e.g., technology, planning and research, and communications)
- Increased staff in institutional research and assessment to bolster a shift towards outcome reporting and data analysis
- Instituted a college-wide new initiatives program for ECC employees to apply and receive funds for projects that link creatively to strategic goals
- Implemented a major refinement in academic program review, including the launch of a Review Team to assess and provide feedback on program reports
- Launched a cross-functional Strategic Planning Committee as well as cross-functional teams (e.g., Equity Coordinating Council) to set strategic goals and carry out work plans related to strategic goals
- Introduced a zero-based budgeting (ZBB) process to encourage budget officers/department directors to plan budgets from scratch (i.e., without accounting assumptions from prior years).

Taken together, these improvements have fostered a sense of optimism and pride in the college’s capacity to advance reforms. The institution has even received national recognition for its efforts from peer colleges and organizations like Achieving the Dream, American Association of Community Colleges, the Community College Futures Assembly, and the Government Finance Officers Association.

While such recognitions are laudable, there remains an internal need to improve our own understanding of quality – particularly in the case of budget planning. While the quality of our comprehensive institutional budgets is outstanding, processes by which we develop institutional budgets from individual department plans are not well-defined. In fact, only recently – through the ZBB pilots we have implemented since 2011 – have we emphasized the importance of a mandatory planning period to precede the budgeting cycle or emphasized a need to share estimation formulas for object codes (e.g., travel, office supplies, etc.) across departments. Moreover, a committee for reviewing and prioritizing budget requests, the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee, has only recently been formed and has yet to be institutionalized fully. Through these instances and others we see an opportunity to focus more intently on budgeting and to develop budgeting as an essential and meaningful part of our strategic operations.

While budgeting is a primary goal of the initiative, we realize that the quality of budgets ultimately depends on the nature of plans that underlie them. Like budgeting, planning will also be addressed through the initiative. At ECC, as with many institutions, department plans are created on an annual basis by offices, programs and committees. Unfortunately, at our institution, these plans are not necessarily synchronized with the budgeting cycle – in fact, at times they are culled together after budgets have been allocated and thus do not serve as guides for the departmental activities and expenditures that follow. Through the Purposeful Budgeting initiative, we see an opportunity to educate ourselves about how planning and budgeting are linked. Adding to confusion, department plans come in a variety of formats. Some are written as lists of projects onto which costs can be assigned, but others are written as higher-order concepts from which specific projects or tasks are difficult to ascertain. One of the tasks we hope to accomplish through the Purposeful Budgeting initiative is to identify a common template for recording plans that links meaningfully to budgeting worksheets and documents.

In the course of carrying out this initiative, we will engage in a number of important tasks. First, we expect to re-engage the campus around the importance of dialog in budget planning and debriefing with staff once budgets are approved and actualized. Secondly, the initiative provides an opportunity to educate employees – particularly middle-level managers and support staff – who are not always included in decisions made farther up the organizational hierarchy. Additionally, the initiative will provide a platform for articulating clear rules, review processes, criteria, evaluation methods, and timelines. In sum, the Purposeful Budgeting represents the next phase in our quality journey as an organization.

1 For the past 9 consecutive years, Elgin Community College has been awarded a Certificate for Achievement for Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association, and for 3 consecutive years, the college has been awarded the organization’s Distinguished Budget Presentation Award.
3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

The Purposeful Budgeting initiative represents a continuation of efforts to link planning and budgeting at ECC. At various times throughout our history, efforts to align planning and budgeting have been attempted but never satisfactorily actualized. The creation of an integrated college-wide strategic plan in 2009 was a step forward in this regard. Prior to 2009, department plans from separate college units (i.e., Academic Affairs, Finance, etc.) were not linked to a common set of institution-wide priorities, making it difficult – if not impossible – to dialog about common strategies. Since then, a single campus-wide strategic/academic plan has been set on a multi-year basis and formally ratified by the Board of Trustees. This practice, along with extensive outreach by Strategic Planning Committee members and the community, has helped us to achieve awareness and buy-in. Creating a single college-wide plan has significantly increased the visibility of our shared goals and values, and employee surveys conducted since 2009 have consistently shown high rates of satisfaction with the ECC Strategic Plan. Our spring 2012 employee survey, for example, showed that over 70% of employees report being ‘satisfied’ or ‘very satisfied’ with the plan’s contents, with little variation among types of employees (faculty, staff, and administrators).

Apart from being a conceptual or strategic document, however, we realize that the strategic plan should guide for operational and budget planning. Here especially – as mentioned in the context of the often misunderstood connection between planning and budgeting in Question 2 – we recognize an opportunity. Although the strategic goals are widely known and appreciated on campus, there is still limited understanding of what to make of them – i.e., how to plan. There are few opportunities currently to discuss department goals or share common objectives, budgets, or resources. This is reflected in employee surveys as well. Although a majority of employees report satisfaction with the ECC Strategic Plan, only 49% agree or strongly agree that the plan guides activities of departments, and 44% agree or strongly agree that the plan guides individual activities.

In the end, we believe the Purposeful Budgeting initiative will allow us to advance our understanding of planning organizationally. The initiative aligns well to ECC Strategic Plan Goal 4 (Promote greater transparency, efficiency, and accountability in college processes and systems), since each objective within this goal mentions the importance of engaging in quality practices:

- Objective 4.1: Proactively solicit feedback from students, employees, and communities in the evaluation and improvement of processes
- Objective 4.2: Make optimal use of student success data to inform future programs and services
- Objective 4.3: Develop operational processes that are responsive to the strategic priorities identified in this plan

The initiative is also closely aligned to our core academic mission. First, because of its emphasis on dialog, the initiative helps reenergize the work of current cross-functional committees, such as the Strategic Planning Committee and the Equity Coordinating Council, whose work to date has been somewhat ill-defined and evolving. Because these committees are interdisciplinary, discussions among group members will, by default, entail crosstalk among academic programs (e.g., university transfer programs, career programs, etc.) and non-academic units (e.g., technology, marketing, etc.) alike, which will help us to unify further around a common purpose. Additionally, because this initiative requires formalizing our practices, we expect it will lead toward better tracking and reporting of progress, which further motivates us to discuss common indicators of academic performance. Finally, because learning comes through dialog, we expect the initiative will help to reduce redundant systems and practices, thereby allowing us to redirect funds that would have been spent on separate, parallel activities into integrated activities aligned to common goals.

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

There are 5 main goals of the Purposeful Budgeting initiative: (1) to document and publicize annual plans containing department goals; (2) to articulate more concretely the association between plans and annual budgets; (3) to invite areas not

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2 ECC has created 3 campus-wide strategic plans since the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness office was created in 2008: the ECC Strategic Plan 2009, the ECC Strategic Plan: FY2010 through FY2012, and the ECC Strategic Plan: FY2013 through FY2017.
already involved in reviewing budgets into conversations; (4) to document processes and procedures used to guide budgeting, including prioritizing practices and criteria; and (5) to communicate and report our intentions to the larger campus and district community.

Within these goals, specific objectives we intend to accomplish are to: establish rules and timelines; define criteria and methods (e.g., rubrics, rating scales, etc.); define employee roles and release time/compensation for faculty, administrators, and staff as required by the Extra Contractual Work Team;3 identify the appropriate committee to oversee portions of this work in addition to the Strategic Planning Committee and the Equity Coordinating Council; and to work with the Information Technology office to establish a web-based platform/vendor to facilitate the reporting of progress.

5. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments, and determine what has been accomplished.

The Purposeful Budgeting initiative will rely on the following evaluation methods already in place:

a. Perceptual survey of budget officers. A survey of budget officers was conducted in 2011 when the college launched its first ZBB pilot. We expect to offer the survey again on an occasional basis. The survey assesses budgeting practices; skills in estimating object codes (e.g., supplies, travel, etc.); the nature and types of budget justifications; and feedback on solutions to standardize budgeting practices.

b. Employee surveys. General employee surveys are given every 2 to 3 years at ECC to assess general satisfaction with strategic goals, shared values, the quality of work provided by service units, etc. Changes in understanding or perception over time will be assessed through this measure.

c. Professional development and professional development surveys. Since a large part of the Purposeful Budgeting initiative will involve coaching/mentoring professionals on how to create goals and reports, we envision professional development for the Administrative Team or selected budget officers/directors. Additionally, professional development may require some kind of retreat or extended meeting for the Cabinet to discuss goals and reports twice annually. Minutes and exit surveys from these events will be used to assess understanding and changes in perceptions over time.

d. Independent review and evaluation of goals and accomplishments by committee. At ECC there has been considerable discussion on the nature of goals contained in plans and whether the college should invest resources differently for different types of goals – for example, goals which innovate or expand operations in new ways versus those that maintain operations with minimal changes. In an analysis of several years’ worth of department goals, the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness office found much to learn from careful reflection on goals.4 Thus, we see, through the execution of this initiative, an emerging evaluation technique in which the Strategic Planning Committee and/or Equity Coordinating Council reviews the goals within department plans to assess the nature and degree of changes/improvements over time.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

6. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

There is a great deal of support for this initiative on campus, as it integrates and extends several lines of work we have deployed for years. First, as previously mentioned, the initiative extends the work of ZBB pilots we have implemented since 2011. Through this work, we expand efforts by inviting more college departments into the ZBB process and discussing department plans broadly. Secondly, in the Teaching, Learning, and Student Development division (TLSD), we expect to extend the operational planning system in place for years. In that division, an established planning system requires academic deans to submit annual goals, pool resources for items like equipment and travel, and engage in annual discussions. Third, in the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness area, a Strategic Initiatives process has been in place since 2010 which

3 The Extra Contractual Work Team is ECC’s officially recognized body, comprised of representatives from the Board and faculty union, who approve compensation rates and formulae for faculty work that falls outside of contractually-obligated duties.

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provides college funds to employees leading special projects aligned to strategic goals. That office has also released data reporting tools emphasizing measurement in the analysis of progress. We plan to apply these efforts to budgeting so that budget justifications made by departments are reported in terms that are measurable and evidence-based. Finally and most recently, the Strategic Planning Committee released ECC’s first-ever operational planning guide in 2013 which outlines expectations and best practices for goal setting, writing, reviewing progress, and communicating information. As a starting place, this document will serve as a guiding foundation to begin this initiative.

In the past, each of our previous gains has come about through the gradual introduction of quality practices. Since 2009, we have come to rely on an institutional improvement diagram put forth by Achieving the Dream to model best practices (see figure below). The model calls for engaging in quality practices: using data, engaging in review, prioritizing, etc. Through the Purposeful Budgeting initiative we will apply these principles to integrated budgeting.

7. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

The President, the Finance office, and the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) office will be jointly responsible for executing this initiative. These offices will be tasked with information gathering, creating timelines and forms, organizing and hosting professional development sessions, and ensuring that department goals and accomplishments are submitted regularly. An advisory accreditation committee has already been formed by the Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness to oversee activities for the 2015-16 comprehensive visit, and execution of the Purposeful Budgeting initiative is within that team’s purview. At present, the advisory team consists of department directors and managers whose offices oversee, or are impacted by, phases of the improvement model displayed above (e.g., finance, communications, research, etc.). These individuals are listed below, and others, including faculty and support staff, will be added next year:

- Assistant Vice President of Teaching, Learning, and Student Development (TLSD)
- Managing Director of Enrollment Services (TLSD)
- Senior Director of Communications (Communications)
- Controller (Finance)
- Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE)
- Director of Institutional Research (PIE)
- Managing Director Academic Operations, Curriculum, and Compliance (TLSD)
In terms of executing the initiative, the Strategic Planning Committee will be responsible for reviewing plans and providing commentary, and the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Team, a relatively new subcommittee of the Strategic Planning Committee which formed in fall 2012, will work with Finance to review budgets and allocations, expense justifications, and financial forecasts. Members of that team include the Vice President/Chief Financial Officer and the Controller from the Finance area, as well as the Vice President/Chief Academic Officer and the Assistant Vice President from Teaching, Learning, and Student Development. Additional members include the Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, and the Managing Director of Human Resources. Finally, the Equity Coordinating Council, the joint faculty/administrative team in charge of overseeing student success interventions, will collect and monitor plans and reports related to student success. Coordination of these efforts will amount to quite an extension of practice.

8. **List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.**

For the most part, the Purposeful Budgeting initiative relies largely on talent and resources we have in place. In proposing the initiative, we are essentially challenging ourselves to leverage these resources more intentionally. To this end, our plan for the first few years of deployment is to secure commitments from units that already have some kind of planning and reporting mechanism in place. These include the Deans’ Council (within the Teaching, Learning and Student Development division) and the Equity Coordinating Council. Additionally, in summer 2013, a small contingent of non-academic support functions have agreed to outline plans for tracking and reporting in ways they align their goals to academic units. These include Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, Communications, Information Technology, and Institutional Advancement/ECC Foundation. Once a system and guidelines are formulated among this group, we plan to invite the remaining Cabinet-level offices, which include Finance, Human Resources, Marketing, and Legal Affairs.

To sustain momentum, the advisory accreditation team explained above will oversee progress and work alongside the Strategic Planning Committee to report on what’s been turned in, reviewed, etc. No special funds or resources will be needed for this purpose, as it is already within the purview of this team and the Strategic Planning Committee to provide this sort of feedback. As another example, the Cabinet will need to review and engage in dialog about department plans and reports, which it will do as part of its current meeting schedule.

Eventually, as outlined in the timeline below (Question 9) we plan to identify a vendor by spring 2016 that can provide a technology solution to encompass tracking plans, budgets, and reports as well as offer ongoing support, training, and consulting. At that point, we plan to allocate internal dollars to support this initiative and will charge the Strategic Planning Committee and the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness office with oversight and communication. Software products currently being considered include: LiveText, D2L, Tk20 and SharePoint.

**Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative** (The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

9. **Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.**

Activities in the Purposeful Budgeting initiative fall into the following 4 interrelated phases, which are described in the operational planning guide we recently released: *Planning and Budgeting at ECC: A Guide to Accompany the ECC Strategic Plan*. These phases include: planning, budgeting, reviewing, and communicating.

1. **PLANNING:** Gathering materials for selecting goals; deciding goals and activities
2. **BUDGETING:** Mapping costs to goals; deciding processes for carrying out mapping processes
3. **REVIEWING:** Assessing what worked and did not work
4. **COMMUNICATING:** Reporting plans and accomplishments to others

Our plan for the duration of the initiative is to apply these 4 phases in an iterative fashion to 3 dimensions of work: plans, budgets, and summary reports. In other words, during the course of the initiative, we will deliberately gather information in the form of department goals; map that information onto costs and resources; review draft documents and solicit feedback from broader audiences; and communicate findings and results formally. We apply these actions first to department goals (gathered in the form of plans), and then to department budget requests and justifications, and finally to reports of
accomplishments. In the table below, these key activities are placed in sequence along with intended action steps. While the sequence or order of events seems reasonable to us at this point, terms or times are approximate.

### ECC’s ‘Purposeful Budgeting’ Initiative Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Key Activities</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Key Questions to be Answered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2013 / Fall 2013</td>
<td>Compile FY2014 department goals (plans) from Cabinet officers [Note: A subgroup of Cabinet officers meets in summer 2013 to begin implementation.] Compile FY2014 department goals (plans) from academic (TLSD) departments</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Use the sample table template contained in the operational planning guide to record department goals Have departments define tasks/activities within goals</td>
<td>Does the template work? Does the template provide the information we need in order to understand opportunities for collaboration?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2013 / Spring 2014</td>
<td>Share and review department goals (plans) with a broader audience (e.g., Cabinet, Strategic Planning Committee, etc.) and gather feedback</td>
<td>Reviewing / Communicating</td>
<td>Gather input and commentary Release a second draft of the table template, if necessary</td>
<td>Can the draft table template be improved? Have all relevant stakeholders been included for feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2014</td>
<td>Launch a third ZBB group of budget officers in spring 2014; have the 2014 ZBB group submit department goals (plans) and budget requests/justifications Assign costs to plans in other (non-ZBB) areas</td>
<td>Planning / Budgeting</td>
<td>Have budget officers estimate costs for particular items Have budget officers discuss processes by which they align activities/tasks to goals Begin to outline review criteria and frameworks</td>
<td>Are there any standards or formulas we can use to better estimate common items? How does the feedback from the 2014 ZBB cohort compare to that collected from 2011 and 2012 cohorts?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>Have non-ZBB budget officers estimate costs for particular items Have non-ZBB budget officers discuss processes by which they align activities/tasks to goals</td>
<td>Is it easier to assign costs to goals or to activities? Once activities/tasks are identified, can goals be adjusted to make them more cost effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Reviewing / Communicating</td>
<td>Organize all requests into a spreadsheet; ‘flag’ outliers for discussion For outliers, have budget officers supply additional justification Finalize review process and frameworks Assign oversight to the Strategic Planning and Budgeting Committee or a similar body</td>
<td>What does Finance need to know from departments when reviewing and adjusting budgets? What do departments need to know from Finance? Can we cut costs by combining similar goals and/or activities without sacrificing quality?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Key Activities</td>
<td>Phase</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summer 2014</td>
<td>• Compile FY2014 department accomplishments</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>• Assess which planned goals have been executed well and which have not</td>
<td>Do we meet our strategic goals through our actions? What elements of departmental plans are not being accomplished (spent)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have the Student Success Infrastructure teams prepare FY2014 student success progress reports</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Have the Strategic Planning Committee create a gap analysis of unfulfilled to fulfilled accomplishments</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have the Equity Coordinating Council review FY2014 student success progress reports</td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>• Assess which planned goals for student success have been executed well and which have not</td>
<td>Do we meet our goals for student success? Which elements of student success plans are not actualized (spent)?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2014</td>
<td>• Share and review accomplishments and reports with broader audience</td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>• Gather input and commentary</td>
<td>How can reports of accomplishments be improved? Have all relevant stakeholders been included for feedback?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>• Gather perceptual data in the form of surveys, focus groups, etc. to assess progress</td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>• Have the Planning and Institutional Effectiveness (PIE) Office gathers data and prepare an executive report</td>
<td>What are the college’s baseline levels of budget satisfaction with this initiative? Which results of are we comfortable with? Which do we want to improve in the future?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2015 / Fall 2015</td>
<td>• Solicit bids from potential vendors</td>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>• Prepare bid documents with Purchasing Office</td>
<td>Which solution will provide budget officers and review committees with the information and ease they need to make the Purposeful Budgeting initiative effective?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2015</td>
<td>• Identify an appropriate vendor</td>
<td>Budgeting</td>
<td>• Finalize contract with Legal Affairs</td>
<td>Which vendor is the best fit for ECC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016 / Spring 2016</td>
<td>• Train budget officers/department directors on goal tracking in software</td>
<td>Communicating</td>
<td>• Invite vendor to campus for training and/or host webinars</td>
<td>Are budget officers or their designees able to effectively track the information they need to track using the new system?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>• Re-gather perceptual data and compare results to earlier deployment</td>
<td>Reviewing</td>
<td>• Have the PIE Office gathers data and prepare an executive report</td>
<td>Are we moving the needle in improving perceptions of budgeting? Have our perceptions of operational planning improved since the latest employee surveys?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fall 2016</td>
<td>• Decide on appropriate processes and councils for oversight of gathering/collecting and review</td>
<td>Planning / Budgeting</td>
<td>• From the master list of campus councils, ask the Administrative Team to prepare a recommendation</td>
<td>What is the most effective way to track information while leveraging the functions and roles of existing committees?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

Dr. Philip Garber, Executive Director of Planning and Institutional Effectiveness
Name and Title

847-214-7285  pgarber@elgin.edu
Phone  Email

Elgin Community College
Institution

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