

An illustration of five stylized human figures holding up large puzzle pieces against a light teal background. The puzzle pieces are in shades of orange, blue, and grey. The scene is decorated with white circles and a large orange semi-circle at the top. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# MEL REFRESHED

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## Clear Horizon



# OVERVIEW

- Getting on the same page
- Presentation of MEL principles
- Group work to review
- Plenary to explore feedback



# WHO YOU MIGHT BE

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- A MEL practitioner
- An evaluator
- A commissioner
- A Foundation or Grantmaker
- A community member or from a community organisation
- Someone else very special....

**CONTEXT**

# WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PRINCIPLES?

- Principles provide guidance for practice while still allowing people to adapt their practice to context.
- Centring values, behaviours, norms and practices at its core, principles-based practice provides a loose set of guidelines to support practice in highly contextual environments.
- The draft principles are framed by Principles-Focused Evaluation and the [GUIDE](#) approach put forward by Michael Q Patton
  - They should be directional and have a clear opposite.
- They aim to guide practice in a flexible way, so that the practice can be adapted to the context.
- They are not criteria or standards. But they can be used to evaluate the quality of MEL.
- Patton suggests the following evaluation questions for this purpose: (1) Are the principles clear, meaningful, and actionable? (2) Are they are being followed? (3) Are they are leading to desired results?

# DEVELOPMENT OF THESE PRINCIPLES

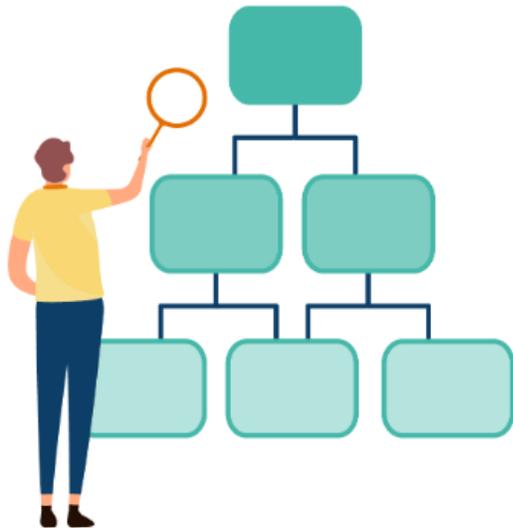


- Draft MEL principles - originally developed to guide teaching / practice at Clear Horizon.
- Co-developed / commented on by over 120 people from 18 countries through two rounds of consultation in 2023 via LinkedIn.
- Drew on allied sets of principles, & on critical reflections around failings of traditional approaches to M&E within today's context.
- These principles will be used to guide the Clear Horizon. We welcome others to adopt these principles too - & humbly hope they may serve as a starter pack for others who want to develop their own.

**WHAT DO WE MEAN  
BY MEL ANYWAY?**

# DEMYSTIFYING MEL:

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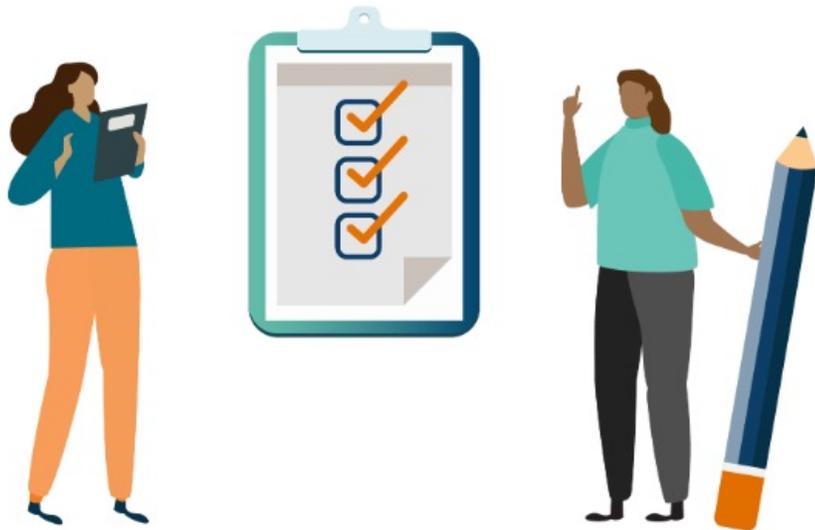
# MEASUREMENT



- Is the ongoing collection of information by people doing the work
- Is primarily for gaining insights early about what's working and what's not through data insights
- Can be done at different levels

# DEMYSTIFYING MEL:

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# EVALUATION



- Is done less frequently than measurement
- Is focused more on impact and outcome
- Is more analytical and involves judgements of merit or worth
- Has two meanings – making a judgement or conducting a study
- Draws on measurement data

# DEMYSTIFYING MEL:

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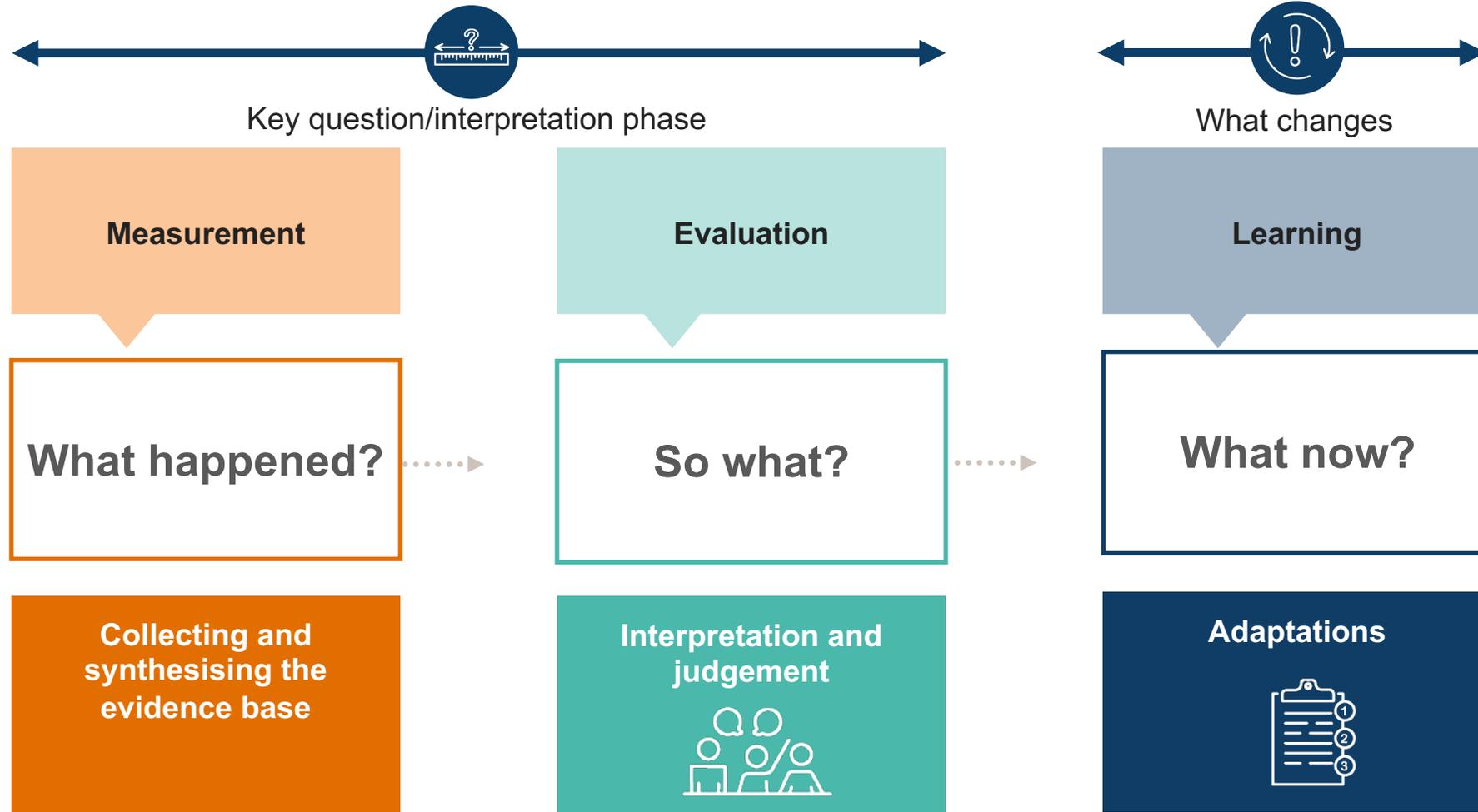


# LEARNING

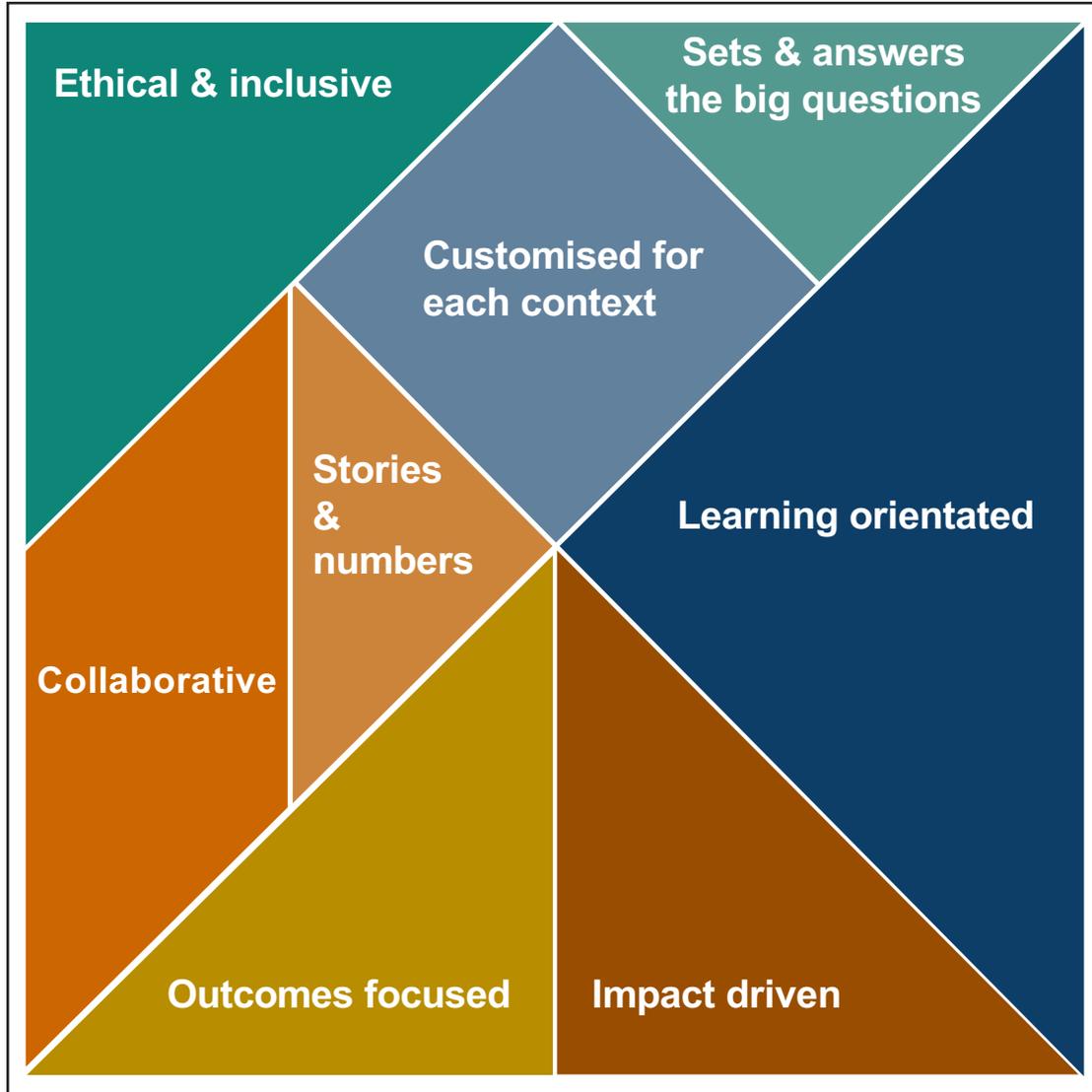


- Uses data and analysis to understand what's happened and decide what to do differently
- Is based on evidence and findings
- Is based on your own learning needs, the need to adapt and refine your activities as you proceed

# A SIMPLE WAY TO THINK ABOUT MEL



# **DRAFT MEL PRINCIPLES**



1. Be learning-orientated.
2. Ensure MEL takes a critical stance.
3. Promote mutual accountability.
4. Include outcomes measurement.
5. Collaborate throughout the MEL cycle
6. Create space and encourage locally-led MEL
7. Adhere to ethical and inclusive practices
8. Customise MEL for every context
9. Combine different types of evidence (stories and numbers)
10. Address a small number of big questions.

# BE LEARNING- ORIENTATED



- Learning and adaption (not accountability) should be the **main driver** of MEL.
- We don't always know what will work when we begin a program. The opportunity to learn and adapt as we go needs to be built into our MEL design.
- This enables us to identify what's not working (quickly) as well as the chance to pivot – so that learning from failures can power the next step of our journey!

# ENSURE MEL TAKES A CRITICAL STANCE



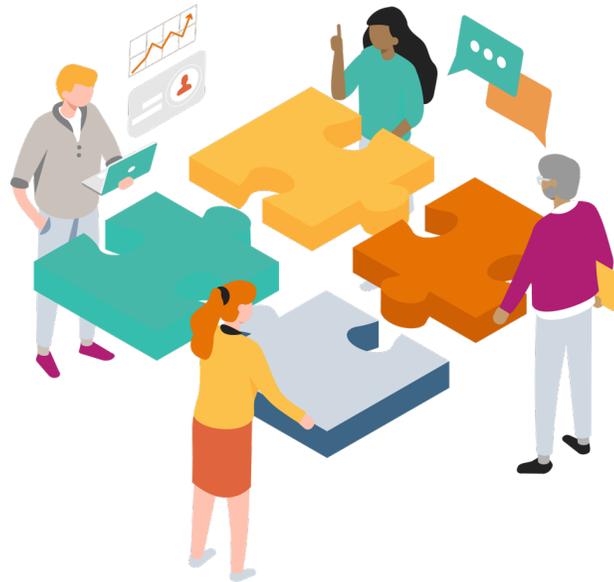
- MEL is not solely aimed at creating good news stories for marketing / getting more funding.
- The ultimate purpose of MEL is to create more and better impact (as opposed to merely reporting it!) and so it needs take a balanced critical stance at what is working, but also at what is not working.

**What constitutes Better outcomes** for us includes:

- **Equity:** whether any groups that have missed out or been disadvantaged by an initiative.
- **Unexpected Outcomes:** It involves collecting data about positive and negative unexpected outcomes, not just the ones we are shooting for.
- Whether programs bring benefits or disadvantage **First Nations people**.
- Any positive or negative effects on the **natural environment**.

All this information helps us gain insights so that we can learn, adapt the program, and create **more and better impact** for people, place, and planet.

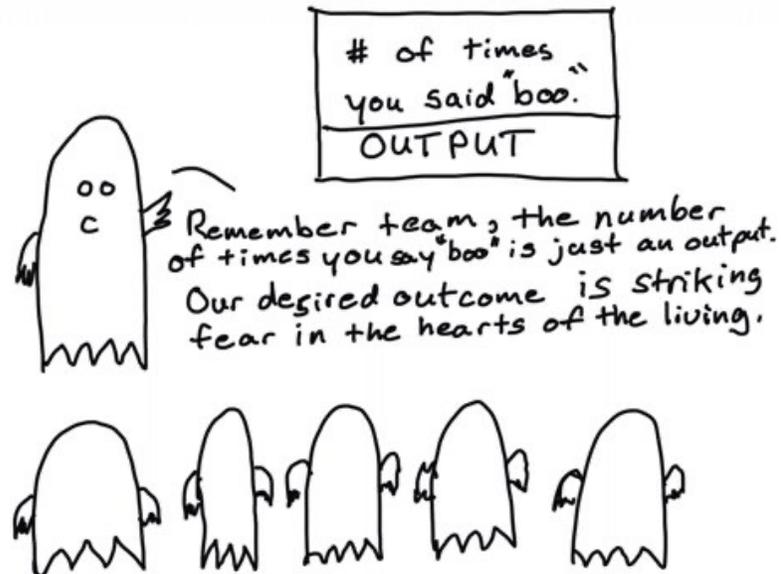
# PROMOTE MUTUAL ACCOUNTABILITY



- MEL is not solely about reporting upwards to funders. Instead, MEL promotes **mutual accountability**, which includes downwards accountability to the communities and stakeholders who are potentially affected by the initiative.
- This means that wherever possible we share our findings with communities as well as with funders and foster transparency.
- This also requires that MEL outputs are **accessible**, and not academically impenetrable.
- Mutual accountability when paired with Principle 1 (be learning orientated) means that in MEL we need to be accountable for learning, showing that the insights are being used to adapt the change initiative and learn from lessons.

# INCLUDE OUTCOMES MEASUREMENT

- MEL should focus on the outcomes of the program, not just the activities or outputs. This means looking at what changes happen as a result of our activities. It means we measure more than activities and outputs!



# COLLABORATE THROUGHOUT THE MEL CYCLE



- MEL is best done when key people are engaged throughout the process of building a MEL plan, measuring change, and adapting.
- This includes developing a shared theory of change that shows clearly how the group believes they will bring about desired outcomes. Ideally, with key stakeholders including diverse voices who may be/should be impacted by the program.

# CREATE SPACE AND ENCOURAGE LOCALLY-LED MEL



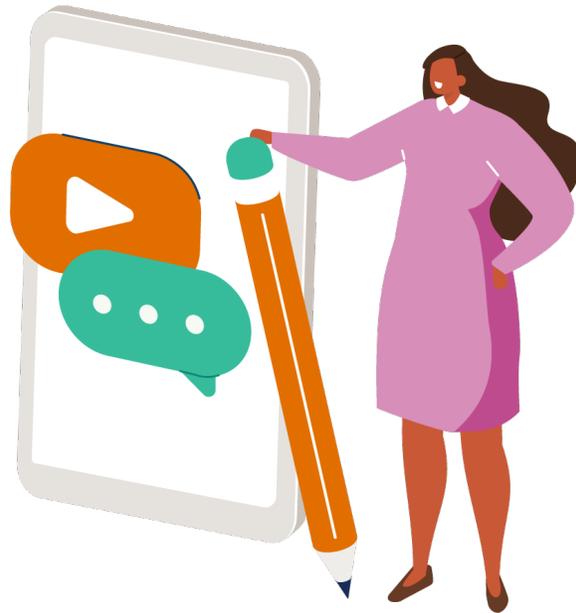
- MEL can and should be designed and **led by local staff and community members** who are also involved in the implementation of the initiative.
- MEL is best done in ways that **further self-determination and decolonisation**. MEL should encourage power sharing and is ideally not implemented by a fly-fly-out MEL expert.
- Where feasible, and always in First Nations contexts, MEL should further **data sovereignty**.
- In first nations contexts MEL should ideally be led by first nations people, and using their own epistemological ways of knowing and having control over collection and storage of data. This is what we mean by decolonisation.

# ADHERE TO ETHICAL AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES



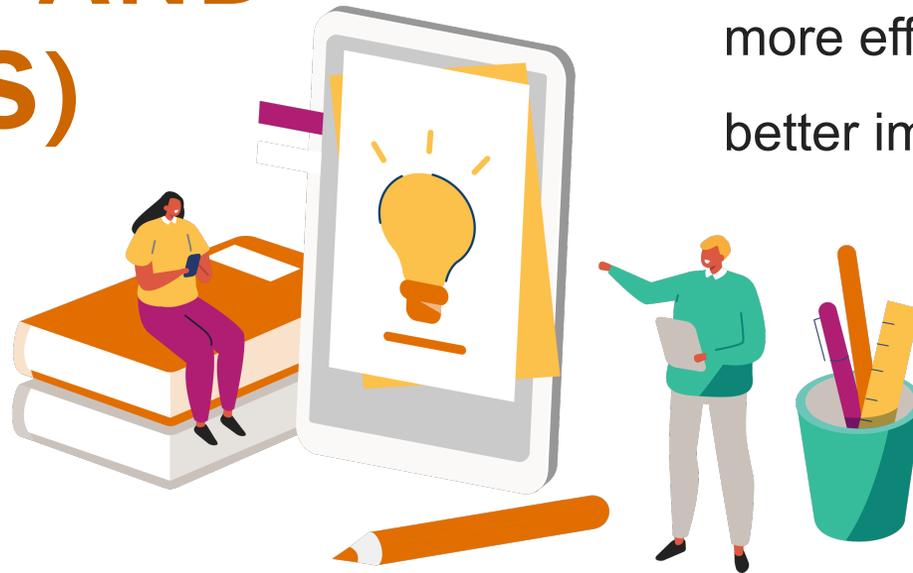
- **Ethical** means that MEL data collection should always be done in a manner that is ethical and respects privacy and confidentiality.
- Fostering **cultural safety** means that in the process of engaging in MEL activities, we work to enhance rather than diminish individual and collective cultural identities, and empower and promote individual, family and community wellbeing.
- By **inclusive**, we mean that MEL should be conducted in a manner that does not discriminate against people on the basis of gender, age, ability, race.

# CUSTOMISED MEL FOR EVERY CONTEXT



- Every context is unique and what works in one place may not work in another.
- Good MEL practice involves scoping and planning which considers the specific needs of the context in which it is being implemented and adapts accordingly.
- It also means we need to be realistic about the budget and capability when designing a MEL process.

# COMBINE DIFFERENT TYPES OF EVIDENCE (STORIES AND NUMBERS)



- Quality MEL data should involve a mix of numbers and stories.
- The combination of quality data and richer descriptions will help your key audiences better understand and learn from your impact.
- Stories help humanise data and may be more effective in creating more and better impact.

# ADDRESS A SMALL NUMBER OF **BIG** **QUESTIONS**

- MEL goes beyond measurement and asks groups to step back, set and address a small number of big questions about the overall value of the program.
- This is the “E” in MEL.





# TASK

**In groups of 3-4**

Discuss / note your feedback – with a sharpie pen – one per sheet

- **GOOD:** note what you think is good on a **green** sheet
- **NOT QUITE RIGHT:** note what you think isn't write on a **yellow** sheet
- **MISSING:** note what you think is missing on an blue sheet.

# STAY CONNECTED & KEEP LEARNING



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