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Foundation
Scotland

Vattenfall Unlock Our Future Fund

Fund Evaluation and Review

2019 - 2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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Scotland**

**Produced by Dr Bea Jefferson on behalf of Foundation
Scotland and the Vattenfall Unlock our Future Fund Panel.**



Review

The Vattenfall Unlock our Future Fund supports charitable activity in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire contributing towards a climate smart future.

The fund supports projects which:

- contribute to a climate smarter world with sustainability at its core;
- invest in community facilities and activities that are fit for the future and are environmentally sustainable, especially community spaces and transport;
- support creative solutions; and
- ensure a legacy and lasting impact, which clearly brings benefit to the local community

The fund is provided by the European Offshore Wind Deployment Centre, which is owned and operated by Aberdeen Offshore Wind Farm Limited, a subsidiary of Vattenfall.

Vattenfall contributes £150,000 per year to the fund (as at 2019) rising in line with the Retail Price Index for the life of the wind farm, which is expected to be at least 20 years. Ten percent of the overall value of the fund is set aside for project activity in line with the fund priorities in Blackdog, the community hosting the substation for the wind farm.

The Unlock our Future Fund panel makes decisions on grant awards and undertakes reviews of the Fund Strategy annually. The fund is administered by Foundation Scotland, an independent grant-making charity.

As well as the four 'headline' fund purposes set out above, the panel has developed additional criteria to help it prioritise applications and guidance on what won't be funded, in addition to Foundation Scotland's standard exclusions, such as funding activities deemed to be the responsibility of statutory authorities.

In late 2023, after five years of grant-making, the panel and Foundation Scotland commissioned an evaluation and review of the fund to gather evidence on the impact of the fund to date, to ensure the priorities of the fund were still in line with the wishes of the communities and stakeholders in the area of benefit, and to make recommendations for the future.

Grant distribution during the first five years of the fund's operation is summed up in figure 1, below.

A theory of change, developed by the fund panel, which sums up what outcomes and impacts the panel envisages for the fund is shown in figure 2, below.

Figure 1: Vattenfall Unlock our Future Fund grant-making 2019 to 2023

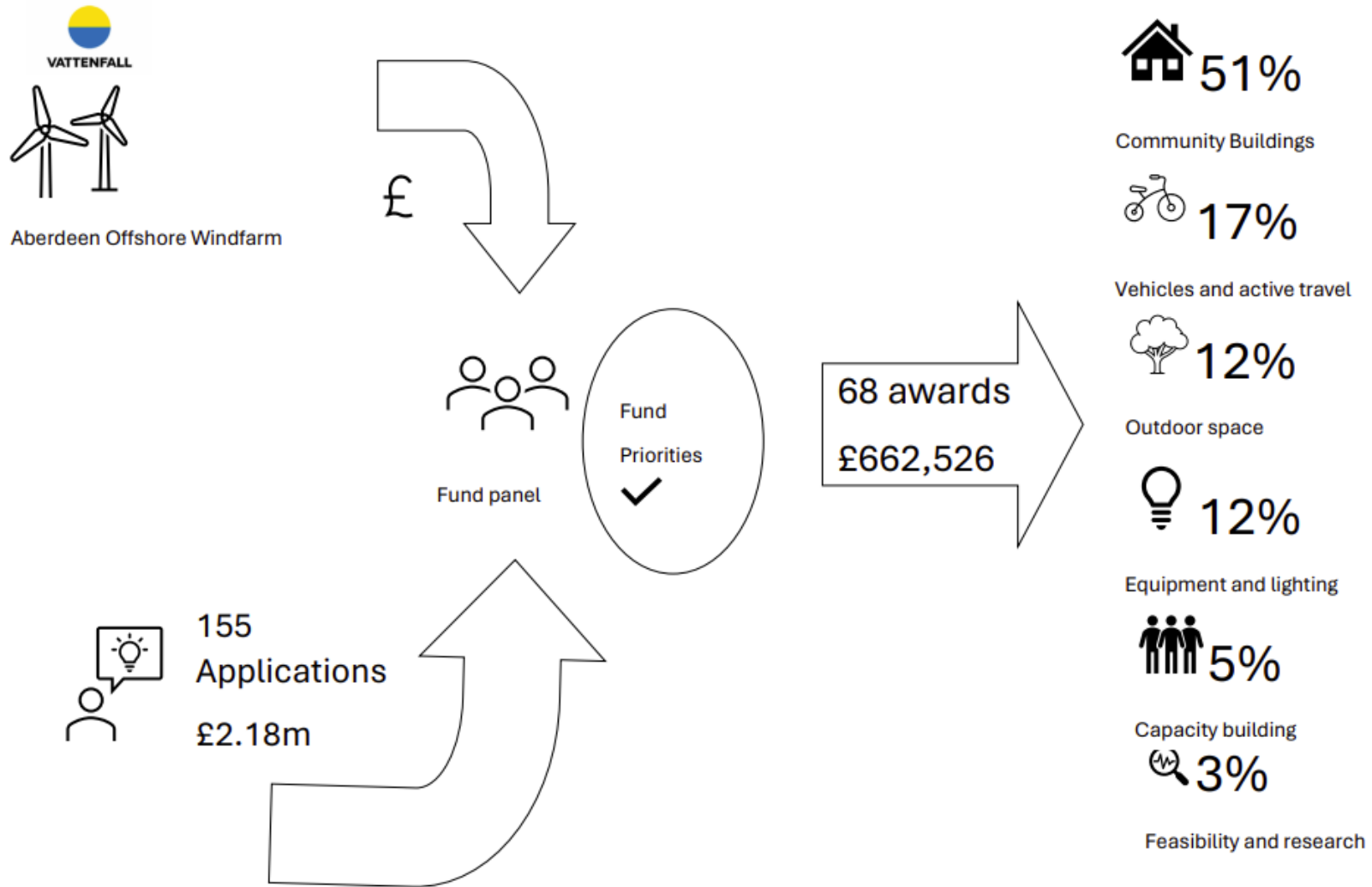
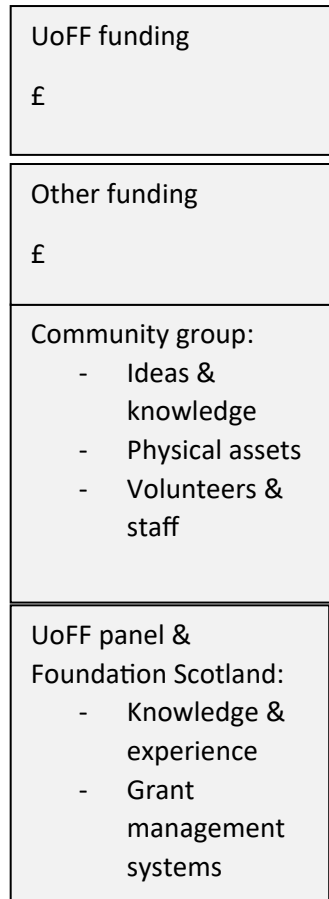


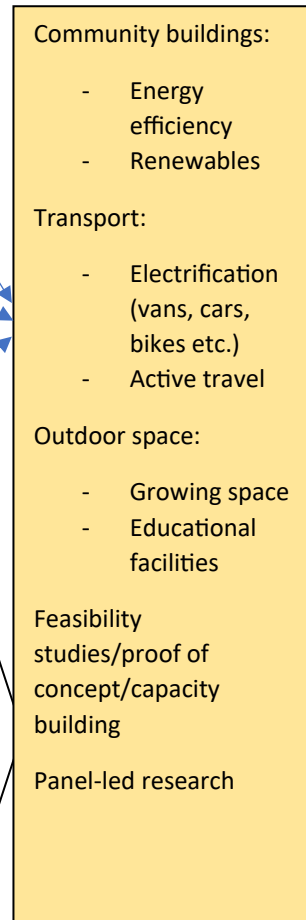
Fig 2 Theory of Change

Inputs



Approval & grant mgmt

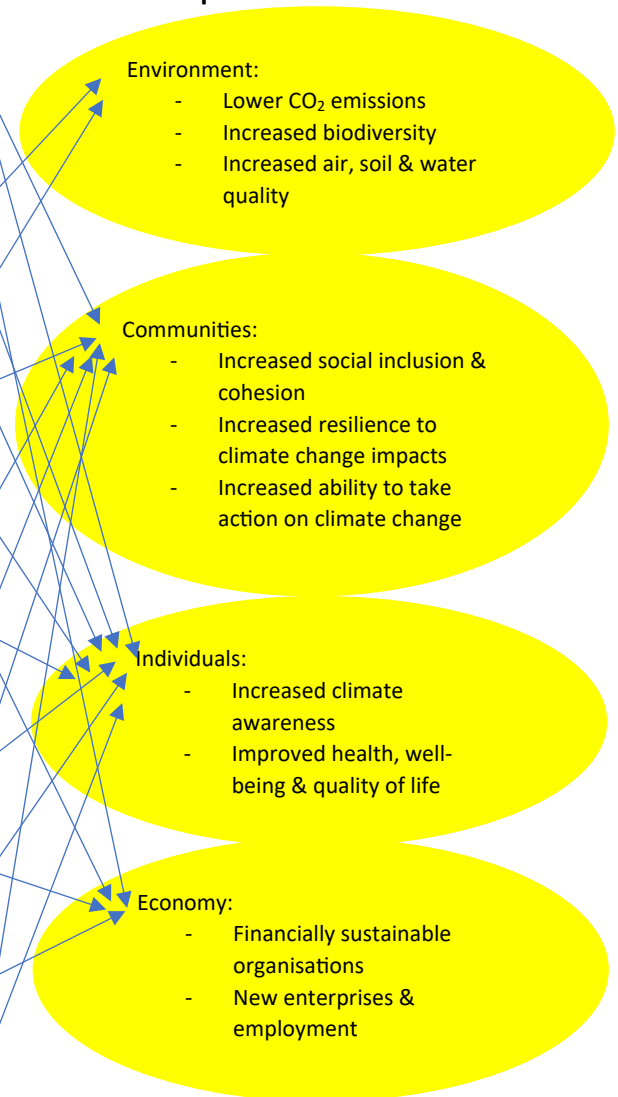
Indicative funded activities



Outcomes



Impacts



Assumptions:

- Community groups are trusted messengers, able to influence and inform the wider community about climate change
- Activities of funded groups make a positive difference to users' health, well-being and quality of life (the mechanism for this will vary from project to project) plus social inclusion and cohesion within the community

Impacts of the Vattenfall Unlock our Future Fund 2019 to 2023

In the first five years of grant distribution, the fund has:

Improved the energy efficiency of 17 existing community buildings, including installation of air source heat pumps, solar panels, battery storage, insulation, energy-efficient glazing and green roofs. The community buildings are used for a wide variety of purposes including village halls, community hubs, a men's shed, a sailing club and a restored railway station on a community-owned heritage railway.

Contributed to the energy efficiency elements of five new community buildings, including specialist accommodation units and support centres, a men's shed and an outdoor education building.

Allowed nine organisations to reduce transport emissions, through the purchase of four electric vans, one electric utility vehicle, one car, one seven-seater vehicle and two electric cargo bikes. The vehicles and bikes have been utilised for a range of purposes including delivering food, second-hand goods, sailing equipment, horticulture supplies and a bowser for watering plants.

Enhanced eight outdoor community facilities, including providing power to site users through solar panels and batteries, enhanced facilities such as composting toilets, a 'hot' composter, seed propagators and water supplies, and the funding of a bridge to improve access to Blackdog beach. The sites improved include community gardens, allotments, community farms and organisations providing a therapeutic environment to vulnerable users.

Funded energy-efficient lighting to five community venues, including floodlights to two football clubs, upgraded lighting for a community arts facility and lighting for a sports hall and shop unit.

Funded energy-efficient equipment, including electric outboard motors for rescue boats, equipment for a men's shed and water fountains.

Supported three capacity building initiatives, including a community engagement programme, a student group developing a hydrogen prototype vehicle and a programme of initiatives supporting sustainable food and active travel at a university.

Funded six feasibility studies, including a feasibility study into a community-owned car charging network, site investigations for the bridge to access Blackdog beach, a feasibility study on retrofitting specific property types found in an Aberdeenshire village, a feasibility study on scaling up vertical axis wind turbines, specialist input to a proposed retrofit of a swimming bath, and the design of a proposed Girlguiding centre.

In addition to funding projects, the fund panel has worked with the University of Aberdeen on three research projects and facilitated networking and the sharing of knowledge between projects through holding annual award events in years where Covid restrictions didn't limit gatherings.

As can be seen by the theory of change in figure 2, the awards are expected to have a wide range of impacts beyond carbon reduction. This makes evidencing the impact of projects challenging, as every project is different and no simple set of metrics can convey what is being achieved.

As part of the evaluation, eight qualitative case studies were conducted. Each case study showed a multiplicity of benefits. Key messages from the case studies were that:

- Projects had **reduced energy usage**, and with it costs – which is of vital importance for ongoing financial sustainability.
- Most of the groups awarded funding remarked on the **improved experience** for users and volunteers brought about by introducing low carbon technologies. This was through having warm buildings, quiet and non-polluting vehicles and improved quality of lighting.
- Many groups had been able to share their **knowledge and experience** gained by delivering projects with other organisations and with wider communities.

- Each of the case study organisations was clearly **valued** by those using the services provided or in the wider community. Conversations with users carried out as part of the case studies rarely touched on the environmental credentials of those who had received awards, the focus was on the difference those organisations had made to people's lives.

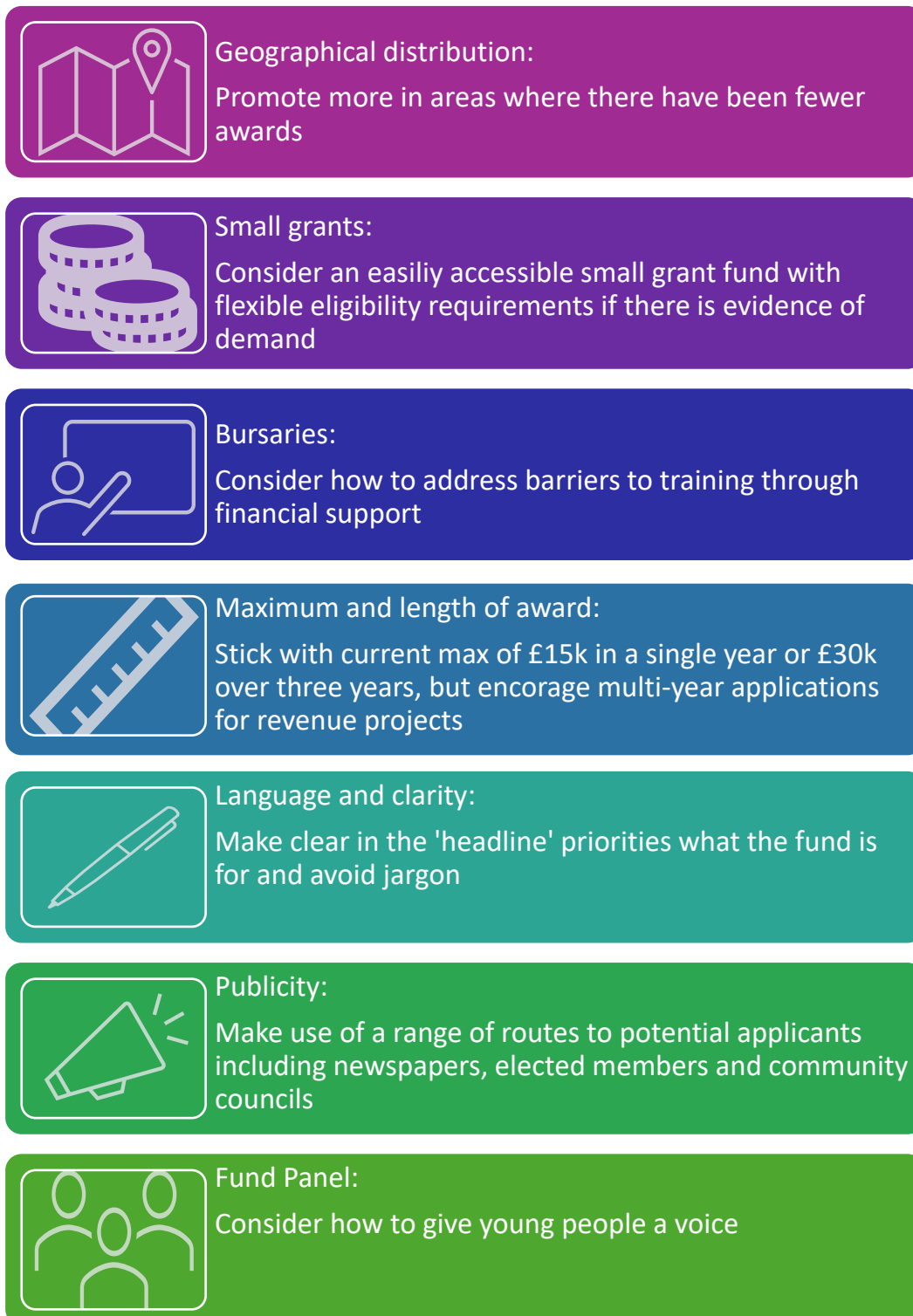
Fund Review

The fund review, which considered fund priorities and delivery arrangements, was informed by an online survey with fund applicants, stakeholder interviews, meetings with representatives from two communities, an online seminar held in conjunction with the North East Climate Action Network, a review of how the funding and policy environment had changed since the fund was launched, and a review of emerging good practice in fund distribution.

Key messages from the consultation are summed up in figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. Summary of consultation responses relating to fund priorities



Figure 4. Summary of consultation responses relating to delivery arrangements

Summary Recommendations

Fund Priorities	Response
<p>1</p> <p>That the overarching purposes of the fund are extended and reworded to:</p> <p><i>The purpose of the Vattenfall Unlock our Future fund is to support communities in Aberdeen City and Shire addressing the climate emergency through:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Energy efficiency of community buildings and facilities</i> - <i>Low-carbon transport and active travel</i> - <i>Greenspace, biodiversity and nature-based solutions</i> - <i>Community-owned energy generation, local heat networks and local energy systems</i> - <i>Community-led skills development</i> - <i>Social enterprise and the circular economy</i> - <i>Building capacity and empowering and inspiring communities and individuals to take action</i> - <i>Education and awareness raising</i> - <i>Resilience to the impacts of climate change</i> <p><i>The fund panel is happy to consider creative and innovative responses to climate change which fall outside the above priorities.</i></p>	<p>The panel preferred to retain the current wording on priorities with a requirement that three out of four criteria be met.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>The additional criteria are amended to include reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supporting a just transition - Creating a legacy and lasting impact - Community Wealth Building (within existing community impacts criterion) - Intergenerational knowledge sharing (within existing sharing knowledge and experience criterion) - Waste and transport hierarchies considered as well as energy hierarchy 	<p>The panel preferred to retain the current additional criteria.</p>

3	Additional guidance is amended to give greater flexibility to funding projects without obvious carbon saving impacts, supporting staff costs and building energy assessments.	The panel felt that an emphasis on carbon saving should be retained.
Delivery Arrangements		
4	It is not recommended to introduce microgrants in 2024. However, the panel should continue to assess the likely demand for microgrants available to unconstituted organisations and potential partners for administering microgrants.	Agreed.
5	The panel may wish to consider setting aside a small portion of the fund to support bursaries for individuals undertaking relevant education and training. Further exploratory work would need to be done with stakeholder organisations to identify the most appropriate opportunities.	Vattenfall and the panel do not wish to support individuals.
6	The fund should be actively promoted in Banff and Buchan through a face-to-face event to publicise the 2024 fund launch and working collaboratively with the NESCAN development officer and local authority contacts for local grant schemes. The number of applications from the area should be reviewed when applications close to see if this makes a difference, and alternative approaches such as commissioning considered in 2025 if applications don't increase.	Agreed.
7	The panel should consider developing a policy on when project funding extensions are acceptable and for how long extensions should be given before an award is withdrawn.	Current guidance retained where a variation is required to extend beyond 12 months.
8	If the priorities are expanded as proposed in recommendation 1, the Foundation Scotland full set of outcome and impact indicators should be reviewed and categories added to reflect the broader scope of the fund.	Foundation Scotland are currently revising the framework and guidance supplied.

9	Foundation Scotland should continue to review the reporting of outcome and indicator metrics to assess the quality of the information given and identify how grantees can best be supported in reporting impact and learning.	See above.
10	The panel trials a single-stage assessment process for all applications in 2024 and assesses whether this saves time for applicants, Foundation Scotland and panel members.	The panel preferred to retain the current two stage process.
11	That the panel considers if it would like to develop a mechanism for engaging young people in decision-making and reviews the options available for doing this.	To be considered when new panel members are recruited.
Blackdog		
12	The revised Fund Strategy should make clear what can be funded in Blackdog, based on the priorities identified by the community, providing that these don't go against the overall objectives of the fund or specific fund exclusions.	Vattenfall and Foundation Scotland are to meet with the Residents Association to consider priorities.
13	The panel should consider whether a proportion of the Blackdog allocation could be given to the Residents' Association as unrestricted funds to support activities in the village such as maintenance and upkeep activities.	To be considered further once above meeting has taken place.
General		
14	A publicity plan should be developed jointly between the panel, FS communities team, FS communications team and Vattenfall which incorporates the 2024 fund being open, new priorities (if the panel decides these should be changed) and the impacts of the first five years.	Priority is opening the fund for 2024. Then further work will be done on promoting the success of the fund during the first five years.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to the individuals, many of whom were unpaid volunteers, who gave up their time to contribute to the evaluation and review. A list of consultees is shown in the full report.

For Further Information

For further information about the Vattenfall Unlock our Future Fund, including the full evaluation and review report, see:

<https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/apply-for-funding/funding-available/unlock-our-future>

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