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Towards Equitable Electric Mobility – Community of Practice

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Summary

For many living in the U.S., limited access to transportation and disproportionate exposure to emissions are barriers stemming from policies that discriminate on the basis of race. Electric transportation programs can address these challenges. Partnerships between racial equity advocates and environmental organizations are vital to ensure that such programs are successful. Together, Forth and the Greenlining Institute created the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice, with the goal to build the capacity for equity-focused and traditional organizations to work together more effectively on transportation electrification at the state level.

Keywords: EV (electric vehicle), policy, government, state government, environment

1 Introduction

Transportation systems in the United States have long been a barrier in meeting the basic needs of racial equity, mobility, and climate change action. Not only is it a barrier, but transportation systems are also the cause of environmental and health problems for Americans. Transportation is the largest source of air pollution in the U.S., with the environmental and health implications it causes disproportionately affecting people of color living in low-income communities. These populations are also most likely to live near sources of pollution and lack access to clean water, air and soil. People of color are also exposed to pollutants from cars that can cause respiratory problems at a rate 38 percent higher than white populations [1]. All of this is what is referred to as “environmental racism [1].”

Transportation itself is a barrier for low-income and minority populations. For many, poor access to transportation is a hurdle stemming from policies that have discriminated on the basis of race. Unreliable mass transit, transportation costs, and unequal access are contributors to this kind of racial discrimination [2]. Today, transportation in the U.S. is the second-highest household expense for most people [3], and a person’s commute time is the most critical factor in their chances of escaping poverty [4]. At Forth, we believe that a

key solution to these challenges is the creation and implementation of innovative mobility programs that utilize electric transportation.

The environmental and economical value of electric vehicles (EVs) is well-documented. A Dec. 2021 study conducted by the Yale School of the Environment found that total indirect emissions from EVs are much lower than indirect emissions from fossil-fuel powered vehicles, demonstrating that EVs are safer for the environment than gas-powered cars [5].

Financially, gasoline-powered cars are more expensive than EVs. A 2018 study from the University of Michigan found the average annual cost to own and drive an EV in the U.S. is \$483. A gasoline-powered vehicle costs \$1,117 per year [6]. Generally, EVs are easier and cheaper to maintain than gasoline-powered vehicles because the EV has only one moving part: the motor. Operators can save significant costs by using EVs as they don't require regular oil changes or tune-ups. The battery also lasts nearly a decade [7].

At the same time, however, there is a strong narrative across the U.S. that paints EVs and other disruptive new transportation technologies as “privileged mobility” for the wealthy. Many of the tax breaks and perks of owning EVs visibly and directly benefit the wealthy [8]. The high visibility and rapid rise of premium vehicles like Tesla has helped fuel this narrative. The oil industry and its allies are aggressively exploiting this perception, promoting the view that EVs only serve the rich and are subsidized by all. Oil companies are finding fertile ground for its arguments in Washington, D.C, U.S. state legislatures, utility proceedings, and even within equity organizations [9].

Moving forward, it is critical to demonstrate how the electrification of transportation can improve life for the most-impacted communities. The formation of partnerships between racial equity advocates and traditional environmental organizations is vital to ensure that innovative programs are approved, funded, and implemented successfully. If mobility and electrification programs are designed to work for historically underserved communities, they will work better for all communities and will maximize the environmental and economic benefits of electrification.

To address this, Forth and the Greenlining Institute are partnering on the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice. Before TEEM, organizations worked on addressing racial equity and climate change in silos and were missing an opportunity to build broader collective power through diverse, equity-focused collaboration. TEEM is a first-of-its-kind community of practice, designed to create these types of collaborations.

TEEM launched in the United States in January 2021 in the states of Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, and Virginia. In January 2022, Michigan was added. The goal of this project is to build the capacity for equity-focused groups and traditional environmental and transportation organizations to work together more effectively at the state level in order to achieve shared policy objectives. The program established and maintains a peer-to-peer community of advocates in which all can share policy goals, learn together, build relationships, and, in the process, develop a mutual commitment towards advancing racial equity and climate change goals in electric mobility.

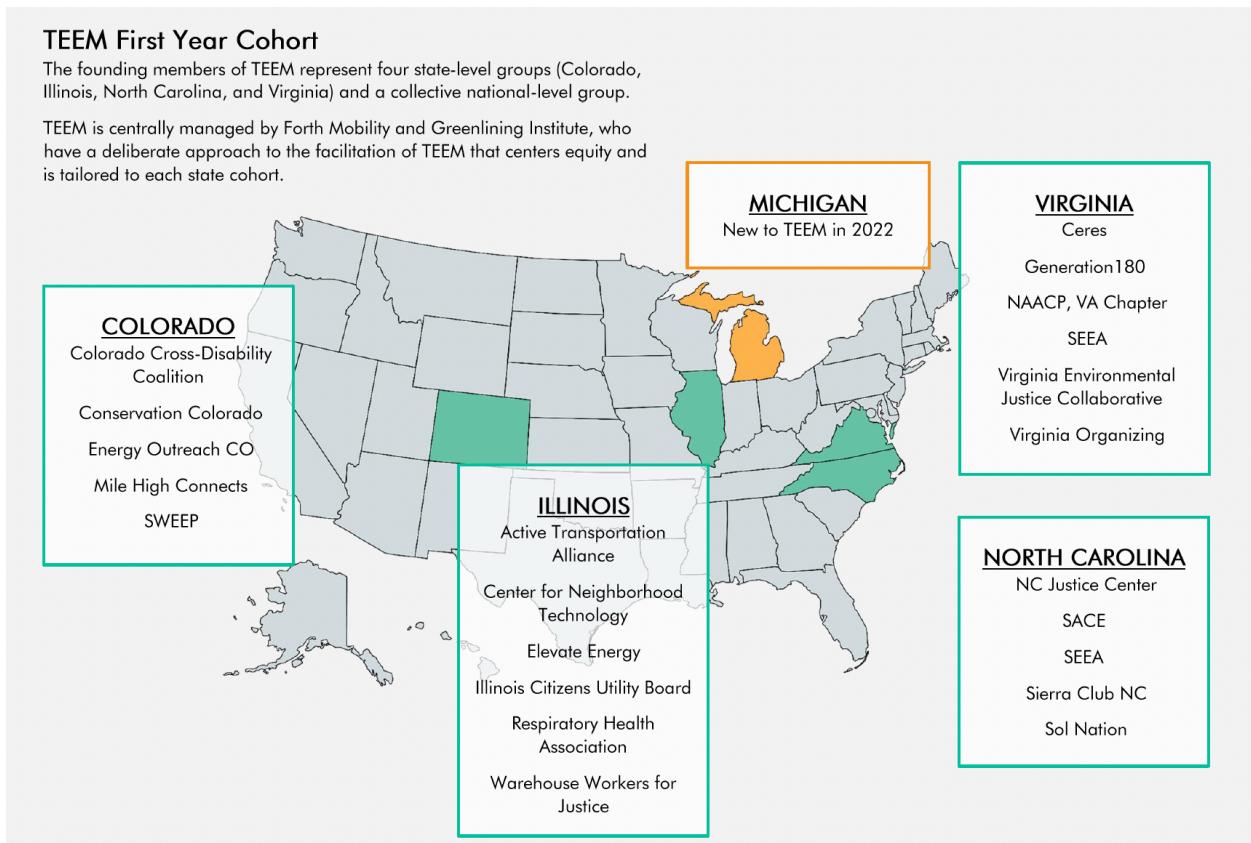


Figure 1: Locations of the first cohort of Forth and Greenlining's TEEM program. (Image source: [Innovation Network](#))

2 Community of Practice Model

TEEM uses a community of practice model, which aims to bring together a group of people who share a collective view of an issue while also contributing individual perspectives on a given problem to create a social learning system that goes beyond the sum of its parts. Forth and the Greenlining Institute first began working on the program in 2020. The two organizations anticipate that by using this model, both will be intentional about investing time to build the community and provide many opportunities for the cohorts to learn together, which will ultimately provide longer-lasting and more impactful results.

2.1 TEEM Model

The TEEM model comprises a number of teams and specific policy focal points. There are a number of components that comprise the TEEM model, including:

- **Facilitation Group:** This consists of staff from Forth and Greenlining with consulting and facilitation support from Upright Consulting. Together, these groups manage the Community of Practice.
- **Participant Teams:** The first cohort consists of organizations from four states. Each team includes at least two equity- and three environmental-related advocacy organizations, with a total of five to six representatives per state. These teams agreed to participate in ongoing learning opportunities and to collaboratively identify and pursue a policy goal.
- **Clear Policy Focus:** Policy opportunities and priorities differ from state-to-state (e.g. for some states, school bus electrification may be a priority; for others, access to financing for EVs may be more

appropriate or politically feasible), so it's important for the model to include a clear and direct policy focus.

- **Seed Grants:** These enable environmental justice and equity organizations to participate in TEEM and sustain the work it generates. The grants are between \$25,000-\$100,000 and are targeted so that those organizations can grow in-house transportation electrification capacity. When combined with peer-to-peer learning experience of the community of practice model, this accelerates the meaningful participation of these organizations in transportation electrification initiatives.
- **Annual Convention:** An annual, planned convention brings all teams together to learn, share best practices, make connections, and find new ways to draw on one another's strengths to make the overall field stronger.
- **Ongoing Support:** This includes regular conference calls, peer-learning sessions, coaching, and support from the facilitation group. Tools, research, models, and experts are recruited to reflect the needs of the community of practice participants and to fill gaps within the field.

2.2 Goals

The main goal for TEEM is to create a container that centers equity voices, cultivates trust-based relationships and collaborations, builds capacity, and generates shared priorities among equity and environmental organizations who aim to advance racial equity in electric transportation and to work together more productively at the state level. Together, these equity and environmental organizations co-develop equitable electric mobility policy objectives, such as increased investments in electrifying transit or electric mobility programs that center equity and serve communities of color.

A secondary goal of this program is to build a strong and connected network of practitioners working on advancing equitable electric mobility. While it's important to have the teams working together at the state level, another action TEEM intends to facilitate is collaboration across state lines. We see strength in sharing best practices, asking questions, and creating relationships among groups from all over the country. These relationships will help as we build towards a national agenda addressing equity within electric mobility at the federal level.

A third goal of TEEM is co-developing state-level and, eventually, national-level strategies and policies to advance equitable electric mobility. Each state team will continue to work together to understand the specific needs and opportunities to develop policy strategies. The facilitation group is not prescribing priorities for each state but, instead, fostering conversations and opportunities that will allow the cohort to drive the priorities. The overall goal for these policy strategies is that they will create longer-lasting impact and greater wins.

2.3 Designing TEEM

Together, Forth and Greenlining designed TEEM to limit traditional power structures from the very beginning. Both organizations aimed to create a space where a group of people would be able to share a collective overall view of an issue while also offering their individual perspectives on any given problem to create a social learning system that goes beyond the sum of its parts. As TEEM was created, facilitators did the following:

- **Ensured representation of equity-focused organizations.** TEEM recruited organizations with experience furthering equity, even when the entities had not previously worked in electric transportation. These organizations received multi-year grant funding to participate in TEEM.
- **Set expectations around equity.** As members were recruited, facilitators were explicit about the

role of equity in TEEM and how the experiences of members in TEEM would be different. Once they joined, the members received core equity principles and commitments that defined the working relationship of members and their vision for success.

2.4 TEEM Equity Principles, Commitments, and Community Agreements

In order for TEEM to thrive as a community of practice, dedicated to promoting equity, Forth, the Greenlining Institute and the first cohort aligned on the definition of equity. All parties agreed upon this: Equity is the practice of eliminating barriers to opportunity for Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities by resourcing them and working together to dismantle systems that withhold power. TEEM believes practicing equity means recognizing and transforming behaviors, systems, and institutions that cause injustice and disproportionate harm for communities of color.

2.4.1 TEEM Equity Principles and Commitments

What follows is the list of equity principles that TEEM members agreed upon. As previously stated, once TEEM was formed, the members received core equity principles and commitments that defined the working relationship of members and their vision for success.

Principles:

1. Racist policies such as redlining, siting of toxic facilities and transportation infrastructure, and the lack of funding for quality transportation options and infrastructure has led to an incredibly unjust, unhealthy, and disconnected environment for many communities of color. Ending these injustices by addressing their root causes is vital to the success of our transportation system and its electrification.
2. Practicing equity requires not only recognizing but also transforming the behaviors, systems, and institutions that cause disproportionate harm to low-income communities of color. The historical and current injustices are barriers to marginalized communities benefiting from climate and mobility solutions. By working to end these systemic inequities, we can achieve a greater impact.
3. Respecting and integrating different types of expertise will enhance learning opportunities and lead to more success for TEEM. Uplifting different perspectives, in particular community perspectives, will lead to more holistic policies that meet the needs of marginalized communities.
4. To center BIPOC needs, we must intentionally create space for equity partners and BIPOC communities to lead conversations on how electric mobility can work for them and the communities they serve and allow ourselves to imagine electric mobility outside of the current paradigm.
5. There is strength and opportunity created by our racial, cultural, geographic, and issue area diversity. Appreciating our differences and taking collective action will create better policies and truly equitable outcomes.

Commitments:

1. Members commit to and practice the equity principles. Regularly using and uplifting these principles in our community of practice and in our work with external partners will set a strong example and promote the adoption of these principles by the larger transportation field.
2. Members foster a healthy and inclusive learning environment. Within TEEM, we value all kinds of expertise, especially the knowledge and experience that historically marginalized groups bring to the table. We actively pursue pedagogical approaches that challenge the paradigm of “learning as usual,” and create opportunities to practice educational techniques that originate from Indigenous and communities of color.
3. We support our members’ unique needs and interests. We acknowledge the unique racial, cultural, geographic, and issue area backgrounds we each bring to TEEM and view our differences as strengths. TEEM will work diligently to ensure that the equity goals of each member organization are accomplished.

4. TEEM builds capacity to diversify the voices that are working in transportation electrification. In order to increase access to clean transportation and create better policies, the transportation electrification field must include diverse voices. TEEM is committed to providing environmental justice and equity-focused organizations with seed grant funding to build capacity. We will also provide resources, such as technical expertise and networking opportunities in the transportation electrification field.
5. We hold ourselves accountable to our equity principles and commitments. At the beginning and multiple stages throughout our program, we will review our equity principles and commitments to get on the same page and ensure that we are staying true to our equity values and practices. We will seek opportunities to revise our principles and practices so as to continually strive for the greatest possible equity outcomes.

2.4.2 TEEM Community Agreements

Agreement	Behavior
Be curious, open, and respectful.	Call in, not out - Example: Invite folks to participate rather than tell them to.
No one knows everything.	Together we know a lot; make space for all to share.
Avoid jargon, acronyms, and industry language.	Use inclusive language that is accessible for people with varying knowledge. Note when jargon, acronyms, industry language aren't explained.
Use "I" statements.	Speak from your own experiences rather than generalizing.
Self-care: Give care to ourselves, however that may be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Turn your camera off or step away from the meeting if needed. ● Bring lunch. It is perfectly fine to eat during our calls. ● Let the facilitators know if there are issues of any kind, they are there to support. ● Leave room for life such as complications that arise during meetings due to pets, family, etc.
Create space for multiple perspectives and experiences.	Speak your truth and seek understanding of truths that differ from yours. Celebrate and embrace different perspectives.
Assume best intentions.	Everyone comes in with a different set of experiences and knowledge. Seek first to understand and assume the best intentions in all interactions.
Recognize that intent is different than impact.	The things we say or do may have a negative impact on others, despite our intent. Be accountable for the impact of our words and actions.

Allow space for silence.	Provide time for others to process and reflect.
Recognize power dynamics.	Power shows up in many different ways; be aware of how you might be unconsciously using your privilege or power.
Accept that tension may not resolve immediately.	Do not rush to consensus, but allow for differences of opinion to be explored.
Create space for new voices to enter the discussion.	Ask yourself: W.A.I.T. - Why am I talking?
Step up, step back.	Those who are outspoken commit to stepping back; those that are underspoken commit to stepping forward.

Table 1: TEEM Community Agreements

3 First Cohort

The first TEEM cohort began in January 2021, with 21 organizations from four U.S. states. Forth and the Greenlining Institute chose Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, and Virginia for the first cohort because of the foundation and political readiness for equitable electric transportation policy currently available in each state. It was also important to have a diverse grouping of states from across the U.S. represented in this work.

Each state team has at least two equity-focused organizations and three traditional environmental organizations. In choosing the cohort, it was important to have a variety of organizational expertise represented. The cohort consists of groups focusing on clean energy, climate change, public health, active and public transportation, and environmental justice. In recruiting traditional environmental organizations, Forth prioritized organizations committed to racial equity work so each will approach TEEM with that lens. See Table 2 for the list of organizations involved in the 2021 portion of TEEM first-year cohort.

3.1 Building the Cohort

The members of the first TEEM cohort joined the program with different levels of understanding about equity and electric transportation policy. Facilitators stepped in to create learning opportunities on these two topics through peer-learning and external speakers. From peer-learning, the members were able to glean from each other's shared experiences and varied perspectives. External speakers provided formal opportunities to learn about topics like data equity and federal transportation policies.

Building consensus around priorities was another step in the process of establishing the first cohort. Each state worked together to identify key policy priorities to pursue. The TEEM facilitators worked to hold states accountable to TEEM's equity commitments, ensuring priorities were representative of the values of both environmental and equity organizations. When disagreements arose, facilitators stepped in as active mediators and advocates for equity organizations. Overall, TEEM members reported positive feelings toward the conflict resolution.

TEEM Community of Practice First-Year Cohort			
Colorado	Illinois	North Carolina	Virginia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Colorado Cross Disability Coalition Conservation Colorado Energy Outreach Colorado Mile High Connects Southwest Energy Efficiency Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active Transportation Alliance Center for Neighborhood Technology Elevate Energy Illinois Citizens Utility Board Respiratory Health Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Carolina Justice Center Sierra Club Sol Nation Southern Alliance for Clean Energy Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ceres Generation 180 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative Virginia Organizing

Table 2: TEEM Community of Practice 2021 First-Year Cohort

4 Results

Given that TEEM brings together such strong organizations from the areas of racial equity and electric transportation, Forth is in a unique position to share lessons learned from leading this work. Through its efforts, TEEM has created a new community for dialogue that leverages the strength of organizations in both the community and political spheres.

4.1 Lessons Learned and Resulting Actions

The first year of TEEM focused on building relationships, trust, and capacity. Members spent most of their time connecting, learning from each other, and finding common ground across their differences. As a result, Forth can report a number of lessons learned from the cohort's first year, as well as the actions it will take to make changes in future years and cohorts. These learnings come as a result of the evaluation process led by Innovation Network.

4.1.1 Environmental organizations had more power

TEEM facilitators worked proactively to ensure equity organizations had equal, if not greater, power within TEEM. However, some equity organizations faced a higher learning curve and had fewer established networks related to electric transportation compared to environmental organizations. Environmental organizations were often more familiar with each other and had a more cohesive vision for electric transportation than equity organizations, creating a common and amplified voice for environmental groups in TEEM. To address the power difference between environmental and equity organizations, facilitators will prioritize creating learning and networking opportunities primarily based on the goals and feedback of the equity organizations.

4.1.2 Power differentials affected purpose

In every state within the cohort, the priorities of the environmental organizations were easier and more efficient to pursue because of the attention and institutional forces that coalesce around their policy issues. TEEM's purpose is to address these forces directly. TEEM facilitators worked with individual members and state cohorts to ensure priorities are representative of the whole group and include the priorities of equity organizations.

Going forward, TEEM facilitators will establish more frequent checkpoints to ensure members understand and are aligned with the purposes and objectives of TEEM activities.

4.1.3 Level-setting was an important stage

Members worked to understand and communicate successfully with one another. There was a steep learning curve in this area as time was needed to build trust, find a common understanding, share individual priorities, and co-develop strategy. While the environmental organizations learned about what equity in action means, the equity organizations learned about electric transportation policies.

To address this, TEEM facilitators will continue to translate and educate as to why electric mobility is an important environmental and economic justice issue and opportunity. Priority will also be placed on explaining why equity is essential to the success of electric mobility.

4.1.4 TEEM relied heavily on its facilitators.

TEEM facilitators led the design of meeting agendas, built close relationships with each member in one-on-one meetings, and navigated complex relationships through mediation. Even with guidance from outside facilitation consultants, the facilitators often felt stretched thin and, over time, built their capacity by inviting members to lead aspects of TEEM.

To assist the TEEM facilitators, TEEM hired a policy associate to add dedicated support and create time for facilitators to focus on cohort strategies and long-term planning for TEEM. Going forward, the program's members will be invited to take on increasing levels of leadership and responsibility to advance the work. For state cohort campaigns to be truly successful, members must utilize their connections within the states and communities in which they are rooted.

4.1.5 TEEM continues to seek balance among relationship-building, capacity-building and state action

While members reported that they appreciated the space for dialogue and relationship-building created in TEEM, at the same time, the organizations desired deeper content and more direct action. While facilitators helped build the trust between members, this was balanced with meeting the needs of the cohort members to see tangible progress and results from their participation in TEEM.

In the future, TEEM will work to strike a balance between relationship-building, capacity development, and state action that corresponds with the preferences of members. The four states entering the second year of the program will focus more heavily on strategy development and advancement.

4.2 Feedback from TEEM Members

The majority of first-year TEEM members participated in a survey and focus groups, reporting that they found value in the program. This survey was conducted by Innovation Network, an evaluation company in Washington, D.C. that works with nonprofits and foundations to tell stories through data. The equity organizations rated the peer-learning and formal speaker activities at a higher level of relevancy than the environmental organizations did. Similarly, the equity organizations reported learning more from the activities than the environmental organizations. Overall, 84 percent of members reported that TEEM increased their knowledge on topics at the intersection of racial equity and electric mobility [10].

Members also said they were interested in continuing to build their knowledge on the topics of electrifying school buses and financing for e-mobility.

When it came to building consensus around priorities, TEEM members reported that common ground was possible to find. A survey showed that 75 percent of members found some common purpose in TEEM. And while some indicated that collaboration could be improved, members scored power-sharing in TEEM at 83 percent [10]. Both equity and environmental members reported gaining new perspective when it came to equity and transportation. They reported they have incorporated equity at higher rates and with more influence and sincerity than before they joined TEEM [10].

5 Future Cohorts

The first year of TEEM was very much focused on building relationships and trust between the cohort members. In its second year, TEEM is adding Michigan as its fifth state in the cohort. The second year will continue the goals of the first year with additional focus on moving toward action on state-level strategies. Forth facilitators are also seeking innovative ways to build capacity and enhance learnings for TEEM. One way to do this is through peer-consulting sessions within the cohort. Forth is also looking for additional ways to support leadership within the cohort.

6 Conclusion

The first year of TEEM was a success. TEEM provided capacity to equity-focused organizations and these entities worked with traditional organizations towards building a community of practice. This program was established and built during an unprecedented global pandemic, which caused disruptions and hardships for entities across the globe. For TEEM to not only find its foundation, but also thrive during this time was no small feat. This kind of work takes time and while Forth reported and witnessed small wins initially, we look forward to seeing the bigger and long-lasting successes in the form of policy campaigns and programs in the years to come.

As TEEM evolves, facilitators will continue to seek input and feedback from members so all can learn from the program and find new ways to incorporate equity into electric mobility. Additionally, all members of the cohort will continue to build relationships and transportation electrification campaigns, such as workforce development for electric transportation. TEEM aims to use its community engagement from 2022 to inform policy campaigns, legislative action, reports, and programs in 2023. TEEM is the first of its kind community of practice, and we look forward to learning even more in Year Two.

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Ms. Shaw develops transportation electrification and e-mobility legislation and regulatory policies, such as the Oregon Electric Vehicle Standard Rebate and the Charge Ahead Rebate, autocycle/three-wheeled legislation, and within the Federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Ms. Shaw holds an executive MBA from Stanford University and a bachelor of science from the University of California, Santa Barbara.



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