Hiring Thoughtfully:
Best Practices for **Employee and Volunteer Screening**

Presented by

PRAESIDIUM
In partnership with FADICA

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What is safeguarding?

Safeguarding refers to **measures** and **interventions** that protect people from abuse, harm, exploitation, or violence.

Safeguarding reflects a commitment to **best practices** that **prevent abuse**, **reduce risk,** and **keep all persons**—especially children and vulnerable adults—**safe**.

Safeguarding also promotes action that **assures justice** and **supports healing** for victims and survivors of abuse.

You may be more familiar with terms like safe environment, risk management, or abuse prevention —
all important aspects of safeguarding.

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A FADICA INITIATIVE

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Organizational safeguarding includes having a written safeguarding policy, Code of Conduct, and supporting guidance in place as part of "best practices."

A written safeguarding policy should guide you in answering the question: **What do we need to do to keep people safe at our organization?**

Guidance and program expectations should be shared with **all stakeholders**, including staff, volunteers, Board members, program participants, and beneficiaries of service.

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What must we do to keep people safe at our organization?

What might we need to *improve* and *adjust* to keep people safe?

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ABOUT
PRAESIDIUM

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Our mission is to help organizations prevent the sexual abuse of children and vulnerable adults and to preserve trust in respected organizations.

Praesidium is a **leading innovator** of scientifically-based solutions designed to transform the way organizations approach the prevention of sexual abuse.
For **over 30 years**, Praesidium's expertise, consulting, and tailored solutions have helped foster **safer environments** for children, vulnerable adults, staff, volunteers, and all stakeholders involved.

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The Scope of the Problem

1 in 4 Girls

1 in 13 Boys

Experience sexual abuse **before** the age of 18
(as estimated by the CDC)

80%
of abuse does **not** get reported
In some industries, reporting is even less frequent

7x
Adults with intellectual disabilities are sexually assaulted at a rate of **7x higher** than those without disabilities

90%
of the time, the perpetrator is **known** to the victim

Youth-to-Youth sexual misconduct occurs at a **higher** prevalence rate than adult-to-youth

??
Experts suggest it is **near impossible** to ascertain the breadth of sexual violations in healthcare

3x
Elders are **3x more likely** to experience abuse

Sexual abuse remains a serious issue that affects millions of vulnerable individuals each year, sparing no generation or demographic.

More information available from: the US Centers for Disease Control here and here, Office of Justice Programs, National Council on Aging, NPR, Associated Press, Atlanta Journal Constitution, Federation of State Medical Boards.

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A LANDSCAPE OF INCREASING EXPECTATIONS

- **Increased regulation and oversight** designed to strengthen abuse prevention measures on a broader scale

- **Expansion of minimum expectations**, some at a national level

- More stakeholders are **demanding more efforts** and **asking more questions**:
  - Families
  - Legislators
  - Foundations, funders, donors
  - Insurance carriers and brokers
  - Local, state, national investigators

- Established industries are asking new questions

- More people are being **held accountable**:
  - Organizational leadership
  - Boards of Directors

- The sands are shifting:
  - Identifying who is responsible for protection efforts
  - **Hardening insurance market** for sexual abuse and molestation coverage
  - Expanding **statutes of limitations**

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The Challenge

⊘ Competing demands

⊘ Low frequency, high effect

⊘ A human problem

⊘ Complacency and Compliance
  - "we know everyone here"
  - "we've never had a serious incident"
  - "all of our staff undergo background checks"
  - "we train all of our staff on mandated reporting"
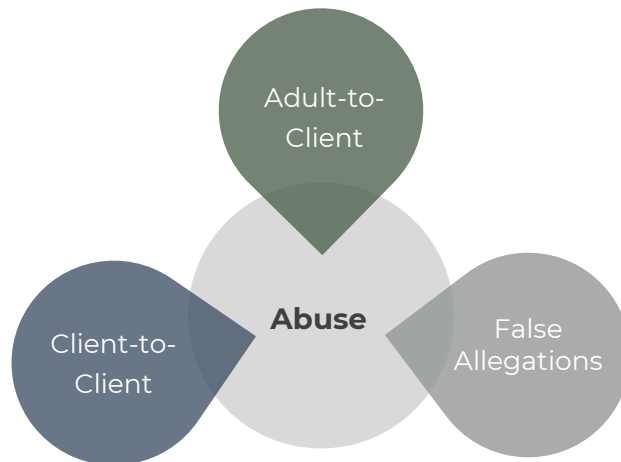 - "we must adhere to all state licensing requirements"
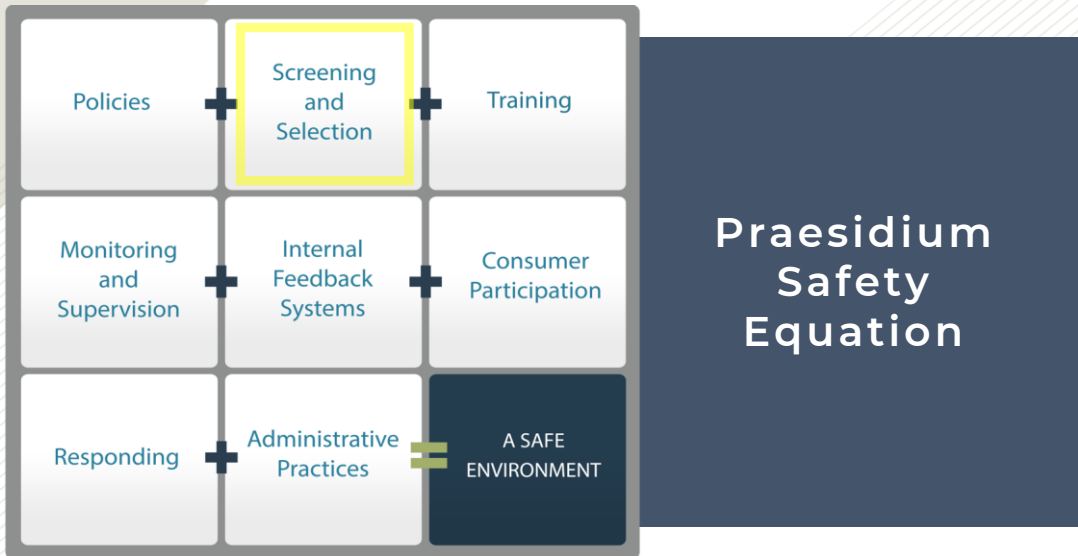
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Continuum of Commitment

Complacency ▸▸▸ ▸▸▸ **Compliance** ▸▸▸ ▸▸▸ **Commitment**

Complacency	Compliance	Commitment
Denies an abuse incident could happen	Focus on reacting to abuse rather than preventing it	Client protection is a designated responsibility
Hopes past success will prevent future abuse	Uses state regulations as standard of care	Policies clearly define appropriate boundaries and how to manage high-risk activities
Has few standardized procedures	Trains staff on how to report abuse and policy violations, but staff may struggle with reporting requirements	Screening process is designed to assess abuse risk
Responses tend to be punitive		Training is scheduled frequently, presents relevant content, is impactful, and offered "just in time"
Treats incidents as staff failure	Minimizes red-flag behaviors	

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Important Risks to Safeguard Against

Adult-to-Client

Abuse

Client-to-Client

False Allegations

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Praesidium Safety Equation

Policies	Screening and Selection	Training
Monitoring and Supervision	Internal Feedback Systems	Consumer Participation
Responding	Administrative Practices	A SAFE ENVIRONMENT

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Multiple elements must work in concert to create a reliable and effective Screening & Selection process

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Importance of Screening and Selection

- ✔ First line of defense against abuse and boundary violations

- ✔ Restricts access to vulnerable populations – only opportunity to stop an offender prior to access

- ✔ Not just for screening out individuals – identify strengths and opportunities for coaching and further supervision

- ✔ Protects your organization and the individuals you serve

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Five Critical Screening Components
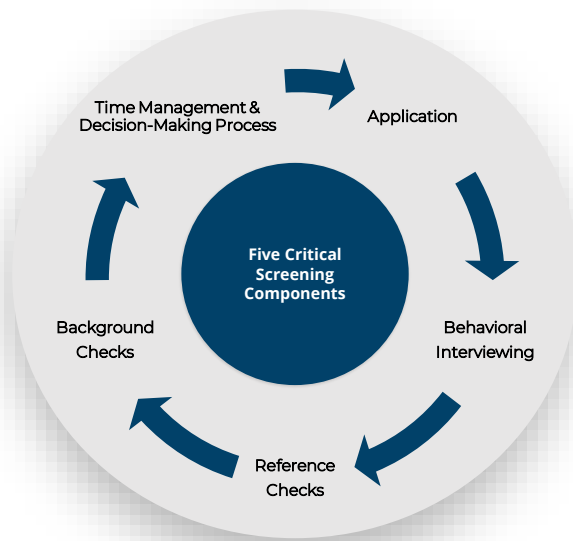
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Challenges in Executing Best Practices

Pace of hiring process – either too slow or too hurried

Information silos across departments

Failure to solicit input and perspectives from others

Inconsistent implementation across programs or locations

Culture of "check-the-box" attitude

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Decision-Making Process

01 Follow a standardized process

02 Document the process

03 Review all data

04 Don't get rushed

05 Allow time for follow-up

06 Identify who is responsible for which steps of the process

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Managing Screening Resources

- Screen for disqualifiers early in the process
- Use the observation of others
- Eliminate unfit applicants as soon as possible
- Include interim decision-points throughout the process
- Follow-up on red flags
- Continual discussions with team and supervisor
- Use all instruments to paint full picture of an applicant

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Encouraging High-Risk Applicants to Self-Select Out

Inform applicants throughout the process that your organization:
- Screens specifically to ensure the safety of clients
- Takes allegations of abuse seriously
- Fully cooperates with authorities in cases of abuse
- Will monitor interactions with clients
- Requires applicants to sign a Code of Ethics/Conduct

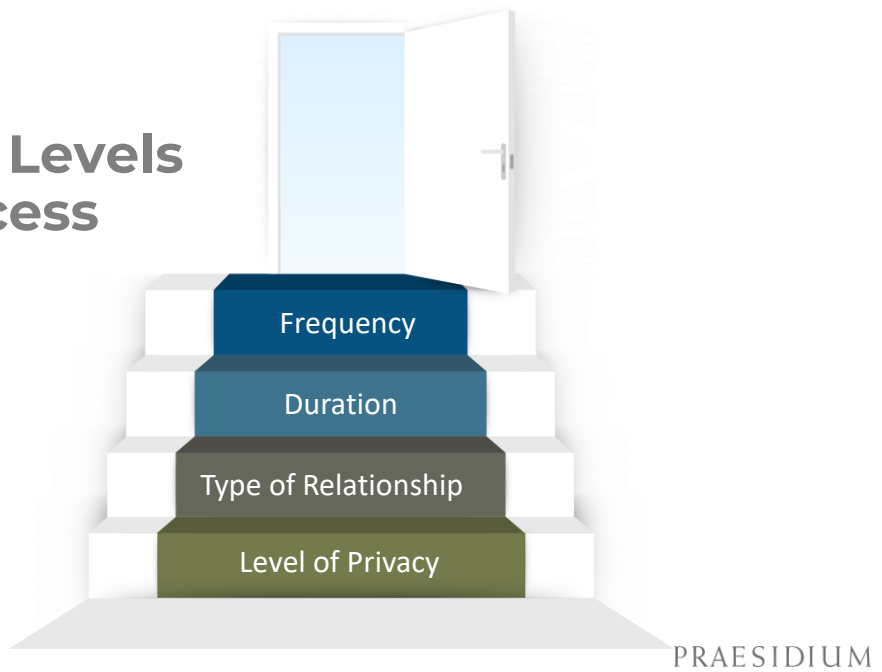QUESTION: Will you offend good applicants by stating the above?

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Who has access?

Contractors

Employees

High Access Volunteers

Low Access Volunteers

Board of Directors

Vulnerable Populations

Vendors & Visitors

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Evaluate Levels of Access

Frequency

Duration

Type of Relationship

Level of Privacy

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Background Checks

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The Background Check Dilemma

Why can't we rely solely on criminal background checks?
- Most offenders do not have a criminal record (only 4 – 5% have records)
- Criminal background checks are not flawless
- Criminal background checks can be limited by scope and search methodology

Why must we do them anyway?
- Industry and legal standards make them a must
- You will be held liable for anything you could have, or should have, known
- Consistent, well-publicized screening programs can keep offenders away

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Best Practices in Background Checks

- ● Recommended checks for all applicants with high access to vulnerable populations:
  - A Multi-State Criminal Background Check
  - A National Sex Offender Registry Check
  - A Social Security Number Trace
  - County Criminal Record Search (all counties where lived or worked for the last 7 years)
- ● Rechecks (frequency, type)

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Applications:
A Goldmine of Information
at a Reasonable Price

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Best Practices for Applications

- ✓ Utilize standardized application forms designed to allow HR/hiring managers to quickly assess for red-flags (i.e., "areas to follow-up on")
- ✓ Includes organization's zero tolerance for abuse
- ✓ Collect the information that you want or need
- ✓ Staff should review and identify red-flags in the application
- ✓ Interviewers should be notified of potential red-flags for follow up
- ✓ Used as more than simply an administrative task

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Red-Flags in Applications

- ✓ Gaps in dates (employment, residence)
- ✓ Conflicting information
- ✓ Incorrect information
- ✓ Incomplete or omitted information
- ✓ Unstable work history
- ✓ Vague reasons for leaving previous jobs
- ✓ Unwilling to use former supervisors as references

- ✓ Short-term relationships with provided references
- ✓ Overeducated for position
- ✓ Moving to a lesser-paying job
- ✓ Patterns or themes of preferences for a particular age range
- ✓ Patterns or themes of problems with authority
- ✓ Found out about position without a clear or relevant connection

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Interviews:
Let People Tell You
Who They Really Are

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Successful Interviews...

- Create a sense of privacy
- Use an open communication style
- Minimize barriers for applicants to be honest and self-reflective
- Decrease the consequences of telling the truth
- Use standardized behaviorally-based interview questions
- Ask questions designed to assess abuse risk & performance skills

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Performance Skills

Trainability
Policy Adherence
Patience
Supportiveness
Judgement
Boundaries

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Structure the Interview

- 20/80 principle
- Introduction:
  - Realistic description of the position
  - Discuss hiring process and importance of an honest assessment of strengths and areas of development
  - Zero tolerance for abuse statement
  - Review the application and resume
- Take notes (facts and follow-up)
- Use more than one person when able

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Behavioral Interview Techniques

Best predictor for future behavior is past behavior

- ⊘ What past behaviors do you want to learn about?
- ⊘ What skill sets do you want to learn about?

- ⊘ Creating behaviorally-based interview questions
  - **"Tell me about a time when..."**
  - **"How did you..."** as opposed to "How *would* you..."

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Behaviorally-based Interview Questions

1) Tell me about a time in your life when you had to quickly learn how to do something. What did you have to learn? How did you learn it?

2) Often at work, we're expected to adhere to policies that may not make sense to us. Tell me about a time when you had to stick to a rule, even though it didn't seem reasonable. How did you handle that situation?

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Behaviorally-based Interview Questions

3) Give me an example of a time when a client really tried your patience. How did you respond to that situation?

4) Describe a time when you were personally supportive and reassuring to a person who needed comfort. How did you know that person was in need? How did you show your support?

5) Tell me about a time when someone commended your good judgment and common sense. What was the situation and how did you handle it?

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Red-Flags in Interviews

- Defensive/angry responses
- Themes of preferences for particular children or client populations
- Perception that children and clients are "helpless" or "vulnerable"
- Evasive responses
- Patterns of gaining frequent access to children or vulnerable individuals
- Patterns consistent with high-risk characteristics

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Reminder: High Risk Characteristics

- Social isolation or difficulty interacting with adult peers
- Uses excessive physical affection, particularly tickling or wrestling
- Difficulty working as a team player or working with authority figures
- Allows clients to get away with things others would not approve of
- Fails to set limits with clients
- Excessively involved with an individual client
- Bends the rules for certain clients

- Discourages other adults from participating or monitoring their interactions
- Using poor judgment with clients
- Having difficulty handling stress or managing stressful situations
- Presents a poor role model for clients
- Uses harsh forms of discipline
- Ignores standard policies about interacting with clients
- Behaves as a peer with clients rather than a supervising adult

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References:
Your Opportunity to Learn from Others

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Best Practices in Reference Checks

- Ensure you request for the appropriate "types" of references – in what capacity should the reference know the applicant?
- Use a standardized reference form for each call, but be sure to modify questions so to learn about the specific experiences the reference has had with the applicant
- Ask follow-up and clarifying questions
- Take notes during the call and write short quotes from the reference to prompt your memory
- Note areas of concern or questions to further clarify with applicant or internal team
- At minimum, conduct three references including a mix of personal and professional references
- Follow-up and share reference results with other hiring team members

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Reference Check Considerations

- Difference between a professional reference vs employment verification
- Benefit of personal references (i.e., family, friend, faith leader)
- Pro/cons of conducting by phone call
- Pro/cons of conducting by written and/or electronic forms
- Utilizing a rating scale
- Identify need for follow-up with reference and/or applicant
- Verification of individuals

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Professional References

- We are looking for someone who will adhere to the standard policies of our organization. How would you rate the applicant's ability to follow policies and procedures?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to relate to children?
    - Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to children?
- In what types of situations have you observed the applicant not working well with children (becoming frustrated, angry, resentful or non-productive)?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to use good judgment in stressful conditions?
- Are you aware of any reason why we should not allow the applicant to work with the populations we serve?

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Personal References

- How long have you known the applicant?
- What is your relationship to the applicant?
- What are the applicant's hobbies and recreational activities?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to interact with and relate to children?
    - Can you give me an example of how the applicant relates to children?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to be patient and stay calm?
- Have you ever known the applicant to use harsh or abusive discipline with a child?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to relate to adults?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to be genuinely supportive and understanding to a person in need?
- How would you rate the applicant's ability to maintain appropriate boundaries with clients?
- Would you be comfortable placing one of your own loved ones in the care of the applicant? Why or why not?

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Red-Flags for Reference Checks

- Reluctant references
- Does not know the applicant well
- No references from recent position(s)
- Deceptive responses or refusal to answer
- Differs from the applicant's account
- Describes high-risk characteristics of adult offenders

- Would not rehire the applicant
- Would not place their own kids or loved ones in the applicant's care
- Not informed they would be used as a reference
- References that cannot be contacted

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Screening and Selection Summary

Review	Follow	Integrate	Identify
Review your screening and selection practices to ensure it consists of numerous opportunities to assess for abuse risk	Consistently follow the same standardized practices for at minimum all high-access employees and volunteer applicants	Integrate all information learned or known about the applicant to make an informed decision on hiring or selection	Identify areas in which the applicant may need additional coaching or training to increase knowledge or skills in the role

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Consultation with Partners

- Document analysis and policy review/development
- Emergency or crisis response to incident
- Exploration of dynamics between domestic and international teams
- Article development for information sharing
- Guided conversation about daily operations & possible gaps
- Custom training opportunities (bilingual in Spanish)
- Funder referrals (various reasons)

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Creating a Culture of Safety

| Leadership is committed and vocal | Standards are clear and enforced | Everyone knows safety is part of their job | Everyone takes warning signs seriously | Everyone reports their concerns | Employee engagement is high | Quality is institutionalized |

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2024
WEBINAR SERIES

SPECIALIZED

High-Reliability Organizations: Inspiration for Fostering Cultures of Safety

WEDNESDAY, NOV. 6

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What can I find on the website?

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safeguarding.fadica.org

Checklists, Templates, and Policy Models
Find inspiration for building out your organization's written policies and best practices.

Custom Webinar Recordings
Explore the archive of recently recorded safeguarding webinars, curated with direct-service/nonprofits in mind.

Collaborative Consulting Opportunities
Schedule a discovery call with FADICA and Praesidium to help discern next steps in your safeguarding journey.

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STAY IN TOUCH

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