

Service User Engagement Strategy 2024 - 2027

APRIL 2025



Prepared by Supporting Communities



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Communities**
Empowering Society

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Welcome

Foreword

Respond is a listening and learning organisation and the people we want to listen to and learn from the most are our service users and tenants. I am delighted to be writing this introduction to Respond's first Service User Engagement Strategy. It is so important that the voice of our services user is heard and we are committed to driving forward service improvements in partnership with service users and their families.

Service User Engagement is a relatively new area in Ireland and as an organisation, we feel strongly that we, along with our sectoral colleagues, have a responsibility to lead and develop new ways of working together. This Strategy will form the basis of how Respond and Respond service users engage with each other.

I would like to thank the services team and our Advisory group of Lisa O' Rourke, Anna McGreal David Parslow, Niamh Randall and John O Sullivan for their work on this Strategy, I know how important this has been to them. I thank 'Supporting Communities' for their guidance on the creation of the Strategy and our Strategy and Public Affairs team who have supported the drafting and design of this document. Finally, I thank our Board of Directors who have been, as they always are, unfailingly supportive of this endeavour.

Louisa Carr
Director of Services



1.0

Our values

Listening

We will consult with and listen to our tenants, service users and staff.

We will reflect their opinions in the planning, design and delivery of housing and housing support services.

Empathy

In our work, we will try to see the situation from the point of view of the tenant or the community with which we are engaging. We will be non-judgemental, regardless of past or current difficulties. We will listen to and value their stories and experiences and endeavour to have a positive influence on their lives.

Sustainability

All our developments will try to enhance the natural world around us and not adversely impact the environment without redress. Through the design of our housing and communities, we will be mindful of our ethical obligations to pursue national goals of sustainable development through energy efficiency and the reduction of carbon emissions.

Value for money

Always conscious that we use state-backed loans and tenants' rental income to finance our building and service-delivery programme, we will ensure that all our expenditure and investment provides clear value for money with evidence-based, testable outcomes.

Integrity

Honesty, truthfulness and transparency of purpose and method will be our constant watchwords.

Trust

We will aim to be a trusted and reliable social landlord to our tenants and service users, a trusted partner for those with whom we collaborate and a trustworthy employer for Respond employees.

Quality design

All our developments will be based on principles of place-making and of creating sustainable and safe living environments. We will seek to follow best practice to deliver integrated housing developments designed to high quality standards capable of being used by all including those with specific needs.



2.0

Equality For All



2.1 Respond is committed to encouraging equality in everything that we do. We value involvement that reflects all our service users.

We are committed to treating everyone fairly and equally, ensuring our services are accessible irrespective of:

- Gender
- Civil Status
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Race
- Religious belief
- Disability
- Age
- Membership of the Traveller Community
- Housing assistance in the provision of accommodation.



“The Equal Status Acts 2000 - 2018 (the Acts’) prohibit discrimination in the provision of goods and services, accommodation, and education. The Acts’ cover the nine grounds of gender, marital status, age disability, sexual orientation, race, religion, and membership of Traveller community. In addition, the Acts prohibit discrimination in the provision of accommodation services against people who are in receipt of rent supplement, housing assistance, or social welfare payments.”

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

3.0

Service User Engagement



3.1 WHAT IS SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT?

Service user engagement happens when an organisation involves service users in shaping, delivering, improving, or evaluating the services it provides. Engagement must be meaningful; in that it is a two-way dialogue where service users and service providers work in partnership to make things better for the service user and the organisation.

The key to effective service user engagement is building a culture where service users feel comfortable raising issues, expressing ideas and generally commenting on the services provided, and in doing so, know that they will be listened to and valued.



3.2 WHO ARE THE SERVICE USERS?

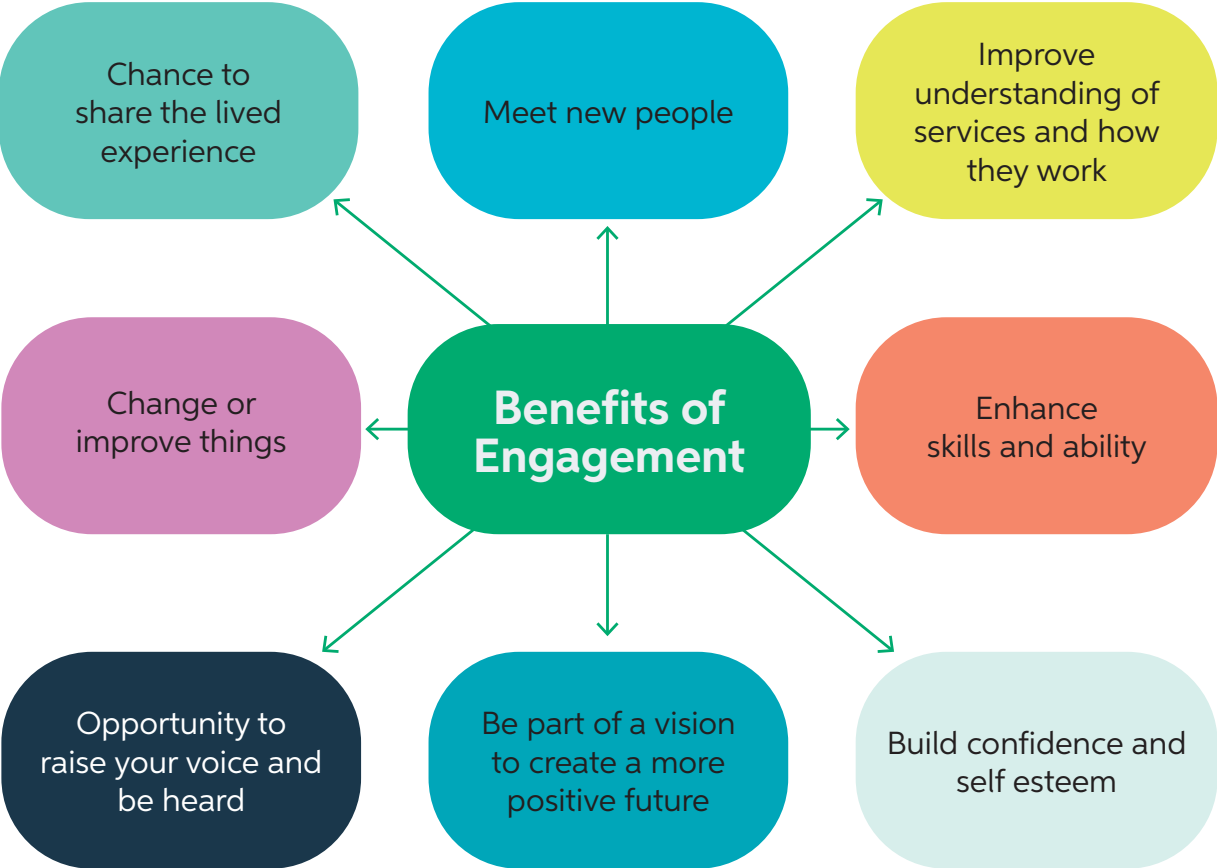
Service users are the people who use a particular service. Therefore, for the purposes of this Service User Engagement Strategy, a service user is a current user of the following Respond services: Early Learning and School Age Care, Family Support, Homeless Services and Day Care for Older People and other relevant services.

3.3 WHY SHOULD WE INVOLVE SERVICE USERS?

There are many reasons to create opportunities for service users to play an active role in the services they use. Service users are a valuable resource. They are experts through their experience and involving them will help us get things right. Services are likely to be more effective if they are developed and delivered with the direct involvement of the people who use them.

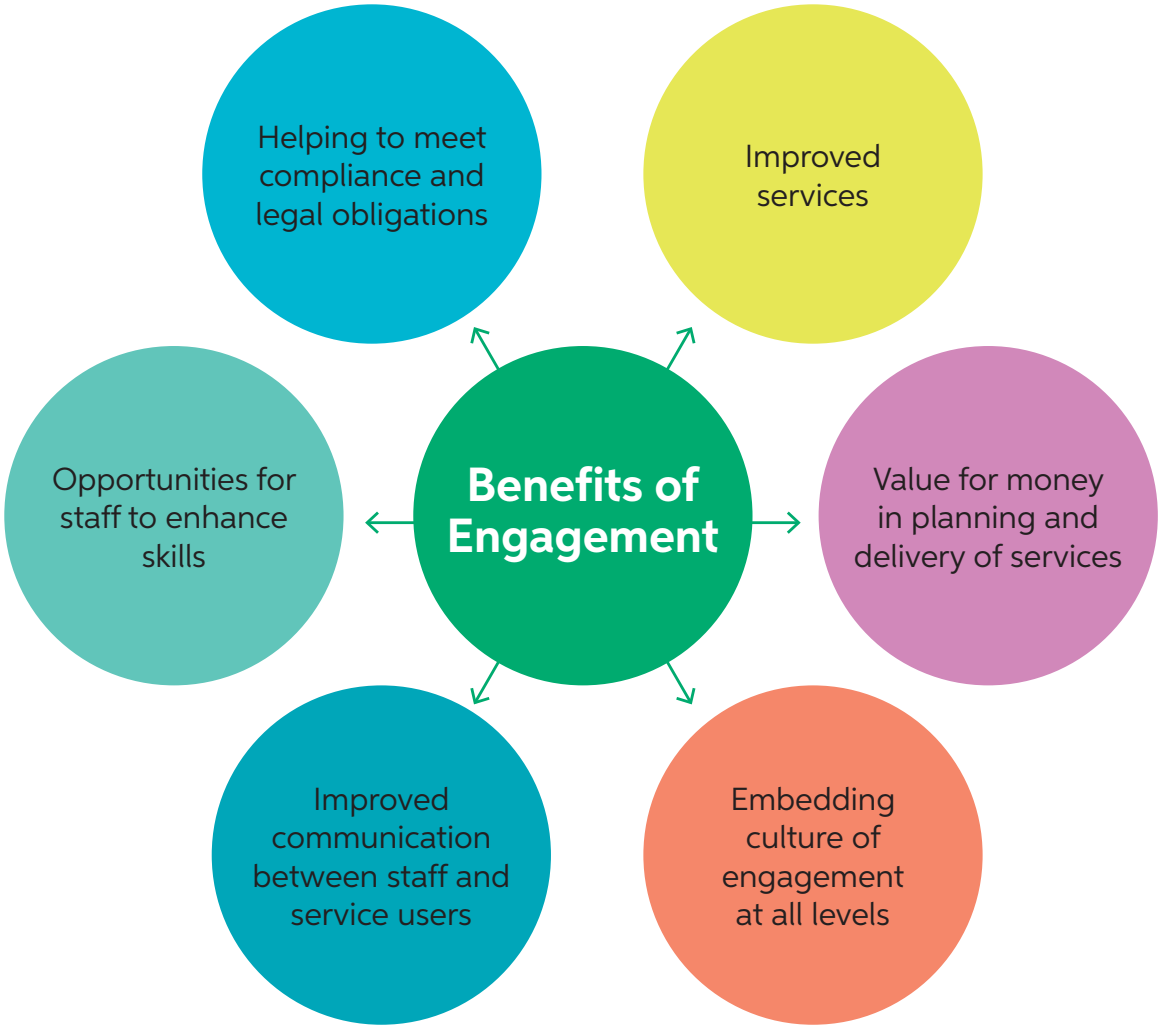
3.4 WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF GETTING INVOLVED?

Service user involvement can offer a range of benefits to both service users and to the organisation.



3.5 THE BENEFITS OF SERVICE USER ENGAGEMENT FOR RESPOND

Service user involvement can offer a range of benefits to both service users and to the organisation.



3.6 BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

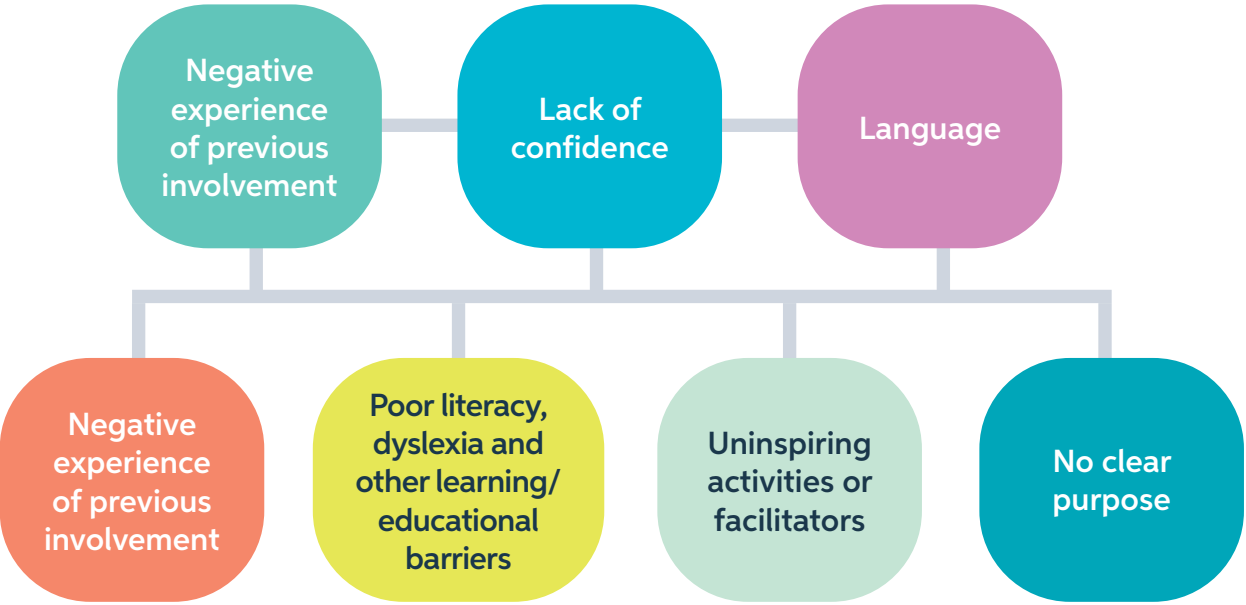
Not everyone will want to get involved; for some service users, it's simply not something of interest, and that is perfectly alright.

However, for some service users, the fear of the unknown might be the barrier that prevents them from volunteering. We must recognise potential barriers to engagement to make plans to help and provide support.

3.7 EMBRACING THE TRAUMA-INFORMED APPROACH TO ENGAGEMENT

Respond is a 'trauma-informed organisation'. This means that when we engage with our service users, we want to reassure them that they are in a safe place to air their views, concerns, and complaints. We recognise that from time to time, things can go wrong. When that happens, it's important to us to put things right and make sure it doesn't happen again. We can only do this together with you.

Potential barriers could be:



4.0

How we developed this strategy

4.1 In October 2023, Supporting Communities (an Independent charitable organisation that champions tenant and community participation www.supportingcommunities.org) was commissioned to work alongside service users and Respond staff members to co-create Respond's first Service User Engagement Strategy.

4.2 An advisory group was set up to establish a timeline and monitor the project's progress. The following diagram depicts the key activities in developing the Service User Engagement Strategy.

- **Oct 2023**
First meeting of the advisory group
- **Oct - Nov 2023**
Review of existing structures
- **Oct - Nov 2023**
Research into good practice examples (ongoing)
- **Nov - Dec 2023**
Individual meetings with key personnel
- Desktop research conducted throughout the project duration
- **Jan 2024**
Meet with the Respond Board
- **Jan 2024**
Meet with service users in Dublin and Waterford
- **Jan 2024**
Consultations with staff
- **Feb - May 2024**
Collation of staff and service user feedback, desktop research
- **June 2024**
Draft report and draft Service User Engagement Strategy produced.
- **Aug 2024**
Advisory group meet to discuss draft report and Strategy
- **Sept 2024**
Charters devised per service area Report and Strategy updated

4.3 Our Service User Engagement Strategy was co-produced by service users and Respond staff and facilitated by Supporting Communities. An overarching Advisory Group was established to map the strategy's progress. A variety of engagement methods were deployed, including 'on-site' visits and meetings with service users, staff, and the Respond Board. In addition, a staff survey was undertaken, telephone surveys were conducted with service users, and desktop research was conducted to seek out best practices.



4.4 What our Service Users Said

I feel very comfortable talking to staff. They are genuine and caring

Friendly and caring
Good hours
Good safety and security

Friendly faces as you walk in, good with child's needs, helped my wee boy to speak, no speech before going in

My mother has had a new lease of life in the five years she has been attending the daycare

Meetings with keyworkers are very useful. Staff are only a phone call away if I need them

I feel safe here. There's always someone to listen. I feel the staff care and make the atmosphere here very homely

5.0
How we will involve you

5.1 We have based our Service User Engagement Strategy on four fundamental pillars for engagement: **Listen, Act, Change, Communicate**

Listen
We will take every opportunity to ensure your voice is heard

Act
We will consider your views and look at how they can shape our services

Change
Your views and opinions will be implemented to improve our services

Communicate
We will tell you how your views have led to improved services



5.2 You can get involved in several ways to help us shape our services. We understand that your time is precious, so we have designed a menu of engagement based on your feedback, this menu builds on the excellent work already established within each of the service areas.



5.3 Our main service areas cater to a wide range of service users, family support, people who are homeless, young children, and older people, each with its own specific requirements. This section of the strategy sets out the options available to get involved across each of the service areas, all underpinned by the fundamental pillars of engagement: **Listen, Act, Change, and Communicate**.

Each service area has its own charter setting out the options to get involved and have your voice heard.

5.4 Our menu of engagement has been designed to offer a range of ways you can get involved, depending on your interests and availability.

The following table shows the various levels of engagement on offer, each with a different options of commitment, meaning you can be involved as little or as much as you want.

Engaging with Service Users

- Provide your feedback through the completion of surveys or using suggestion boxes.
- Come along to Respond’s activities or events, e.g. welcome events and Meet the Manager days.
- Give your feedback at review meetings, one-to-one meetings with Respond staff and at exit interviews.

Service User Group engagement

- Help plan activities for service users and/or the local community.
- Give your input into the information Respond produces for service users.

Service User structured participation

- Join a focus group to look at ways services can be improved.
- Participate in service user engagement training
- Work with Respond staff to develop actions arising from service user feedback.

Service User Strategic Participation on Organisational priorities.

- Influencing Strategic Policies:** Providing input on critical areas like, service needs analysis, long-term service delivery, service design, Service User engagement frameworks, and service delivery priorities aligned to the needs of our service users.
- Specialised Contributions:** Service Users can be involved in areas such as: Reviewing and influencing major organisational policies and contributing to the development of strategic initiatives (e.g., sustainability, equality, or growth strategies)

5.5 Menu of Engagement

Options	Descriptor	Time Required
Welcome events, information sessions, Meet the Staff events	Attend events arranged in your setting to meet with the Staff and key personnel. This is an ideal opportunity to find out more about the service area, ask questions and provide your ideas and suggestions.	
One-to-one meetings	You can have your say in a more personal way by meeting Respond staff in a one-to-one setting. Again, we will provide feedback on any changes made as a result of your engagement.	
Surveys	If you do not like the idea of attending meetings but would still like to be involved, why not provide feedback by completing surveys. We will always provide you with the results and any changes you have helped to make.	



Options	Descriptor	Time Required
Organise activities or events for service users	Work with Respond staff to organise activities, for example, coffee mornings, fun days, classes, courses, projects or outings.	 
Information for Service Users	Help Respond improve or develop information for service users, such as newsletters, website reviews, or updating welcome packs.	 
Focus Groups	Get involved in a focus group to examine Respond’s services in more detail and make suggestions as to how they can be improved, such as menu or activity planning.	  
Support to get Involved	Are you interested in learning more? Why not participate in service user engagement training to develop your skills and build confidence?	  
Monitoring Group	In year 2 of the strategy the Service Users Engagement Coordinator will establish a monitoring group. The role of the monitoring group will be to review and measure progress of the action plan.	   
Policy & Strategy Reviews	Invitations to provide feedback on service area policies and related strategies.	   

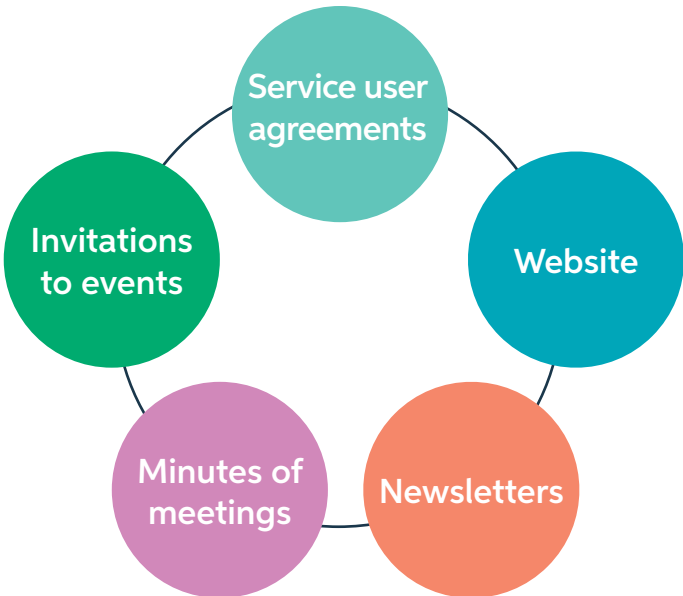
5.6 A specialised charter has been developed for each of our four service areas. Each charter sets out the key engagement activities for getting involved and how we will listen, act, change, and communicate with you.



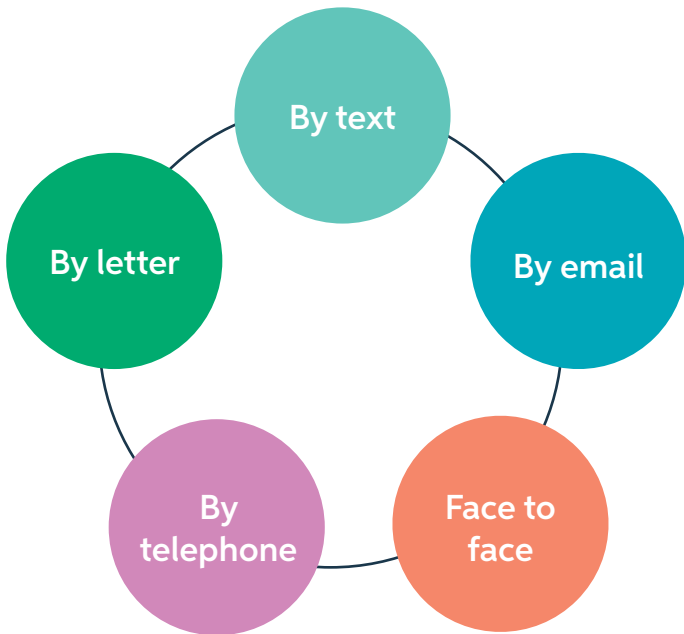
6.0

How we will keep you informed

6.1 We will ensure that all information given to you will be easy to understand, up to date and available in a variety of formats and languages upon request. This includes:



6.2 Based on the feedback from our engagements to date, we will continue to communicate to you by your preferred methods:



7.0

Supporting and resourcing Service User Engagement

7.1 At Respond, we are committed to ensuring our service users' voices are heard and listened to. Allocating resources, specialised staff, a training budget, or specific initiatives, is a key element to the success of this strategy. Respond will ensure that adequate funding is provided and regularly reviewed to ensure that identified needs are met.



8.0

Monitoring and evaluation

8.1 We have created an action plan that sets out the steps we will take to put our Service User Engagement Strategy into practice. This is a living document which we will review and monitor to make sure we are moving forward.

Progress updates to:

- Service users via the website and newsletters
- Staff teams, Executive management
- Respond Board

8.2 In addition, this strategy will be regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to be fit for purpose and relevant.



About Respond

Respond, a construction-led Approved Housing Body and service provider, has been working all around Ireland for over 40 years. Our vision is that every family and individual in Ireland will have high-quality housing as part of a vibrant and caring community. Housing and decent accommodation, in the areas where people want to live, are central to improving people's lives and enhancing the health and well-being of society.

18,000 plus tenants live in 8,180 properties across the 26 counties that we either own or manage. Respond also provide a range of services for families and individuals within our communities. This includes emergency accommodation with 24/7 support for families who are homeless in six Family Homeless Services, three Day Care Services for Older People, 17 Early Learning and School Aged Care facilities, Family Support and Refugee Resettlement Services. Our aim is to provide person centred services to support people to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.



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improving lives

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