



Reducing Revocations Challenge Request for Proposals

May 22, 2019

Cover Sheet

A. Goal of the RFP

The goal of this Request for Proposals (RFP) is to solicit proposals for action research on the drivers of probation revocations.

In September 2018, Arnold Ventures announced a major initiative to transform community supervision and reduce the failures of supervision that contribute to mass incarceration. Among its efforts is the launch of the Reducing Revocations Challenge (RRC), an initiative in which Action Research Teams (ARTs) in up to 10 jurisdictions will receive funding for a 16-month period to 1) conduct in-depth research and data analysis on the drivers of probation failures and 2) identify policy and practice solutions based on the research findings. ARTs will consist of a research partner and local probation department or district office in a statewide system. The CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) will serve as the research intermediary for the RRC, overseeing the RFP process and managing ARTs as they carry out research and policy work.

Timeline and Submission Instructions

- 1. Release Date of RFP: May 22, 2019
- 2. Q&A Webinar: June 3, 2019 at 3:30pm EST, accessed via https://cuny.webex.com/meet/ISLG.
- Questions: Questions about this RFP may be submitted in writing to RRC@islg.cuny.edu.
 Questions to be addressed during the webinar must be submitted by May 30, 2019; any additional questions must be submitted by June 7, 2019.
- 4. Answers to all questions will be available as an addendum to this RFP by June 10, 2019. It will be the responsibility of the proposers to check the ISLG website to remain up-to-date regarding all addenda issued for the RFP. Any addenda will be listed alongside the RFP here: https://islg.cuny.edu/sites/our-work/reducing-revocations-challenge/.
- 5. Proposal Due Date: Proposal submissions are due by June 24, 2019 at 11:59pm EST. Proposals should be submitted via https://cuny-islg.fluidreview.com/.
- 6. Failure to submit a proposal by the due date and time will result in the proposal being considered non-responsive to this RFP and not considered for award. Unless an addendum to this RFP is issued extending the due date and time, all proposals must be submitted prior to the time and date set forth above.
- 7. Anticipated Contract Start Date: October 1, 2019

B. Funding and Number of Awards

Arnold Ventures and ISLG anticipate awarding up to \$200,000 each to 10 ARTs for a total of \$2 million, with 16-month contracts running from October 1, 2019 to January 31, 2021. ARTs will also receive funding for travel to attend a cross-site summit in New York City.

C. Contact Information

Questions regarding RFP content or technical difficulties should be submitted in writing to RRC@islg.cuny.edu.

Table of Contents

Cover Sheet	ii
Table of Contents	iii
Background	1
Reducing Revocations Challenge	2
Proposal Content and Format	6
Project and Award Timeframe	9
Review Process and Evaluation Criteria	10
Appendix A: Budget Template	11
Appendix B: References	12

Background

There has been growing agreement among practitioners, policymakers, and the general public that there are far too many people under correctional control in the United States (U.S.). Indeed, in 1980, 1.8 million adults were in prison, jail, or under community supervision; by 2016, that number had grown to over 6.6 million. As the result, a number of large-scale initiatives have launched with the goal of reducing jail and prison populations. However, there remains a significant gap in the reform landscape in the area of community supervision—ironically, the type of correctional control that is by far the most common in the U.S. and one that continues to grow. While there have been significant decreases in recent years, these have not been enough to counter the general upward trend: the number of people on probation has increased more than 230 percent since 1980. We have now reached the point where the rate of adults under community supervision is now one in 55 (roughly 2 percent of the U.S. adult population), representing nearly two-thirds of the total correctional population.

Community supervision is designed to be an alternative to incarceration, yet revocations have been shown to be a significant driver of jail and prison admissions. Rates of failure among people on probation are alarmingly high, as are the rates at which people are revoked to prison or jail. In 2016, almost a third of probation exits were unsuccessful, with 12 percent ending in incarceration. Community corrections populations make up large proportions of prison admissions in a number of states—more than two-thirds of admissions in Arkansas and Georgia, for example. The likelihood of failure is exacerbated by the high number of probation conditions set for any given individual (an average of 15 per person), which present enormous barriers to success.

To attempt to counter these trends and maximize the chances of success, a range of evidence-based supervision strategies have emerged over the years. There is strong support for risk-need-responsivity (RNR) models, for example, which prioritize supervision and resources for individuals at greatest risk of recidivating, and focus services on the needs found to be most closely linked to risk. Correctional models grounded in RNR principles have demonstrated lower recidivism rates across genders, ages, and supervisory settings. Relatedly, we know that over-supervising low-risk individuals can lead to worse outcomes, because it can interfere with the very support systems that minimize risk in the first place, while reducing probation terms can improve outcomes without compromising public safety. Some jurisdictions have also begun using graduated responses, which have been shown to reduce reincarceration among probationers and parolees by as much as 33 percent.

While these strategies have effected change in many jurisdictions, success rates remain far too low, and our understanding about what leads to failure far too limited. We know very little about the factors, circumstances, and behaviors that drive revocations to jail or prison—including but not limited to the role of technical violations vs. new criminal activity—and how to respond to clients in a way that prevents new criminal activity without over-punishing less harmful behaviors. Without this knowledge, we lack understanding about how to effectively manage the population in a manner that reduces revocations and maximizes supervision success, while at the same time protecting public safety. We need to build our understanding of the factors that drive revocations and use that knowledge to shape reform efforts toward a new model of supervision. The Reducing Revocations Challenge (RRC), a joint enterprise between Arnold Ventures and the CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG), aims to address these gaps in the field by exploring in-depth the drivers of probation failure across a range of jurisdictions and using that information to identify new policy and practice solutions.

Reducing Revocations Challenge

A. Overview of the Challenge

The RRC is a new initiative that aims to increase success on probation through the identification, piloting, and testing of promising strategies grounded in a robust analysis and understanding of why revocations occur. Specifically, the RRC will support action research in 10 jurisdictions around the country to better understand why revocations occur and how they can be prevented. This research will be carried out by Action Research Teams (ARTs) comprised of a research organization—which will serve as the lead applicant—and a local probation agency or district office in a statewide system. Each ART will conduct an analysis of revocation drivers, and use it to propose a policy, programmatic, or practice intervention that is responsive to the probation agency's unique challenges. In a potential second phase of the RRC, select jurisdictions will receive additional funding to further develop and implement their proposed interventions. Throughout the process, ISLG will provide technical assistance and support, including peer learning events that will culminate in a cross-site summit to share findings and discuss policy and practice implications.

B. Action Research

ART research studies should be comprehensive in nature, exploring a wide range of potential revocation drivers, with special emphasis placed on exploring the underlying behaviors that lead to violations and the outcomes of those violations (e.g., incarceration, revoked and restored with new conditions). More specifically, ARTs should consider the following factors and circumstances in their analyses:

- 1. <u>Pathways toward revocation</u>. How do behaviors and decisions at different process points move people toward or away from revocations?
 - What are the underlying behaviors associated with revocations and the violations that lead to them?
 - What specific types of noncompliance occur? To what extent are they new crimes vs. technical violations vs. absconding?
 - What graduated responses are employed prior to filing a violation?
 - Who approves violations before they are filed? What do internal oversight mechanisms look like?
 - What dispositions do probation officers recommend following a violation?
 - What are the outcomes of violations (including length of incarceration dispositions) and how do they align with probation officers' recommendations?
 - How long does it take to process and resolve probation violations and what are the implications for supervision success?
- 2. <u>Policy and practice context</u>. How do legal and administrative policies—and the way they are implemented—affect how probation clients move through these pathways?
 - What are the local policies around conditions set, violations, and revocations?
 - To what extent do individual probation officers within the same agency vary in their responses to noncompliant behaviors (i.e., what is the role of discretion?)
 - o Are there structured decision-making protocols in place to guide those decisions?
 - What role do caseload type and size play in violation and revocation rates?
 - What types of conditions are being violated when revocations occur? Are they standard conditions? Special conditions?

- When, over the supervision term, do violations and revocations occur? What role, if any, might probation terms and early discharge policies play in that?
- To what extent do supervision supports and resources protect against violations and revocations? How are probation clients matched to these supports and resources and where might there be gaps?
- 3. <u>Individual characteristics</u>. Are violations/revocations more likely among probation clients with certain characteristics?
 - Demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age, residence)
 - Sentencing charges—Misdemeanors versus felonies, as well as specific charges (e.g., domestic violence, cases involving firearms)
 - Offending patterns (e.g., repeat larceny)
 - Risk and/or supervision levels
 - Specialized needs (e.g., young adult, behavioral health)

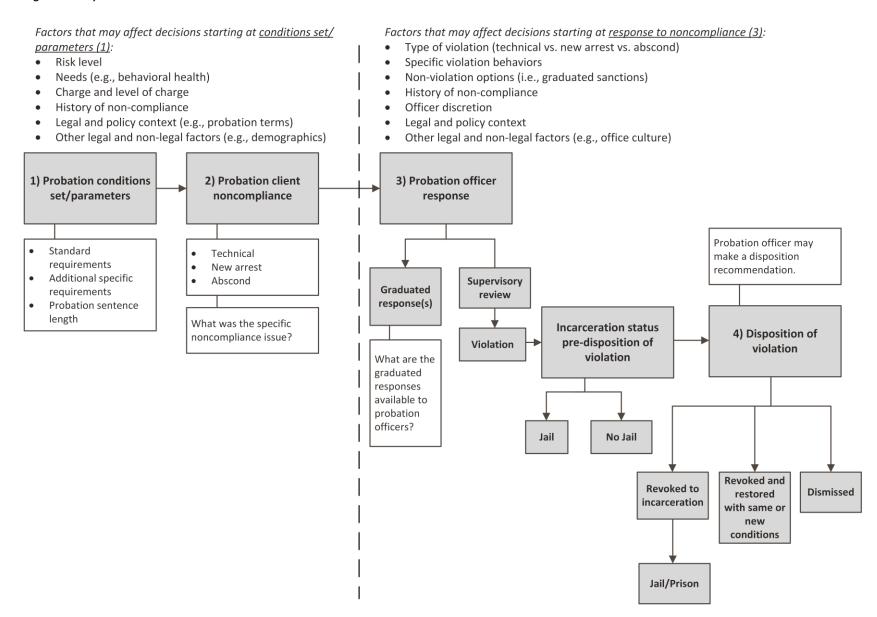
Figure 1 depicts how these key factors, circumstances, and decision points may relate to one other along the revocation process.

To fully examine these questions, ARTs will employ a mixed-methods approach utilizing multiple data sources. For example, while information on violation types (i.e., new crime vs. technical violation vs. absconding) may be readily available in administrative datasets, it is likely that information on the underlying behaviors leading to these violations will require review of electronic case notes or paper case files. Exploration of the broader legal context, in turn, will require investigation of the policies (e.g., probation terms) likely to play a role in decision-making and outcomes at different points in the process. For that reason, all proposed research designs are expected to include the following four elements: 1) a review of relevant legal and administrative policies and procedures; 2) a quantitative analysis of administrative data; 3) case file reviews; and 4) interviews with key stakeholders, such as probation officers and supervisors, judges, and those with lived experience on probation.

Once analyses have been completed, ARTs should have an understanding of which factors, decisions, and/or circumstances are the most salient in their local context, as well as how they interact with each other to drive revocations. ARTs will compile their findings into publicly-available research reports that share what they have learned about the factors driving supervision failure, justice-system policies and responses, and the characteristics of the population of individuals on probation. ARTs will also submit to ISLG and Arnold Ventures a brief proposal describing opportunities for policy and/or practice interventions that will help reduce revocation rates given the drivers they have identified. Suggested policies and interventions may focus on revocations driven by the commission of new crimes, targeting missed opportunities for crime prevention, or revocation driven by technical violations, particularly those that result in incarceration. Proposed policy changes may be legal or administrative in nature. Where interventions are suggested, they may take risk level into account, with some interventions targeting low-risk individuals who could conceivably benefit from less supervision through reduced reporting, inactive supervision, or shorter supervision terms; and some interventions targeting higherrisk individuals who may require more support and services. All potential strategies, regardless of their nature, must take into account the context in which probation agencies operate and the challenges they may face.

Promising strategies may be selected to receive additional funding for development and implementation in a second phase of the RRC.

Figure 1. Key Decision Points and Considerations in the Revocation Process



C. Support and Peer-Learning Network

ISLG will provide light touch technical assistance (TA) and support to ARTs throughout the Challenge, in addition to facilitating a broader peer-to-peer learning network. TA is expected to take different forms, depending on the needs of each ART, but may include activities such as consulting on methodological, statistical, and data capacity issues (e.g., suggesting analyses, advising on data collection protocols); providing information on best practices and lessons learned from other jurisdictions (e.g., what is known about the effectiveness and feasibility of specific types of interventions); answering technical and process questions (e.g., how to participate in webinars); and helping ARTs translate findings into recommendations for policy and practice. ISLG will also review and provide feedback on each ART's research design, draft findings, report, and strategy proposal. All assistance will be delivered through phone calls and emails. To facilitate this assistance, ISLG will set up ongoing check-in calls with each ART.

The learning network, in turn, will take the form of semi-regular all-sites conference calls and a series of webinars throughout the project period, culminating in a cross-site summit in the Fall of 2020. The summit will be a full-day meeting that brings the 10 ARTs together with ISLG project staff, experts in the field, individuals who have been under community supervision, and representatives from Arnold Ventures to share research findings and discuss the implications of those findings for policy and practice. In addition to promoting peer-to-peer learning, the summit will allow experts and attendees to share information on potential intervention models, and create opportunities for sites to brainstorm and vet their own ideas with both general experts and their colleagues. All ARTs are expected to be represented at the summit.

A six-person Advisory Board comprised of researcher and practitioner experts in the field of probation will provide additional support and guidance to both ISLG and ARTs throughout the course of the RRC.

D. Timeline and Deliverables

ARTs will complete all project activities in a 16-month contract period that is expected to begin on October 1, 2019. At around this time, ISLG will host an introductory webinar to kick-off the Challenge; reiterate key dates, expectations, and roles; and provide guidance on administrative and substantive processes. The project period will end on January 31, 2021. All ARTs are expected to complete and release their research reports to the public on or before this date. The full schedule of key activities and deliverables is laid out in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Key Activities and Deliverables¹

Activity	Deliverable (to ISLG)	Due date
Complete any revisions to research	Final research design and data	October 1, 2019
design requested by ISLG following	collection/measurement plan	
application review		
Kick-off webinar		By October 15, 2019
	Interim narrative and financial	April 1, 2020
	report	
Collect and analyze data	Draft findings	August 15, 2020
Cross-site summit		By October 15, 2020

¹ Specific deliverable dates may change as the initiative unfolds. ISLG will provide updated dates to ARTs as needed.

Conduct additional analyses as needed and draft research report	Draft research report	November 15, 2020
Develop proposal for local strategy to reduce revocations	Strategy proposal	December 15, 2020
Revise research report	Second draft research report (submitted to ISLG upon request)	January 1, 2021
Finalize and release research report	Final research report	January 31, 2021
	Final narrative and financial report	February 28, 2021

Proposal Content and Format

A. Cover letter

The cover letter should indicate that the applicant is applying for funding through this RFP and provide basic information about the applicant (e.g., location, contact information) and the practitioner partner for the applicant. While all ARTs must include both a research organization and a local probation agency or district office, applications should be submitted by the research organization.

B. Proposal Narrative (8-page maximum)

Applicants should propose research designed to answer the key research questions laid out above, specifying which decision points will be targeted and how; what metrics will be utilized; and how data will be collected and analyzed. Proposals should be co-developed by the research organization and the probation agency. Applications may also include partnerships with other criminal justice agencies; however, all ARTs must include a probation agency. Applicants are also encouraged to review Arnold Ventures' <u>Guidelines for Investment in Research</u>.

The proposal narrative should be single-spaced and paginated, and should use a standard 12-point font (Times New Roman is preferred) with 1-inch margins. The overall length of the proposal narrative should not exceed eight pages, with the following maximum page lengths for each of four specific sections:

- Statement of the problem (1 page max)
- Work proposal (5 pages max)
- Policy and practice implications (0.5 pages max)
- Organizational capacity and experience (1.5 pages max)

These are the maximum page lengths that will be read and scored. References should be included in an appendix and do not count towards the page limit. Proposals should not contain hyperlinks; all relevant information should be included in the body of the proposal. Reviewers will not visit external websites when evaluating proposals.

Proposal narratives should consist of the following components, each clearly defined and labeled:

Statement of the problem (1 page max). Proposals should begin with a brief description of the
local landscape around probation revocations, including, at a minimum, what is currently known
about violation and revocation rates; what, if any, interventions have been tested; and why and
how probation revocation presents a challenge for the jurisdiction. To make a compelling case,
applicants are strongly encouraged to include data on violation and revocation rates.

2. Work proposal (5 pages max)

- a. Research design and justification. Applicants should lay out a detailed research design, including the rationale for selecting the design, a description of how it will answer the key research questions and considerations laid out in this RFP, and a proposed analytical plan. As noted above, all designs should include at a minimum the following elements:

 a review of relevant legal and administrative policies and procedures;
 a quantitative analysis of administrative data;
 case file reviews; and
 interviews with key stakeholders, such as probation officers and supervisors, judges, or those with lived experience on probation. Applicants should also note the potential limitations of their design and how challenges will be addressed or mitigated.
- b. Proposed measures and data. Applicants should list the key measures that will be used to explore both factors and circumstances that drive probation revocations and key outcomes of violations and revocations. Data sources and quality should be clearly delineated for all key measures, along with a plan for how to access the necessary data (e.g., a timetable for executing data use agreements), data collection methods, and the person(s) who will be responsible for collecting and analyzing data. Accompanying these measures should be a general description of what local data are available to answer these questions and in what format (e.g., electronic, text fields, paper files), the strengths and weaknesses of the data available—with a particular focus on data that will be used to measure the key metrics described above—and how the applicant will address the challenges, if any, of accessing data not readily available for use—including data on underlying behaviors that lead to probation violations and revocations, which are often only available in case notes.
- c. Publication and dissemination strategy. Applicants should propose a plan for reporting on the findings of the research. While all ARTs will be required to submit a research report to ISLG, the results of this research are also expected to be released more widely to the public so that they can contribute to the broader knowledge base on drivers of probation revocation and how they might be addressed.
- 3. Policy and practice implications (0.5 pages). Applicants should briefly discuss the anticipated implications of their research for policy and practice, including how the findings will be used to identify opportunities for revocation reduction and developed into a strategy proposal.
- 4. Organizational capacity and experience (1.5 pages). Applicants should describe their organizational capacity to perform the work set forth in items 2 and 3 above, including a staffing plan and a description of the researcher/practitioner partnership that is being proposed. Applicants should also include in this section specific examples of relevant experience, with a particular focus on experience conducting action research, as well as any history of work with the probation agency named in the application (including the types of projects and a description).

of the working relationship). Letters of support from the partner probation agency and other criminal justice stakeholders should be attached in the appendices, as should resumes or curriculum vita for project team members (see below).

C. Budget

Applicants should provide a detailed, line-item budget for the proposed work not to exceed \$200,000, including both direct and indirect costs. For this phase of the RRC, all funds should be directed towards research activities and should go to the applicant research organization, with the assumption that funding will shift all or in part to the probation agency or office for those sites selected to receive additional funding to implement revocation reduction strategies in a second phase of the RRC. Budgets do not need to include travel-related costs for participating in the cross-site summit; all relevant travel costs (e.g., flight, lodging, meals) will be covered by ISLG. All budgets should include both personnel and other than personnel expenditures (e.g., technology, printing), and staffing allocations should include salaries and percent FTE, as well as fringe benefits costs. ARTs may engage subcontractors and/or consultants in the work; any subcontractor or consultant costs should be clearly delineated in the budget with additional detail provided in the budget narrative (although ISLG does not need to approve individual subcontractors, only the associated costs). A budget template can be found in Appendix A.

Indirect costs are defined as organizational costs incurred for a common or joint purpose benefitting more than one project and not exclusively attributable to or created for the project supported by a particular funder. Institutions of higher education, including community colleges, are permitted to receive an indirect cost rate of 15 percent of total direct project costs; all other organizations (e.g., non-profit, governmental, for-profit, etc.) may receive an indirect cost rate of 20 percent of total direct project costs; however, consulting or subcontract expenses, sub-awards, and tuition (if applicable) shall not be included as part of the total direct project cost base for the indirect cost calculation.

D. Budget Narrative

Applicants should clearly outline and define all direct project costs, including the fringe rate calculation detail for all personnel, as well as information about any subcontractors or consultants. The budget narrative should link the proposed costs to the proposed work proposal components and activities, and outline any assumptions on which the budget is based. Applicants should specify the types of expenses included as indirect costs, and describe how they determine whether to charge an expense as an indirect versus a direct cost. If equipment, rent, or other expenses are considered direct, such expenses should be described in detail as they relate to the project's purpose with a corresponding justification for why such expenses are considered direct, and how the directly charged shared expenses allocated to this grant are calculated.

E. Appendices

All applications should include the following appendices:

1. Letters of support. Applications must include a letter of support from the head of the probation agency or office with which the applicant will partner. All letters must include the following, at a minimum:

- Agreement to be an active participant in the project, including participating in the crosssite summit in the Fall of 2020 and leading or co-leading the development of the strategy proposal;
- Commitment to sharing the administrative data and access to individual records that will be needed for the work described in this application, including timely execution of data use agreements, where needed;
- c. Agreement to the public release of the findings arising from the proposed work, through publicly available research reports; and
- d. The name of a point person or persons at the agency who will be responsible for working with the research partner and ensuring they are able to access what they need in order to carry out the work described in this application.

While not required, applicants are also strongly encouraged to submit letters of support from local judges, as well as any other criminal justice system actors whose buy-in will be critical for implementing policy and practice reform in future.

- 2. Resumes/curriculum vita. Resumes or curriculum vita should be submitted for all key project team members.
- 3. References. All proposal references should be submitted as an appendix; they do not need to be included in the body of the proposal and do not count towards any page limits.
- 4. Latest annual audit report or financial statement. A copy of the applicant's latest audit report or certified financial statement should be uploaded as an appendix. If no report or statement is available, a statement giving a detailed explanation as to why it is not available should be provided.
- 5. Fiscal sponsorship documentation (if applicable). Nonprofits without 501(c)(3) status are required to have a fiscal sponsor in place upon proposal submission. In such instances, applicants should state the name of the fiscal sponsor; outline the responsibilities of the fiscal sponsor; and outline their obligations to the fiscal sponsor. Applicants should also submit any fiscal sponsorship agreement. If the applicant has a fiscal sponsor, any fees charged by the sponsor should be included and clearly labeled in the budget.

Project and Award Timeframe

May 22: RFP released

May 30: Deadline to submit questions to be addressed during the webinar

June 3: Optional webinar

June 7: Deadline to submit any additional questions
June 10: Addendum responding to questions published

June 24: Deadline to submit proposals

By August 21: Notification of awards

Review Process and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be reviewed and scored by a combination of ISLG staff, Advisory Board members, and external reviewers, as needed, who will make recommendations for funding to Arnold Ventures. In scoring proposals, the following weights will be assigned to each section:

- 1. Statement of the problem 10%
- 2. Work proposal 50%
- 3. Policy and practice implications 5%
- 4. Organizational capacity and experience 30%
- 5. Budget and budget narrative 5%

Reviewers' decisions will be guided by the following: (1) extent to which the proposal demonstrates knowledge of the local context around probation revocation; (2) extent to which the proposal addresses the priority research questions; (3) data capacity and ability to measure key outcomes; (4) feasibility of the research plan, including the plan for obtaining data not readily available electronically; (5) capacity of the research team to carry out the relevant analyses; (6) level of buy-in from probation leadership and other stakeholders; and (7) demonstration of local commitment to making policy and practice changes on the basis of the findings.

Appendix A: Budget Template

Personnel					
Name	Salary	FTE	Actual cost	Total	
Person 1					
Person 2					
Person					
Fringe benefits cost					
Subtotal personnel					
Other Direct Costs					
Item	Purpose and Cost Assumptions	Cost per item	Quantity	Total	
Item 1					
Item 2					
Item					
Subtotal other direct costs					
	Subtotal personnel and other dire	ect costs			
Subtotal					
Indirect costs	Percentage			Total	
Subcontractors and consultants					
Name	Role and Cost Assumptions	Rate		Total	
Subcontractor 1					
Subcontractor					
Subtotal subcontractors/consultants					
Total Costs					
Total					

Appendix B: References

- ⁱ Bureau of Justice Statistics (2018). *Key statistics, table: Estimated number of persons under correctional supervision in the United States, 1980-2016.* Retrieved from https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?ty=kfdetail&iid=487.
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