

THE ADMINISTRATOR

NEW TRAINING INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS WORKPLACE INCIVILITY

NCCCMA initiative designed for local government front lines.

Local government professionals across North Carolina increasingly face difficult and, at times, uncivil interactions in the course of public service. Recognizing the growing impact of these encounters on employee well-being, retention, and organizational effectiveness, the North Carolina City and County Management Association (NCCCMA) has approved a new partnership initiative with the UNC School of Government to develop a statewide training program focused on workplace incivility and citizen interactions.

Approved by the NCCCMA Executive Committee, the initiative will support development of a four-module, on-demand training program designed for frontline local government employees and supervisors. The effort builds on research from the Local Government Workplaces Initiative and reflects increasing recognition that difficult interactions with community members have become a common challenge for public servants across jurisdictions of every size. Research shared with the Committee highlighted the effects of repeated incivility on workforce morale, recruitment and retention, and the quality of public service delivery.

Once completed, the online training will consist of four modules supported by facilitator guides and participant materials, enabling local governments to conduct internal discussions and tailor implementation to their organizational needs. Planned content areas include understanding the role of local government employees within the public service mission, de-escalating difficult interactions, emotional labor,

resilience, and self-care strategies. The curriculum is being informed by research in psychology, emotional labor, and de-escalation, as well as direct feedback from municipal employees in North Carolina communities.

Committee members emphasized the importance of creating a scalable and accessible resource capable of serving organizations across the state, particularly given the practical limitations of in-person training delivery. The online format will also allow local governments flexibility in how they use the material, whether with management teams, frontline staff, or organization-wide professional development efforts.

The program will be made available to local governments through an organization-wide access model, allowing participating jurisdictions to use the materials internally without per-employee costs. Committee members also discussed the importance of ensuring strong recognition of both NCCCMA and supporting partners within the training materials as the initiative moves forward. Initial cost estimates for the class are \$200 for NCCCMA members, and \$500 for non-NCCCMA members.

By prioritizing this effort, NCCCMA is taking a proactive step toward supporting the local government workforce and equipping public servants with practical tools to navigate challenging interactions while strengthening organizational resilience. As development progresses, the Association anticipates sharing updates and future opportunities for members to preview and implement the training.

NC COMMUNITIES GRAPPLE WITH DATA CENTER BOOM

Local governments faced with how to confront difficult conversations.

As artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and digital services continue to expand, communities across North Carolina are increasingly being asked to consider proposals for large-scale data centers—facilities that power everything from streaming services to online banking and emerging AI technologies. While these projects often promise major capital investment and expanded tax bases, local governments across the state are also confronting difficult questions about infrastructure capacity, land use, utility demand, and long-term community impacts.

A recent [article](#) from the National League of Cities (NLC) highlights the growing importance of helping local governments better understand the opportunities and challenges associated with data center development. NLC notes that data centers often require substantial electricity, water resources for cooling, transportation access, and carefully structured zoning considerations. Communities are increasingly weighing those demands alongside questions related to noise, visual impacts, emergency services, and compatibility with surrounding land uses.

For North Carolina communities, these concerns are no longer theoretical. Several jurisdictions have recently adopted or considered temporary moratoriums on data center construction to provide time for planning and policy development. Communities including Canton, Chatham County, Durham, Wendell, and Apex have either enacted or debated temporary pauses while evaluating zoning regulations, infrastructure readiness, and community concerns related to water and energy consumption, land use compatibility, and neighborhood impacts. Local officials have emphasized that moratoriums are intended not as opposition to economic development, but as an opportunity to establish thoughtful guardrails before projects move forward.

At the same time, policymakers in Raleigh are increasingly reexamining the state's long-standing incentives for attracting data center investment. North Carolina currently provides significant sales and use tax exemptions for qualifying data center developments, including exemptions related to construction materials, equipment, and electricity. However, bipartisan discussions have emerged in the General Assembly around whether portions of those incentives should be modified or rolled back as the scale of projects and associated infrastructure demands continue to grow. Proposed legislation has also focused on issues such as utility cost transparency, energy demand, and consumer protections related to large-scale facilities.

The discussion reflects a broader challenge facing local government leaders: balancing economic opportunity with responsible long-term planning. Data centers may offer meaningful tax base growth and private investment, but they also require careful evaluation of electric grid capacity, water resources, land use compatibility, and public expectations. As the pace of development accelerates, many North Carolina communities are finding that success depends not only on attracting investment, but also on ensuring communities are prepared to manage its impacts thoughtfully and transparently.

Sources

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-Prepared by Nathan Lozinsky, NCCCMA Director of Ops/ Admin, with assistance of AI-supported research and drafting tools.

MILLONZI HONORED FOR RECOVERY WORK

Work recognized for partnering for disaster recovery work in WNC.

Kara Millonzi of the UNC School of

Government in April received the Office of the Provost's Engaged Scholarship Award at the 2026 UNC Public Service Awards, presented by UNC Provost Magnus Egerstedt and hosted by the Carolina Center for Public Service (CCPS).

The School of Government nominated Millonzi, the Robert W. Bradshaw Jr. Distinguished Professor of Public Law and Government, for her work convening a broad coalition of partners in disaster recovery after Hurricane Helene struck western North Carolina in September 2024.

“We credit Kara with the vision, energy, and get-it-done attitude needed to stand up resources quickly, effectively, and include everyone’s perspective in the work,” wrote Sonja

Matanovic, associate dean for strategic communications and partnerships at the School of Government, in nominating Millonzi for the honor.

In accepting the award, Millonzi shared how she became drawn into Helene recovery efforts from the very first days. She organized weekly office hours for local government officials in the months following Helene’s landfall. In calls, she and her colleagues facilitated discussions via Zoom with finance officers about how to respond to the tragedy, helping jurisdictions meet funding deadlines.

“[Local government officials] turned to the School of Government because they know that’s what we do. We help local governments navigate the legal and practical issues they face every day and in crisis moments,” she said. “But we don’t do that alone. We support the work of our partners all across the state.”

Millonzi helped convene the Local Government Helene Recovery Partnership, made up of the following partners: UNC School of Government,



Governor’s Recovery Office for Western North Carolina, the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners, the North Carolina League of Municipalities, Western Carolina University, Lead for North Carolina, and High Country, Western Piedmont, Foothills Regional Commission, Southwestern Commission, Land-of-Sky, and Centralina Councils of Government.

These partners worked to launch the NC Local Government Disaster Recovery Portal, a one-stop, centralized website to help local governments impacted by Hurricane Helene access disaster-recovery funding, training, and practical guidance.

“It’s my honor to accept this, not on behalf of myself, but on behalf of my colleagues at the School and all of the partners who continue to work to help western North Carolina recovery.”

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: PAIGE DOWLING

Our “Member Spotlight” offers a glimpse into the personalities and lives of you – the N.C. City & County Management Association member. Our “Member Spotlight” this month features **Paige Dowling**, Sylva Town Manager.



Birthplace? **Sylva.**

Any siblings? **My brother, Hunter, is six years younger than me. Growing up, he was my built-in best friend. We are very close. Hunter learned to swim when I threw him in the pool. He learned to ride his bike when I took his training wheels off. I loved dictating these milestones for him.**

Favorite food? **Pizza is my death row meal.**

Favorite vacation spot? **Pawley’s Island, S.C.**

Favorite hobby? **Walking, reading a good book, genealogy, and enjoying a craft IPA.**

Childhood dream job? **First, I wanted to be the weatherman so I could pick the weather. Later, I wanted to be an attorney.**

Favorite Movie? **“Fried Green Tomatoes.”**

First local government job? **I interned at the N.C. General Assembly and then in the Jackson County Planning Department.**

Western or Eastern BBQ? **Eastern and mixed with a ton of ketchup.**

Mountains, beach or Piedmont? **Mountains! I do love Piedmont sunsets though.**

Favorite Idol/Role Model? **My combined role model and government hero was Representative Phil Haire. Phil taught me the true impact public service has on everyday lives and the importance of giving back. I worked in his legislative office from 2008-2010. The Haire Institute for Public Policy at WCU is named for Phil and Connie Haire. Phil Haire was a town attorney for 28 years so he also counts as my local government hero.**



Describe your town in 10 words or less. **Stunning mountain town with vibrant downtown, recreation, and Appalachian charm.**

What is one thing most people KNOW about you or would say about you? **I love this profession because you have the opportunity to make a positive impact for someone every single day.**

What is one thing most people would be surprised to learn about you? **I was hired as a town manager when I was 24 years old.**

ICMA CREDENTIALIAED MANAGER SUMMIT COMING TO DURHAM

Officials from across the country planning to attend.

Local government professionals from across the country will gather in North Carolina this summer as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) brings its Credentialed Manager Summit to Durham on August 6. The one-day event is designed specifically for ICMA Credentialed Managers and will focus on leadership development, lifelong learning, and strengthening professional networks among local government executives.

Hosted at the PNC Triangle Club at the Durham Bulls Athletic Park, the summit will provide participants with an opportunity to engage in peer learning and discussions centered on the evolving practice of professional local government management. The program will include updates from ICMA's Credentialing Advisory Board, conversations on professional growth and continuous learning, and facilitated discussions on the enduring relevance of the Cookingham Guideposts, which continue to shape ethical and effective local government leadership.

The afternoon agenda will also focus on emotional and psychological well-being—an increasingly important topic for local government professionals navigating complex workplace and

community challenges. Credentialed Managers who attend may earn five hours of professional development credit toward their annual credentialing commitment.

As one of only two summit locations nationwide in 2026, Durham provides a convenient opportunity for North Carolina local government leaders to connect with peers, exchange ideas, and invest in their continued professional development without traveling far from home. Registration is limited to maintain an interactive learning environment.

Sources

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MEMBER MILESTONES

Welcome to a new section in *The Administrator* where we will highlight career milestones of N.C. City & County Management Association (NCCCMA) members. These milestones may include job changes, retirement announcements, educational/professional achievements, civic achievements and more. If you have a milestone to share, please send them to Rob Shepherd, NCCCMA Executive Director — shepherd@sog.unc.edu.

Congratulations to **David Ellis**, Wake County Manager, who has been selected as the ICMA Vice President for the Southern Region! Ellis will be installed at the ICMA Annual Conference later this year in Long Beach, Calif. In addition, Ellis was appointed by the ICMA Board of Directors to the ICMA MissionSquare Board of Directors.



New Life Members

Congratulations are also in order for Hickory Assistant Manager **Rick Beasley** and Kannapolis City Manager **Mike Legg** on being named as the newest NCCCMA Life Members.

MPA Graduates

Please give a round of applause to Waynesville HR Director **Page McCurry** and Gaston County Financial & Management Services Director **Scott Attaway** who both recently earned Master's in Public Administration degrees.

Here are other recent Member Milestones from across North Carolina local governments:

New appointments:

- Christina Amos resigned as Manager of the Village of Marvin (effective June 6), and accepted a position with Wingate as Town Manager (effective June 15).
- LaShaun Carter appointed Assistant County Manager of Charlotte, effective May, '26.
- Tim Corley appointed County Manager of Beaufort, effective June, '26.
- Bryan Miller appointed Assistant County Manager of Stokes County effective March, '26.
- Jonathan Allen appointed Manager of Spring Hope effective March 17, 2026.
- Sam Cullen appointed Manager of Maggie Valley effective March 17, 2026.

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The Administrator is a monthly newsletter of the N.C. City & County Management Association, a professional association of city and county managers and assistant managers from counties and municipalities throughout the state of North Carolina.

For comments or suggestions, please contact the editor, Matt Lail at 919-819-3979, or email collards12@yahoo.com.

UPCOMING EVENTS

2026 NCCCMA Summer Seminar

June 25-27, 2026
Asheville

2027 NCCCMA Summer Seminar

June 17-19, 2027
New Bern/Craven County

2028 Joint Summer Seminar

June 22-24, 2028
Hilton Head, SC*

**Joint Conference with SC City & County Management Association*

MEMBERS IN TRANSITION

If you are looking to keep up with your colleagues in the profession, be sure to check out the Members in Transition page:

www.ncmanagers.org/page/ManagerInTransitionReports

- Alice Derian announced as Manager of Blowing Rock effective June 3, 2026.
- Jarred Goff appointed Administrator of Vass effective April 9, 2026.
- Ruffin Hall announced as Deputy Manager of Wake County effective May 11, 2026.
- Rebecca Hefner appointed Deputy City Manager of Charlotte, effective April, 2026.
- Eddie Madden announced as Manager of Elizabethtown effective date TBD.
- Kerri Melton appointed Assistant City Manager of Shelby, effective May, 2026.
- Steve Miller appointed Assistant Manager of Hickory effective March 16, 2026.
- Octavius Murphy announced as Manager of Mount Olive effective April 20, 2026.
- Jonathan Rorie appointed Manager of Washington effective April 13, 2026.
- Jessica Trotman announced as Manager of Columbus effective April 1, 2026.
- Leighanna Worley appointed Town Manager of Wilson Mills effective April '26.

Retirement Announcements:

- Brian Alligood announced his plans to retire as Beaufort County Manager, effective June 30, 2026.
- Gordon Hargrove has announced his retirement as Boiling Spring Lakes Manager later this year.
- Wayne Herron has announced his retirement as Cornelius Deputy Manager, effective date TBD.
- Jamie Justice announced his retirement as Davidson Manager effective June 30, 2026.
- Jason Martin announced his retirement as Davidson County Assistant Manager, effective April 30, 2026.
- Rob Hites announced his retirement as Waynesville Manager, effective July 1, 2026

Resignations:

- Matt Blackwell resigned as Assistant City Manager for Kings Mountain, effective April 24, 2026.
- Chris Costner resigned as Assistant City Manager for Kings Mountain, effective May 1, 2026.

New ICMA Credentialed Managers:

- Troy Lewis, Tarboro



**NORTH CAROLINA
CITY & COUNTY
MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION**

MENTORING & COACHING PROGRAMS

Are you a new manager and looking for advise?

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The NCCCMA Mentoring & Coaching Programs connect experienced County and City Managers with individuals who would like to advance their careers.

- > **Coaching is for quick questions**
- > **Mentoring is for longer term support**

Sign up today at:

mentoring.ncmanagers.org



MEET AN EMERGING MANAGER

Spotlight on Alston Brown.

This month's "Emerging Manager Spotlight" highlights Alston Brown, Finance Director in Walnut Cove.

Birthplace: Lenoir.

Current job and location: Finance Director in Walnut Cove.

Favorite hobby? I enjoy spending time outdoors whenever I can. Hiking is one of my favorite ways to recharge, it gives me a chance to appreciate all of the natural beauty we have here in North Carolina. More recently, I have taken up golf, which has been both a fun challenge and a lesson in patience and continuous improvement.

What is your go-to book recommendation and why? I have been on a bit of a sci-fi kick lately and really enjoyed Project Hail Mary and The Martian by Andy Weir. But if I had to recommend one book, it would probably be Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver. It is one of those books that sticks with you. As someone who cares deeply about serving rural communities, a lot of the themes around hardship and resilience really hit close to home. It is a good reminder that people's circumstances are often a lot more complicated than they may appear at first glance. Give it a read, I do not think you will be disappointed.



Why did you join the Association? I joined NCCCMA because local government can be challenging work, as anyone reading this, I am sure will agree with. I think having a strong network of peers who understand those challenges is incredibly valuable. As someone early in my career, I have really appreciated the opportunity to learn from experienced managers, and hear how others are approaching similar issues. It is rare that a situation you are dealing with is completely unique to your local government. Building relationships with people who are committed to public service is important, and I am grateful to the Association for helping me do so.

What does public service leadership mean to you? To me, public leadership means being a good steward of the trust people place in their local government. My path into this work has included earning my MPA at Appalachian State, internships in Troy and Wilkesboro, communications work in Rural Hall, and now serving in finance here in Walnut Cove. Those experiences have given me different perspectives, but they have all reinforced how closely local government is connected to the everyday lives of the people we serve. I think that matters now more than ever. So much of how people view public service gets filtered through the noise and division they see in national politics, but local government is different because the work is tangible. It affects the services people rely on each and every day.

What do you think is the most pressing issue the next generation of managers will have to face? I think one of the biggest challenges will be sustaining institutional trust and capacity at a time when expectations are growing and resources often are not. AI will absolutely be part of that conversation, and local governments will need to figure out how to use new tools responsibly and effectively, but technology is only one piece of it.

Communities are expecting more from local government than ever, whether that is faster communication, better service delivery, infrastructure investment, or thoughtful growth, all while many organizations are dealing with workforce turnover, budget constraints, and increasing reporting complexities. The challenge for the next generation of managers is going to be meeting those expectations without losing the trust that makes effective local government possible in the first place.

SUMMER SEMINAR TO HIGHLIGHT HELENE – 'AND EVERYTHING AFTER'

Opening general session to celebrate the amazing recovery of Western N.C.

There's no question that the damage and destruction caused by Hurricane Helene almost two years ago left scars across western North Carolina. But even less in question is how formidable was the response from local, state, and federal officials to the horrific storm.

The opening general session to this year's NCCCMA Summer Seminar will give attendees the chance to pause, reflect, and celebrate the recovery. A stout panel of experts – N.C. Governor Josh Stein has been invited to attend – will introduce the state of Helene recovery through the voices of local government managers who have lived, and continue to live, through the stages of disbelief, response, worry, heartbreak, anger, celebration, and beyond.

This year's NCCCMA Summer Seminar will be held, appropriately, in Asheville June 25-27th at the Renaissance Hotel. Hotel room blocks are now open, as is conference registration.

In addition to the phenomenal opening general session, the Summer Seminar will include a number of pre-conference activities to stir your mind and your soul:

- Guided fly-fishing tour
- Guided Biltmore Estate bike ride
- LaZoom Explore the City Bus Tour
- Guided Hike of Craggy Pinnacle Trail
- Pre-Conference Golf Tournament to benefit the NCCCMA Civic Education Program

In addition, you won't want to miss the Pre-Conference Workshop on Artificial Intelligence

and Local Government Innovation. This hands-on training session will help local government managers and administrators to begin implementing new technologies into administrative tasks. The presenters will focus on applications of Artificial Intelligence in state and local government with a particular focus on identifying use cases and areas for technological assistance, connecting data and tasks across entities within and across governments for efficiency, and building organizational readiness for innovation. The structure will emphasize hands on training, peer learning, and interaction amongst the presenters and participants.



As always, a number of concurrent sessions will allow you to learn from your peers to become the most effective local government manager you can be. Sessions will touch on: organizational culture, transparency and the public's trust, civic pride and engagement for America 250 and beyond, and data centers

and local communities.

And finally, as mentioned in last month's *The Administrator*, the closing general session will feature remarks on "A Heart To Serve," provided by UNC Asheville Associate Head Men's Basketball Coach Woody Taylor. The coach will take a deep dive into how we can grow and learn to improve our leadership styles. Most important, Taylor will explain how serving can be the difference in how efficient leaders impact those around them.

Register today for the 2026 NCCCMA Summer Seminar:

<https://www.sog.unc.edu/courses/nc-city-and-county-management-association-summer-seminar> .

ETHICS MATTER

Why political neutrality still matters in local government.

In a time of heightened political polarization, few professional expectations are more important—or more difficult—than maintaining political neutrality in local government leadership. For North Carolina’s professional managers, assistant managers, and administrators, neutrality is not the absence of values or leadership. Rather, it is a commitment to ethical professionalism that strengthens trust in the institutions we serve.

Political neutrality has long been a cornerstone of the council-manager form of government and a defining expectation of professional local government management. ICMA’s Code of Ethics reinforces this principle through Tenet 7, which calls upon members to refrain from political activities that undermine public confidence in professional administrators. While the language is straightforward, living out this responsibility in today’s environment is far more nuanced.

Local government leaders increasingly operate in an era where community debates—whether related to growth, public safety, housing, infrastructure, education, or social issues—are often viewed through partisan lenses. Issues once seen primarily as operational or policy-driven can quickly become politically charged. For managers and administrators, the challenge is not avoiding difficult issues; it is engaging them professionally while preserving trust across governing boards, staff, and the public.

Political neutrality does not mean disengagement. Professional administrators still have a critical responsibility to advise elected officials, present policy options, and implement board-adopted priorities. Neutrality instead requires a disciplined commitment to fairness, objectivity, and evidence-based recommendations. The role of the professional manager is to provide sound analysis, operational expertise, and implementation capacity—not political advocacy. This distinction becomes especially important when governing bodies hold differing viewpoints or when communities are deeply divided on an issue.

For many professionals, one of the greatest indicators of success is simple: residents, elected officials, and staff should not know—or feel compelled to wonder—how their manager votes. When professional credibility is grounded in competence, transparency, and consistency, managers are better positioned to serve effectively regardless of election outcomes or changes in governing leadership. Political neutrality allows professional staff to remain trusted advisors through transitions, preserving continuity and organizational stability.

At the same time, neutrality should not be mistaken for silence or indifference. Professional local government managers care deeply about communities and often bring strong personal convictions to public service. The ethical challenge lies in balancing those convictions with the obligation to maintain public confidence and avoid actions that could be perceived as partisan. In practice, this means exercising judgment, restraint, and awareness of how actions—particularly in public forums and on social media—may be interpreted.

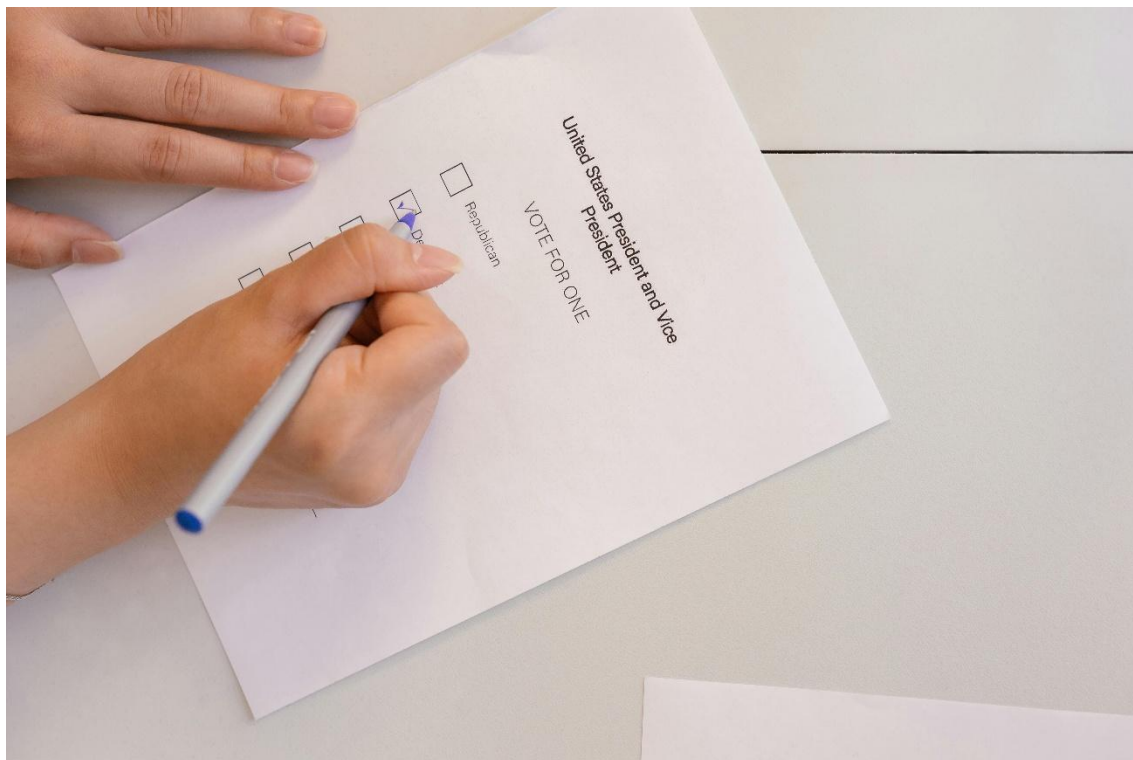
For North Carolina’s local government profession, political neutrality remains one of the strongest safeguards of public trust. It protects the integrity of the manager’s role, strengthens relationships with elected officials across perspectives, and ensures communities receive professional administration rooted in

facts, sound judgment, and service. In an increasingly polarized environment, being professionally grounded may matter now more than ever.

Sources

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