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Karen Glenn
Brigham Young University, karen_glenn@byu.edu

John Murphy
Brigham Young University - Utah, john_m_murphy@byu.edu

Cory L. Nimer
Brigham Young University - Utah, cory_nimer@byu.edu

Dainan M. Skeem
Brigham Young University - Provo, dainan_skeem@byu.edu

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Stewardship and Sustainability: Applying the TCOS Framework to Reappraisal

Karen Glenn

John Murphy

Cory L. Nimer

Dainan M. Skeem

ABSTRACT

This article reports on a Brigham Young University Library Special Collections reappraisal pilot project based upon OCLC's Total Cost of Stewardship (TCOS) framework. The case study considers how reappraisal activities align with TCOS principles, and its use in reviewing faculty papers. The pilot measured reappraisal and reprocessing costs for a small sample of papers of university administrators, and identified all other collections of faculty, staff, and administrators for reappraisal in both university archives records and manuscripts collections. Findings identified through the pilot will inform a larger reappraisal project in Special Collections to refine appraisal and processing work and reclaim repository space.

Introduction

Over the past decade, available collections storage space in the Brigham Young University Library's Special Collections has become increasingly limited as our facility has reached its planned capacity. This space crunch has come at a time of administrative change within the Library, including new leadership and a reorganization that divided Special Collections into separate units centered around acquisitions, processing, and collection management functions. These changes have required improved internal communication, consultation, and negotiation across the BYU Library. Before opening a discussion about additional space, however, library administration requested that all existing processing backlogs be addressed. In the meantime, the department has also been encouraged to consider reappraisal and potential deaccessioning to recover storage space in our facilities.

Our current planning work has focused on the connections between reappraisal and program sustainability.¹ This has resulted in a revision of internal policies, procedures, and workflows for reappraisal based primarily on OCLC's Total Cost of Stewardship (TCOS) framework. This case study considers how reappraisal activities align with TCOS principles, and its use in reviewing faculty papers in our manuscript holdings. Since this is a work in progress, there will be questions this paper will be unable to answer at this time, though we will continue reporting on additional findings in the future.

Background

Brigham Young University's University Archives was established in 1956 with the goal of preserving the papers of University presidents and faculty. Special Collections was established in 1957 to manage the archival materials along with the Library's growing collection of manuscripts and rare books. By 1960, staff were visiting remote locations around the state, gathering manuscript materials that documented mining and the economy.² Over the ensuing decades, that focus broadened to include the history of the American West and Mormonism across the globe. Storage capacity has grown to encompass 100,000 linear feet of archival and book shelving. There are now 11 faculty librarians and 4 support staff who are responsible for the acquisition and management of the materials, as well as providing access to them through our public reading room. Patrons use ArchivesSpace to view finding aids and request materials through Aeon. The majority of our materials can only be accessed physically in our reading room, though long-term efforts to digitize and make materials available online have been facilitated with CONTENTdm.

Special Collections is part of the Research & Learning Division within the BYU Library and reports to the Associate University Librarian for Research & Learning. With the reorganization of the Library in 2020, some of the traditional functions found in Special Collections were placed in different divisions that are managed by other Associate University Librarians. The department now works closely and collaboratively with the Archival Processing Section of the Cataloging & Metadata Department to arrange and describe archival collections. They also work in coordination with the Collection Management unit of the Collections Care Department for the proper storage and tracking of materials, and the Digital Initiatives Department for the digitization of books and manuscript materials. To assist in communication and project management needs, Basecamp has been adopted and is used by each unit.

1. In this article, we define sustainability as the balance of long-term collection development needs and goals with institutional resource allocations, including personnel, space, supplies, and budgetary limitations. We are not addressing issues related to environmental sustainability.
2. J. Gordon Daines III, "The Inception of Brigham Young University's Archival Program, 1956-1962," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (2015): 137-140.

In 2000, BYU Library built additional storage space to accommodate our expanding collecting scope in both general and special collections. It was designed to provide 20 years' worth of growth space. As we moved into our new space, projects were launched to deal with backlogs of collection materials. Funding was obtained and students were hired to assist a full-time curator in documenting the full extent of our backlogs and establish workflows that created MARC records, EAD registers, and finding aids for over 1,150 collections.

Prior to 2015, each curator was responsible for the acquisition, arrangement, and description of materials brought in under their collection development policy. In an effort to standardize the arrangement and description of archival and manuscript materials, the Central Processing Unit was established. When the reorganization of the library occurred in 2020, this unit was moved to the Cataloging & Metadata Department and renamed the Archival Processing Section.

As the new space continued to be filled with new acquisitions and the Cataloging & Metadata Department approached 2020 with limited space left, it was assumed additional space would be built or redesigned to accommodate continued growth for the department. For many years, department professionals believed that digital books and born-digital manuscripts would alleviate the need to build additional storage spaces and that the books on library shelves would shrink dramatically, providing more space for unique materials. Since this digital renaissance has yet to fully occur, we have found ourselves in a difficult situation. Campus administration cannot build additional space and library administration is balancing the needs of departments across the BYU Library. Although herculean efforts have been made to reduce our backlogs, further work needs to be done to ensure collections are fully processed and accessible to patrons and that recent acquisitions are accounted for and put into the queue for processing. To assist with this work, in 2022, a curator position was repurposed as an Accessioning Archivist to coordinate work between the Cataloging & Metadata Department, Archival Processing Section, and Collection Management.

As we have moved several years beyond the planned capacity of our storage facility, we continue to identify ways to address space constraints. As part of these efforts, we continue to redirect personnel responsibilities away from traditional curatorial roles and responsibilities and towards efforts to better manage legacy and incoming collections, including reappraisal. This work-in-progress report focuses on our attempt to reappraise the faculty papers of administrators at BYU for potential transfer to University Archives or deaccession. Although transferring materials to University Archives does not address our space constraints since it is part of Special Collections, it does ensure that the materials are managed under the mandates and policies of the University Archives. We are using the Total Cost of Stewardship (TCOS) model to help us establish a sustainable process to complete this task.

Existing Models

The TCOS Framework released by OCLC in 2021 uses a capacity constraint model to encourage institutions to consider “all the costs associated with building, maintaining, and caring for collections.”³ The report prominently features iceberg imagery as a metaphor for the hidden costs of acquisitions, which include processing, preservation, digitization, and storage costs. The OCLC project also provided a range of tools for calculating these costs and for documenting internal decision-making processes, such as cost calculators and templates for collection policies, operational impact reports, processing plans, and digitization proposals. With its focus on acquisitions, the TCOS Framework and related tools encourage archivists to be aware of the less visible downstream effects of new collections. As described in the TCOS report itself, the framework is intended to allow “confident assessment of opportunities, giving an institution knowledge that it can live up to these stewardship commitments.”⁴

Since its release in 2021, TCOS has helped frame conversations about sustainability within the archives community. Conference sessions at the Society of American Archivists annual conference and other settings during the past two years have pointed to the need to consider resource limitations when making acquisition and collection management decisions.⁵ More recently, Ryan Zohar noted the value of TCOS in guiding decision-making about archival description at the Middle East Institute.⁶

While the TCOS model focuses primarily on acquisitions, by viewing a repository as a closed system, it suggests how repository space limitations also impact an institution’s collections. In the museum sector, there is a growing literature on sustainability as practitioners and institutions recognize the resource limitations facing cultural heritage institutions. As noted by Jennie Morgan and Sharon Macdonald, “never-ending growth—and fully comprehensive collecting—are simply

3. Chela Scott Weber et al., “Total Cost of Stewardship: Responsible Collection Building in Archives and Special Collections,” (OCLC, 2021), 5, <https://www.oclc.org/content/dam/research/publications/2021/oclcresearch-total-cost-of-stewardship.pdf>.
4. Weber et al., 14.
5. Some of these sessions have included “Making the Invisible Visible: The Operational Impacts of Collection Building,” American Library Association, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section, 2021; “Defining Archival Debt: Building New Futures for Archives,” Society of American Archivists, 2022 (see: Jillian Cuellar, “Defining Archival Debt: Building New Futures for Archives,” *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies* 10 (2023)); “Are We Ready to Talk About It? Strategies for Managing Archival Backlogs,” Society of American Archivists, 2023.
6. Ryan Zohar, “Beyond the Frame: Toward a Collection-Level Redescription of the Colbert Held Archive,” *The American Archivist* 86, no. 2 (2023): 410.

not possible.”⁷ Nick Merriman has described uncontrolled acquisitions in the face of limited space and funding “no longer justifiable on intellectual grounds, on resource grounds or on moral grounds in terms of inter-generational equity.”⁸ In this view, it has been argued that deaccessioning materials to support new acquisitions is an ethical imperative necessary to support the ongoing functioning of cultural heritage institutions.⁹

For archivists, deaccessioning has also increasingly been seen as an accepted collection management practice. While Karen Benedict in her 1984 article “Invitation to a Bonfire” vigorously rejected the use of deaccessioning to address space issues, more recent authors such as Courtney Buehn have concluded that it is a reasonable approach to create space for new collections.^{10,11} In a 2017 survey, Marcella Huggard and Laura Uglean Jackson reported that 79 percent of respondents from academic institutions reappraise or deaccession collections, with a primary benefit of providing more collection storage.¹² In approaching reappraisal ourselves, we closely reviewed the SAA Guidelines on Reappraisal and Deaccessioning (GRD) as we considered the role of reappraisal in addressing space issues.¹³ The standard recognizes the role of reappraisal and deaccessioning in collection management, but similar to the TCOS Framework, it also notes the costs that come with reappraisal, stating that “it’s important to calculate the costs and benefits before implementing such a project.”¹⁴

7. Jennie Morgan and Sharon Macdonald, “De-growing Museum Collections for New Heritage Futures,” *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 26, no. 1 (2020), 60.
8. Nick Merriman, “Museum Collections and Sustainability,” *Cultural Trends* 17, no. 1 (2008): 19.
9. Marilena Vecco and Michele Piazzai, “Deaccessioning of Museum Collections: What Do We Know and Where Do We Stand,” *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 16 (2015): 223.
10. Karen Benedict, “Invitation to a Bonfire: Reappraisal and Deaccessioning of Records as Collection Management Tools in an Archive—A Reply to Leonard Rapport,” *The American Archivist* 47, no. 1 (1984): 45-46. Benedict felt that deaccessioning in a space crisis was a strategic error as it was not efficient and might encourage administrators to remove collections with long-term value to address short-term concerns.
11. Courtney Buehn, “The Importance of Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Collegiate Archives in the Pacific Northwest,” *Journal of Western Archives* 4, no. 1 (2013): 16. See also Laura Uglean Jackson, “Introduction,” in *Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Archives and Special Collections* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), ix; Mary Ellen Ducey, “Access to Backlogs and Legacy Resources” (paper presentation, Society of American Archivists annual conference, Washington, DC, July 2023); Claudia Willett, “We Cannot Collect Our Way Out of a Backlog” (paper presentation, Society of American Archivists annual conference, Washington, DC, 2023).
12. Marcella Huggard and Laura Uglean Jackson, “Practices in Progress: The State of Reappraisal and Deaccessioning in Archives,” *The American Archivist* 82, no. 2 (2019): 515.
13. Society of American Archivists, “Guidelines on Reappraisal and Deaccessioning,” Society of American Archivists, May 2017, https://www2.archivists.org/sites/all/files/GuidelinesForReappraisalDeaccessioning_2017.pdf.
14. Society of American Archivists, “Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning,” Society of American Archivists, 2017: 8.

To support this work, the guidelines provide useful templates for documenting reappraisal decisions, and a checklist for working through such a project.

Methodology

With approximately 12,500 unique manuscript collections, it was decided that a pilot project should first be initiated to determine the scope of a future large-scale reappraisal project. Recognizing that the papers of faculty, staff, and administrators frequently contain records of the university, we decided that the pilot project should focus on the personal papers of former university administrators. Unfortunately, this necessitated a large survey of all manuscript finding aids since their titles alone mainly consisted of a person's first and last name followed by "papers." Reading a list of collection titles such as "John Doe papers" was unhelpful if the staff did not know if John Doe was a BYU employee. Thus, the biographical note of each finding aid containing dates falling within the years of the university's existence was scanned for information about the creator and their roles at the university. Other notes in the finding aid were then analyzed or an internet search was performed if the biographical note was unhelpful. This process required on average 45 seconds per record, resulting in about 110 hours of surveying time, carried out over several weeks by the Archival Processing Section Supervisor. The survey produced a list of 903 professional papers of staff, faculty, and administrators, comprising 7.2 percent of all Special Collections holdings (see Figure 1). Of these, 43 manuscript collections were identified as the personal papers of former university administrators, and the manuscript curators and university archivist then further narrowed the list to begin with the 10 smallest collections for full reappraisal as the finalized pilot project. On average, each pilot project collection measured approximately 3-5 linear feet.

There were multiple goals set for this pilot reappraisal project: 1) Identify university records within the personal papers of former BYU administrators for transfer to University Archives; 2) Identify non-permanent materials that could potentially be transferred to another institution, returned to the donor, or deaccessioned, freeing up valuable space in the repository; and 3) Track data on the process of reappraising these collections to better inform project planners on the resources needed to conduct a wider reappraisal project of the personal papers of university employees.

Before the process of reappraisal could begin, we reviewed the tools that would be of use. Reviewing the TCOS tool suite, we found that we had already implemented many of its recommended policy and communication documents, including collection development policies and proposal forms for acquisitions, processing, and digitization. Based on the project's cost estimator tool, we established procedures for tracking time spent on reappraisal and reprocessing tasks. We also consulted the Society of American Archivists' Guidelines for Reappraisal and Deaccessioning; the reappraisal form template found in the appendices was modified and used based on our institutional needs. We also created our own transfer form template to assist in documenting the decisions made after reappraising each collection.

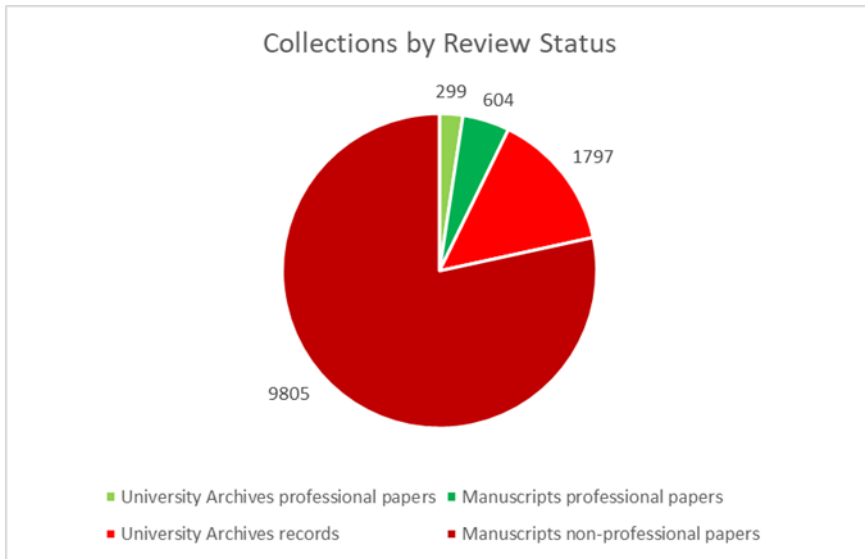


Figure 1. Composition of Special Collections holdings by review status, with collections needing review in green and the remainder in red.

Results

Diving into our selected 10 collections for this reappraisal project proved to be important for better understanding the resources needed to carry out a larger reappraisal project. Due to the need to have two curators and the university archivist present for each collection reappraised, a total of 35 person-hours was spent on this phase.¹⁵ Case files needed to be consulted, finding aids examined, the materials requested and pulled from storage and then physically examined, and forms completed for each individual collection. Based on our review, it was determined that seven of the collections would remain personal papers, with two of those needing further processing to make them more discoverable. The remaining three collections contained significant portions of university records and were, therefore, marked for transfer to the University Archives.

15. Responsibilities over manuscript collections are divided between two curators, one who manages 19th and 20th century manuscripts and the other manages 21st century manuscripts. The 21st century manuscript curator also has responsibilities for faculty papers since most faculty, whether recently retired or still working, would be considered 21st century donors. If, in reviewing a collection of papers from a retired faculty member from 1990, it is decided that the materials are of a professional nature, the 21st century manuscript curator would be responsible for making disposition decisions. On the other hand, if it is determined that the papers are personal in nature, it would be the responsibility of the 19th and 20th century manuscript curator to decide disposition. The third participant in this process is the University Archivist. As materials are examined, they are present to ensure that materials that are deemed records of the university are marked for transfer.

None of the collections were marked for wholesale deaccessioning, though specific elements and series were identified for removal. We were surprised at the number of materials within collections identified as part of a faculty or administrator's career at another university, before they were hired at BYU. Based on our current collection development policies, which limit acquisitions to BYU-related papers, these materials were marked for deaccession and will be offered back to the donor or the donor's family.¹⁶ Although retaining this material originally meant there was a more holistic view of the employee's entire career, possibly supporting a biography of their life, space has become such a premium that we feel we cannot justify retaining these materials.

Once the collections had been reviewed and decisions made about the disposition of the materials, forms were completed to help document those decisions and processing plans were completed to explain the changes needed. These plans guided our Archival Processing Section in carrying out reprocessing, including the changing of repository information, updating finding aids, physically rearranging materials, and assisting the appropriate curator in managing the complicated process of removing materials from our institution.

This reprocessing was performed as part of the pilot project in order to measure the incurred reprocessing costs for collection change requests. The average time for reprocessing, regardless of the size of the collection, was determined to be about 3.5 hours per linear foot, equally divided between student and staff tasks. The Archival Processing Section employs two full-time staff and three part-time staff, in addition to 6-8 students. One full-time staff member and two students in the Archival Processing Section were utilized during the pilot, which was a significant allocation of labor resources when weighed against the existing processing demands of the Section. Reappraisal decisions required various reprocessing tasks, including integration of transferred material (similar to new accessions), removal of existing materials, and revisiting legacy finding aids that triggered processing tasks which if left undone, could lead to a confusing, partially standardized finding aid once new material was integrated. Additional project duties: more granular tasks, including rehousing, relabeling, and consolidation; additional or updated description such as creator, title, extent, date changes; additional or editing of note fields that brought the finding aid into alignment with DACS; discovery of sensitive material that needed to be flagged and removed to storage with other restricted materials; and identification of additional materials for deaccessioning. Reprocessing due to reappraisal felt more complex than regular processing queues because multiple finding aids were simultaneously updated to account for changes. This complexity was magnified when a collection contained an elaborate hierarchy of series and subseries. For these reasons, future reprocessing within this workflow will always require that a portion of the required labor comes from trained staff archivists rather

16. While materials have been identified for potential return to donors, at this point, the work of returning these items has not yet begun.

than students. Otherwise, the Archival Processing Section Supervisor concluded that reprocessing costs are not significantly more than the costs of typical processing, but still require a diversion of resources from regular processing queues.

Findings

Overall, this pilot project determined that significant resources will be required to execute a broader reappraisal project. To review the 903 collections at this rate, even if we became more efficient at appraising, but accounting for various sizes of collections, would require a full-time employee 1.5 years to complete. Collaboration between archivists and curators in reappraisal and repository transfers is essential, as is formal collaboration between archivists, curators, and collection management staff, requiring further resources across library divisions and the adaptation of internal tracking tools. There is also a need to collaborate with University Records & Information Management to coordinate incoming materials and the return of weeded materials to their originating department.

Reappraisal causes a varying amount of reprocessing of all or parts of collections, as materials are being removed from, added to, or established as new collections. Further staff time is also required to label, barcode, and edit shelving locations. When collections were arranged in complex hierarchies, this work was magnified and it was difficult to balance each moving piece, both physically and intellectually within ArchivesSpace, leading us to conclude that large-scale reappraisal may require more staff time versus student labor. The Archival Processing Section also concluded that legacy collections that utilized required MPLP (More Product, Less Process) principles in their housing and structure of description may now have to be reprocessed at a deeper level of description and preservation, because the changes requested by reappraisal are often more granular than the current state of the collection allows. For instance, a collection that retained original folders that are missing dates or titles should now be labeled or replaced in order to identify whether the folder contains relevant faculty papers. Or those folders may be transferred to an existing finding aid that utilizes more description due to higher research interest, so titles and dates will need to be determined, written on the folder, and inputted to ArchivesSpace. This finding shifts how Special Collections will apply an MPLP strategy when requesting arrangement and description levels in a processing plan. In the future, MPLP principles will be weighed against the collection's potential risk of reappraisal, leading to multiple processing iterations, and be considered as an option, rather than as the default.

Despite some consolidation during reprocessing, and the identification of material to be deaccessioned, the pilot project did not produce a significant overall space gain. As some collections were reduced in size, others expanded as they were moved into more appropriate housing. However, this finding does not rule out the possibility that significant space gain could occur with larger-scale reappraisal.

Lastly, one of the unintended outcomes of the pilot's collaborative review process has been the development of new methodologies and techniques to facilitate more efficient collection appraisal. This would impact decisions about what to acquire or transfer, depth of materials review once they have arrived, and level of processing description at the outset of planning for processing incoming materials.

Future Steps

We began work on the Special Collections reappraisal pilot project nearly two years ago, and as already outlined, the immediate goals and objectives of the pilot project have been met. To move into the next stage of full reappraisal of all collections, we will need to expand on both the scope and breadth of the pilot project.

First, we need to engage with BYU Library administrators in discussions of our pilot project findings, future plans, and concerns. We hope and expect they will recognize both the short- and long-term benefits of the project and will in turn support the further development and expansion of our reappraisal efforts.

Second, we need to create a more defined and sustainable workflow process to support expanded reappraisal efforts. Up to this point in time, only a few curators and archivists have been involved in the reappraisal pilot project due to lack of time and competing priorities. One solution under consideration is the creation of a full-time or part-time "reappraisal archivist" position to supervise all reappraisal activity for manuscripts collections. To justify such a position, a full and accurate summary of expenses across library divisions, including staff time, anticipated duties, and a specific reappraisal workflow should be created.

Third, we should normalize and fully integrate reappraisal activity into our existing workflows. These efforts would include both the Manuscript Collections Coordinator, who is currently responsible for coordinating the flow of collections into and out of the processing queue, and the Archival Processing Section Supervisor, who is responsible for archival arrangement and description and coordination of records returns. In addition, we should establish more robust internal tracking mechanisms to update case files, collection registers and finding aids, and content management systems.

Conclusion

As stewards of limited resources within our existing library system, we have attempted, as part of our reappraisal project, to identify faculty papers collections and university archives materials that are both necessary and required to meet the university's institutional mandates and overall mission and objectives.

Given the relatively small size of the collections selected for inclusion in the reappraisal pilot project, the pilot project did not lead to any significant overall space

savings. While some of the collections included in the pilot project decreased in size, other collections expanded in size to accommodate larger and more appropriate manuscript and archival containers and housings.

Based upon our review of all faculty, staff, and administrative collections selected for eventual reappraisal, we are confident that significant space savings will result from a broader reappraisal project, particularly as we begin work on larger collections. For example, we identified many large (over 20 linear feet) mid to late 20th century collections that were never appraised, containing almost exclusively publications, newspapers, and photocopies of journal articles that will be removed and deaccessioned as part of the reappraisal project.

While many of the tools recommended in the Total Cost of Stewardship Framework had been adopted prior to the pilot project, the TCOS capacity constraint model was particularly helpful in informing our planning and decision making. Resource limitations necessarily constrain our choices as special collections archivists and curators, and in terms of work in Special Collections, future collection development efforts will now be more limited and focused, with more attention devoted to collection appraisal prior to acquisition of new manuscript and university archives collections.

As a profession, reappraisal will become increasingly necessary as we continue to fill our limited storage spaces, as well as create and maintain sustainable special collections libraries. In terms of our institutional requirements, our immediate goal is to reach equilibrium through the application of reappraisal guidelines for existing collections. Towards meeting our more intermediate as well as long-term objectives, we anticipate that as we move forward with the reappraisal project, we will be in a better position to not only manage our limited resources, but also plan for future institutional growth needs and requirements.

To partially address space challenges, Special Collections manuscript curators have devoted significant time over the course of the last two years to the revision of collection development policies. As a result of this work, particularly within the context of our reappraisal project and the TCOS model, curators have collaboratively revised their collection policies to align more closely with BYU library and university goals, mission statements, and strategic objectives.

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