



**OUR STRATEGIC
PLAN *to***

END *the* WAIT™





A LETTER FROM ELLIE HOLLANDER, PRESIDENT AND CEO

In 2024, Meals on Wheels America celebrated our 50th anniversary. It provided a moment to honor our past and look with excitement to our future. For five decades, Meals on Wheels America has leveraged its national programming, partnerships and influence to enhance the capacities of community-based Meals on Wheels organizations, expanding nutrition and social connection services for individuals in greatest need, driving positive change across policies and practices, and mobilizing resources to build resiliency and sustainability.

And we've seen our efforts work. Nationwide, we've warded off threats to federal funding, raised millions of dollars to deliver meals and friendly visits to older adults, and created a rich and growing research base that proves the health and economic benefits of Meals on Wheels. We've leveraged national partnerships to drive awareness and engage celebrities and policymakers to champion older adults' health and well-being and have been a tireless voice for local organizations in a way that has truly lifted all boats.

Despite our relentless efforts, local Meals on Wheels providers are struggling to address the sheer volume of need. Federal funding has not kept pace with either the growing senior population or rising costs. And particularly since the pandemic, funding from state, local and private sources has failed to keep up with demand, forcing organizations to stretch their resources further and serve fewer older adults.

Our seniors can't wait any longer. Now is the time to make their needs a top priority in our country. Local Meals on Wheels organizations serve nearly every single community across the country, and they're eager to do even more, but they desperately need more resources to do so.

That's why, in honor of our 50th anniversary, **Meals on Wheels America launched a bold strategy** that will allow the Meals on Wheels network to collectively expand its reach and improve more seniors' lives. We will continue to be an innovator, thought leader and knowledge generator. We will build alliances and work intensively with government, coalitions, partners and researchers to identify policies and interventions that positively impact our network and the seniors it serves. We will pursue high-impact partnerships and work to build a movement of champions who make seniors their top cause and Meals on Wheels their top charity.

Older adults have contributed so much to our lives, and they deserve a reciprocal level of support, respect and dignity. Our new direction will center the needs of our network, allowing seniors who are stuck in limbo to access lifesaving services from their community-based Meals on Wheels organizations.

Together, we can create a more secure, healthier future for us all. **Together**, we can serve more and serve better. **Together, we can End the Wait.**

Gratefully,



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellie Hollander".

Ellie Hollander
President and CEO
Meals on Wheels America

WE FACE EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES, BUT THERE ARE IMMENSE OPPORTUNITIES

In our fast-moving world of economic uncertainty, political turmoil, increased disasters and so much more, urgent issues confront us on many levels. And yet, there is a silent humanitarian crisis affecting so many people in our community. It deserves attention but, instead, is mounting behind closed doors.

For far too long, the pressing needs of seniors have been underfunded and ignored, leaving millions waiting for nutritious meals and moments of connection — waiting for America to care. Meals on Wheels has been the most effective solution to senior hunger and isolation for more than 50 years; nevertheless, we're waiting too. Waiting for more government funding, donations and volunteers.

The enormity of these challenges makes it easy to see a world of unsolvable problems. But Meals on Wheels America sees countless opportunities to transform how our organization, network and country work together to champion senior health and well-being and to eliminate waitlists and ensure every senior who needs Meals on Wheels gets it.



SENIORS ARE WAITING FOR AMERICA TO CARE

- Nearly 13 million seniors face food insecurity.¹
- 56% of seniors feel lonely.²
- 1 in 3 Meals on Wheels organizations has a waitlist with seniors waiting, on average, four months.³
- Only 1% of philanthropic donations in the U.S. go toward senior causes.⁴
- Federal funding covers 37% of the cost for Meals on Wheels to serve more than 2 million seniors annually.⁵
- More than half of local Meals on Wheels providers struggle with recruiting and retaining enough volunteers.⁶

MEALS ON WHEELS CAN HELP IMPROVE SENIORS' HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- Meals on Wheels provides support at the intersection of hunger, malnutrition and social isolation.
- Meals on Wheels providers already operate in nearly every community.
- 64% of local providers are confident they could serve more seniors with more funding.⁷

WHEN WE ALLOW THIS NEED TO GO SO CHRONICALLY UNDERFUNDED, WE ALL PAY THE COST, AND OUR SENIORS ARE LEFT WAITING.

Here's what some of our local organizations had to say:

"We have an extensive waitlist for Meals on Wheels clients due to the need of our community being greater than our budget. Several of the individuals on our waitlist have passed away while awaiting services."

"Our Meals on Wheels program operates in a huge, rural, isolated area. Older adults are scattered across ... almost 600 square miles. ... Gas in our community is a whopping \$5.39 per gallon! Insurance for a delivery vehicle is over \$4,000 a year. The cost of food has never been higher."

"We are currently unable to release any waitlisted clients. Some have been on the waitlist for years."

"The demand for Meals on Wheels is unprecedented in our region. We added 252 people to our waitlist within the past 90 days. ... We do not have enough freezer space. Food prices have drastically affected our cost per unit."



WHO WE ARE

Meals on Wheels America is the leadership organization supporting the more than 5,000 community-based organizations across the country that are dedicated to addressing senior hunger and isolation. Powered by a trusted volunteer workforce, this network delivers a comprehensive solution that begins with a meal and is proven to enable independence and well-being through the additional benefits of tailored nutrition, social connection, safety and much more. By providing funding, programming, education, research and advocacy, Meals on Wheels America empowers local organizations to strengthen their communities, one senior at a time.

OUR VISION

An America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity.

OUR MISSION

To empower local community providers to improve the health and quality of life of the seniors they serve so that no one is left hungry or isolated.

OUR BELIEFS

- All seniors should age with dignity and respect.
- Aging in place is a superior option for most seniors.
- Meeting the holistic needs of older adults starts with the meal.
- Together, We Can Deliver™.

OUR COMMITMENTS

- Delivering appropriate meals to serve seniors more effectively.
- Understanding each community well enough to meet its seniors' distinct needs.
- Identifying and addressing unmet needs.
- Leveraging our trusted relationship to keep seniors healthy, safe and connected.
- Collaborating at all levels to ensure no senior is forgotten.



WITH INCREASED SUPPORT, WE CAN SERVE MORE SENIORS LIKE MARY LOU

Congestive heart failure landed Mary Lou in the ICU, where she caught COVID-19. "When I came out of there, I was on oxygen. I was in a wheelchair and weak as a kitten." Once her family's cook, she then struggled to even stand, much less prepare her own meals. Mary Lou had to wait on others to feed her, and that's where United Way Meals on Wheels in Birmingham could help. It ended her wait by delivering nutritious meals and providing essential companionship. "I have the sweetest people that bring my meals," she said. "I call them my angels."

OUR OUTCOMES FOR OLDER AMERICANS

Through our programming, partnerships and influence, we will work toward two connected and reinforcing outcomes: Serve more and serve better.

SERVE MORE

By enacting a holistic set of strategies, we can meet the growing unmet need among older adults and ensure that everyone who needs Meals on Wheels gets it.

SERVE BETTER

By driving capacity building and partnership at multiple levels, we can extend local organizations' abilities to deliver tailored nutrition and enhanced social connection services that continue to differentiate Meals on Wheels and deliver meaningful impact.

Our plan to End the Wait moves us closer to the reality we aspire to — one in which all seniors have access to the nutritious meals, moments of connection and other lifesaving services they need to live nourished lives with independence and dignity.



SERVE MORE: EXPANDING OUR REACH THROUGH A STRONG, SUPPORTED NETWORK



The Problem

Today, nearly 13 million seniors worry about having enough food⁸ and 56% feel lonely, a declared epidemic.⁹ And the number of seniors is rapidly increasing, creating enormous challenges for the community-based organizations that serve this population. Many of these challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic, undermining years of progress and negatively affecting seniors in hard-to-reach places.

Without urgent action at scale, it is expected that 14.5 million seniors — 4.2% of the total U.S. population — will be food insecure by 2030.¹⁰

Our Solution

Eliminate waitlists and ensure every senior who needs Meals on Wheels gets it by increasing funding and resources.

We'll continue to leverage our reimagined MORE (Member Offers, Rewards & Expertise) program to help local organizations reduce operational costs and increase efficiency through discounted pricing and trusted guidance on the products and services they use most. Through our partnerships with selected vendors, we will leverage the aggregated buying power of the nationwide Meals on Wheels network so we can pass benefits and savings to individual providers.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Incentivize innovative community-specific solutions through targeted grant opportunities.
- Develop, promote and scale successful collaborations for Meals on Wheels organizations to fill gaps in service.
- Lower local operating costs by leveraging the network's collective buying power.

Build organizations' capacities to serve more older adults through infrastructure investments, volunteer recruitment and retention, and staff training to help meet the growing demand.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Foster growth, innovation and sustainability through the development of a Center for Best Practices that includes information and resources on service delivery, policy and advocacy, research and evaluation, and collaboration.
- Enhance business acumen through tailored technical support in key domains, such as leadership, infrastructure, operations, data and systems, community engagement, nutrition and social connection.
- Bolster sustainability by improving local delivery and kitchen infrastructure.



Expand and foster collaborative efforts to serve previously unserved or underserved seniors, ensuring equitable access to Meals on Wheels services for all older adults in need.

We'll build a robust coalition of support by expanding partnerships with organizations like the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs (NANASP). Meals on Wheels America and NANASP will continue leveraging our combined influence on Capitol Hill, providing collective insights to decision makers in Congress while advocating for the protection and funding of the Older Americans Act.

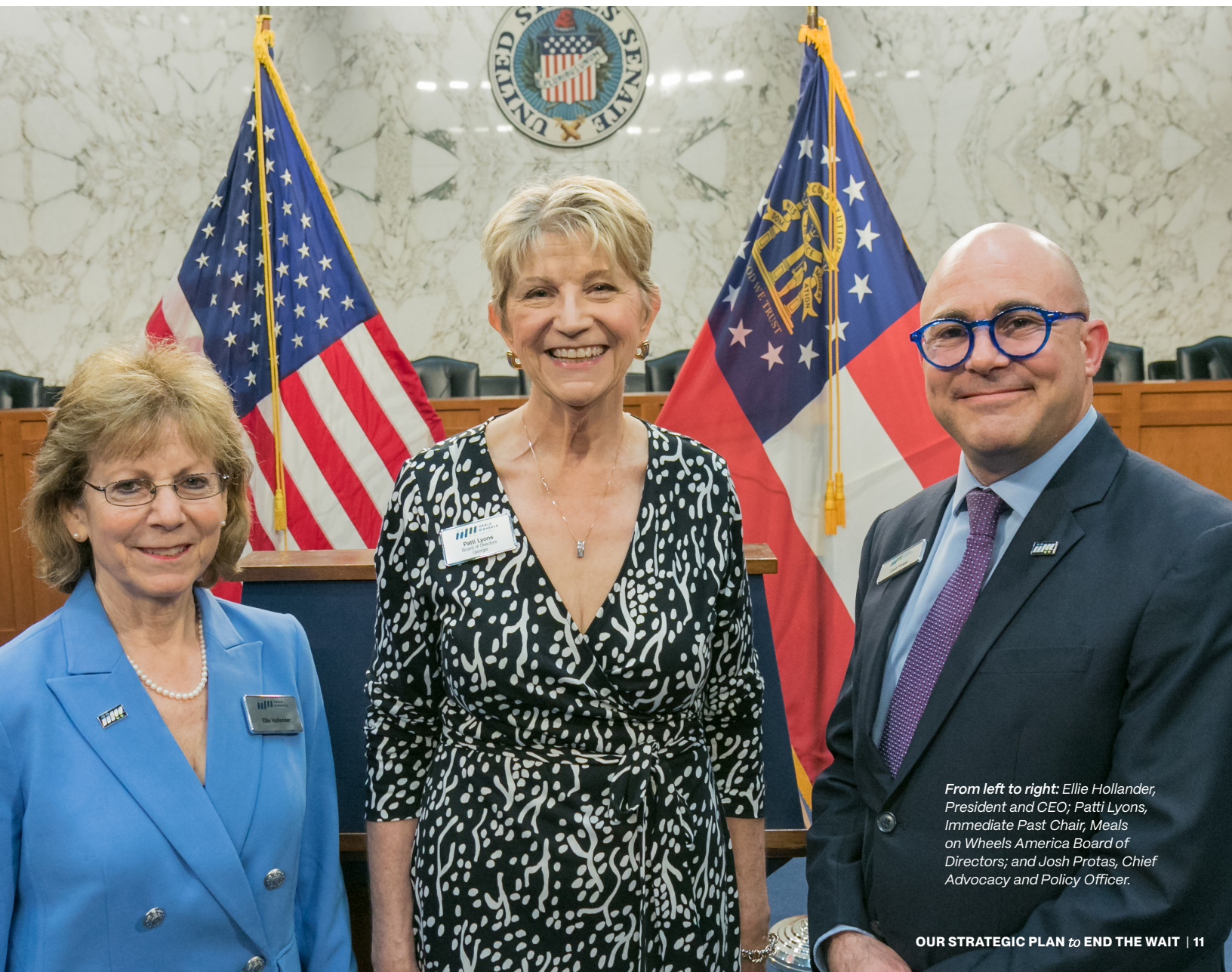
KEY INITIATIVES

- Enhance inclusion and strategic alignment through a formal advisory group structure that reflects the diversity of the network and informs Meals on Wheels America in its strategies related to data, volunteerism and health care.
- Support collaborative efforts focused on advocacy and shared services through existing Meals on Wheels state associations.
- Build national partnerships that drive awareness and action around advocacy while bolstering programming and impact at state and local levels.

Influence Congress and offer policy solutions that increase Meals on Wheels' federal and state funding and protect the Older Americans Act (OAA) — the primary legislation that addresses senior hunger and isolation and that supports the Meals on Wheels network.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Protect the OAA through increased federal advocacy efforts, leveraging national coalitions, partnerships and our unique influence on Capitol Hill.
- Put pressure on Congress to adequately fund Meals on Wheels by raising the collective voice of our grassroots advocates, including local Meals on Wheels organizations, donors and supporters.
- Grow advocacy in key states to drive increased public resources and legislative support.



From left to right: Ellie Hollander, President and CEO; Patti Lyons, Immediate Past Chair, Meals on Wheels America Board of Directors; and Josh Protas, Chief Advocacy and Policy Officer.



WE CAN END THE WAIT FOR SENIORS LIKE CARL

After losing his driver's license and being hospitalized twice — once for a cardiac problem and once again for pneumonia — Carl was having trouble caring for himself. When a hospital case manager noticed he wasn't getting proper nutrition, she referred him to Meals on Wheels. His local organization sprang into action and began providing him with meals and companionship. "There are people out there who do care about the needy and homebound," he said.

SERVE BETTER: DEEPENING IMPACT THROUGH TAILORED NUTRITION AND SOCIAL CONNECTION



The Problem

For older adults, good nutrition is perhaps the most fundamental cornerstone of a healthy life, yet many factors make them vulnerable to malnutrition. The ability to afford or shop for food, prepare a meal, or even open a can — whether due to economic, transportation, physical or mental challenges — may be too difficult. Plus, most seniors (95%) have at least one chronic health condition, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes or arthritis, and nearly 80% have two or more.¹¹ And many suffer from loneliness and social isolation, declared a national epidemic in 2023 by the U.S. surgeon general.

The nutritious meals and social connections provided by Meals on Wheels improve health and well-being, help manage chronic conditions, and enable independence at home.

Our Solution

Enhance the network's nutritional and culinary expertise to meet older adults' complex nutritional needs and take Meals on Wheels' value to new heights by developing shared services, resources and technical assistance programming. This will benefit the full network, but especially organizations not yet offering meals that are medically tailored for the seniors they serve.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Provide shared nutrition services by launching a network of regional registered dietitians who can provide targeted training and support, both virtually and in person.
- Innovate menu planning and meal offerings by collecting and sharing client-informed research and resources through the Center for Best Practices.
- Ensure high-quality, locally led, medically and culturally tailored meal preparation, packaging and delivery through high-touch technical assistance.

Enable the Meals on Wheels network to deliver more social connection services through national partnerships, thought leadership and capacity-building support.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Increase participation in local social connection offerings through engaging marketing materials that leverage behavioral science to make program offerings more appealing.
- Build the next generation of Meals on Wheels volunteers and champions who deliver social connection services by piloting and scaling partnerships with national volunteer programs and developing robust corporate volunteer engagement offerings.
- Promote the connection between Meals on Wheels services and a reduction in seniors' feelings of loneliness through marketing, thought leadership, advocacy and partnerships such as The Foundation for Social Connection Action Network.

An example of an existing social connection offering is Meals on Wheels Loves Pets, a national program that helps many of our local organizations deliver pet services and support, keeping seniors and their furry companions together. Since the program's inception, Meals on Wheels America and its partners have helped thousands of Meals on Wheels clients and their pets remain at home and together through the delivery of pet meals, veterinary care and other supportive services.

Strengthen our evidence base and demonstrate the impact of Meals on Wheels while guiding continuous improvements. We'll collaborate with local organizations, health care providers and research institutions to build a robust repository of data and information.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Showcase the positive health outcomes of our network's services by building an up-to-date, consistent and aggregated set of data on local organizations and older adults served.
- Develop a systematic review and methodology on the effectiveness and impact of Meals on Wheels against specific outcomes through a multitude of externally conducted studies.
- Raise awareness of the value that Meals on Wheels offers related to nutrition, social connection and health by disseminating published papers, presentations and evidence summaries.



Position Meals on Wheels as a solution for the health care industry, and help our local network earn revenue, deliver a valuable service and ultimately improve seniors' lives.

Over the decades, the Meals on Wheels network has touched the lives of millions of seniors, providing them with the nutrition and human contact they need. But the benefits of this care and compassion go far beyond, driving notable improvements to the health care industry's bottom line. Meals on Wheels works with health care providers and payers to identify risks before they become problems, address problems before they become health issues, and solve health issues before they become catastrophic and costly. In fact, Meals on Wheels can serve a senior for an entire year for about the same cost as just one day in a hospital or 10 days in a long-term care facility.

KEY INITIATIVES

- Enhance ease of implementation for local organizations operating health care contracts by providing a robust set of tools, resources and knowledge.
- Influence key opinion leaders and decision-makers in health care and the Food Is Medicine movement by bolstering our health policy expertise and educational efforts.
- Build the infrastructure that allows the Meals on Wheels network to expand into new markets.



WHAT WE NEED TO END THE WAIT

DATA AND TECHNOLOGY

Underpinning all challenges and opportunities described above are data and technology. Meals on Wheels America is in the process of upgrading its own systems while harnessing the power of data analysis within the network to unlock insights and identify opportunities for growth and mission impact. We are on a path to becoming the leading producer, consumer and broker of this data — helping our organization and network to better understand and address complex, interconnected challenges facing older adults. This will include a steady and heightened emphasis on measurement and evaluation.

INCREASED FUNDING

Meals on Wheels, and aging issues at large, continues to go chronically underfunded. This lack of support has led to dire consequences for older adults' health and well-being, and we can no longer wait.

To serve more and serve better, local Meals on Wheels organizations will require increased financial resources. Meals on Wheels America will work to drive revenue to its network through an integrated and comprehensive approach that includes:

- **Private Philanthropy:** By offering strategic philanthropic opportunities, we can raise funds from individuals and institutions seeking to make a measurable impact.
- **Mass-Market Fundraising:** Through storytelling, awareness raising and brand visibility, we can make the case for everyday donors to come together and support Meals on Wheels.

- **Corporate Partnerships:** Through multiyear, multifaceted alliances with dedicated corporations, we can help generate both revenue and volunteer support for our network of local organizations.
- **Federal and State Funding:** By protecting and enhancing the Older Americans Act, advocating for increased funding for senior nutrition organizations, and expanding nutrition access and social connection for older adults, we can strengthen the social safety net of public support.
- **Innovation and Earned Income:** By seeding and scaling innovative efforts, we can help lessen dependence on traditional philanthropy and build sustainability for years to come.

YOUR SUPPORT

Achieving our vision of an America in which all seniors live nourished lives with independence and dignity cannot be done alone. Local Meals on Wheels organizations across the country are willing and wanting to generate more impact but lack the support needed to meet the ever-increasing demand. At Meals on Wheels America, we have the right team and the right strategy in place, fueled by a culture of innovation and creativity that will extend our unique value proposition for many years. The possibilities are limitless when we work together.

Join us to help End the Wait.

www.MealsOnWheelsAmerica.org/OurPlan



¹ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of data from the December 2023 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement

² Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the 2022 Health and Retirement Study, weighted data

³ Meals on Wheels America 2025 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America

⁴ Candid, U.S. Social Sector, 2019

⁵ Meals on Wheels America's calculations from Administration for Community Living data on total expenditures and OAA funding

⁶ Meals on Wheels America 2024 Member Benchmarking Survey, conducted by Meals on Wheels America

⁷ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division and the December 2023 Current Population Food Security Supplement

⁸ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of data from the December 2023 Current Population Survey Food Security Supplement

⁹ Meals on Wheels America analysis of data from the 2022 Health and Retirement Study, weighted data

¹⁰ Meals on Wheels America's analysis of U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division and the December 2023 Current Population Food Security Supplement

¹¹ National Council on Aging. Chronic Inequities: Measuring Disease Cost Burden Among Older Adults in the U.S. A Health and Retirement Study Analysis, 2022



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