



THE U.S. GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: WHAT SHOULD IT LOOK LIKE?

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AUTHORS' NOTE

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When President Barack Obama launched a new U.S. global development policy last year to world leaders assembled at the United Nations, he said, “Put simply, the United States is changing the way we do business.”¹ He also stated that supporting development cannot be the work of governments alone, noting that “foundations, the private sector and NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] are making historic commitments that have redefined what’s possible.” This is well supported by the fact that the vast majority of resource flows from the United States to developing countries now come directly from private individuals, organizations and companies rather than from the U.S. government.

Having recognized this dramatic shift, and in an effort to nurture greater policy coherence across the broad range of U.S. government agencies and instruments now engaged in promoting global development in various ways, in September 2010 the White House issued a presidential policy directive on global development announcing that it was creating the U.S. Global Development Council.² The directive stipulated that this council would be “comprised of leading members of the philanthropic sector, private sector, academia, and civil society, to provide high-level input relevant to the work of United States Government agencies.” However, no further details about the council were provided when the directive was released, nor have there been any subsequent statements from the administration clarifying how the council will function and when it might be up and running. This paper therefore spells out some of the key considerations that should be addressed as the council moves from concept to reality.

Advisory boards and councils designed to guide the government in its work are legion in Washington. They range from the high profile and influential, such as the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee and the President’s Economic Recovery Advisory Board, to the obscure, such as the Joint Board for the Enrollment of Actuaries and the Flue Cured Tobacco Advisory Council. Advisory boards and councils can effectively steer the work of government in constructive ways, or they can serve as a delaying tactic to feign political concern in the absence of meaningful action. We offer these ideas and recommendations to spur a policy dialogue to enable the U.S. Global Development Council to emerge as an influential and steadily effective entity rather than one that fades into irrelevance and inaction.

WHAT CAN THE COUNCIL ACHIEVE?

Before determining how the U.S. Global Development Council might best be structured and operate, it is useful to first consider what it can achieve. The council’s mandate should have four core aspects.

The first core aspect of the council’s mandate should be to promote policy coherence. U.S. development policy is fragmented across more than 20 agencies and departments, and getting these disparate arms of government to synchronize their approaches has always been difficult. In the past decade, new entities—such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief—have emerged, and a wider array of institutions—such as the Department of Defense, the Department of State, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Department of Agriculture—have taken on expanded roles in providing international assistance. This expansion has further complicated an already disjointed system in which, for example, the nodes

for decisionmaking about multilateral development banks and bilateral development programs reside in entirely separate departments.

In addition to aid, other important debates and policies related to development—in areas ranging from trade, investment and energy to migration and domestic agricultural subsidies—have profound effects on official American support for sustainably reducing global poverty and promoting economic growth and good governance in other countries. These effects can be positive, especially when different policy levers are synchronized to support specific development outcomes that are in the national interest. But they can also be negative, such as when the United States' tariff policies undermine its investments to spur economic growth in partner countries.

The only place in the U.S. government where all these aspects of global development policy come together is the White House. But the White House has a severely limited staff. And thus, all too often, its officials who would be in a position to untangle the development policy puzzle are instead compelled to focus on a crisis, such as the recent upheaval across the Middle East and North Africa. Therefore, a central goal for the Global Development Council should be to facilitate the emergence of a more coherent, effective and efficient way for the various U.S. government policy instruments to cooperate in pursuing a unified development strategy. In this way, the council could help shape a much broader approach to development while limiting the internecine fights between agencies that have often led to undisciplined and ill-designed development efforts.

The second core aspect of the council's mandate should be to serve as a strategic bridge between the public and private sectors. A shared strategic vision for development is all the more essential now that official U.S. international assistance is part of a much larger pie of private capital flows and philanthropy. To encourage commercial environments and risk-sharing mechanisms that will attract investment in developing countries, effective partnership between the U.S. government and the business community is essential. Philanthropic foundations are also major players, spending billions of dollars in development programming and research.³ U.S.-based NGOs also annually contribute billions of dollars in privately financed development assistance, collectively rivaling the assistance-related investments of major donor governments.⁴

For U.S. development support to be effective, it must consistently draw upon the wealth of technology innovation and rigorous analysis on various aspects of poverty reduction, economic growth and governance originating in the nation's universities and research centers. Although the U.S. government does currently consult with many of these essential and innovative partners, much of that engagement is focused at the agency level, and is geared toward aid financing and execution at the project level or on single sector concerns such as health or ag-

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riculture. The Global Development Council should play a key role in shaping a much broader consensus among government agencies, private firms, NGOs and concerned citizens through strategic engagement and consultations on the broader direction and challenges of U.S. development policy.

Another facet of this bridging function is for the council to serve as an external advisory group made up of people who can provide an authoritative, independent reality check on the basis of their collective experience and wisdom. Because theories and innovative practices for development support are ever-evolving, the council could serve as a sounding board for new directions as the U.S. government more deliberately steers its global development policy. If council members are supportive of a policy shift or new initiative, they will also be in a good position to publicly validate that change and thus help shape important policy dialogues and political dynamics. Conversely, if they believe that a policy decision is misguided, they will be in a position to effectively voice their concerns.

The third core aspect of the council's mandate should be to elevate and maintain the seriousness of development policy deliberations. During the past decade, a bipartisan consensus had been solidifying in Washington around the importance of international development for American values, economic interests and security. Official U.S. investments in development aid increased significantly, and development has now consistently been distinguished as a pillar of U.S. national security strategies spanning the George W. Bush and Obama administrations.⁵ The Obama administration has committed to reforms that should strengthen the quality of development policy and operations while also enabling a greater voice for development considerations at the highest levels of U.S. foreign affairs policymaking.

However, current economic hardships here in the U.S. and the accompanying debates in Congress show that the emerging consensus on the importance of supporting international development is susceptible to considerable budget pressures. In this situation, the Global Development Council—comprising preeminent leaders in business, philanthropy and international affairs—could help. With its very existence, this group of high-profile individuals could sustain attention to global development on behalf of the administration while also illustrating the connections between private sector success and the effectiveness of U.S. policy and operations. The council should be a standing body that advises the U.S. government across political transitions from one administration to the next.

Finally, the fourth core aspect of the council's mandate should be to keep the emphasis on best practices. Much has been written and agreed upon in recent years about the principles of effective development support. The U.S. government must continually strive to incorporate these lessons into practice, and here the Global Development Council can help. For example, there is a considerable body of evidence underscoring a basic truth of development: Aid is much more likely to be effective where host country governments are committed to reform and are investing in their own people. Without a commitment to take on hard issues such as combating corruption, promoting democracy and fostering genuine economic reforms, U.S. aid dollars will too often be good money after bad.

In line with President Obama's own directive on global development, the council can play a key role in helping to push the U.S. government, U.S.-based NGOs and U.S.-based businesses to concentrate their resources in those nations and sectors where they are most likely to achieve a catalytic effect and nurture lasting change. At the same time, the U.S. has undeniable interests in stabilizing conflicts and strengthening fragile states. Here, too, U.S. efforts should reflect internationally recognized principles of effective peace building and state building. The need to adopt and implement best practices also holds true across many other key areas—including transparency, knowledge sharing, rigorous evaluation and accountability for results, an agreed-on division of labor among donors, and aid program ownership by the people of recipient countries.

Each of these four proposed core components of the Global Development Council's mandate relates to an ongoing need within U.S. global development policy. Accordingly, the president's decision to create the council should lead to the formation of a carefully chosen group of key advisers who together constitute a structural element of the U.S. development policy architecture rather than just another blue-ribbon commission focused on producing a single report. Toward the end of the George W. Bush administration, the Helping to Enhance the Livelihood of People around the Globe (HELP) Commission deliberated and then delivered its report on reforming foreign assistance; and after the start of the Obama administration, two relevant reviews were undertaken side-by-side over the course of more than a year—a presidential study of development policy, and a strategic planning effort by the State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) called the Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review.⁶ These studies, coupled with many more official and nongovernmental initiatives during the past decade, leave little appetite for another isolated review.⁷

MODELS FOR THE COUNCIL

In considering the best shape and role for the Global Development Council, an obvious jumping-off point is to look at some of the other analogous advisory bodies currently in operation, both within and beyond the development field. The council should incorporate the best elements of these other committees, boards and councils while avoiding clear pitfalls. Thus, here it is useful to briefly consider nine of these entities as comparative examples, in both positive and negative senses.

The first example is USAID's long-standing Advisory Committee on Voluntary Foreign Aid (ACVFA), which is meant to "serve as a focal point for relations between the U.S. Government and private and voluntary organizations active in the fields of relief, rehabilitation and development overseas."⁸ In its new development policy, the Obama administration has made a "long-term commitment to rebuilding USAID as the U.S. Government's lead development agency."⁹ The ACVFA charter states a second objective: "To assure that the voluntary sector plays a vital and dynamic role in the formulation and execution of foreign assistance programs." Though it may be helpful for USAID to have its own advisory council to encourage smoother cooperation with voluntary organizations, given today's range of policy instruments and agencies involved in development, an advisory body with far greater scope and mandate is clearly warranted. The Global Development Council thus needs to look at the whole range of U.S. government activities to promote development and the whole range of other partners involved in these efforts outside government.

The details of ACVFA's membership and operations are instructive in thinking about the Global Development Council. ACVFA reports to the administrator of USAID, though its existence predates the agency, because it was created by a directive from President Harry S Truman in 1946. It comprises no fewer than 15 and no more than 30 members, appointed by the administrator. These members do not serve as individuals but rather as representatives of organizations that together form "a balanced cross section of non-governmental entities including private and voluntary organizations, cooperatives, foundations, private firms, professional societies, universities and other sources."

ACVFA's business is carried out through public meetings and the work of subcommittees and working groups. Its annual operating costs are approximately \$250,000, which is provided by the Office of the USAID Administrator, much of which covers the cost of one full-time staff member. ACVFA is currently supposed to hold two public meetings annually—down from three—but it has not held a meeting since October 2009. Discussions with the staffs of ACVFA's current and former organizational members suggest that even when it met regularly, it added somewhat limited value beyond the informal and frequent opportunities afforded to those same organizations to advise the administrator. Many of its recommendations have focused on more procedural issues, such as the nature of contracting and efforts to improve evaluations. In general, ACVFA has not been a wellspring of consensual thinking on overall directions for development policy and implementation strategy. As required under the Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972, ACVFA is subject to biennial renewal. Its existence was renewed for another two years in January 2011.

The second example is the Board of the Millennium Challenge Corporation, which is made up of the secretary of state, the secretary of the Treasury, the U.S. trade representative, the administrator of USAID, the CEO of the MCC and four public members who do not otherwise serve in government and are appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate. In theory, the MCC's Board reports to the president; but in practice, the board is chaired by the secretary of state and vice chaired by the secretary of the Treasury, and its deliberations by and large do not rise to the level of the president. The board's four public members have traditionally been put forward in a consensus fashion by the majority and minority leaders of both the House and Senate. This is an interesting, and helpfully bipartisan, selection model, but it also exposes the board to potentially slow confirmation and quorum shortfalls. The MCC Board meets quarterly. In general, the MCC Board has been seen as effective, and its four public members bring strong sectoral expertise and have helped increase the breadth of people who can explain the importance of the MCC's work to the public. The board plays an important role not only in approving the MCC's compacts but also in discussing the policy approach to the MCC's work.

The third instructive example is the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations, which is important given the connection between trade policy and development outcomes. This committee, which is overseen by the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, provides independent policy advice on trade policy and related matters, such as U.S. negotiating objectives and bargaining positions and the operation of trade agreements. The committee is required to prepare a report on proposed trade agreements for the administration and Congress. By law, its membership must broadly represent the key economic sectors affected by trade, and can consist of up to 45 presidentially appointed members who serve for two-year terms without compensation or reimbursement. Recommendations for members come from a number of sources, including members of

Congress and various professional associations and organizations. The composition of the current 30-member committee was announced in September 2010.

The fourth example is the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS, which was established by President Bill Clinton in 1995 to help provide input to improve the U.S. government's response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This council is a large one, currently with some 30 members, and its sheer size poses difficulties for its management and efficacy. It has also faced its share of challenges beyond its size. When President George W. Bush took office in 2001, White House chief of staff Andrew Card initially suggested that the council would no longer be necessary. Subsequent Bush administration appointments to the council sparked fears, including those expressed by the Union of Concerned Scientists, that the administration was packing the board with unqualified members.¹⁰ This highlights one of the great dangers to selecting boards at the presidential level: The shifting political winds and priorities that accompany changes in administrations can quickly render boards irrelevant or obsolete—underscoring the need for a board dealing with an issue such as long-term global development to be selected and structured to encourage bipartisanship, broad ownership and strategic coherence.

The fifth example, the President's Intelligence Advisory Board—like the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS—demonstrates that even boards with a long history and initially impressive memberships can fall prey to rapidly changing political priorities if not carefully constructed. The President's Intelligence Advisory Board, through a number of different iterations, dates back to the 1950s. Given its purview, the board has direct access to the president and all intelligence documents. Its duties are classified, so their specifics and findings are largely unknown. But a 2008 report on the board by the Richard Lounsbery Foundation concluded that “in some instances, the Board has played a central role in advising the president and intelligence community . . . and has made a significant contribution to the country's national security.” However, the report added: “In other instances, the Board has been ignored and treated as a dumping ground for rewarding political cronies.”

In the 1970s, in the wake of the Church Committee hearings that exposed considerable wrongdoing in U.S. intelligence agencies, the President's Intelligence Advisory Board focused much of its work on trying to prevent reoccurring intelligence scandals and illegal activities. The board was given authority to oversee the inspectors general and general counsels of those agencies involved in intelligence gathering, and these officials were charged with preparing regular reports to the board on any concerns they might have about the activities of their agencies.

In 2008, President Bush stripped the President's Intelligence Advisory Board of much of its power, and there were already concerns that a high percentage of its members appointed during his administration had little expertise in intelligence issues and had been placed in these positions largely because they were loyalists and campaign contributors who would not second-guess intelligence issues.¹¹ By executive order, Bush eliminated the board's oversight authority with regard to the respective inspectors general and general counsels, and he stripped the board of its ability to refer matters to the Justice Department for criminal investigation. Inspectors general and general counsels were also no longer required to report activities to the board.

In 2009, an executive order by President Obama restored the President's Intelligence Advisory Board's ability to make criminal referrals to the Justice Department.¹² This executive order, though not setting a regular schedule for reports from inspectors general and general counsels to the board, did clarify that the agencies "shall provide" the board with the information and assistance "needed to perform their functions under this order."¹³ Though the process of international development will likely never be as sensitive or contentious as the functioning of intelligence agencies, the example of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board highlights the desirability of establishing a board mandate that will survive the potentially very different views of successive administrations and the need to ensure that board appointments remain of consistently high quality and are drawn from individuals with genuine competence in the needed area of expertise.

The sixth example, the Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee—which is charged with providing the senior leadership of the Department of Defense with independent, informed advice and opinions concerning major matters of defense policy—is one of the better cases of a board with continuing access and senior-level influence. Perhaps most useful for the comparison with the Global Development Council, the Defense Policy Board focuses upon "issues central to strategic DoD planning," and is responsible for "research and analysis of topics raised by the Secretary of Defense, the Deputy Secretary or the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy."¹⁴

A necessary distinction from the Global Development Council, however, is that the Defense Policy Board is tied directly to only one department of the U.S. government. The board has traditionally been composed of prestigious defense experts, including former secretaries and deputy secretaries of defense, former senior National Security Council members and experts from leading think tanks and the defense industry. The fact that the board is called together and tasked with exploring specific issues by the senior Pentagon leadership, and is provided with background material for this effort, helps lead to more focused discussions of highly specific topics of interest. The board is not seen as playing an oversight role. The board currently consists of 26 members, who are appointed by the Department of Defense, and it meets quarterly. The inclusion of senior figures from the defense industry has raised some concerns about their vested interest in seeing overall levels of defense spending expanded or maintained, but this concern is certainly not unique to the area of defense policy.

The seventh example is the President's Economic Recovery Advisory Board, which was established in 2009 by President Obama as a source of outside counsel for the administration in the wake of the global financial and economic crisis. Following the model of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, the board offered inde-

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pendent, nonpartisan counsel directly to the president. It consisted of 16 high-level members from prominent American corporations, and was chaired by the former chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker. It met quarterly in public forums that were open to outside comments and attendance. From the outset, the board was created with a two-year mandate, which expired on February 6, 2011. It was superseded by the President's Council on Jobs and Competitiveness, which held its first, partially public meeting at the White House on February 24. Although, with 25 members, it is larger than its predecessor, it still retains some of the original membership. Because it has been set up to engage constructively with business, it is chaired by Jeffrey Immelt, the chairman and CEO of General Electric, and it counts a number of other corporate leaders among its membership, along with labor union representatives and academics. As the newest example of a presidential advisory board, the council provides a high-profile model for bringing together a diverse set of interests while retaining competent, high-quality membership (although there has been some controversy about the fact that GE, with multibillion-dollar profits, paid no U.S. taxes in 2010).

As the eighth example, a number of useful nongovernmental advisory boards have been created to take advantage of outside expertise. For instance, in September 2007 the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced the formation of three new program advisory panels, each tied to a division of the foundation and reporting on program strategies and results directly to program presidents. Each panel consists of five to seven independent individuals, including a chair designated by the program president. The current panel members, distinguished experts with a range of experiences, were appointed by former Gates Foundation CEO Patty Stonesifer. These members serve one- to three-year terms and participate in two annual panel meetings.

The ninth and final example, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, which was launched in 2000, provides another crosscutting, innovative approach to concentrating a range of expertise from across sectors. GAVI is a true global health partnership whose members include stakeholders from both the public and private sectors—including national governments; philanthropic foundations; civil society organizations; multilateral institutions; and representatives from the financial, manufacturing, and technical research communities. GAVI is governed primarily by a board, whose membership includes representatives of its diverse stakeholder organizations as well as unaffiliated private individuals. The board helps shape GAVI's strategic vision, support its program implementation, and acts as its fiduciary. GAVI credits its successes in part to the power of its public-private composition and partnership, highlighting the importance of building on both public sector experience and private sector insights.

A more exhaustive study could analyze the many more governmental and nongovernmental advisory boards that are either directly related to international development or otherwise provide lessons for the composition and functioning of the Global Development Council. Additionally, the council's actual establishment will surely need to pass muster from a legal standpoint to resolve issues ranging from potential conflicts of interest to the body's relationship to the Federal Advisory Committee Act. However, even this limited review of highlights key issues and prompts recommendations for how the council should be organized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CREATION AND DURATION

- The Global Development Council should be established by Presidential Executive Order and have its first meeting no later than September 22, 2011, the one-year anniversary of the president's announcement of the U.S. global development policy. The council should be a continuing body, subject to renewal every four years. Ultimately, the council's existence could also benefit from the imprimatur of congressional authorization.

MISSION

- The Global Development Council should advise the president on (1) practical steps to promote development policy coherence across agencies, and (2) the means to strengthen links and coordinated action between private and public U.S. global development actors. The council should also (3) elevate and maintain the seriousness of development policy deliberations, and (4) encourage best practices for development support that achieves catalytic effects and sustainable improvements.
- The Global Development Council should have a role in setting broad policy and ensuring coherence across the development activities and development-related policies of *all U.S. government agencies*, not just the State Department, USAID and the MCC. This purview should include activities funded by the Agriculture, Defense, Treasury, and Energy departments and other U.S. government agencies. Broad strategic coherence has often been lacking across these agencies as they have pursued their own agendas, sometimes at cross-purposes. The Global Development Council should have a role in advising at the broad programmatic level rather than in micromanaging budgets or day-to-day operational decisionmaking. The scope of development activities across agencies is simply too broad and too detailed for such a council to focus on country-specific programs and projects. The council should have both the power to request and be provided with information vis-à-vis the respective agencies carrying out development activities and the ability to conduct targeted research on key development issues brought to the council by the president or vice president.

REPORTING

- The Global Development Council should provide advice, information and recommendations to the president. Recognizing that this may often happen through an intermediary, the council should report to the president through a designated official on the White House's national security staff who is responsible for coordinating the broad range of global development policy instruments and agencies. The administrator of USAID must also be closely involved because USAID is meant to be rebuilt as the U.S. government's lead development agency.

MEMBERSHIP

- The Global Development Council's membership should be bipartisan or nonpartisan, comprising internationally recognized leaders from the highest levels of philanthropic foundations, businesses, NGOs and research institutions with significant and frequent experience in developing countries. One way to avoid partisanship may be to consult closely with the House and Senate majority and minority leaders on the initial member appointments.
- Once its initial members are selected by the president, the board of the Global Development Council should be charged with managing its own member selection, and thus its future members will be nominated by the board, not by the president. This is the best way to avoid the politicization or downgrading of the council over time. To ensure continued political buy-in, the council's nominees could still be subject to final endorsement by the president and the House and Senate majority and minority leaders.
- The council should establish a formal agreement that explains in detail the time commitments and expectations of its members.
- To ensure high-level participation and commitment and to avoid an unwieldy size, the council's total membership should be kept at or below 10.
- The council's members should serve no more than two consecutive three-year terms and should not be compensated for their service.

MEETINGS

- The Global Development Council should meet in person quarterly. To ensure that the insights provided by its members are as frank as possible, its meetings should not be public, although it should reserve the right to disseminate its findings as appropriate. At least one meeting a year should be chaired by the president, and this annual meeting should help spell out the council's research priorities. A clear procedure for avoiding potentially deadlocked votes should be identified at the outset.

CONNECTION TO DEPARTMENTS AND AGENCIES

- The Global Development Council should have a clearly established channel for requesting information from agencies with presidential authority and for communicating its findings back to agencies.
- The council's meetings should include consultations with the heads of agencies engaged in development activities.
- All agencies engaged in development activities should prepare brief submissions for the council, at intervals deemed reasonable by the council, detailing how their activities are promoting international development and how they are reinforcing the U.S. global development strategy.

- Quarterly reports submitted to the council from the inspector general of each such agency should contain a brief statement raising any potential concerns regarding the agency's development programs or policies.

SUPPORT

- The Global Development Council will not be effective if it lacks the basic resources needed to carry out its duties, and therefore staff members from USAID and other pertinent agencies should be detailed to provide a working secretariat for the council. The secretariat should be led by an executive secretary and supported by annual resources in the range of \$300,000 to \$400,000.¹⁵

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- The U.S. government should not conflate this effort to consult deeply and strategically with other necessary efforts to consult widely with development policy stakeholders outside the government. Such other efforts and channels—both formal and informal—must continue to exist. This is good policy, and it may also relieve some of the pressure associated with establishing a board that is representative of a variety of perspectives while also remaining small enough to be productive.
- The administrator of USAID should consider whether or not to phase out ACVFA—or otherwise revise its stated mission—when its mandate comes up for renewal in January 2013.

FURTHER READING

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ENDNOTES

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3. Since 1994, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation alone has funded approximately \$17 billion worth of projects focused on global health and global development. See “Foundation Fact Sheet,” December 31, 2010, <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/about/Pages/foundation-fact-sheet.aspx>.
4. In 2008, U.S.-based NGOs gave \$11.8 billion in private development assistance, which was slightly more than the development assistance investments of the government of the United Kingdom. See Hudson Institute, “The Index of Global Philanthropy and Remittances 2010” (Washington, D.C.: Hudson institute, 2010).
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