Southeast Evaluation Association Newsletter

SEA

December 2011

SEA's Workshop Truly the Biggest Bang for the Buck!

by Bernadette Howard

SEA kept the annual tradition going by hosting an Annual Workshop in Tallahassee on October 27-28, 2011. The theme for SEA's 23rd Annual Workshop was: "Biggest Bang for Your Buck: Using Evaluation to Demonstrate Impact During Lean Times". In the spirit of the workshop's theme, the SEA Board drastically reduced registration fees for SEA members to thank them for their support.

Dr. Liliana Rodriguez-Campos offered a pre-workshop seminar entitled, "Collaborative Evaluations Step-By-Step." Using clear and simple language, Dr. Rodriguez-Campos outlined key concepts and effective tools/methods to help workshop attendees to master the mechanics of collaboration in the evaluation environment. Dr. Rodriguez-Campos went on to explore how to apply the Model for Collaborative Evaluations (MCE) to real-life evaluations, with a special emphasis on those factors that facilitate and those factors that inhibit stakeholders' participation. Her use of actual case studies allowed participants to get hands-on experience which reinforced the workshop's content. Participants appreciated the opportunities for audience participation and Dr. Rodriguez-Campos' dynamic presentation .

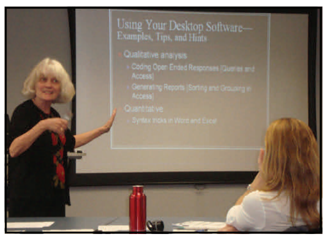


Photo courtesy of Bernadette Howard

The workshop continued with breakout sessions on Thursday afternoon and all day Friday. Examples of topic areas for the breakout sessions included: cost-effectiveness, maintaining institutional relevance, developing measures, stretching dollars, and cultural competency. SEA introduced speed roundtables—please see page 4 to learn more!

The workshop ended with reflections from the practice of evaluation. Frank Alvarez with the Office of the County Auditor (in Broward County) shared his thoughts from the local level, Dr. Betty Serow shared her thoughts from the state perspective in her role at the Florida Department of Health, and Dr. Fran Berry, at the Askew School of Public Administration and Policy at Florida State University (FSU), complemented the discussion with an academic perspective. These insights from experienced practitioners in the field resulted in all attendees leaving on a high note.

Inside this issue:

Photograph courtesy of John Austin

Good Luck, John Austin!

by Bernadette Howard

John Austin has served on the SEA Board since 2009, most recently as Secretary. He and his family will move to Tampa this month where he will start in a new job with the Moffit Cancer Center. John has spent the last ten years serving public and non-profit organizations as an analyst and planner. His primary focus is in increasing productivity and effectiveness of programs. He recently worked for the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) as an internal consultant to the Director of the Division of Law Enforcement. John provided several trainings for SEA members on Unit Processing Mapping, and his sense of humor and willingness to pitch in wherever needed will be greatly missed. Good luck, John, in your new position!

SUMMARY OF SEA TRAINING 11/28/2011

Webinar on Documenting Institutional Effectiveness Using the FAMOUS Framework

by Steve Lize, Co-chair of the Program Committee

The Southeast Evaluation Association hosted a Webinar on November 28 entitled "A Six Step Assessment Approach for Documenting Institutional Effectiveness" presented by Dr. Uche Ohia, a member of SEA and the Director of University Assessment at Florida A&M University. The Webinar was hosted on Adobe® Connect™ by Karen Childs of the University of South Florida Mental Health Institute. She also provided technical support.

Dr. Ohia's Webinar addressed the imperative of institutional effectiveness in responding to quality assurance and accountability requirements. Dr. Ohia guided participants through a multi-step and streamlined framework that she developed for implementing an efficient institutional effectiveness system. An innovative and easily remembered mnemonic summarizes the six critical steps: FAMOUS. The six-steps in the cyclical assessment are:

1. **F**ormulate learning outcomes/functional objectives
2. **A**scertain criteria for success
3. **M**easure performance using direct and indirect measures
4. **O**bserve and summarize results
5. **U**se results for improvement
6. **S**trengthen program by implementing an improvement action plan.

After the evaluator establishes the expected outcomes or objectives for a program, she or he must define the direct and indirect measures for the assessing achievement of those outcomes or objectives. Dr. Ohia provided a template to help evaluators track such operational steps using the FAMOUS framework.

The FAMOUS Webinar presentation was interactive. Dr. Ohia included several cases and examples for participants to practice. Although the Webinar format limits the presenter and participants from discussing directly, participants asked questions by typing them to Dr. Ohia through the Webinar's chat interface.

Dr. Ohia provided some links to resources for her FAMOUS framework and other institutional effectiveness assessment guidelines:

- F.A.M.O.U.S. Assessment Approach website: www.famousassessment.com.
- Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcomes Assessment from North Carolina State University: http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/rsrc_new.htm
- Measuring Quality in Higher Education - Instruments, Products, Services, and Resources: http://applications.airweb.org/surveys/Inventory.aspx
- FAMU Office of University Assessment webpage: www.famu.edu/assessment
- American Association for Higher Education, Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning: http://ultibase.rmit.edu.au/Articles/june97/ameri1.htm

The Webinar drew 16 participants mostly from Florida, with one each from Alabama, Georgia, and North Carolina. While six participants each identified with either state/local government or higher education, four others identifies with private and non-profit organizations.

The Southeast Evaluation Association would like to thank Dr. Uche Ohia for providing her training and Karen Childs at the University of South Florida for hosting the Webinar and providing technical assistance. Please see SEA's website for information on future programs!

SEA calls for members to volunteer as coordinators, presenters, or technology hosts. If you would like to coordinate a Webinar or in-person professional development session, or serve as a trainer or panel discussant, please contact SEA program committee co-chair Steve Lize, lize.steve@gmail.com.or Kathy McGuire, mcguire.kathy@oppaga.fl.gov.

The President's Message

by Jennifer Johnson

As 2011 draws to a close, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for all of your support this year. I am so proud to be part of this phenomenal organization, the longest running affiliate of the American Evaluation Association!

My primary goal this year was to increase membership by increasing our programs. We began to deliver programs via webinars. This year we delivered three Webinars and we plan to continue this next year. We view Webinars, workshops, and other programs as ways to connect with and recruit potential new members.

Another one of our goals this year was to increase the number of and accessibility to SEA programs. Thanks to the hard work of Program Co-Chairs Kathy McGuire, Dr. Steve Lize, and Dr. Mark Baird, we met our goals. Since January, SEA offered seven programs and co-hosted two additional programs with the American Society of Public Administration. Program offerings ran from "Using Process Mapping" to "Measuring Quality in Postsecondary Education" to "Developing an Index for Use in Evaluation." We offered programs face-to-face and via Webinars.

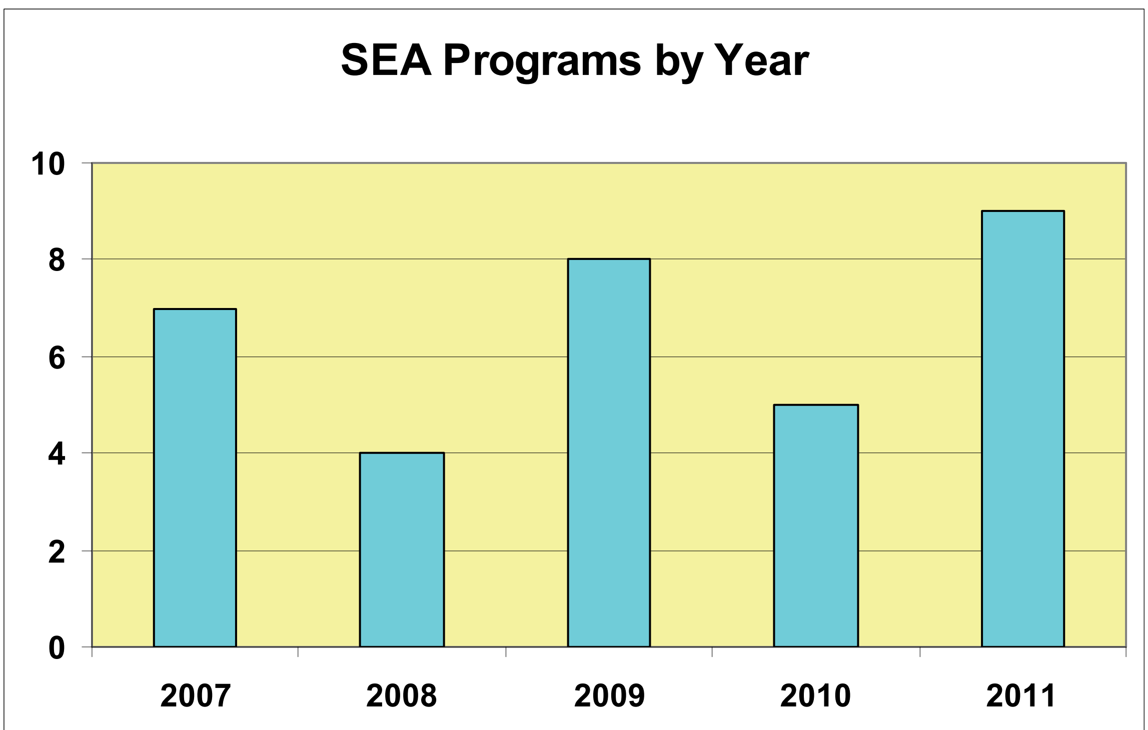
Finally, SEA has held an annual conference for 23 years. A few years ago we changed its title from "annual conference" to "annual workshop" to better describe the valuable training we offer. Due to economic conditions this year, we rescheduled our annual workshop from February to October

We successfully hosted a 2-day workshop replete with an informative and dynamic keynote speaker, Dr. Liliana Rodriguez-Campos for our pre-workshop seminar, then one and a half-days of a variety of session topics. Read about the roundtables in this edition.

Photograph courtesy of Jennifer Johnson

As I prepare to hand over the gavel to Dr. Fred Seamon, President-Elect, I encourage you to volunteer in 2012 to serve on SEA's Executive Board, to offer a program, to coordinate a webinar, or to participate in SEA events. Let's work together to maintain our level of excellence in meeting SEA's objectives. Best wishes to you all for a wonderful holiday season!

Regards,
Jennifer Johnson



Check SEA's Website for Updated Dates, Times, and Locations for 2012 SEA Programs

HIGHLIGHT OF SEA WORKSHOP OCTOBER 28, 2011

"On Your Mark, Get Set, Go!"

by Linda Smith, Ph.D.

The 2011 SEAL Annual Workshop brought together professionals from a variety of work settings. Even though our backgrounds varied, we found several "Hot Topics" that were common to all. One of the popular activities at the Workshop was a group of roundtable discussions in which participants shared their challenges and approaches to dealing with these common issues. This year's topics included:

- ROI vs. CBA (Return on Investment vs. Cost Benefit Analysis) Do we need longitudinal studies?
- Small Budgets – Big Needs
- Evaluating with Limited Program Information

Photo courtesy of Bernadette Howard

Photo courtesy of Bernadette Howard

At each roundtable, a facilitator posed key questions to begin the discussions. Many thanks to David Summers, Gary Walby, and Kathleen DelMonte for serving in the role of facilitator. After 15-20 minutes of exchanging experience and ideas, the whistle blew and participants moved on to the next roundtable. This "speed-dating" approach to discussions allowed all participants to share in and benefit from the insights of fellow evaluators. No information has been received yet to tell us if any of these "dates" resulted in a long term relationship!

It's Time to Join SEA for 2012!

December 31st is not only New Year's Eve, but it is the day your membership in SEA expires! For the rock bottom prices of $30 for your annual dues (only $10 if you are a full-time student), you are a member of SEA, an association with the following objectives:

- To promote improvement and accountability at all levels of policy and programs.
- To encourage, stimulate, and provide training for evaluation personnel.
- To foster and promote program evaluations by providing opportunities to exchange information and ideas relating to evaluation.
- To promote the development of theory and the acquisition of knowledge on which to base professional program evaluations.
- To promote the use of standards in the evaluation profession.

SEA's Website offers one-stop shopping with the membership application and payment options at your fingertips. Join today, and get ready for an exciting year ahead of training opportunities, job announcements, networking, and newsletters! If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact SEA Coordinator Bernadette Howard.

The Needs Assessment Kit (5 volumes)

James Altschuld, Series Editor

As of 12/10/11, the complete five volume kit sells on-line from $145.23 (used) to $156(new).

Needs Assessment Phase II: Collecting Data (Vol. 3)

James W. Altschuld

Series Editor: James W. Altschuld

This volume sells on-line for $37.94 (used) to 41.94 (new) as of 12/10/11.

By Sean Little

This continues my review of the five volume *Needs Assessment Kit.* This volume focuses on data collection, specifically surveys and focus group interviews, providing an introductory discussion of their methodologies. Altschuld provides an extended discussion of within-method variation in surveys, issues peculiar to workplace focus groups, and cyber focus groups.

Within-Method-Variation.

Survey research emphasizes standardized prompts or questions, but when surveying respondents from different levels, it may be necessary to avoid simplistic standardization and tailor the prompts to the level taking the survey. Altschuld distinguishes three levels of respondents: service recipients (Level 1), direct service providers (Level 2), and other stakeholders (Level 3). Service recipients (Level 1) will have different, and possibly lower, literacy skills than direct service providers (Level 2) or other stakeholders (Level 3). Each level will have a different perspective on the areas of concern with Level 3 having the most abstract perspective, Level 2 having a mid range level of abstraction and Level 1 having the most concrete perspective. These different perspectives and literacy skills may require different questions and different wording of the same questions for the different levels.

Workplace Focus Groups.

Largely as a matter of convenience, service delivery staff (Level 2) compose most focus group interviews in needs assessments. When focus group interviews occur in the work place, anonymity disappears and other work place related concerns can emerge. As gathering valid information in workplace focus group interviews depends on the protection of confidentiality, the needs assessor should not mix supervisors and supervisees in the same focus group. This is especially important and difficult for those organizational cultures that discourage 'negative' talk. Prior to data collection, the needs assessment committee (NAC) should have conduced a cultural audit of the organization to analyze the organizational culture. This cultural audit, should reveal whether the organizational culture promotes open communication or discourages "negative" talk.

Cyber focus groups.

A cyber focus group occurs in cyber space rather than physical space and thus lacks face-to-face proximity. In a cyber focus group interview, visual information will be lost, but a cyber focus group may be the only way for a geographically dispersed or temporarily constrained people to meet. Altschuld discusses both synchronous and asynchronous cyber focus groups interviews.

Like a chat room, a synchronous cyber focus group occurs "live" in cyberspace. In social chat rooms and synchronous focus group interviews, typing speed, fear of misspelling and typos affect responses. While the social norms of social chat rooms accept typos, misspellings, and "TXT" speak, the social norms of a workplace do not. Some people may not feel comfortable displaying a chat room level of "errors" in a work environment which could distort or restrict their responses.

Like a collaborative work space, an asynchronous cyber focus group allows a person to participate when it is convenient for them rather than at one set time. Questions can be posted in the discussion space and the respondents can respond when they check-in. Obviously people can process their responses much more thoroughly in an asynchronous focus group interview than in either a face-to-face or a synchronous cyber focus group interview.

In both synchronous and asynchronous focus group interviews, respondents will be able to read the responses of the other participants, which will activate a different type of information processing than will hearing the responses of other group members.

Weakness of the method.

Generally service recipients (Level 1) will complete the survey. According to Altschuld the discrepancy between "what should be" and "what is" forms the most critical part of a needs assessment. Unfortunately, this is the most troublesome portion of *The Needs Assessment Kit.* Altschuld uses a matrix consisting of rows for areas of concern and two sets of columns to operationalize the discrepancy between "what is" and "what should be". One column measures how important the respon-

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Logic Modeling Methods in Program Evaluation

Research Methods for the Social Sciences
By Joy A. Frechtling
As of 12/10/11, the book sells on-line from $33.75 (used) to $39.53 (new).
Reviewed by Sean Little

Critics of logic models have charged that when an evaluator assists in developing a logic model, the evaluator risks crossing the line dividing "doing" evaluation from "doing" organizational development. This may cost the evaluator the objectivity necessary to determine the merit, worth, and value of the project. Responding to this criticism, Frechtling has developed an excellent introduction to logic models.

An organizational developer's primary interest lies in accomplishing something, but an evaluator's lies in measuring something, particularly the implementation of a project and the achievement of its outcomes. A logic model facilitates two things of use to the evaluator: 1) the development of the evaluation questions that can measure implementation or outcomes, and 2) the identification of the data that can answer those questions. The bulk of this book focuses on the use of logic models to design an evaluation and to develop evaluation questions.

Functions of a Logic Model

According to Frechtling, A logic model has six functions: 1) clarifying project intentions, 2) enhancing communication among the stakeholders, 3) managing a project, 4) designing an evaluation plan and the evaluation questions, 5) documenting a project for replication purposes, and 6) examining a constellation of projects. The process of developing a logic model contributes to functions one and two, but the remainder of the functions requires a completed logic model.

Stakeholders may differ in their understanding of what the project should accomplish, when that accomplishment should occur, and how this is to be measured. Logic models force stakeholders to clarify and develop a common understanding of the accomplishments, measurements, and target dates for the project in question. Creating this "political" understanding among stakeholders of what a project is, does, should achieve, and when it should achieve it, strengthens the project and enables the results of the evaluation to have greater credibility among stakeholders.

A logic model will identify key points for performance measurement and the key questions for implementation analysis, formative evaluation, and summative evaluation. Project management requires knowledge of project resources, activities, outputs, and outcomes. In order to replicate a project, it is necessary to understand a project's peculiar context and what constitutes its core components.

Problems with the use of logic models

Frechtling identifies four major problems with an evaluator's use of logic models: 1) over–relying on logic models, 2) misunderstanding the basic features of a logic model, 3) selecting the wrong level of detail, and 4) failing to maintain objectivity.

Over Relying on Logic Models

More than one theory of change can explain how a project works. Frechtling argues that early identification with, or focus on, one theory of change may preclude developing the evaluation questions necessary to rule out alternative theories of change. Following this line of argument, a major function of developing a logic model lies in generating multiple theories of change and evaluation questions necessary to exclude invalid theories of change. This argument has many similarities to Scriven's arguments against focusing on intended outcomes to the exclusion of unintended outcomes.

A project's theory of change always exists in a particular geographic or cyber setting, at a particular time, within a given political context, serving particular clients, and within multiple social units, organizations, cultures, polities, etc. When replicability forms a major goal of logic model development, context becomes paramount and must be included in a logic model. While these contexts constitute a resource or input, they are dynamic rather than static. The use of logic models does not obviate the need to become sensitive to complexity theory, which may well be the "growth field" for program theory evaluation, according to Frechtling.

Misunderstanding the basic features of a logic model

Many people confuse outputs, the empirical proof that an activity has occurred, with outcomes, the measurable change in individuals or population served by the project. Frechtling argues that outcomes, not resources, funding or activities, drive a successful project. Developing a logic model begins not with the activities of the project but with the project's intended outcomes. This method of thinking about a project differs greatly from linear thinking about activities driving the project which leads to a focus on outputs rather than outcomes.

A second type of misunderstanding occurs when evaluators adopt a specific measure for a given outcome, rather than identifying a given outcome and investigating alternative ways to measure it. The measures that operationalize an outcome will differ in cost, feasibility, temporal sequencing and political acceptability. Again this has great similarity to arguments about unintended outcomes, and Frechtling's earlier argument about excluding alternative theories of change.

A third misunderstanding involves a

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Needs Assessment Phase II: Collecting Data (Vol. 3)

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dent rates the area of concern (the "what should be") and the other measures how well the project meets that important need (the "what is"). In order to calculate the discrepancy, the value in one column is subtracted from that in other.

My impression is that this is a fairly cognitively complex task, requiring a fair amount of "data literacy". In addition, survey researchers (Dillman, Smyth, and Christian 2009, *Internet, Mail and Mixed Mode Surveys*, and Alwin, 2007, *Margins of Error)* have found that matrices such as these present reliability difficulties. As service recipients often have low levels of literacy, it is reasonable to test the appropriateness of these complex matrices for this population, but Altschuld does not mention utilizing cognitive interviewing to determine how difficult respondents find these matrices. Altschuld does mention that not all respondents complete all parts of the matrix with fewer completing the achievement component ("what is") than the importance component ("what should be"). Decreases in item response rate, however, can indicate that respondents find the item difficult. Altschuld treats this as a technical problem of analysis rather than an issue of reliability. As this discrepancy is the keystone of Altschuld's model of needs assessment analysis this constitutes a serious flaw in his model, however, it could be a fruitful area of research.

Despite my qualms about the lack of cognitive interviewing of respondents for the matrix component of the survey, the kit has many strong points, particularly using mixed methods, directing group processes, moving from data collection to decisions, and implementing action plans.

Logic Modeling Methods in Program Evaluation

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failure to consider feedback loops and complexity issues. As more opportunities for feedback exist in those multi-year programs with multiple projects, feedback loops have to be incorporated into the logic model for these types of programs.

A fourth misunderstanding involves failing to establish time frames in which short term outcomes will be achieved. Funding for almost all projects restricts outcome measurement to short term outcomes. If the major stakeholders have not agreed to specific time frames for short term outcomes, service providers may reject negative evaluation conclusions, claiming that, if only more time had been given, the outcomes would have been achieved, diminishing the utility of the evaluation and the reputation of the evaluator. Similarly, funders could reject positive evaluation finding claiming that the desired results should have been obtained earlier with less cost.

Selecting the wrong level of detail

Simple projects have one component and one outcome area and they require simple logic models. As project become more complex, the level of detail necessary to describe the theory of change becomes much more complex. Frechtling describes this as the question of the right grain size. The critical test concerns whether critical components are missing or too many details are included, decreasing the visual clarity of the logic model.

Failing to maintain objectivity

In those cases where the project's theory of change is poorly articulated or non-existent, the evaluator may become over involved in the development of the project's theory of change. The evaluator can develop a sense of "ownership" of the evaluand, increasing the difficulty of impartial evaluation. Frechtling advocates for evaluators limiting their role in logic model development to requesting clarification or pointing out logical fallacies. The evaluator using logic models must have a great deal of self-discipline to avoid slipping into the role of program developer. Separation of the roles of evaluator and program developer can enhance stakeholder acceptance of the logic model, increasing the utilization potential of the evaluation.

Explanatory Evaluation

Frechtling argues for adding explanatory evaluation to formative and summative as types of evaluation. While summative evaluation measures the effect of a mature project, and formative evaluation measures a project's implementation and potential for improvement, explanatory evaluation focuses on how a program works, for whom, and under what conditions it can work. Testing and ruling out alternative theories of change forms one of the major functions of explanatory evaluation. Although Frechtling does not mention it, explanatory evaluation appears to have a great deal in common with the realist evaluation approach.

On the whole, this book makes an excellent contribution to the study of the methodology of logic models, packing a great deal of information into its 146 pages. This book also makes a major contribution to the body of literature dealing with the distinction between evaluation and organizational development and the independence of the evaluator.

SEA

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We're on the web!
www.southeastevaluation.org

The **Southeast Evaluation Association** (SEA) is a regional affiliate of the American Evaluation Association. We represent evaluators and evaluation-related professionals from the state, university, school system (local) and private sectors. Our members come from a variety of backgrounds: policy analysis, program auditing, teaching, program evaluation, and performance measurement. SEA's annual conference attracts nationally recognized speakers and participants from the entire southeast region. Several agencies use our programs and conferences as low cost training and networking opportunities for their employees.

Annual membership ($30; $10 for full-time students) offers reduced registration fees for the Annual Conference, Pre-Conference Workshop, Essential Skills Workshop, and the various training sessions held throughout the year. Members also receive a periodic newsletter throughout the year. The newsletter is a great way to keep up with the SEA activities and innovative research in the field of evaluation. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to email us.

Suggestions

SEA welcomes all ideas for topics for future workshops, brown bag lunches, newsletter articles, and conference sessions. Please contact Bernadette Howard (seacoordinator@southeastevaluation.org) with your ideas!

Thank You

Many thanks for getting this newsletter out are due to the diligent work of the Newsletter Production Crew:

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