

Practical Significance | Episode 54: The Power of Saying "Yes"—Volunteering & Service in the ASA

Ron Wasserstein: This episode of the *Practical Significance* podcast is brought to you by Stata.

Donna LaLonde: Welcome, everyone! We're delighted to be back for another episode of *Practical Significance*. This is the highlight of our day, and we hope you enjoy it as well. We have two special guests with us to talk about volunteering and serving on ASA committees. We're really appreciative that Susan and Bo agreed to join us to share their experiences and insights on how you, too, can get involved in committee work.

But first, we have a few traditions on *Practical Significance*, and one of them is to start by asking our guests to tell us a little about their day job. Susan, we'll start with you.

Susan Paddock: Great. Hi Donna, I'm happy to be here. It's great to see you. My name is Susan Paddock, and I'm Chief Scientist and Executive Vice President at NORC at the University of Chicago. NORC is an independent nonprofit research organization.

Our focus is to provide trustworthy research and data for our clients, policymakers, and society. Our main substantive areas include health, education, economics, justice, and public affairs. My role is to provide strategy and vision to advance our capabilities in statistics, data science, survey methodology, and AI. We have well over 100 experts in these areas.

Donna LaLonde: That's great. I didn't realize there were over a hundred folks—good trivia fact! Bo, let's go to you. Tell us about your day job.

Bo Li: Thank you, Donna. I'm Bo Li, a professor in Statistics and Data Science at Washington University in St. Louis. Our department is almost two years old, and I've been here for about a year. I'm also co-director for the Transdisciplinary Institute for Applied Data Science, or TRIADS.

My daily job has two parts. One is like any professor: teaching, research, advising students, and service to the department, university, and our professional society. As co-director, I work with the other co-director to offer data science training across campus—to faculty, students, and anyone interested—and to promote interdisciplinary research and enhance public engagement. Those are the three main tasks for the mission of this. We call it the TRIAD. It is just acronym for that institute.

Donna LaLonde: Thanks Bo. That sounds fascinating and maybe we'll have to have a podcast all about the nature of the institute and the work. But for today we are going to talk about your service to the ASA and we wanted you to think back to that first time you said

yes. Both of you are so generous with your time and have said "yes," a lot but the first time that you were motivated to serve on a committee and Bo, I'll start with you, what initially motivated you to volunteer to serve on an ASA committee?

Bo Li: So in general, if I think I'm a good fit, good fit means that I think I can make contributions and also, I have some ideas, have something to say to make the committee to improve, let's say to improve the committee's work or to make something new for the society.

And also, I would try to get some idea about how much time it's going to cost and whether I have the bandwidth to do the work and if I feel I have the bandwidth and then I would say yes because I'm happy to make some contribution to our society. This is where we live, where we work and where we make friends. So, I'm eager to just like serve our society.

Yeah, I intended to serve on committee not just for ASA and serve for, let's say for the campus in general.

So when I saw that question actually the first thing come to my mind was the thing that I volunteered to serve on a task force on tuition revenue sharing program when I was at UIUC, and the college formed this committee, and I was department chair at that time. I think that committee is truly relevant to our department because we have a revenue sharing program and I feel I do understand how this program work and I also think whatever policy this committee makes is very important for the department. So, I volunteered to serve on that and so I can bring my knowledge and my opinion to the table.

I forgot who asked me to go after the position for the Statistical and Environmental ENVR section chair for ASA. I love this section. This section is how I grew up in statistical world and I know the people and I have benefited from this Section activities. And I know the previous chairs, so I talked to some of the previous chair and see what kind of responsibilities and how much time it takes for them to run those chair job. I'm eager to serve on that committee. I feel everyone needs to take a turn to serve on that. Right. I feel like now I have time to do that. It's really my turn to serve on the committee.

Donna LaLonde: Thanks for that, Bo. And I'm also glad that you mentioned sections because certainly volunteering and being willing to serve on sections makes a huge contribution to the ASA in addition to committee service. And so, Susan, what motivated you to say yes? Maybe that first time. But what continues to motivate you to say yes?

Susan Paddock: I was really fortunate early in my career to be invited to serve on a committee for ASA. I was invited to serve on the Law and Justice Statistics Committee. And I suspect what happened there was that the President elect of ASA was aware of the work I was doing when I was in the start of my career at the RAND Corporation, because one of the first areas I worked in was illicit drug policy. And so, there are some obvious connections to law and justice statistics.

And so I was excited that I would have an opportunity to not only bring my statistical knowledge and the knowledge that I was quickly gaining from the research projects I was on in drug policy, but to also be able to contribute to the committee's mission, which is really interesting. It's a committee that has very significant involvement from the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

And it's a committee that is composed of statisticians and criminologists and others from the law and justice research community. And so, it was a really great opportunity to hear more about that field and to meet new people - especially for someone at the stage that I was at in my career. And then more recently, I was asked to serve on the Data Science and AI committee. And that's another really exciting opportunity and one that I think is super important. And now given my role on the board, I'm an ex officio member, which is good because that meant someone else could come online and formally serve on that committee.

I want to be able to contribute and positively affect our society and our profession, through activities in AI and data science. I have this feeling in our community that we learned a lot from the rise of data science and how we responded as a profession and I think with AI there's just this sense of excitement and urgency now. And so that's, really captured by the committee and not just by Data Science and AI as a committee, but of course by all the activities and the sections and chapters and the presidential initiatives and other committees as well, because it's such a cross-cutting topic.

And so, the Data Science and AI committee also works closely with other committees such as Committee on Professional Ethics and others. Being on a committee is a great opportunity to meet people and to work on things such as responses for requests for information from the government on AI and bringing the voice of statistics and data science to that. So those are the reasons why I said yes to committee service over the years.

Ron Wasserstein: Well, thank you both for being willing to be volunteers, I guess. Donna, when you asked that question, I started thinking back to the first things that I volunteered for at the ASA. And just to show you how long ago this was, the first committee like thing that I was involved with after I had been involved in chapters and sections a bit, was a special task force for determining what sort of database the ASA should have. So that's back before everybody had a database, you know, and the database that the ASA had at that time was called File Drawers.

But anyway, Susan, you've come full circle on this because you have said yes to committees and now as vice president, one of your responsibilities as chair of the Professional Issues and Visibility Council is to invite people to be on committee. So, could you tell our podcast listeners a bit about how the committee appointment process works?

Susan Paddock: I'm happy to. So let me also just give a bit of context about the committees and about the Professional Issues and Visibility Council that I chair.

So, there are many committees in the ASA and so I'm happy to answer that. So let me just give a bit of context about committees and where they sit in ASA. There are many

committees, and some committees have a focus that is internal to ASA, for example, a focus on membership and making sure that members needs are met. And so, there's a membership council that, that consists of the group of those committees.

And so, there is a vice president on the board who chairs that council. And I chair the Professional Issues and Visibility Council which focuses on committees that have an external focus, such as e.g. AI and data science that I just spoke about and I've mentioned the Ethics committee and there are many other interesting committees.

And then we also have an Education Council because we have committees that are interested in education, and we also have awards committee as well. There are probably a number of committees of interest to every ASA member, if I had to make a judgment about that. And so, one of the roles that I have with the professional issues and visibility council is working with the committees and the vice chair of the council to gather names and suggestions for potential committee nominations.

Now formally it's the president elect who makes the nominations for the committee members. And that's a big job. And so, the councils are there to support the president elect with those nominations so that we gather suggestions from the committees. And now we ask the committees to also think not just about members who are already on the committee and whether they serve additional three-year terms, because basically the terms are three years long. But we really ask people also to think beyond just their immediate networks. And I know that's a priority of President elect Jeri Mulrow. She wants to expand opportunities for those who are earlier in the career or mid career to have this type of service and to kind of have the experience that I talked about at the beginning of this podcast when I was early in my career. I would encourage everyone who's interested in any of these committees to reach out to committee chair, reach out to a council chair, vice chair, or to fill out the form that's on the Amstat webpage, the light bulb form. And that's where you can express interest in serving on these committees.

And we want to just make sure that if you have an interest that your voice is heard. And there might not be a seat for you on a committee, say next year, but maybe there's a seat the following year or so on. But the most important thing you can do is to reach out and raise your hand and say you're interested in serving on a committee if it looks like something you'd like to do.

Donna LaLonde: And Bo, we're going to ask you to take a deep dive into the committee that you currently chair and how your role on that committee evolved. And you are currently the chair of the Committee on Funded Research. So, you might want to tell our listeners a little bit about the committee but also tell us how you became involved and how you see generating interest in potentially serving on the Committee on Funded Research. Are there activities that folks can participate in without being on the committee, for example? Feel free to think broadly.

Bo Li: I think how I involved with this committee was because a conversation with Steve Pearson. I remember one year at JSM, I was talking with Steve about the work I was currently doing, and I was working on West Nile virus disease. And another project I was working on was for climate data and both of them were funded by NSF. For the West Nile virus disease, that work was funded by the program called ATD Anti Threat Detection at DMS. And the climate work was funded by the Atmospheric and Geospatial Science, the EGS program at the NSF Geo Directorate. So that's a little bit unusual for statisticians. And then Steve said, well, there is a committee for funded research and probably your expertise can help diversify the grant opportunities for statisticians.

So, after that conversation I forgot about it. But then in a couple of years I suddenly was invited to serve on that committee. I think it's because of Steve, because he's so super organized and keeps everything in place. I had that conversation with Steve. So, I know why we call it a CFR.

And actually CFR, the acronym is really exactly the same as a climate work I was doing at that time because we call it a climate field reconstruction, also called CFR. So, I felt like already in the CFR, so I happily said yes. I feel this is the committee I can make some contributions to. And then after I joined the committee, I found I really love the work of this committee does.

It basically has two important missions for that committee. And one is to increase the communications and interaction between statisticians and the funding agencies. Funding agencies could include everything like NSF, NIH, those typical ones, but also like private foundation and even industry founding opportunities. And so, we try to broaden our founding opportunity for everybody in our field to bring more resources to develop statistics.

And the other mission is to distribute the information to make, to bring the opportunities to everyone in the community because even we have the, even we know that information, but not everyone knows. Most statisticians, I think they usually know nsf, DMS and that program. But other than that, some people might know, some people might not. So, we wanted to bring that information to all the statisticians, especially for the junior researchers, because they just came to this field, and they do not have broad knowledge about what can fund their work. And so those, those two missions are very important to develop our field.

And I found that the committee members, all committee members are really friendly. And some of them, I already know them for a long time, really my friends. And some of them, I just meet them by working on the committee, get to know them, but all of them they are very smart, have brilliant ideas. So, I really enjoy working with them.

And I think this is my fourth year and for the first three years we had three chairs for this committee. Lance Waller was the first one I remember and then Kate Kalder the second one

and then Veera from Michigan. Sorry, I still don't know how to read his last name, but I think there is only one Veera to me.

And Veera and I came from the same graduate college. We have known each other for a long time. Those three chairs, they are super responsible and creative and they all take the job very serious and did excellent job to advance grant opportunities. By observing them, Like they set up a really good model, and make me want to follow their footsteps to try to improve the funding opportunity and especially for our junior researchers just came to our field to give them enough information where they should apply for grants to support their work.

Right now, I think it is a challenging situation for everybody. So, the committee spent a lot of time to discuss what's the best we can do. And also we are still discussing like what we can do for this year's JSM because this committee usually organize a panel to invite like nsf, NIH and PCORI and some other like a doj, the Department of Justice and other funding agencies to make a presentation to tell us like what programs they have. And usually, they would encourage us to apply for their grants. But this year I guess it is probably very difficult to do that. We are still discussing that.

Donna LaLonde: Yeah, I've enjoyed working with that committee as well. I think one of the opportunities that you give folks who are not on the committee is you invite folks to be presenters at webinars, which is really nice. It's very generous of folks to agree. But it's also a way for someone to contribute without being a formal member of the committee. And so, I really appreciate that work.

Ron Wasserstein: Well, you mentioned the relationships on the committee and earlier I referred to the very first committee that I was on and I'm quite close to someone who I met on that committee 30 some years ago. Unfortunately, neither she nor I have gotten any older in that time, but boy our kids sure have. Susan, you mentioned that there are a lot of ASA committees with a lot of different kinds of interests. You also mentioned a form that people can go online and fill out indicating their Interest in serving on a committee.

So, I'm going to ask both of you, and I'll start with you Susan, to give our listeners some advice about how they might find the right committee match for their interests and abilities.

Susan Paddock: Yes, so the form is the light bulb form and it's available on the ASA website. And for those who would like to express interest in serving on a committee, when filling out that form, what would be really helpful would be to indicate which committee or committees you're interested in and to explain why if you have relevant experience, certainly put that in in your light bulb form.

We also are not looking necessarily for those with the most experience to serve on the committees and, and these are time limited appointments and so we have a mix of people serving at all different career stages. So don't feel like you must have the perfect résumé to say you're interested.

Ron Wasserstein: Thanks Susan. So, Bo, what advice do you have for finding the right committee for someone based on your experiences in deciding whether to join certain committees?

Bo Li: First, it's very important to understand the mission and the specific jobs for the committee. Usually there are such description online to describe what this committee would do and then also if possible talk to someone who currently serve on the committee or used to serve on this committee and get the first hand information for what they have been doing and also how much time this committee required them to contribute.

For example, for the ENVR. I keep talking about ENVR because that is my home section, the statistical environment. There are many young and energetic people who wants to be involved in the committee work and usually if they talk to me, I will just roughly introduce what the committee does. And then I would suggest a couple names who used to serve on this committee or currently on the committee. Ask them to talk to them and get an idea.

Also, if you think you understand what the committee does based on the name, sometimes it's not exactly as you're expected. So, I think it's important to really understand it before you can make your commitment and again make sure that you are able to make your time to contribute to the committee. I think it will be challenging for both the individual and committee if that person doesn't have the bandwidth or doesn't have the expertise to serve on it.

Donna LaLonde: Thanks very much, those are really great suggestions and incredibly helpful. So, I always like to ask about what the surprises are. And so, Susan, I'll start with you, but what was an aspect of serving on a committee that you didn't anticipate when you first volunteered, what was a surprise?

Susan Paddock: Yes. So, I'll go back to when I served on the Law and Justice Statistics Committee in the early 2000s. In the early part of my career, one opportunity I did not anticipate I would have when I agreed to serve on the committee was to be a discussant of some work that was funded basically by BJS, who is the sponsor of the committee. And the work was on different ways of imputing data in two of the key criminal justice data sources. I think it has been over 20 years, but I recall it was Uniform Crime Report and NIBRS.

There were two projects that were funded, and I was asked to go to the American Society of Criminology and be a discussant when those projects were presented. So, for meat the time, early in my career, which was a great surprise and a great experience.

And was probably the first time I participated in grant review as a professional. So, yes, sometimes the work the committees do can be very far ranging and it really just emerges from what the ongoing needs and opportunities are in the fields that are represented by the committees.

Donna LaLonde: That's great and interesting that the committee had that strong connection to another association or society. And I think that's important for folks to be aware of, especially with some of the committees.

Bo Li: I feel like the most rewarding or the most thing that I enjoy is that I feel I'm doing the right thing that benefit the society that I belong to. And it really makes me happy when sometimes I feel that I really helped somebody or I made some improvement, did something useful. So, for example, when I was the chair for Caucus of Academic Representative, the CAR, that was right after pandemic, we just started to have in person meetings. And then at the jsm, we hosted in person meeting. I think it was the first in person CAR meeting after the pandemic.

And then we host a small mini workshop to talk about the most concerning issues during that time, including like how to encourage faculty and staff back to work. Because that time I think all the department chairs struggle with that issue, and we invited people to give a talk, and we hold discussions. So, I think during that time the department chairs really need such a platform to exchange ideas and to support each other. Also, they can complain to each other, but it's also, I think, a kind of mental support.

So that's not something very big. But I feel good about it because I think we organized those activities people can really benefit from; I think Another great thing serving on the committee is that I can learn so many things and I learn how things work. And also, I get to know people, so I get to know all the committee members, my colleagues who serve on that committee, and I get to know their brilliant minds and to learn how other people can turn the ideas into action and make a difference. So, I always feel like I learned quite a bit by serving on the committee and working with other members.

Ron Wasserstein: So, thank you both. Obviously, you have found committee service to be rewarding and occasionally surprising in good ways. And so, Susan, we've established during this podcast that you've done quite a few things over quite a few years. What advice would you give to someone who wants to become more involved in ASA service?

Susan Paddock: I think the advice I would give would be, if at all possible, to first of all, show up to some ASA meetings because it's such a great opportunity to meet people and find out what the opportunities are and for people to get to know you and your interest.

And I even just start from the beginning, especially for people who are brand new to going to conferences or brand new to ASA. If you're going to a meeting, volunteer to chair a session. Session chairs are always needed, and you actually learn a lot and connect with a lot of people when you volunteer to do that. In fact, there's someone whose very first JSM talk was in a session I chaired, and he still brings it up to me twenty plus years later.

And it's just really fun. And I will also say the way I really became heavily involved in ASA was through sections. And sections are really wonderful because when we enter ASA, we usually have some very particular areas of activity and focus. There are several sections that are geared toward topics that range from specific methodology, such as the Bayesian

section, which I've been a member of since graduate school, to substantively focused sections such as the Environment section or Health Policy Statistics. And so there it really is something for everyone in those sections. The sections have their own activities, everything from mixers and business meetings at JSM to even hosting their own webinars and conferences.

Another way I know a lot of people get involved with ASA is through chapters which are locally focused. And there are lots of chapters around the United States. And that can be a great way to become more involved with ASA, especially if you're interested in, you know, having that local interaction and focus. I don't even live in Washington, D.C. and I'm a member of the D.C. chapter because, you know, a lot of the, you know, people with whom we work at NORC happen to be in D.C. as well. So yes, there are many, many different ways to get involved in the ASA.

Ron Wasserstein: Thanks, Susan. And you've tried out a lot of them, so appreciate that very much. Bo, you mentioned earlier that you love to help people, and you love to help the association, and we know very well that's true. And we must ask about your new role as the editor of ASA Discoveries, the ASA's brand-new journal. So, we want to know what it's like to be the inaugural editor of an ASA journal. So, will you give us a little sneak peek at that and at what you and your editorial team are planning for ASA Discoveries? And you know, this is something that I am very excited about.

Bo Li: Yes, of course, I cannot help talking about it either, honestly. So, I'm quite honored to be the inaugural editor of this ASA journal. But honestly, I was a little anxious when ASA checked with me about this task. And I talked to a few people, including Donna and Ron, you remember that.

And I also talked with Kathy Ensor and my department chair Ximing and I also consulted with Marina Vannucci, professor at Rice, because she just started a new journal, and I received lots of encouragements and support from them.

So, everything has been moving along very well. I'm excited about its launching. It's on its way and currently I already have a very excellent editorial board. I have four outstanding co editors. Sebastian Haneuse, he's at Harvard University and Galen Jones from University of Minnesota, Shujie Ma from University of California Riverside and Abel Rodriguez from University of Washington.

So, they all represent different fields. Sebastian is in biostat for Biostatistics and Galen is in computation and physical science. And Shujie is excellent in theoretical work and Abel is in social science and computation. So, I think we have very comprehensive and diversified group on our editorial board and all of them also have rich experience in editorial work. Some of them already were editors for other journals. So, I think they will help me a lot in this journey.

And we have spent a lot of time to discuss about the vision of the journal and the article types we want to include for this journal. So, I wanted to make two points about the vision

of this journal. One is it will be an open access journal. This is to ensure that research findings are freely available to the global scientific community and public. So, this is a more equal access to the research findings because some people, some region may not have the resource to pay for the journal to get the article.

And the second point is we welcome all significant contributions to the advancement of statistical and data driven research, either in theory or practice. So, we want all the work that can help make statistics remain pivotal in emerging research fields. And we want to promote a broad and inclusive scope of work. And those visions also align with what Ron proposed to me at the beginning. I think ASA has thought a lot about what is the vision for this journal.

And because of that, and then we have planned for the article types we want to publish. Some are traditional article types and some are not traditional. We hope to provide a more flexible platform for sharing ideas and discoveries. So, I want to give just like a list of article types that we want to include.

So, research articles, review articles, those are the traditional article types that every statistical journal include. And not very traditional ones include data notes. So, this is a brief description of a data set to promote reuse. Data notes must include a data availability statement and at least one data citation. And these notes should not include analyses or conclusions, just provide note for people to use.

Another one is research letter. So, this would be a short scholarly communication which may be original research or a comment in relation to a published work.

And the third one is rapid communication. So, this one would be the fast-breaking research updates or other news item. So, this one is very helpful for the Society to quickly get some very important research discoveries and some important news.

And the fourth one is letter to the editor. So, this can be miscellaneous correspondence to the journal's editorial office that is not specifically a comment on or a response to a published article, but just a letter to the editor, to talk about the vision of our society, of our field.

And so, as I mentioned, the Taylor and Francis publisher, they are very supportive and we have met a few times already and they basically have everything they need right now. And they are currently finalizing the details for launching the journal.

So please stay tuned.

Ron Wasserstein: Thanks, Bo. And we will make sure that the word gets out widely as we're ready to launch. And we're looking forward to people seeing your initial editorial for the Journal and getting ready to submit their work in those various categories.

Donna LaLonde: Well, I started with a tradition. And so, we have two traditions by which we end the podcast. And the first one is to ask folks what's on their "to-be-read" list or what they're listening to. Watching movies, all the above. So, Susan, I'll start with you.

Susan Paddock: Sure. Well, I will tell you about a book that just came out this month and I just received my copy a few days ago and just started to read it. The book is called *Fact Forward Perils of Bad Information and the Promise of a Data Savvy Society.* And the author of this book is Dan Galyn, who is a colleague of mine. He's the president and CEO of NORC.

And so, there's a lot of excitement, of course, at NORC about this new book. And I'm excited because the book is aimed at a wide audience and this is really I think a crowd pleaser because it's going to be of interest to people such as ASA members who are data savvy and are very interested in topics such as data literacy, data quality, quality of information, and interested in topics such as the public data infrastructure.

And it's accessible enough that you can give this book to someone who is not as enthusiastic about statistics and data as we are, and they would also get a lot out of it. So that's the book that I am reading right now.

Donna LaLonde: That's great. I'm definitely adding that to my list. As soon as we're done, I'll order that. Bo, what are you reading? Listening to, watching all the above.

Bo Li: So, the book that I wanted to read currently is called *Chronicles* by Bob Dylan. And the reason was because I recently watched the movie *A Complete Unknown*. I love the movie and it's fantastic and I was a little disappointed it didn't get an Oscar award because I feel like in my mind it's much better than *Anora*, which won the Oscar.

Anora is a great movie, but I love *A Complete Unknown* and because of that I become a huge fan of Bob Dylan, and I wanted to read the *Chronicles* by him. That's a biography for the same time in the movie. So, I really wanted to get that and, I wanted to share one TV shows that I watched, that feel so powerful, is the *Baby Reindeer*. I don't know how many of you have watched that. It's really powerful and somehow sticks to my mind, that I wanted to share.

And as I grew up in China, so I also watch lots of shows and read things produced in China, but I think the *Chronicles*, and this is really the book I want to read.

Donna LaLonde: That's great. *A Complete Unknown* is on my to-be-watched list. You've made it rise to the top. Well, and we have a final tradition on *Practical Significance* and that is to end with Ron's top 10. So, I'll turn it over to my colleague Ron.

Ron Wasserstein: Thank you, Donna. We're headed into summer and maybe you are thinking about getting away. Always ready to help. The *Practical Significance* podcast presents the top 10 dream getaways for statisticians and data scientists.

We do remind listeners that these vacations, while appealing, can require a significant investment of time, money and degrees of freedom.

Number ten, Chi Square Beach. You can test whether this location is a good fit for you.

Number nine, the Beijing Islands. Each time you go, you'll update your beliefs about how much you enjoy it.

Number eight, Kurtosis Cove. Perfect for travelers who enjoy extreme values in their vacation experiences.

Number seven, Mark off shores on this Botiful coastline. Your next destination depends solely on your current location, not how you got there.

Number six Bootstrapping Bayou. From a sample of this destination's Boty, visitors can estimate how much they will enjoy their entire vacation here.

Number five, Bossan Point. The finest seafood and guests can estimate the time when their meal will arrive without needing to know how long it has been since the previous guest was served served.

Number four, Regression Reef. Happiness increases linearly with each day spent snorkeling here.

Number three, Colonel Heights. A majestic mountain range with smoothed peaks offering nonparametric views of the valley below.

Number two quartile key.

This quaint harbor town is divided into four distinct districts, each containing exactly 25% of the tourist locations.

And the number one dream getaway for statisticians and data scientists: Monte Carlo.

You didn't think we'd forget this, did you? Come here to enjoy the law of large numbers but watch out for the curse of dimensionality. Well, that's it for this episode of *Practical Significance* . We look forward to continuing the conversation next month.

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