

Washington English Center

2023 Annual Report

Yuliia, a Ukrainian refugee, shares the memory of how her classmates at WEC responded when they first learned that she and her son had fled their home and come to the U.S. :

“When I described my story, every person in my group wrote me and proposed help (What I can do for you? How I can help?). It was amazing, really.”

Since 1993, Washington English Center (WEC) has welcomed immigrants and refugees to the United States as they learn to read, write, listen to, and speak English with greater fluency and confidence.

At the outset, we taught students from Central America; but now, 30 years later, we welcome students from nearly 100 countries. Throughout the years, our mission has remained constant: To provide affordable English-language instruction and workforce programs to adult immigrants using volunteers.

No matter a newcomer's English proficiency, background, profession, or country of origin, we are ready to support adult English-language learners in pursuing their goals. The 2023 Annual Report exemplifies who we are, what we do, and why this work matters.

*Read on and see firsthand
what sets us apart...*

“In the beginning, I just needed protection,” shares Marcelo. “That was my first goal when I arrived.” As a political asylee from Bolivia, who arrived in the U.S. last December, Marcelo began taking classes at WEC in the spring. He is one of 1,253 adult learners taught by WEC this past year—and, like all his peers, he came to WEC to improve his English.

Classes at WEC help Marcelo feel “comfortable, or maybe, I don’t know the word...” He hesitates before settling on “confident.” This is a common feeling among WEC’s students, as over 92% report that studying just one term at WEC increases their confidence in using English. But, uncertainty inevitably remains. Even as Marcelo improves his fluency, he asks, “Do you understand me?” Before laughing and adding, “Or, at least try to understand me?”

Marcelo shares that he’s “looking for a future in this country, in this state.” He says, “I love my country, [but] I am falling in love with the United States.” He is an in-person student, taking evening classes, and he recently received his work permit and a social security number through U.S. Customs and Immigration Services. “It’s an honor,” he says.

For his first several months in the U.S., before taking classes at WEC, Marcelo admits that he “stayed in [his] room all the time.” But, online or in-person, young or old, male or female, WEC’s students consistently form bonds and connections with one another. Now, he comes to class early and has started building a sense of community at WEC: “It is very, very great to stay here,” he shares. “The people are very kind. I love these people.”



Marcelo Camacho
*Intermediate Level Student
from Bolivia*

Facts and Figures from Our Fiscal Year



1,253 Unique Students Served
Online and In-Person, Mornings and
Evenings

- **67%** in Group Classes
- **13%** in Individual Tutoring
- **20%** in Both

784 Individual Tutoring Pairs



\$44,920 in Scholarships Awarded to
248 Students



77% of our Students Live in the DMV
11% of our Students Learn From **24**
States (Outside the DMV)

Volunteers Teach from **25** States



8,705 Hours of Group Classes
7,774 Hours of Individual Tutoring



941 Volunteers Donated > **\$2.27M**
of Their Time

For Maria Carmela, who came to the U.S. from Italy in 2021, it's not enough to take classes—she wants to teach them, too. “I felt it was the time for me helping other people,” she says. Maria Carmela feels that “knowing the foreign student needs” gives her special insight into being an English teacher. That's why she began teaching beginner level classes this past winter. She isn't alone, either: Over the last year, nearly two dozen students have returned to the classroom as teachers and tutors.

“This experience allows me to feel the joy of helping others and making a real difference in their lives,” Maria Carmela says. “Listening to my students improving their English gives me a sense of accomplishment.” This year, WEC's volunteers have taught almost 16,500 hours between group classes and individual tutoring pairs—helping newcomers learn to read, write, listen to, and speak English with greater fluency and confidence.

Gradually, “WEC became my second home,” she shares, helping her form a social life and meet immigrants and refugees from around the world. Between graduations, coffee socials, happy hours, and more, hundreds of students and volunteers alike participated in 42 social events this year. For members of our community like Maria Carmela, these activities are essential to applying what they have learned in the classroom to their daily lives.

Although she enjoys outside-the-classroom learning (“visiting museums, parks, and so on”), Maria Carmela's favorite tradition at WEC takes place the last day of class each term. Students are encouraged to bring a favorite dish from their country of origin and, after the final exam, classes participate in potlucks and learn about food from their classmates' countries. “I hate the final test,” Maria Carmela laughs, “But I love the food.”

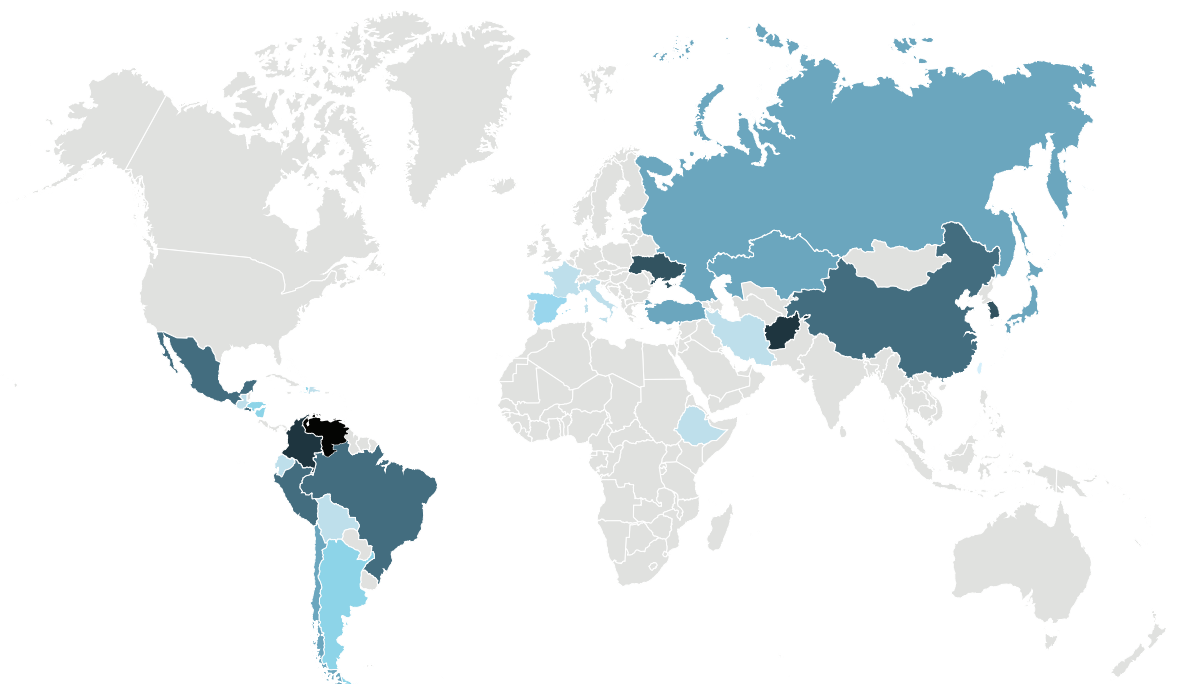


Maria Carmela Amodio

Advanced Level Student from Italy and Volunteer Teacher

Our Students Came to Us from 94 Different Countries

Highlighted countries are those with students who make up at least 1% of our student population



Number of Students

More



Fewer



12% of Our Students Learn Online
from **42** Different Countries



47 Languages Spoken by Our
Students, Besides English

Just like our students, our supporters come to us from all walks of life—they are volunteers, the children of immigrants and refugees, and companies owned and run by immigrants. They also include government agencies like MOAPIA, which supports community-based organizations that work with DC’s Asian American and Pacific Islander residents. Ben, MOAPIA’s director, shares that his agency “works with immigrants and refugees on a daily basis and we know firsthand the challenges they face.”

“The work that WEC does in terms of providing its students with the language skills for a fair shot at upward mobility is so important,” he continues. This year, with new funding from the Mayor’s Office on African Affairs, and continued funding from MOAPIA and the Mayor’s Office on Latino Affairs, WEC is the only organization to receive funding from all three agencies that support newcomers to DC.

That said, individuals are the lifeblood of this organization. Nearly 450 individual donors gave via birthday fundraisers, at happy hours, during trivia nights, and on social media. Contributions came in the form of generous sponsorships of our spring event and anonymous donations with the only request being that the gift go wherever it is needed most.

No matter when or why someone gives, the result is the same. Gifts ensure our students receive access to the education and support they need to achieve their goals, whether those goals take them across the world or just down the street. Ben says it best: “WEC helps provide our residents with the tools they need to better access city services on their own,” adding that MOAPIA is “grateful for [WEC’s] support of our city.”



Ben de Guzman

*Director, DC Mayor's Office on
Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs
(MOAPIA)*

Supporters and Partners

This page lists the foundations, corporations, government agencies, and individuals who supported our work this last fiscal year at the \$1,000 level or higher. We are grateful for every gift we receive, no matter the amount. This list does not include anonymous gifts.

Valedictorian (\$10,000+)

A. James & Alice B. Clark Foundation | CLA Foundation | Crimsonbridge Foundation | DC Mayor's Office on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (MOAPIA) | DC Mayor's Office on Latino Affairs (MOLA) | Holy Trinity Catholic Church | Joan M. Kerrigan | Sheila Kerrigan | KIHOMAC, Inc. | Mission North | The Morris & Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation | Nancy Noonan and John Odenwelder | Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) | Dian and Steve Seidel | Diane Zipursky and John Holmes

Dean's List (\$5,000 - \$9,999)

Jennifer and Vincent Browning | Capitol Counsel | Clark Construction, LLC | Kindy French and Emanuel Friedman | Ann M. Gosier | Susan K. Hattan and Steven Kittrell | Keegan Werlin, LLP | Kettering Family Foundation | Morgan Stanley | Elizabeth J. Rappaport | Liz and Patrick Tisdale | Joan Warren | Elizabeth K. Werner and Carl S. Kravitz

Honor Roll (\$2,500 - \$4,999)

Becker | Amy F. Berger and Glen Nager | Blank Rome, LLP | Chip Brian-Horberg and Dr. Michael Horberg | Ashley Bryant-Baker and Brian Baker | Cooley, LLP | Mary Douglas and James Dick | Patti Franco and Charles Clark | Felice Friedman | Barbara and David Garlock | Hina M. Gir | Miaoru Guan and Bob Huang | Rose Gutfeld and Peter Edwards | Aleshia Harding and Emmanuel Wondwossen | Margaret Freeston Hennessey | Hightower Bethesda | Nora and Chris Hohenlohe | Dina Lassow | Linda and Henry Lynch | Bruce MacLennan | Connie and John McGuire | Margot and Richard Peet | Savant Wealth Management | Michelle and John Silwonuk | Louise and Burt Wides

Scholar (\$1,000 - \$2,499)

Maya Ajmera and David H. Hollander, Jr. | Kira Alvarez and Tim Hruby | Wolfram Anders and Michele A. Manatt | Fran and Frank Butler | Jane Chalmers and Frank Greve | Gina Dallabetta and Paolo Miotti | DC Mayor's Office on African Affairs (MOAA) | Marcie and Andrew Dicello | Mary Janice and Frank Dicello | Jimmy Felter | Ann and Tom Friedman | Cary Fuller | Ruth B. Gramlich | Mary Ellen and Michael J. Guerra | Kim Heebner and Daniel M. Price | Connie Heller | Ratna Hilscher | Joe Hoban | Dr. Jeanne Holzgreffe and Glenn Westley | Joseph F. Horning, Jr., and Lynne Horning | Jackson National | Sharon and Phillip Johnson | Dean Jolliffe | Cheryl Kariya and Ulrich Heuler | Cathy Klion and Tom Plotz | Minal Kundra | Frank LaPrade | Stephanie and Gene Lawson | Laura and Barry Levine | Maxine and Amanda Lillis | Anthony Livshen | Judge Alan and Liz Lourie | Mark Lynch | Kathleen K. Manatt | Brigid McCarthy and Daniel Charles | Kathryn and Frank McDonnell | Kathleen McGann | John Moriarty | Anu and Taresh Mullick | Terry O'Hara Lavoie and Jack Lavoie | Barbara Ormond and Theodore Ahlers | Marina Primorac | Michael Rankin/TTR Sotheby's International Realty | Melissa Reinberg and Neal E. Kravitz | Ritzert Weiss Partners: Christie-Anne Weiss and Christopher Ritzert | Sen. John D. Rockefeller, IV, and Sharon Rockefeller | Susan W. Ross | Linda Rubenstein | Karen and Joseph Sandler | Deborah Schneider | Martha Talley | Emily and Antoine van Agtmael | Drs. Mary Ellen and Drew Weissman

“When you look at our budget,” Aleshia says, “There is not a lot of fluff.” As WEC’s Board treasurer, she maintains a keen focus on fiscal responsibility: “We fully utilize this budget toward reaching our students. Improving and helping the lives of immigrants and refugees. Every dollar is well-used.” To that end, WEC awarded \$44,920 in scholarships to support our students, helping 248 newcomers afford classes and improve their English this year.

Of course, there is still work to be done. “We’re not just maintaining the status quo,” says Aleshia. “We are trying to innovate to a future where we have a more enduring WEC.” Diversifying revenue streams—forging new corporate partnerships, strengthening bonds with existing donors, and leaving no stone unturned when it comes to pursuing new funding opportunities—is essential to WEC’s success. Even then, this work is still about our students.

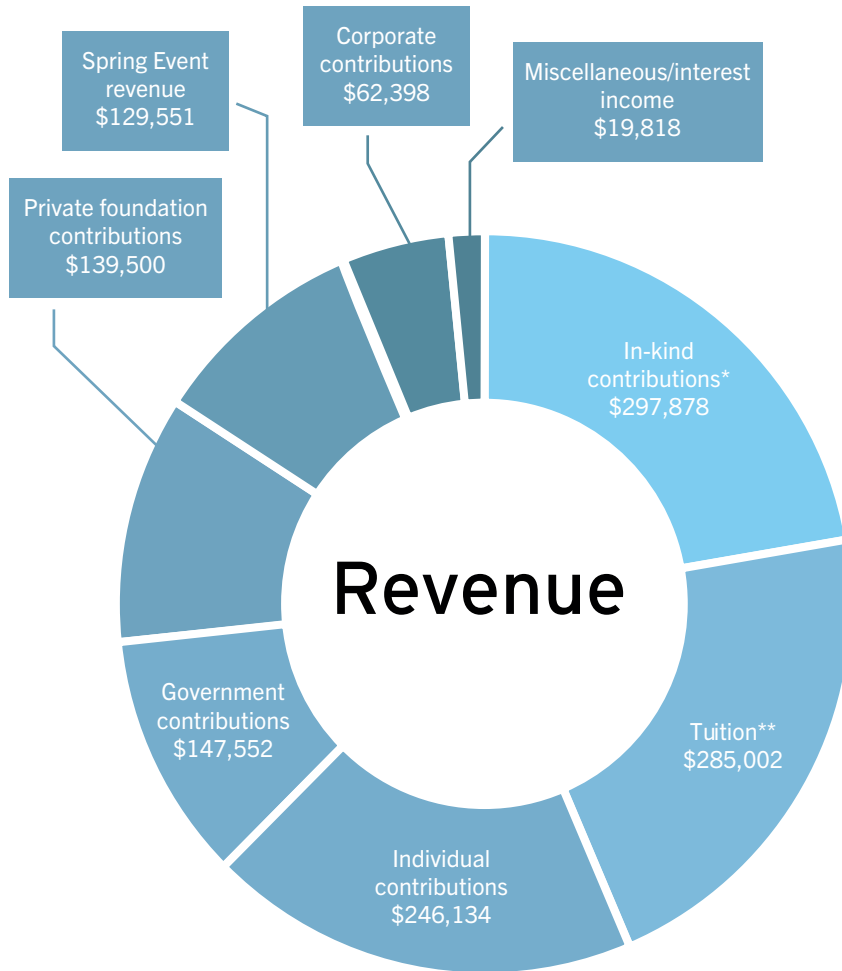
“WEC touches a part of me that is really close to my heart,” she shares. As the daughter of immigrants, Aleshia has seen first-hand the challenges that come with moving to a new country, not knowing anyone, and not having a support network. “You may not have family or a community here,” she says. For so many, that’s exactly what WEC helps build, which is why this work matters.

Those who volunteer their time, lend their talents, or support our mission through giving understand the importance of what’s going on inside our classrooms. “We’re not wasting people’s time,” Aleshia says. “It’s not a wasteful venture. WEC is an amazing organization filled with great, hard working people, and I love it.” Then, she smiles: “Everyone should love it.”



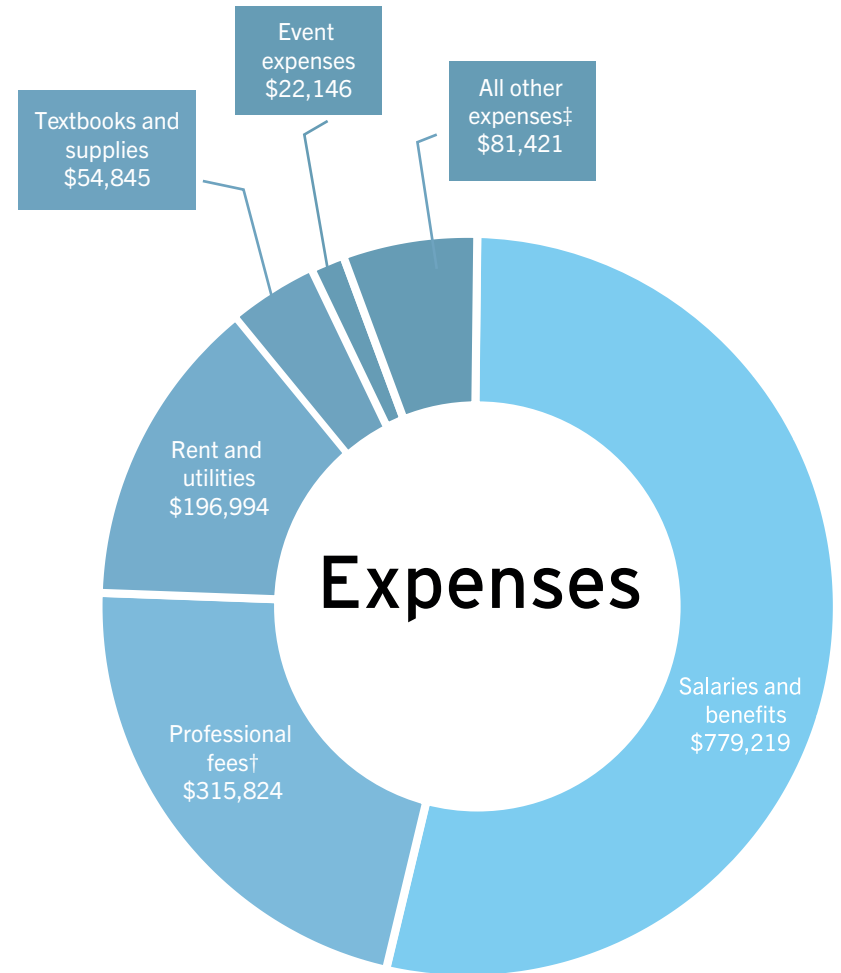
Aleshia Harding
Treasurer, Board of Directors

Revenue and Expenses



* Includes pro-bono legal services.

** Net of scholarships and discounts.



† Includes \$297,878 of pro-bono legal services.

‡ Does not include \$44,920 in student scholarships.

For Claudia, who has been on staff at WEC since 2008, “Seeing the progress of our students—how their lives change” is the most rewarding part of her job. From students not being able to speak English to getting their G.E.D., to participating in parent–teacher conferences, to getting a promotion at work, and so much more. “That’s what makes me stay,” Claudia says. “That’s why I’m here.”

One particular story that comes to her mind was a student who was struggling to pass his citizenship test and had failed it multiple times. Then, one day, he came into the office waving an American flag: “He said, ‘I finally passed it, I passed it. I’m a citizen now!’ That was one of the best memories”—but there are countless others. Throughout her 15 years at WEC, Claudia says, what inspires her is the change that is possible when students believe in themselves.

Thirty years ago, when WEC was founded by Pilar Laugel and others, they could not have imagined what the organization would one day grow into—and what technology would make possible. 77% of our students live and work in DC, Maryland, or Virginia (DMV). Another 11% are learning from twenty-four other states via Zoom. The remaining 12% live in Colombia, Mexico, Japan, Afghanistan, Turkey, Algeria, and beyond. They are united by a desire to learn English.

When asked if she had a message she wanted to share with those reading the annual report, Claudia said this: “Thank you for making WEC what it is. From a small organization that began with just three levels of English for the DMV to now being worldwide.” For our supporters, volunteers, and students, her message remains the same: “Thank you for putting your trust in WEC.”



Claudia Belloso
Student Services Manager, Staff

Those below constitute WEC's staff and leadership during the 2022-2023 Fiscal year.

Staff

Yaritza Abrego, Associate Director of Volunteers
Claudia Belloso, Student Services Manager
Phillip Carlisle, Director of Development
Nataliia Cherevko, ESOL Specialist
Sarahim Davila, Community Outreach Manager
Jessie Ebersole, Director of Academic Programs
Chris Griffiths, Director of Operations & Finance
Danna Gutman, Academic Programs Associate
Sheeva Harris, ESOL Specialist
Renee McKie, Director of Student Services
John Odenwelder, Executive Director
Kendall Silwonuk, ESOL Manager
Danny Snyder, Data Scientist
Rufina Torrez, Student Services Associate
Xilin Yao, Student Services Associate

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Chip Brian-Horberg
Ashley Bryant-Baker
Mary Douglas
Ann M. Gosier
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Aleshia Harding, Treasurer
Laura Levine, Secretary
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Sharon Owens Johnson
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Emily Naber
Mary Spanarkel
Sherry L. Steele
Heather Tatton-Harris
Polina Vinogradova

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Jennifer Browning
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Erin Haskell Ross
Jocelyn Samuels
Karen Yudelson Sandler
Robert Sledge
Liz Tisdale
Elizabeth Werner
Natalie Wexler
Louise Wides

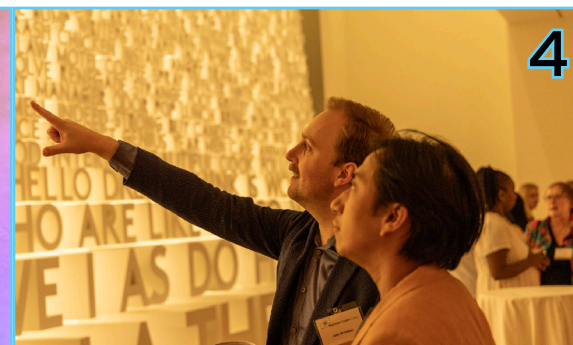
Lighting Paths to the Future Through Language Celebrating 30 Years

This year, WEC celebrated its 30th anniversary at the annual spring event—bringing together over 250 students, volunteers, and supporters for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres catered by Immigrant Food+ and hosted at Planet Word Museum (Picture 4, 5).

Student speaker Rufina Torrez (Picture 3) shared how WEC's English classes and tutoring helped empower her to support her son—from helping him do his homework in English to becoming vice president of his parent–teacher association. Alumni speaker Aly Kaba (Picture

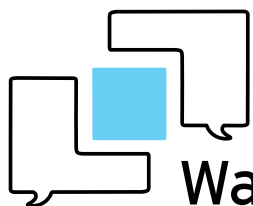
3) shared how WEC's workforce development programs helped him secure an internship in the DC Mayor's Office, where now, almost a decade later, he is the Director of the Mayor's Office on African Affairs.

Trinity Washington University Provost Dr. Carlota Ocampo (Picture 1) accepted the 2023 Champion for Immigrants award on behalf of her university (past recipients: Ray Suarez; Toby Bozzuto; Cooley, LLP). Mary Janice and Frank Dicello (Picture 2) accepted the inaugural Pilar Laugel Award for Exemplary Service.



Abou, a Cameroonian immigrant, shares the memory of how his volunteer teachers went above and beyond to provide hands-on learning outside the classroom:

“The teachers take us to the library. Teach us how to borrow books, how to learn computer, how to be successful... Take us to the museum, tell us history about United States. Tell us history about the world... It’s my favorite memory!”



Washington English Center

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