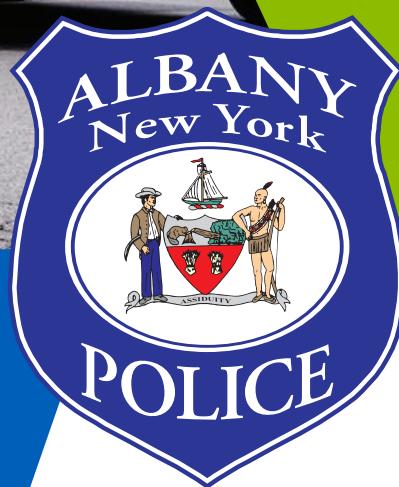
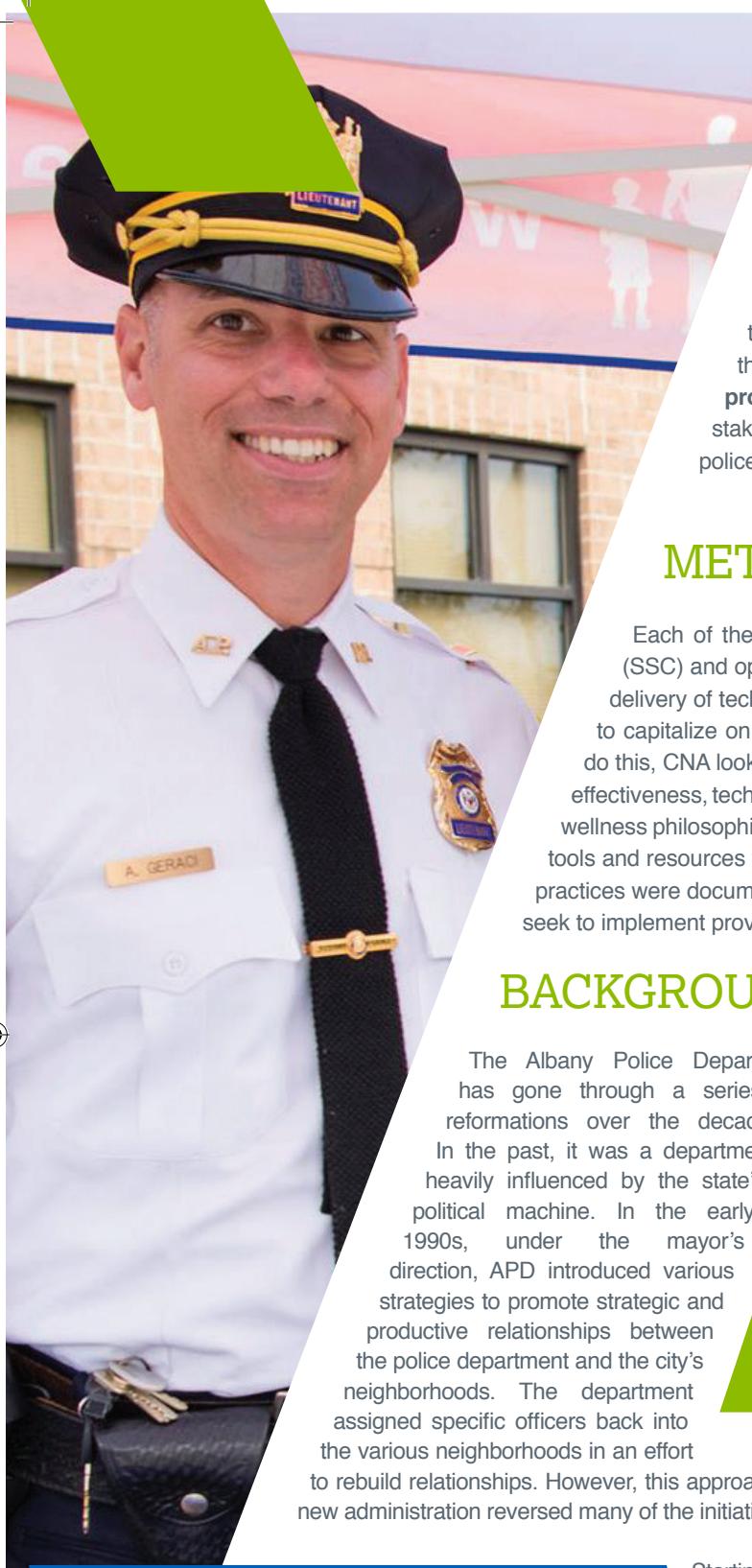


# Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative: Albany Police Department



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## INTRODUCTION

The Albany Police Department (APD) is 1 of 15 departments selected to participate in the Safer Neighborhoods through Precision Policing Initiative (SNPPI). SNPPI provides policy review, assessments, training, and technical assistance to a cohort of law enforcement agencies across the nation. The four goals of the initiative are to identify promising strategies that **reduce crime, protect officer's safety and wellness, establish productive interagency partnerships** with law enforcement and community stakeholders, and **implement innovative and effective technologies** to assist police department to safeguard neighborhoods. ■

## METHODOLOGY

Each of the 15 selected departments is assigned a CNA Strategic Site Coordinator (SSC) and operations analyst to assist with planning, implementation, coordination, and delivery of technical assistance. CNA worked with APD to develop a customized strategy to capitalize on the great work already in progress across the four policing principles. To do this, CNA looked at APD's policies and practices related to crime reduction efforts, policy effectiveness, technological capabilities, training structures and offerings, and officer safety and wellness philosophies. The CNA team then helped identify the TTA opportunities and additional tools and resources to enhance areas related to the principles of precision policing. These best practices were documented and will be made available to police departments nationwide as they seek to implement proven practices that promote public safety. ■

## BACKGROUND

The Albany Police Department has gone through a series of reformations over the decades. In the past, it was a department heavily influenced by the state's political machine. In the early 1990s, under the mayor's direction, APD introduced various strategies to promote strategic and productive relationships between the police department and the city's neighborhoods. The department assigned specific officers back into the various neighborhoods in an effort to rebuild relationships. However, this approach was short-lived: there were significant budget cuts across the city, and a new administration reversed many of the initiatives.

**“** APD's Vision Statement: Albany Police Department will strive to eliminate crime and the fear of crime by inspiring and empowering our community to work together to improve our quality of life and make Albany the safest community in America.

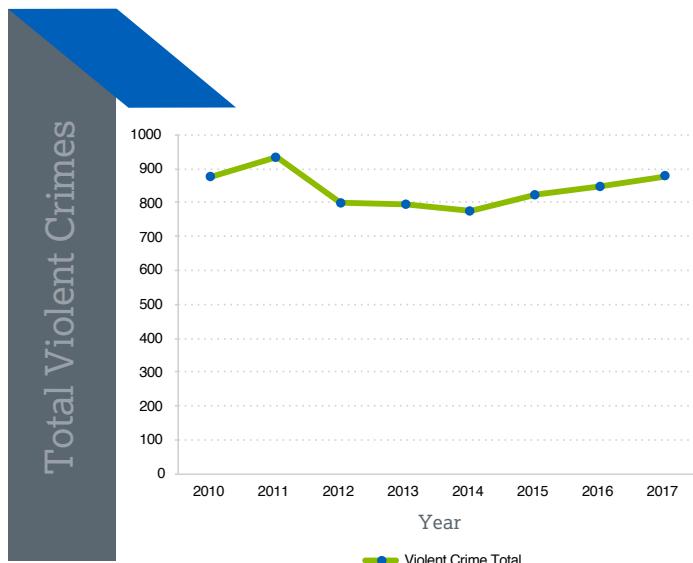
The centerpiece of APD's overall strategy is to more effectively address crime, fear of crime, and quality-of-life issues while creating a sense of greater community involvement through collaboration, partnerships, and transparency to enhance trust in the police.

Starting in the early 2000, APD redesigned the way it partners with the community. The department assisted in standing up multiple community-based organizations that would create productive, positive working relationships with community stakeholders. The Citizens' Police Review Board and the Albany Community Police Advisory Committee were two interagency partnerships that assisted the department in addressing crime and quality-of-life issues throughout the city. Chief Brendan Cox and his successor, Acting Chief Robert Sears, initiated and continued a whole-of-department approach to ensure that all members of the department are building strong relationships with residents all over Albany. The centerpiece of APD's overall strategy is to more effectively address crime, fear of crime, and quality-of-life issues while creating a sense of greater community involvement through collaboration, partnerships, and transparency to enhance trust in the police. ■

# CRIME DATA

Historically, the city of Albany has experienced relatively low levels of crime. Since 2010, Albany has had fewer than 1,000 violent crime incidents each year. Despite a recent upward trend, violent crime has stayed consistently below 2011's total of 935 violent crime incidents. While Albany has experienced a slight increase in homicides since 2010, there are still fewer than 10 incidents per year. APD has developed specific programs to strategically target those offenders who contribute to these crime rates. APD's crime reduction programs target both youth and adult crimes. ■

FIGURE 1: TRENDS IN VIOLENT CRIME IN ALBANY: 2010 - 2017



this program. First, the officer conducts a basic needs assessment to determine the needs for the youth and their families. Second, the officer presents the case to the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT)—a group that provides services to at-risk individuals—for review. Finally, the MDT will identify and provide appropriate support services.

The Finn Institute in Albany, NY, conducted a recent study looking at the success rate of the TRaC program. It examined 11 months of arrest data to determine post-TRaC intake offending patterns. According to the Finn Institute's initial report, the TRaC program has a 77 percent success rate in deterring individuals from repeat criminality, meaning 77 percent of those who participated in the TRaC program were not arrested for violent or property crimes.

ESU utilizes a case management approach for young adults between the ages of 17 and 22 who are most at risk of being

## IDENTIFYING PROMISING PRACTICES TO REDUCE CRIME

APD has incorporated two crime reduction strategies in its strategic plan: "Winning over a Generation," which focuses on youth, and "Healing Wounded Communities," which focuses on increasing public trust in an effort to reduce violent crimes.

### Youth-Focused Programs

Winning over a Generation is a strategy that focuses on building relationships with the next generation to deter and prevent the revolving door of career criminality. APD initiated numerous youth engagement activities targeted at all youth in the city, including those stigmatized and marginalized in schools and communities.

### Prevention Service Unit

The Prevention Services Unit is composed of the "To Reach and Connect" Unit (TRaC) and the Enhanced Supervision Unit (ESU). The TRaC program concentrates on children ages 12 to 16 and acts as an early intervention program to keep kids out of the juvenile system. APD officers take a case management approach to conducting outreach to at-risk youth, providing them with mentoring and access to support services as needed. APD, the school district, service providers, family members, and probation officers can refer youth to

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involved in gun violence. The police department identifies individuals who are perpetual violent crime offenders and often in a state of crisis. The goal of the ESU is to build relationships and trust with the identified individuals and to provide them with support services, such as mental health services, employment assistance, and education opportunities, to steer individuals away from a life of violence. In 2017, 65 individuals were identified for ESU intervention, of which, 6 individuals were involved in gun violence, 4 were perpetrators of gun violence, and 3 were victims of gun violence.

## Youth Court

In addition, APD has created a Youth Court, with the help of community stakeholders, to deter and punish youth crime. The impetus for creating the Youth Court was the recognition that first-offender, nonviolent youth were entering the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems, creating a perpetual youth crime problem in Albany. Community members, juvenile justice workers, and the law enforcement community saw the need for a youth diversion program.

## CADET Program

An innovative approach to connecting youth to the police department is APD's City of Albany Departmental Experiential Training (CADET) Program. The CADET Program is a five-week summer program in a youth-targeted Citizens' Police Academy. Youth from the ages of 13 to 18 receive an assigned job within the police department. This paid program allows youth to learn about the intricacies of law enforcement and gives them a unique insight into the department. Other youth-focused programs include the Police Athletic League (PAL), bike rodeos, and National Night Out, to name a few. Given APD's strategic focus on youth, APD identified technical assistance through CNA to focus on their School Resource Officer (SRO) program. APD recognized the need for a more robust program that was also solidified in standard operating procedures, memoranda of operations, and other agreements with the School Board. CNA identified a subject matter expert (SME) to assist in developing these products and to provide expertise as APD redesigned the SRO program.

## Adult-Focused Programs

APD recognized that the youth programs focused on winning over a generation would affect the long-term crime trends. APD also recognized the importance of addressing today's crime issues. The Healing Wounded Communities strategy seeks to build a stronger working relationship with communities that have historically experienced systemic criminal activity. APD designed multiple programs to reduce violent crime and target adult offenders.



## Neighborhood Engagement Unit

In 2010, APD developed the Neighborhood Engagement Unit (NEU) to build problem-solving partnerships with the community, to engage with community members and organizations, to organize community and law enforcement events, and to address neighborhood-level issues. The NEU is composed of 33 Patrol Officers, 4 Community Service Officers, 3 SROs, 1 PAL Officer, 4 Prevention Service Officers, 1 Antiviolence Coordinator, 1 Youth Aide, 1 Social Worker, and 2 Interns. The sworn officers of the NEU make up 25 percent of the patrol-functioning personnel. Members of NEU attend Neighborhood

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Association and Neighborhood Watch meetings in their areas and neighborhood events, such as community clean-ups, barbecues, and block parties, that allow the police to interact in an environment devoid of confrontation and in nontraditional ways. Sworn officers

from the NEU have also participated in presentations against gangs and bullying and have facilitated activities that encouraged positive reinforcement during Teen Night, a collaborative event to proactively prevent teens from participating in gang-related activities. On average, the NEU participates in over 500 meetings and events that directly involve neighborhood groups and community partners. The NEU is at the forefront of collaborating with community residents to identify problems in the community and to develop solutions. NEU officers do not have traditional patrol operations but, rather, identify problems in neighborhoods that inhibit the well-being and safety of its residents.

## Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion

Albany initiated the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program. LEAD allows police officers to use their discretion to direct low-level offenders into services or programs rather than into the criminal justice system. LEAD includes a full-time case manager who works directly with the initiative and manages the referral process. The case manager works with the clients to obtain such services as drug treatment, mental health services, and housing services and to assist with a variety of other needs. The LEAD program will allow an officer the ability to divert someone whose underlying issue may be drug dependence, mental illness, or homelessness to services that person needs to recover. One of LEAD's main goals is to ensure that clients have access to the services needed to prevent them from returning to a life of crime. The LEAD program has seen a decrease in recidivism among participants.

## Violent Offender Identification Directive

To be able to target the worst of the worst offenders in Albany, APD partnered with the Albany Crime Analysis Center (ACAC) to create the Violent Offender Identification Directive, or VOID. VOID is a data-driven risk assessment tool, used by APD to identify people who are most likely to be involved in gun violence, whether as victim or perpetrator. VOID takes over 100 different data points, including previous weapon charges, history of gang activity, previous assaults, and truancy, and applies a weighted scale to determine the subsequent quantified risk. After the list is created, a two-pronged

approach is implemented: enforcement and prevention. Members of the district attorney's office, police department, and supervisory agency meet for a weekly strategy session to examine various methods of prevention and enforcement. The Community Response Unit carries out all enforcement actions, while the Enhanced Supervision Unit carries out all prevention strategies. ▀

## ESTABLISHING PRODUCTIVE INTERAGENCY PARTNERSHIPS

APD continues to develop productive interagency partnerships with law enforcement and community stakeholders to share responsibility of crime and quality-of-life issues. By unifying unique organizations throughout the city, APD believes that Albany will continue to see a reduction in crime and will increase the quality of life among all residents. Two multi-agency partnerships that have had significant impact on the community and police department are the ACAC and the Albany Community Police Advisory Committee (ACPAC).

## Albany Crime Analysis Center

ACAC is an interagency fusion center that collects, maintains, and analyzes crime data throughout the Albany region. ACAC is staffed with crime analysts, APD officers, Albany County Sheriff's deputies, Albany County Probation Department officers, and New York State Police officers. ACAC is able to produce real-time crime products for officers and investigators in the field to best inform them of the crime issues taking place at a given time—for example, on daily known offender arrests and video surveillance maps. They also produce command level reports on information such as stops, summonses, arrests in a given area, heat maps, and university crime data. Since ACAC is a multi-agency operation, APD is able to share and benefit from information across multiple counties and state level data. Access to the fusion center has helped APD integrate crime data into daily operations in an effort to address the most pressing crime issues throughout the city.





## Albany Community Police Advisory Committee

ACPAC was established by the City of Albany to solidify the partnership between the police department and the community. The committee consists of 15 Common Council appointed residents, 4 police officers, 4 at-large members, 1 chair, and 1 vice chair. Each member assesses the needs of his or her neighborhood and works with service providers and the police department to bridge the gap.

In partnership with ACPAC, APD hosts Pop-Up Events which are strategically held in neighborhoods that have high crime rates. In one such event, held on August 18, 2016, APD, ACPAC, the local radio station, Albany Housing Authority, and Common Council members held a barbecue in the heart of a high-crime neighborhood—one especially known for its gang activity—where children, community members, and officers could enjoy games, sports, and an outdoor movie. Increasingly, officers have identified known gang members attending these events. Historically, the section known as Lark Street, has experienced high levels of gun violence. This neighborhood was strategically selected as a target area for the Pop-Up Events in an effort to drive down crime and build relationships with the community. In 2017, there were no reports of gang-related shootings in the Lark Street neighborhood.

ACPAC also partners with APD to host public seminars and forums to discuss pressing issues, such as the implementation of body-worn cameras (BWCs). In June 2016, the APD hosted a public forum on BWCs at the local public library. The ACPAC facilitated a discussion after a presentation about the new initiative during the open-floor question-and-answer session. Both the Pop-Up events and the public

forums are examples of initiatives that are designed to increase the access the public has to the police department, keep them informed about police activities, and receive input from community members on policies or initiatives. ■

## IMPLEMENTING INNOVATIVE AND EFFECTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

The APD uses multiple social media platforms to engage the community in an effort to increase community trust and access. The APD uses its website, Facebook, Twitter, and Nixle to connect with and engage the community.<sup>1</sup>

In a more nuanced method, the APD through the ACAC provides information to local universities and colleges regarding information that may involve one of their respective students. The ACAC also puts out a 28-Day Nixle Report to the various neighborhoods, but it cautioned us that it has its limitations in adding certain data.<sup>2</sup> The ACAC will also produce reports for officers who are attending community meetings (e.g., Operation Safe Corridor, Daily Known Offender Arrests, and Video Surveillance Maps). The APD is in the process of hiring a vendor to create a public map that includes crime data and community engagement.

The APD is in the process of implementing BWCs for officers and has consistently involved the community during the development process. For example, as mentioned previously, APD posted its

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draft policy on Facebook to solicit public input.<sup>3</sup> In addition, when implementing a new red light camera at an intersection, APD must take into account local needs by holding a community forum to receive feedback regarding the specific location of the new red light cameras.<sup>4</sup> ■

1 Albany Police Department, “Police Department,” City of Albany official website, Accessed Sept. 6, 2016. <http://www.albanyny.org/Government/Departments/PoliceDepartment.aspx>; “Albany Police Department.”

2 ACAC, “28-Day Nixle Report,” Aug. 2016.

3 “Albany Police Department.”

4 Chief Cox and Command Staff, interview by Lauren Frey and Robert Haas, APD Headquarters, Aug. 18, 2016.

# PROTECTING OFFICERS' SAFETY AND WELLNESS

APD has focused on developing policies and procedures to protect and promote officer safety. APD takes the following steps to protect officers while on the job:

1. Requires personnel to wear seatbelts
2. Issues antiballistic vests
3. Provides every officer with a tactical first aid kit

To promote officer wellness, APD created The Officer Wellness Program. Recently, it has expanded the program to include the Fitness Advisory Board (FAB). The FAB included three officers and one supervisor who are responsible for developing and implementing a holistic wellness approach for the department. The FAB holistic approach is to provide resources to improve physical and mental health to APD officers. To improve physical health, the FAB promotes the annual Fitness Test, which is based on the Cooper Standards. APD created incentives to promote high scores. If an officer receives high scores in all categories, he or she is eligible to earn 4, 8, 12, or 16 hours in compensatory time within that calendar year. The FAB also organizes an APD team to participate in local and nationally recognized races, such as the "Run to Remember" held in Boston. In addition, the FAB worked with APD to update the gym facility to increase access for officers to improve their physical fitness during work hours. The FAB also promotes mental wellness by bringing in outside experts to discuss stress relief techniques, meditation, and yoga. The FAB promotes its programs department-wide via their wellness page on the department's intranet. ■

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM SNPPI TTA

APD participated in three different TTA opportunities through SNPPI: Strategic Communications through CNA's SME, Peer Exchange with Cambridge Police Department, and Redesign of the School Resource Officer Program through CNA's SME.

### Strategic Communications

Acting Chief Robert Sears wanted to focus SNPPI efforts on assessing APD's strategic messaging. His desire was to create a unified strategic message about APD's programs so that community members would hear the same descriptions from any given officer. The SSC and analyst identified Laura McElroy, an SME in strategic messaging, to assist APD in designing a unified message about the productive work of the police department. Ms. McElroy developed a three-pronged strategy:

1. Develop a Strategic Communications Plan and protocol.
2. Develop hands-on Media training for Executive Staff and social media training for officers.
3. Assess deployment of internal and external communications.

With a new Strategic Communications Plan, APD will have a unified message to the public about ongoing activities—a message aimed at creating a stronger relationship with Albany's residents.

After examining policies, procedures, and crime statistics, and conducting interviews with APD staff, the SSC and analyst identified

small areas of improvement within the department. The four main areas of focus were SRO programs; crime reduction programs; data collection, analysis, and dissemination; and community engagement. The SSC connected APD with two police departments that implement programs across their four focus areas: Cambridge Police Department and Lowell Police Department.

### Peer Exchange with Cambridge Police Department

Through SNPPI, APD had three opportunities to exchange promising practices with Cambridge Police Department (CPD). In November 2016, ADP hosted members of CPD's Prevention Services Unit, Department of Communications and Public Relations, Community Services Unit, Police Review and Advisory Board, and the Officer Wellness and Resiliency Team. APD had the following takeaways from the first peer exchange:

1. Develop procedures for releasing crime statistics, department policy statements, and other department data based on CPD's guidance.
2. Use CPD's online platform as an example for developing online interface for community members to access APD information.
3. Expand Officer Wellness Program to include access to mindfulness techniques, officer support/ resiliency, and stress management.

Given the chief's priority to redevelop the SRO program, APD traveled to CPD to examine its SRO program. Members of APD's Neighborhood Engagement Unit met with CPD's SROs to share best practices. APD learned how CPD works with the Cambridge School Board to provide public safety within the high schools and middle schools. Seeing a successful SRO program prompted ADP to examine other TTA opportunities in this area.

### School Resource Officer Program

APD expressed the desire to create a formal understanding between the Albany school board and the police department to address juvenile crime. After the CPD peer exchange, CNA worked with APD to develop a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) to outline the roles and responsibilities of the SROs. This MOU would provide a baseline for the new SRO programs, which seek to mentor, educate, and partner with youth in Albany. In addition, CNA identified an SME who specializes in addressing juvenile crime, including in a school setting. The SME examined APD's SRO policies and procedures and interviewed members of the APD staff. The SME provided a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that detailed the APD's redesigned SRO program, in hopes of developing a better relationship with the school board. In early 2018, the Albany school board agreed to provide funding for an additional SRO in a city middle school. ■



## FINAL THOUGHTS

The Albany Police Department has stood the test of changing leadership within the department and city council while staying true to its strategy, which is rooted in protecting the well-being of the community through leadership and service. APD restructured its department and developed new strategies based on the needs of the community. While developing the corresponding programs to meet the strategic objectives, APD incorporated experts from city departments, community members, nongovernmental organizations, and law enforcement partners into their planning and implementation of the described programs. The Albany Police Department is well positioned to serve as a model for smaller, urban police departments across the nation because it has numerous examples of successful and productive partnership with the community to address some of the most challenging city-wide issues. ■

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