

Standards for Library Services to People in Institutions

RICHARD T. MILLER, JR.

ANY AUTHOR WHO PROPOSES to examine in one article the topic of standards for institutional library services must admit at the start that nothing more than an overview can be offered. The diversity of the institutions from state to state, changes in how society at large views these institutions and their residents, and differing approaches by state library agencies—these and other factors militate against any simple description of library standards related to institutional libraries.

This article will begin with a review of the various types of institutions which exist. Next it will consider some of the national, state and local standards which exist for each type of institution, as well as cover guidelines or goals which are sometimes used in lieu of standards. In addition, standards used by state library agencies in their institutional library planning will be discussed. A consideration of the particular problems associated with standardization of standards in institutions will follow. Finally, observations will be made about some of the positive and negative aspects of current standards, and conclusions will be drawn concerning the effective use of standards in the institutional library setting.

Growing Diversity

Many of us can remember from our childhood the various names we had for institutions where “abnormal” people were placed—the “nut house,” the “funny farm,” the “pen.” These institutions may have

Richard Miller is Projects Coordinator, Missouri State Library, Jefferson City.

been, along with their residents, the objects of our childish derision, but they were nearly invisible, often tucked away in remote, less populous areas. Their residential populations were large, and a person was either in the institution or not—there was no “halfway” about it.

Institutions today have gone through considerable changes. We no longer have just the mental hospital, the prison, the jail, but a profusion of types of institutions designed mainly to keep people who need institutional services as close as possible to the mainstream of society. Now we see, for example, sheltered workshops, group homes, halfway houses, juvenile detention centers, and pre-release facilities. And the populations of the large residential facilities, except for adult correctional institutions, have decreased considerably. These changes have been brought about partly through societal attempts to “humanize” treatment of its members who are not able or not willing to live in our society without some special care or treatment. But another factor leading to these modifications is purely economic—it is cheaper to feed, clothe, house, and care for a person the closer that person is to the mainstream of society. Thus, for example, a convicted felon who can function in a halfway house setting, working and paying taxes, costs society less than one in a maximum security institution. Similarly, a developmentally disabled person living in the family home or in a group home and working in a sheltered workshop costs society less than if the same person were living in a state-run institution.

These examples are given to illustrate the diversity of institutions as a reflection of the diversity of their clients. In any consideration of standards for library services to people in institutions, then, it is a foregone conclusion that such standards will need to take into account the variety of people served by these diverse institutions with their variety of library needs. We can no longer be content with providing westerns, mysteries and martial arts books to jails when prisoners are seeking free-world employment so that they can move into halfway houses. Just as the clients can no longer be “pigeonholed” so easily, neither can their library needs.

Current Institutional Library Standards

The following section will review some of the various national standards now in place for institutional library services. It does not pretend to be an exhaustive consideration of the topic. The arrangement will be by type of institution or resident. Some state or local standards or guidelines, sent in response to a request by the author, will also be

People in Institutions

mentioned, especially if they represent significant departures from national standards.

Institutions for the Mentally Retarded/Developmentally Disabled

Until the publication of *Standards for Libraries at Institutions for the Mentally Retarded* by the American Library Association's Association of Specialized and Cooperative Library Agencies (ASCLA),¹ no detailed national standards existed for such library services. While the earlier standards of the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Hospitals went into some detail on staff library services for this type of institution as well as for other "hospital" settings, they had little more to say on the subject of resident library services other than that these services should be provided.² The ASCLA *Standards* themselves are comprehensive, covering the subjects of organization, function, materials selection, design and equipment, budget, and staff. They follow the format for standards developed by the American Library Association in its *ALA Standards Manual*, which will be discussed at some length later in this article.³

The standards, completed in June 1978 but delayed for various reasons, were "designed to describe an adequate library program for an average institution."⁴ Statements appended to the standards offer some indication of the compromises which had to be reached as the standards committee attempted to pull together the varying points of view of both committee members and experts to whom the standards were submitted for comment: "There were those who thought the quantities were too high and those who thought they were too low. There were suggestions for things to add and for things to delete. In general, the Committee counted the 'votes' and adjusted the *Standards* to suit the majority."⁵ This tug-and-pull of whether standards should be minima or "something to shoot for" seems to come up any time standards are written.

Prior to these ALA national standards, a number of states wrote standards of their own. South Dakota produced individualized standards, in addition to policies and procedures, for each one of its mental retardation institutions.

In Iowa and Missouri, the institutional consultants of the two state library agencies wrote joint interim standards for residential institutions for the mentally retarded.⁶ While aimed specifically at institutions, they attempted to go beyond the residential institutions to which the ALA standards are limited. In their introduction, the authors noted that public library services to other institutions (such as group homes) or to mentally retarded individuals might be extrapolated from these standards.⁷

Mental Health Institutions

No national standards exist for library services in mental health institutions. Alan Engelbert, institutional consultant for the Missouri State Library, contacted all the state library agencies in September 1980 in preparation for writing standards for Missouri. He found that no state currently has such standards, and that most states which responded concurred that national standards would be helpful. A number of states did note, however, that they have standards, guidelines, goals, or objectives for the development of all types of institutional libraries. (This topic of standards within the state library agency, as opposed to those within the institutions themselves, will be discussed later.) In response to the author's inquiry, Pennsylvania sent Engelbert a draft copy of rather extensive guidelines for such service.⁸

Prior to the writing of the Missouri standards, the only document in the state which related to the need for library services (and this only indirectly) was a statement that mental health patients had the right of access to current newspapers and magazines. For working with the mental health institutions, the state library first used the ALA standards for health care institutions,⁹ and later the ALA standards for institutions for the mentally retarded,¹⁰ but neither one proved satisfactory. The new Missouri standards themselves borrow heavily from various national standards, and the format follows closely that of the ALA mental retardation standards. As do the latter standards, the Missouri standards for the mentally ill set forth in the introduction the purpose, objective, need, scope, audience, methodology, assumptions, and terminology.¹¹ The standards statements cover the role of the library; administration; staff; budget; materials; space, furniture and equipment; and services. According to the scope note, these standards, while intended for Missouri Department of Mental Health facilities for the mentally ill, "may also be used as a guide for providing library services to mentally ill individuals who are clientele of other facilities (e.g., nursing homes where mentally ill persons have been placed)."¹²

Institutions for Youthful Offenders

In 1975 the American Library Association and the American Correctional Association (ACA) jointly issued national standards entitled *Library Standards for Juvenile Correctional Institutions*.¹³ The publication of these standards was nothing short of a major coup, because a nonlibrary organization joined with ALA to issue library standards. Anthony Trivisono, ACA's executive director, in his preface to the standards, states that the document offers: "clearly defined concrete

People in Institutions

standards which can serve as a guide in providing and maintaining adequate library facilities in juvenile institutions....In addition, these standards will provide for the recently established Commission on Accreditation for Corrections a firm basis for the evaluation of this specialized service to offenders."¹⁴ (Unfortunately, a later attempt to issue standards jointly for adult correctional institutions bogged down when ACA decided to make changes in its accreditation process.) The juvenile standards themselves are quite similar in format to a number of other national standards mentioned in this article. In fact, they preceded most of these other standards, and served as a model for a number of them.

Two state standards should be mentioned here. The first of these, from California, has obviously used the national standards, but has rewritten parts of them, deleted, added, and modified them to make them locally applicable.¹⁵ In correspondence transmitting these standards, Bonnie Crell, the coordinator of Library Services of the Youth Authority, noted that these standards were "being issued as Institutions and Camps Branch Standards."

Another example of an entity other than the state library agency promulgating standards was sent by Alden Moberg, former institutional consultant for the Oregon State Library. In that state, libraries for juvenile detention facilities (as well as the schools for the visually and hearing impaired) fall under media program standards for public schools.¹⁶ In this situation there is no connection whatsoever to national institutional library standards.

Adult Correctional Institutions

No other area of institutional librarianship seems to have generated as much interest in standards as adult corrections. The publication in 1981 of *Library Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions* represented a culmination, and a disappointment of sorts, for the committee members who had worked many hours on these standards.¹⁷ The disappointment was that these standards could not be published jointly by the ACA and the ALA, as the standards for juvenile correctional institutions had been. By the time these adult standards were ready, the ACA had decided upon a standardized approach and format of its own for all accreditation standards it issued. While these accreditation standards¹⁸ refer to the ACA/ALA jointly developed standards, they are not nearly as detailed. Even more discouraging is the fact that, under the current ACA accreditation process, adequacy in another aspect of a correctional institution may be substituted for adequate library service. The

ACA/ALA Joint Committee, however, is continuing its work to strengthen the ACA library standards accreditation process.

Judging from the responses to this author's request for state and local standards and guidelines, many states have library standards for state-run adult correctional facilities even if standards exist for no other type of institution. Furthermore, standards for this type of institution seem more likely to be promulgated by a corrections-related entity rather than by a library-related one. In Texas, for example, the *Library Policy and Procedures Manual* of the Windham School District (the Department of Corrections independent school district) was prepared by the library staff and adopted by the Texas Board of Corrections.¹⁹ This publication includes standards statements. Michigan and Florida both sent policy directives from their respective departments of corrections. Oregon sent sections of that state's administrative rules which apply to its corrections division. In all these, the standards are mixed in with policies and procedures, and are somewhat less detailed than national standards written by librarians. But they carry with them something not all national library standards do—the weight of approval by the governing entities of these correctional institutions.

Pennsylvania has recently developed guidelines based on the ACA Commission on Accreditation standards and on the ACA/ALA standards. These guidelines were produced by adult correctional librarians in that state.²⁰ Apparently, this group felt the need to use something other than the national standards. Perhaps they felt that guidelines, rather than standards, would be more acceptable to correctional administrators in their state.

Another aspect of correctional libraries which has received much attention is that of legal library services. In fact, it is often this part of library services which is of most interest to correctional institution administrators, for it is here that they are most likely to be involved in litigation. While the ALA national standards devote about two of the twelve pages of standards to legal library services,²¹ correctional administrators apparently assign it more importance. The Florida Department of Corrections' directives, for example, devote three pages to library services in general and eight pages to law libraries.

While not standards, two publications are cited in standards regularly and should be noted here. These are the American Association of Law Libraries's *Recommended Collections for Prison and Other Institution Law Libraries*,²² and the ACA's *Providing Legal Services for Prisoners*.²³

Local correctional institutions present particular problems when attempts are made to standardize library services. The jurisdictions one

People in Institutions

is dealing with are many and varied, and conditions in municipal or county jails vary greatly. Also, since many local correctional facilities depend upon a public library for service, the quality of public library service available and the level of service the library is willing to offer to the institution are factors which are difficult to control.

National standards have recently been issued by ASCLA for library services to local correctional facilities.²⁴ These standards should prove to be a good starting point for localities and states which currently have no library standards for jails. These ASCLA standards were based on exemplary standards from Oregon and Illinois.²⁵ In Illinois, for example, library services are part of that state's standards for county jails.²⁶ This is also true in California, where statements concerning library services appear in the minimum jail standards and in various documents for establishing and operating jails. While these are not as comprehensive as librarians in that state had wished, California at least has library standards in the statewide standards promulgated by the state's Board of Corrections. This is more than many states can claim.

Miscellaneous Institutions

While it is fairly easy to sort most institutions into the categories used previously, each state has institutions which are miscellaneous, usually one-of-a-kind facilities. In Missouri, the State Chest Hospital, State Veterans' Home and State Cancer Hospital fall into this category. Generally, *Standards for Library Services in Health Care Institutions* has been used when planning their services.²⁷ However, these standards are somewhat dated, and they offer more help on staff library services than on services for patients. Furthermore, they contain no quantitative standards. Since no other pertinent standards currently exist, it might be advisable to search elsewhere for help. For library services for an institution with an elderly population, for example, it might be feasible to use these health care standards in conjunction with publications which are not standards, such as *Equal Access*,²⁸ or "Guidelines for Library Services to an Aging Population."²⁹

A Unique Case

The South Dakota approach to institutional libraries was mentioned briefly before, but needs further amplification. I found no other state library agency which had written individual standards specifically for each institution.

In a letter to the author dated June 29, 1981, institutional consultant Betty Siedschlaw states: "In the early 1970s it became apparent... that institutional libraries were operating in the state without any

guidelines or policies in a strictly 'do-the-best-you-can' attitude....In 1977 the Institutional Consultant began working on minimal standards for each of the institutions using the *ALA/ACA Standards for Adult Correctional Institutions* as a guide." She went on to point out that these standards were written because the national standards then in existence were unattainable for that state's institutions. Another unique element of South Dakota's standards is that they were presented to each institution before going into effect: "It was made clear to each director and librarian that the standards and policies could be adjusted by them if they did not agree with the consultant's opinion, or if a policy needed to be added or eliminated."³⁰

State Library Agency Standards

Most state library agencies have quite clearly defined standards or guidelines for in-house operations. Even if there are no standards which directly apply to the operation of institutional libraries such as those reviewed earlier, state agency standards or guidelines often define, at least indirectly, what constitutes adequate institutional library services. This is usually accomplished by setting out minima or goals for the state library agency to attain in its service to these state-run institutional libraries. In many cases these standards-type statements are part of the state library agency's long-range plan under the federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSCA).

Guidelines in Hawaii, for example, include criteria for library services to the institutionalized which offer some specifics on recommended collection size and content, on services rendered, and on staffing. Arizona's long-range plan is even more detailed, with quite specific criteria for determining the adequacy of institutional libraries.³¹ Florida's long-range program also lists detailed criteria for institutional libraries, and these criteria form the basis for goals and objectives to be achieved by the state library agency.

West Virginia's long-range plan and Delaware's policy statement concerning institutional libraries again both indicate what the state library agency will do about this particular type of library service. While some of the foregoing plans are not very clear on how initiation or improvement of institutional library services will be brought about, Connecticut's plan, by contrast, assigns personnel from its own staff to other departments which operate state institutions. It is the responsibility of each of these library supervisors to move the institutional libraries in the direction of meeting certain standards.

People in Institutions

New Mexico provides a detailed series of statements which list the goal to be attained, the current conditions in the state, the objectives, the activities, and the evaluation measures. These statements, however, are intended for the state agency and not for the institutions themselves, although what the institutional library "shall" have or do is covered. New Jersey's institution planning guide is eclectic, incorporating goals and minimum requirements, philosophical statements, and parts of various national standards.

But no matter how varied these statements seem at first, they all appear to be derived from the first or revised edition of *Standards for Library Functions at the State Level*.³² This seminal publication notes that a state library agency, as part of its service to state government, should have clear and official relationships with other state agencies responsible for institutional libraries.³³ Appendix II of this publication, entitled "The Relationship and Responsibilities of the State Library Agency to State Institutions,"³⁴ expands upon this responsibility.

There are differences between standards written for use by an institutional library itself and those written for a state library agency one step removed from the institutional library setting. Neither type can be said to be superior to the other. In fact, a combination of statements relating to each other—in the state library agency's long-range plan and in the institutional library's policies (and preferably also in the documents of the state agency responsible for the institution)—could help support the presence of library service.

Standardizing Standards for Institutions

Each state is unique, as are the individual institutions within that state. What can be observed from the documents sent by various states and institutions is that many places build in their own modifications even when they use national standards. Some states, such as Missouri, use all the national standards available for institutional libraries, but tell the institutions that the standards are something toward which to progress. Others take parts from various standards to produce their own. Still other states have managed to have pertinent statutes, rules and regulations, and so forth, passed to cover library needs. Using rules and regulations from nonlibrary sources (e.g., education standards) has proven effective in some institutions.

There is little standardization, then, of institutional library standards among the states and among the various types of institutions. Nevertheless, such standardization, at least on the national level, is

important because it provides a solid base upon which the states can plan their programs. The states or individual institutions might modify the national standards, but the latter still provide something toward which to move.

The American Library Association has done much to help produce “standardized” library standards issued under its imprimatur through its publication of its *ALA Standards Manual*. Granted, using this manual does slow down the standards-writing process, but it also guarantees some consistency from one set of standards to another. The manual does make one wonder, however, if this standardization is not more for the consumption of librarians than it is for others outside the profession. This is not to quibble with the manual, since it is especially useful in making certain that standards cover all areas as they are being written. However, those outside the profession—say, an administrator of a mental health institution—are not likely to be much affected one way or the other by some of the niceties called for.

The *ALA Standards Manual*, for example, distinguishes between a standard and a guideline. The former is defined as “a rule or model of quantity, quality, extent, level, or correctness, approved by a unit of ALA...and promulgated by the Association as a gauge by which the degree of attainment of official ALA Goals can be measured.”³⁵ A guideline, on the other hand, is a “suggested level of performance or adequacy viewed by the ALA Standards Committee...as a desired direction of development, not having the force of an ALA Standard, nor the commitment of an evaluation by which judgments can be confirmed and evidence evaluated.”³⁶ While these definitions certainly are clear, one wonders again if the distinctions so carefully drawn here are simply lost on anyone outside the profession, and whether the phrase “not having the force of an ALA Standard” is meaningful.

The Pros and Cons of Standards

The topic of library standards is always a controversial one. Despite efforts on the part of the American Library Association (e.g., the *ALA Standards Manual*), there probably will never be agreement on the purpose of standards. This is as true in institutional libraries as it is in other libraries.

Certainly, library standards do not lack for criticism. Meredith Bloss, in his article entitled “Research; and Standards for Library Service,”³⁷ criticizes current library standards at some length. The premise of his article is that there are few, if any, “library service standards [or

People in Institutions

guidelines, or criteria] based upon solid research."³⁸ His contention is that "Research would be a welcome addition" to the usual methods for drawing up standards, which currently are simply the compilation of "batteries of statistics, and the 'wisdom of the seers.'"³⁹ The definition of *standards* in the *ALA Standards Manual* comes in for sharp criticism, especially the phrase: "An ALA Standard is intended as a criterion by which current judgments of value, quality, fitness, and correctness are confirmed."⁴⁰ The process of "confirming" judgments already decided upon earlier through the promulgation of standards certainly has little to do with a research approach.

Bloss argues that "service standards would be more creditable, particularly among 'non-library' authorities, if the standards were to be based upon solid research."⁴¹ This is at best an arguable point. One has to wonder whether an institutional administrator would be any more likely to heed a standard based on research than on the judgment and experience of librarians, especially if that research is outside that administrator's field.

Bloss also questions the wisdom of the charge which was given to the ALA Committee on Standards. This charge states: "The development of standards should act as a powerful force for upgrading library services, resources, and facilities—the ultimate goal of the Association and this Committee."⁴² Many librarians apparently feel that they can use ALA standards as a club to increase the funding for libraries. Bloss implies that librarians need to question the validity of this approach.

Lancaster, quoted in the Bloss article, contends that "library standards have a tendency to be guidelines rather than true enforceable standards of the type that govern engineering...operations."⁴³ Boyer, in this same article, is quoted as saying: "Leaders of many communities are no longer impressed by standards drawn up by 'outside' sources, no matter how reputable," and "minimum standards can be used in a 'coercive' way only if there is a sufficient *reward* for compliance."⁴⁴ Both these statements, however, fail to take into account the characteristics which are unique to the library, those which set it apart from other types of endeavors. It is most unlikely that measurement or evaluation of libraries can ever be based on standards such as those used in engineering, to use the example cited by Lancaster. The latter is based upon scientifically proven physical properties, such as stress factors and weight-bearing capacities. To compare libraries with engineering in this sense is absurd. It is also unlikely that libraries will ever have "coercive" standards with rewards for compliance high enough to bring about significant change based on this mode of operation. Change in

relation to library standards always comes back to how successfully librarians themselves are able to use the standards. "Whatever effect...library standards have must...come from persuasion."⁴⁵

Much of the debate in the Bloss article probably seems no more than an academic exercise, especially to institutional librarians. The latter are more likely to be worried about whether or not their jobs will be retained than about the "fine tuning" of library standards. The librarians responding to the author's inquiry displayed a very pragmatic approach. Whatever worked for them in terms of standards, they used. The success or failure of an institutional library program is very closely linked to the personalities involved, especially to the librarian's. Standards, no matter how carefully written, are only as successful as the librarian makes them. Institutional library standards are not the "be all and end all," but simply one of the many tools which may help improve library services at the disposal of the institutional librarian, of the state library agency, and of the institution's administration.

The previous arguments might lead one to conclude that national standards are not very important. Certainly, the pragmatic, "use-whatever-works" approach employed by institutional libraries seems to vitiate the need for national standards for institutional libraries. And yet the national standards are needed. They are the strongest link an institutional library has to the rest of the library profession. Good, effective standards represent the best thinking on what quality library service is, and they focus constantly on the need to improve library services. Without national standards, state and local institutional libraries might become bogged down in the minutiae of their situations and lose sight of overall goals.

Conclusions

Institutional libraries present special problems and challenges. In most places the institutional library is not under the control of a library entity. Even in those states where outside staff or administration is provided, the institutional library still must function, first and foremost, within the institution. Most states' institutional libraries as a whole are inadequate by almost any measure one might use. Libraries probably do not make it into the administrator's top ten priority items. Even in those places where the library has strong backing from the administration, there may be too little money to provide meaningful support. Isolation often plagues institutional libraries—few are members of multitype library cooperatives; some are in physically iso-

People in Institutions

lated locations; the librarian may rarely see other librarians; and training and travel funds are limited or nonexistent.

In institutional library work it is the library which must bridge the gap, often between very disparate organizations, if the bridge is ever to be built. Almost without exception, it is the librarian who approaches the correctional, mental health, or other nonlibrary organization or institution and initiates work to improve library services. Only rarely does the reverse hold true. And it is the library which must be the chameleon, changing its color to suit the surroundings. Certainly, the American Library Association must continue to produce standards where needed, but it must also realize that "anything goes" when it comes to realizing the goals inherent in those standards.

A great number of people who criticize library standards in particular comment on the vague and overlapping uses made of them. One writer stated, "Standards may be interpreted variously as the pattern of an ideal, a model procedure, a measure for appraisal, a stimulus for future development and improvement, and as an instrument to assist decision and action."⁴⁶ The context in which this quotation appeared carried with it an implied criticism of the multiplicity of uses of standards. But standards, at least as they are employed in the institutional setting, are all these and more. In fact, the more creative one is able to be in using the standards, the greater the chances of meeting them. It would be wonderful, would it not, simply to issue institutional library standards and then wait as the administrators of each institution moved to meet the standards? Unfortunately, that is not the case, and standards which cannot be used as a combination club and carrot, and as a means of convincing, cajoling and wheedling are not likely to survive long in the institutional setting.

A number of tentative conclusions can be drawn from the various standards, guidelines, policies, and procedures gathered from around the country, and from personal experiences in Missouri. The first is that it is always better to be talking and planning with institutions about their library services than to reject them if they do not "come up to standard." There are, of course, limits to the tolerance which can be displayed; some institutions need to be left alone until they want library services, or until a key stumbling block is removed. The second conclusion is that one should not worry too much about the purity of the standards used. "Whatever works" is probably a better guideline, based on the variety of standards observed by this author. Finally, convincing the institution's administration (or even higher officials in the department which administers a number of similar institutions) appears to be the best method to ensure acceptance of the standards.

The following recommendations, growing out of these conclusions, are listed here in hopes that they may prove useful to those less familiar with institutional library work. To those experienced in the field, they are nothing new.

1. Be ready, willing and able to compromise when using standards.
2. Involve the nonlibrary administering agencies in the standards writing, rewriting or implementing process. Allow consideration of standards before imposing them.
3. Try to have the standards adopted by the institution, even if this requires some modification.
4. Work with institutions and related administering agencies (e.g., state department of mental health), as well as related organizations (e.g., state sheriffs' association), to incorporate library standards into state and local statutes and into institution policies. This is a long and tedious process, and it is unlikely that such library standards will ever be as complete as librarians would like, but it is worth the effort.
5. Consider adopting standards of nonlibrary organizations if they will lead to improved library services.

The beginning of the *ALA Standards Manual* has something to say on this last point: "Standards published by another organization may be adopted as a standard by a division after their review by the Committee on Standards, to determine whether they are consistent with ALA goals, policies, and standards."⁴⁷ Despite this provision, the cross-fertilization which would be brought about by such acceptance is rare in ALA. Whether or not such activities should be more evident on the national level is debatable. But for the librarian working with a state-run or local institution, such local compromise may mean the difference between library services surviving or going under.

Institutional library standards offer a means of effecting change and serve as a guidepost for the librarian trying to justify the existence of the library in the face of so many other priorities. These standards represent a significant contribution to the constant struggle to improve library services to hundreds of thousands of people in the institutions of this country.

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People in Institutions

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RICHARD MILLER

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