



CAO as experience leader:

**FOUR OPPORTUNITIES
TO MAKE AN IMPACT**

Executive summary

A state government's purpose is to deliver services to citizens and businesses in that state. Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) oversee numerous services that keep the wheels of state government operations turning. In fulfilling this role, CAOs must orchestrate a host of resources and serve a variety of agency customers. While efficiency and effectiveness remain crucial goals for any CAO, there's another "e" that is increasingly important: experience.

New research from the National Association of State Chief Administrators (NASCA) and Accenture helps articulate what today's citizens expect of state governments. It also reveals exciting opportunities for CAOs to play an expanded role in improving customer experience within their states:

- | Experience must be an **enterprise** priority, and the CAO is often well positioned to support it.
- | **Hybrid** work arrangements and hybrid service delivery are critical to meeting employee and citizen expectations.
- | The CAO can become a **role model**, educating and inspiring through the experience their office delivers to agency "customers."
- | By increasing focus and deploying **resources** to support agencies' backend work, the CAO can free up time for agencies to focus on the front-end experience they deliver.

This report dives into these findings and offers four recommendations for CAOs seeking to improve employee experience and, by extension, citizen experience.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 01 Invest in upfront and continuous insights and planning**
Create a baseline assessment of each agency's/function's current customer service maturity level. Use knowledge of gaps to identify a plan for change. Invest to continuously understand the citizens' evolving mindset and needs.
- 02 Reimagine the hybrid experience through space and technology**
Rethink real estate needs and the role that technology can play in facilitating hybrid experiences and coordinating resources across both digital and in-person environments.
- 03 Provide leadership and commitment**
Often, it is the CAO's role to advocate for citizen experience, setting the bar for what good customer service looks like and delivering support that enables agencies to do the same.
- 04 Ride the COVID era**
Consider how your state can use pandemic experiences to further shift people, places and processes for more simplicity and greater digitization.

WHY EVERY IMPRESSION MATTERS

NASCA and Accenture surveyed 1,500 citizens across the country and found that most respondents (81%) interact with government less than once a month. The infrequency of interactions means that state governments have limited opportunities to deliver good customer service.

In our CAO survey, 11 of 23 CAOs indicated that the perception of government services had become more positive or significantly more positive during the pandemic. However, our citizen survey revealed a different finding, with 36% of citizens indicating that their level of trust in government has declined.

The key takeaway? To improve experience and increase trust in government, it's critical to make every service encounter a good one.



81%

citizens who interact with government less than once a month

36%

citizens whose level of trust in government declined during the pandemic

In our survey, citizens were generally positive about the digital interactions they had with government. Just over half (51%) indicated these encounters were “good” or “very good.” But digital isn’t for everyone. In fact, 31% of respondents said they still prefer to interact with government in person or via phone. This finding suggests that government has the tough job of simultaneously delivering easy-to-use digital services and high-quality in-person services.

In the CAO survey, all 23 respondents said the availability of digital government services has changed over the past two years. Fourteen said there are more digital channels; nine said there are significantly more. Among the top-three enterprise-wide digital solutions launched over the past two years, video calling with a state employee, virtual assistant (instant messaging or text chatbot), and mobile app/dashboard for state benefits and services are most common.

Although websites and portals remain popular, these traditional digital channels must be easy to understand and navigate. Additionally, states have opportunities to effectively engage with citizens, including through greater use of mobile technology.

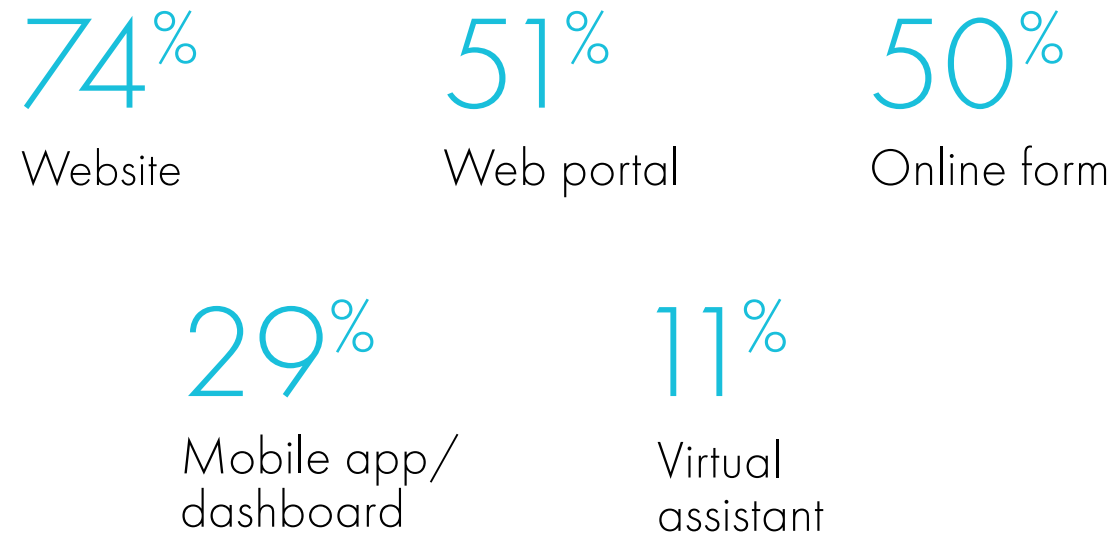
Citizens interact most frequently with financial and health services.

When we asked citizens what government services they had accessed digitally or remotely in the past year, their responses reflected interactions with multiple state agencies. Top responses included:

- | **Tax return filing or other revenue services**
- | **COVID public health services, such as testing, vaccination and health ID**
- | **Support with Medicaid/Medicare/health benefit exchange**
- | **Driver license renewals**

Websites are the most frequently used digital tool to access government services. Apps and virtual assistants are emerging trends.

Which digital tools have you used to access government service over the past two years?¹



Citizens were generally positive about digital interactions; some still prefer in-person/phone



¹ Multiple answers allowed.



Key insights from Illinois

Janel L. Forde, Director, Department of Central Management Services (former)

As part of our study, we conducted workshops and interviews with state CAOs. That included Janel L. Forde, former Director of the Illinois Department of Central Management Services. What follows are five key insights from Janel:



What's not measured doesn't happen. Even if a state doesn't have an enterprise office of citizen experience, it's important to have a single person, entity or office in each agency that's focused on customer service.



The need for customer service is inherently different for the public sector. Unlike the private sector, there is no competition to increase customers or revenue growth based on service encounters. However, there are opportunities to increase broader transparency and accountability—enabling taxpayers to understand how the state is stewarding resources.



Design thinking can be a powerful tool in driving the citizen agenda, but it requires investment in product development and service design talent. Leveraging these resources, map the current customer journey and how it could look with greater digitalization.



People have now experienced groceries delivered in a few hours and merchandise that arrives in just two days. Citizens are wondering why government isn't keeping pace.



Resources are not limitless, so focus citizen experience investments on high-priority customers. For example, it may be more important to focus on improving experience (and outcomes) among Medicaid recipients versus the experience in a state's Department of Motor Vehicles.

Points of frustration

The NASCA-Accenture Citizen Survey surfaced points of friction when citizens access government services digitally.

What has frustrated you when digitally accessing government services in the past year?¹

74%

Slow or unclear processes

59%

Unavailable or ineffective customer support

34%

Digital tools that were hard to use or did not work well

Our survey of 23 CAOs affirmed that states recognize these as areas for improvement. Most (17) cited slow processes. Fifteen CAOs cited unclear processes and difficulty accessing digital channels as two other main issues. Fourteen pointed to ineffective customer support; 11 indicated that unavailable customer support is a main challenge.

Only 55% of citizen respondents said they know where to start when they need service or information from a state agency. Thirteen of the 23 CAOs surveyed echoed that finding, citing “knowing where to begin” as the most challenging step in accessing state government services.

¹ Multiple answers allowed.





What citizens value

We asked citizens to think about their experiences with private companies. We wanted to understand which aspects of these private-sector experiences they would like the public sector to emulate.

70%

Fast, helpful
customer service

58%

Simple, intuitive
processes (i.e., less
bureaucracy)

52%

Simple, intuitive apps
and websites

Citizens also indicated that more personalized services would be helpful:

69% said personally addressing communications to individuals' needs would be "very impactful" or "extremely impactful."

61% said providing relevant government service recommendations would be "very impactful" or "extremely impactful."

50% said that receiving reminders about government service would be "very impactful" or "extremely impactful."

CAO REFLECTION:

"We do a fair job at in-person service. The problem is that people do not know who to call in state government."

CAO OPPORTUNITIES

Given the diversity and infrequency of service encounters, no single state agency can move the meter on citizen experience. An **enterprise strategy is essential**—and the CAO is well positioned to help in crafting and executing it.

NASCA and Accenture have identified **four opportunities** for state CAOs to make a greater impact on employee and citizen experience.





CAO OPPORTUNITY 01

Contribute to and coordinate an enterprise vision

Who “owns” citizen experience in state government?

Answers varied in our survey of 23 state CAOs.

- 10 of the states indicated that the CAO should spearhead citizen experience
- 6 said agencies should drive experience
- 4 suggested the governor’s office should be the state-wide experience advocate

In our study, we identified **only one** state with an office dedicated to customer experience.

For any CAO, their span of responsibility will likely affect how much their team can shape employee and citizen experience. When CAOs manage both human resources (HR) and information technology (IT), there are more opportunities to make a greater impact.

If responsible for HR, for example, the CAO can have more influence over recruiting and hiring practices (though CAOs concede they still face challenges in making competitive offers to candidates). More innovative recruiting approaches may help in surfacing more candidates and candidates with better qualifications for roles within state government. The CAO’s office can also help in creating incentive structures that reward excellent customer service. And it can help in providing the learning and training opportunities state workers need to build and improve customer service acumen.

A CAO’s office that owns IT is more likely to have a bird’s-eye view of the technology infrastructure, applications and other resources that enable digital government services. They also may be grappling with technical debt and underinvestment in new technologies. Indeed, in our CAO survey, **16 of 23** states said budget constraints persist as the biggest barrier to improving customer service.

Even if a CAO does not oversee HR and IT, there is still a role to play in driving an enterprise focus on experience through other administrative responsibilities. Improving experience is not a problem for any single department or program; it’s a whole-of-government opportunity.



Tennessee: Customer service embedded in the culture

Christi Branscom, Commissioner, Department of General Services

For Tennessee, customer service is a top-of-government priority. In 2013, state leaders created the Office of Customer Focused Government (CFG)—an important step for infusing customer centricity into the culture and day-to-day operations of state agencies. Today, CFG continues to serve as a focal point for customer centricity, including using customer feedback to understand and continually improve agency and employee performance.

The Department of General Services (DGS), led by Commissioner Branscom, is responsible for providing centralized procurement and real estate management, among other centralized services. In serving other agencies and internal functions of government, DGS maintains a strong focus on customer service. In fact, serving as a “trusted partner” to other agencies is part of the DGS mission statement, and its core values of “engaged, thorough, accountable and motivated” reiterate a commitment to creating a culture of customer service excellence.

How might other states emulate Tennessee’s success?

Make feedback easy: DGS has a chief strategy officer who routinely measures customer experience through KPIs, agency feedback and service requests and regularly incorporates the feedback into the department. Tennessee has incorporated customer service groups into different services, such as fleet and procurement. Their job is to create a system of continuous improvement. Tennessee makes it easy to collect feedback. For example, state employees include a request for customer service feedback in their individual email signatures.

Consider real estate as a customer experience lever: DGS also supports key functions that enable other agencies to deliver excellent customer experiences. Physical space, design and furniture layout play a significant role in how a customer engages with government services, and the pandemic has contributed to significant changes in these variables. With agencies embracing more digital service and digital scheduling, space needs are evolving. For example, the Tennessee Department of Human Services used to need large rooms to house people waiting for service. Now, they can use their phones or an app to pre-schedule appointments. This capability changes the agency’s space and design needs; it also helps ensure that customers enjoy more efficient, effective customer service. With this change, the in-person customer experience now begins at a service counter or smaller waiting room—not in a large, unpleasant waiting room.

Use technology: Technology is another strong enabler in improving customer experience in Tennessee. For example, for citizen-facing services, the state offers MyTN—a Web-based tool that provides a single point of convenient, secure access to a growing list of government services. MyTN gives citizens 24/7 access to an evolving list of state services right in the palm of their hand. Similarly, for internal service, DGS uses tools, such as a work order management system, so staff can place requests online around the clock. This system also enables work order progress tracking and offers a mechanism for evaluating whether the service satisfied the request. Regular reports yield insights from the highest level to a specific maintenance request.

Central experience champion: As part of the shared service cabinet meeting, the CFG stays connected across agencies and services. The CFG serves as the state’s internal consulting office to drive enterprise-wide innovation and operational efficiency to benefit Tennesseans. The in-house office began as the enterprise experts focused on efficiency and effectiveness. It has since evolved to focus on improving customer experience and fostering continuous improvement. CFG and the Governor’s office regularly identify outstanding customer service through the Governor’s Excellence in Customer Service Award. With an office dedicated to customer centricity, Tennessee is better positioned to embed customer service throughout state government operations and culture.



CAO OPPORTUNITY 02

Enhance hybrid service delivery and work arrangements

Strategically deployed digital capabilities can improve customer experience within some state government entities, but a good in-person presence remains critical. **Public service delivery does not need to be an either/or, all-or-nothing proposition.** Indeed, states are increasingly operating in a hybrid environment. They are adopting hybrid approaches both for how state workers do their jobs and how state residents and businesses access government services. In our CAO survey, **19 of 23 CAOs** indicated that their state allowed for more remote work as part of new digital initiatives.

The shift to hybrid requires a new way of thinking about service delivery and, in turn, how state governments support this work. The CAO is often at the heart of this transition. Understanding citizen expectations—including the findings of the NASCA and Accenture survey—is a critical first step. **Knowing that people prize speed, personalization and access on their terms, CAOs can launch or expand programs to improve efficiencies and modernize functions.**

CAOs also can play an important role in examining hybrid work and hybrid service delivery through an equity lens. That may include identifying opportunities to shift services from traditional Web-based channels to mobile-enabled channels. As one state CAO explained, 20% of households in that state do not have a personal computer, but nearly everyone has a phone or other mobile device.

Hybrid experiences reshaping employee and citizen experience

Before the pandemic, the Tennessee Department of Human Services maintained large spaces to accommodate individuals and families waiting for service. During the pandemic, they launched a scheduling platform. It has reduced space requirements for the state and improved experience for individuals by allowing them to quickly make a reservation.

Rhode Island's Department of Motor Vehicles has launched an excellent hybrid experience. Before the pandemic, drivers would take a number and get in line for service. Often this required taking a day off work. During the pandemic, it became necessary to rethink the process. The state implemented a reservation system that has reduced transaction time to an average of 12 minutes.



Key insights from Nebraska

Jason Jackson, Director, Department of Administrative Services

As part of our study, we conducted workshops and interviews with state CAOs. That included Jason Jackson, Director of the Nebraska Department of Administrative Services. What follows are six key insights from Jason:



In Nebraska, agency directors and program administrators are collectively responsible for customer experience. It's a decentralized approach, and it can be challenging to have a natural inclination toward customer experience. The private sector has the benefit of real-time customer benefit based on what they purchase.



What's the right ratio for hybrid service? Web-based versus in-person should be 80/20. There are some experiences that just don't lend themselves to self-service or digital. Sometimes customers—whether agency employees or citizens—need the assurance of talking to another person.



We are taking a closer look at the role of the HR function in supporting customer experience. In our compensation plans, are we creating the right type of incentives? Are we helping leaders measure individual performance? Are we providing learning/training that's complementary to these skills?



In the public sector, failures are very public, which can cause a fear of experimentation. We are fortunate to have a governor who recognizes the value of trying new approaches but still understands that mistakes may happen.



In our state, 90% of pay packages are performance based. Agency directors are obligated to come up with individual goals. Contributors below the executive director level have their own performance goals.



The single most important thing the CAO can do? Model the behavior that constituent-facing agencies should be doing.



CAO OPPORTUNITY 03

Serve as a customer experience role model

In some states, a centralized structure makes it possible to create and manage customer service improvements at the state level, agency level and even individual employee level. For states with decentralized operations, it may not be practical to implement similar plans. Regardless of structure or span of responsibility, all CAOs share one valuable opportunity: to serve as a role model for customer experience.

By nature, state governments have monopolies on most public services. For example, citizens can't choose where to renew licenses, file tax returns or apply for unemployment benefits. Even though agencies aren't "competing" for business, improving citizen experience can support several important outcomes—from a better employee experience to higher operational efficiency and greater trust in government.

In supporting agencies that serve citizens and residents, CAOs have countless opportunities to model excellent service. That can include deploying new or enhanced digital tools, but it can also include these "low-tech" yet worthwhile investments:

- | Listening, empathizing with and responding to agencies' needs and challenges.
- | Becoming more familiar with each agency's operations and making recommendations for streamlining and simplifying processes.
- | Undertaking deeper training on each agency's "business" so that centralized customer service resources can provide more effective support to all stakeholders.
- | Implementing a formal approach for collecting, measuring and acting on feedback from agency customers.

When CAOs and their teams lead by example, it helps nurture a customer service culture.

CAO REFLECTION:

"It is very challenging to have a natural inclination toward customer experience. The private sector has the benefit of real-time customer feedback through purchasing decisions. Public sector does not."



Key insights from Washington

Tara Smith, Director, Department of Enterprise Services

As part of our study, we conducted workshops and interviews with state CAOs. That included Tara Smith, Director of the Washington State Department of Enterprise Services. What follows are seven key insights from Tara:



The Department of Enterprise Services is a central service provider to other agencies within state government. We find that more people want access to government services outside of the traditional workday. We're working to expand that and trying to provide answers in different ways.



It's critical to first understand our agency customers' expectations. It's hard to define the level of customer service unless we know what they are looking for.



Our governor's office has a robust outreach capability, with staff embedded in communities and focused on reaching out to people where they are. It takes time to build this capacity, but some agencies are starting to expand this.



When looking at state services, start with access. There's always been the ability to renew car tags online, but is the access equitable? Is the website in multiple languages? Does everyone have internet? A permanent home address?



The ability to recruit and retain the best talent is a huge challenge across state government. We need to be more flexible and creative when recruiting.



Rather than just asking, "What can I do for you?" we're thinking of agency customers as partners. We want to understand more about their "business"—who their customers are, how they're getting the resources they need to serve them, and how much the resources align to agency goals and government services.



When you look at implementing change, have you prepared your customer for that change? Are your staff aware? Are staff within your agency customers aware? After you implement a change, evaluate how it went and make course corrections as needed.



CAO OPPORTUNITY 04

Deploy resources so agencies can focus on citizen experience

Our citizen survey affirmed what people expect from their citizen experience: Fast. Personalized. Online when they want it, in-person when they don't. It is no small feat for an agency to deliver that experience amid myriad challenges—from staffing shortages to outdated technology. In this challenging environment, the last thing agencies need are time-consuming, complex administrative to-dos.

This is where CAOs can shine. By streamlining and simplifying back-office administration, CAOs can free up capacity for agencies to enhance their front offices.

The good news? Most citizens, residents and other users of government services are willing to play an active role in making front-office improvements. In fact, in our survey, 71% expressed willingness to learn a new process if it means it will lead to greater ease of use and efficiency. There is also opportunity for government to learn from citizens. In our survey, 85% of citizens said they are “somewhat likely” or “very likely” to provide feedback by completing a survey.

CAO REFLECTION:

“Our clients are the other agencies in the state. No one signs up to be an agency director so they can work on administrative functions. They are hired for program expertise. They can't be more effective than we are, so we need to make sure we can help them keep the promises they make.”



Key insights from Rhode Island

James Thorsen, Director, Department of Administration

As part of our study, we conducted workshops and interviews with state CAOs. That included James Thorsen, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Administration. What follows are four key insights from James:



One of our biggest pain points relative to the citizen experience is chronic understaffing. The problem is especially acute in the health and human services fields.



The CAO's role is to create organizational infrastructure to help government run better. Then the people closest to their stakeholders can be responsible for managing those relationships.



Our DMV is a great example of a hybrid citizen experience. Before the pandemic, you would take a number and get in line. You might even have to take a day off work to wait in line. During the pandemic, we implemented a reservation system, and it's a home run. It has reduced the amount of time it takes to transact to 12 minutes.



Overall, the pandemic exposed woeful underinvestment in IT. Now we are better positioned to make a case to massively increase IT investment. And we're recognizing that IT isn't just a capital investment. Now there are other ways to access the innovations that we need.

Advance the journey to leading experience

Each state CAO operates with a distinct organizational and governance structure. Despite these differences, NASCA and Accenture recommend that every CAO consider these solutions.

01

Invest in upfront and continuous insights and planning

If the CAO's office and their agencies haven't moved yet to being "listening organizations" highly and visibly engaged with customers every day, this would be the time to do so. If you don't know where to start, begin with the agencies under the CAO's purview. These state workers have chosen to take on a job helping others and assisting the agency. And remember, they are citizens, too.

- | Invest to continuously understand citizens' evolving mindsets and needs. This may include the use of design thinking workshops.
- | Create a baseline assessment of each agency's/function's current customer service maturity level. Use knowledge of gaps to identify a plan for change.
- | Explore customer evaluations of service.

02

Reimagine the hybrid experience through space and technology

Rethink real estate needs and the role of technology in facilitating hybrid experiences. Focus on coordinating resources across digital and in-person environments. This approach provides for a more robust experience for the citizen. It also positively impacts the state's real estate footprint, ultimately providing economic benefits. The new hybrid experience will affect how employees work and how services are delivered.

- | Reexamine and consider which employee functions can be remote and which need to be in person.
- | Determine where to strategically deploy digital solutions, allowing for hybrid service delivery.

03

Provide leadership and commitment

In large, siloed organizations like state governments, it can be challenging to see citizen experience holistically. Often, it is the CAO's role to advocate for citizen experience, setting the bar for what good customer service looks like and delivering support that enables agencies to do the same.

- | Provide time and training to focus on customer experience.
- | Identify ways to incorporate customer service as a performance measurement for employee performance reviews.

04

Ride the COVID era

The pandemic ushered in new norms and expectations. Many state governments now have firsthand experience with higher levels of remote and hybrid work environments; greater use of digital channels; and the efficiency and experience improvements that can result. Consider how your state can use pandemic experiences to further shift people, places and processes for more simplicity and greater digitization.



Key insights from Massachusetts

Catharine Hornby, Undersecretary, Executive Office for Administration and Finance

As part of our study, we conducted workshops and interviews with state CAOs. That included Catharine Hornby, Undersecretary of the Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance. What follows are five key insights from Catharine:



Responsibility and accountability for citizen services is diffusely spread across the power structure within state and local governments, and in some cases, across service providers.



Some processes, largely IT, benefit from being more centralized. IT is difficult for the public sector to do well, as contractual complexity is very high and the consequences of failure can be very negative. In most cases, any one department has a relatively low frequency of IT procurement, meaning the opportunity for enhanced learnings from each procurement experience only comes with centralized coordination.



The most important roles of the CAO relative to the citizen experience are resource allocation and providing a centralized perspective on broad decision making around budget, staff, IT investment and procurement. The CAO provides a consistent fabric of awareness across a broad range of topics and is systematic/thorough in its information gathering through routinized budget exercises.



Agency leaders understand the need for more citizen-centric government. The people running government agencies are interested in making government better. They are sometimes challenged by business processes with enormous inertia as well as lags in investment in infrastructure, including IT.



There is an opportunity to leverage the change that COVID brought about to reinvent how resources as well as processes are directed toward the overall service of the constituent.

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Methodology

To understand citizens' expectations and CAOs' perspectives, NASCA and Accenture conducted:

A survey of 1,500 citizens across states, facilitated through a blind panel in partnership with a survey vendor to further understand evolving views on state public service delivery.

A survey of state Chief Administrators from across the country on their views of what the future holds for the administrative office and how government structure may change.

Five interviews with state Chief Administrators to answer remaining questions and highlight innovative approaches.

Two in-person workshops with state Chief Administrators at NASCA conferences to explore and ideate on these topics.

About NASCA

Founded in 1976, the National Association of State Chief Administrators (NASCA), is a nonprofit, 501 (c)3 association representing chief administrative officers (CAOs)—public officials in charge of departments that provide support services such as human resources, information technology, procurement, risk management and general administrative services to other state agencies. NASCA provides a forum for CAOs to exchange information and learn new ideas from each other and private sector partners. NASCA engages states in transforming government operations through the power of shared knowledge, operational excellence and thought leadership. More information at www.nasca.org.

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