



WIHEDC

**WISCONSIN INDIGENOUS HOUSING
& ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORP.**

Building Financial Sovereignty

Economic Impact Study of
Indigenous-Owned Businesses and Non-Gaming
Tribal Enterprises in the State of Wisconsin
~ Executive Summary ~

November 2024

Introduction

Indigenous communities and businesses were disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Research shows that Native-owned businesses in the U.S. experienced a 43% decline in business activity in the first quarter of the pandemic compared to just a 10% drop for white businesses. At the same time, the unemployment rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives peaked at 28.6 percent in April 2020, early in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tribal Nations rely on revenue-generating initiatives (Tribal enterprises) to pay for the wide range of governmental services they provide to their citizens. These businesses are heavily concentrated in gaming, tourism, and hospitality, and as such, were hit especially hard when forced to close in the pandemic.

In some, primarily rural, regions in the state, Tribal governments, Tribal enterprises, and other Native-owned businesses are the largest employers and primary economic drivers.

The pandemic caused many Tribes to prioritize exploring diversifying their Tribal enterprise portfolio beyond gaming and hospitality. While these remain core sources of income, COVID-19 showed the world just how important diversity in economic activity is for both large and small communities.

Now a few years out of the worst of the pandemic, many businesses are still struggling to get back to pre-pandemic levels, others have had to pivot to completely new business models and are still in a learning curve, and individuals, families, and communities are still feeling the lingering impacts.

In order to develop effective policies, programming, and attract additional resources to support Indigenous-owned businesses and Tribal enterprises on a statewide level, the first step is to look at the data to understand who these businesses/entrepreneurs are, where they are, what support they need, and what their impact is on the state's economy.

The contributions of non-gaming Tribal enterprises and Native-owned businesses to Wisconsin's economy has historically not been fully studied outside of the impact of gaming. This means that these entrepreneurs/businesses are likely being undercounted, underfunded, and under supported. This report represents a starting point to changing that.

Understanding the landscape of Native entrepreneurship and Tribal enterprises outside of gaming, identifying gaps and challenges, and quantifying the substantial impact that these businesses have in the state is the first step in developing programs and policies that effectively address their needs. This information can also be used to attract additional funding and resources and direct it to where it is needed most.

Owning and running a business is a path to generating personal income, self-fulfillment and satisfaction, the expression of skills, talents, and passions, and job opportunities and income for others. It is particularly important to foster and support entrepreneurial opportunities and business growth for Wisconsin's Indigenous communities, since many Native Nations in the state are located in rural areas that do not have a lot of other employment opportunities.

The goal of this economic impact study is to establish a baseline report and business directory that will ultimately foster policy initiatives, programming, and resources to support Wisconsin's Native entrepreneurs and non-gaming Tribal enterprises.

The data in this report demonstrates the significant economic contributions of Wisconsin's Indigenous peoples to the state and highlights opportunities for support. Additionally, this report tells the stories of some of the many Indigenous entrepreneurs and Tribal enterprises that participated in this study. The final piece of this project is a directory of Native-owned businesses and organizations that can be used by Tribal governments, other Native businesses, and anyone else wishing to support and patronize them.

We are grateful for the participation of so many Native entrepreneurs and Tribal enterprises in this study as it provides us with a baseline from which we may grow in our understanding and support of and ultimately showcase and celebrate this significant impact, while continuing to build financial sovereignty for Wisconsin's Native businesses, Tribal enterprises, families, and communities.

Sincerely,



Fern Orie

CEO, Wisconsin Indigenous Housing
and Economic Development Corporation



Tribal Nations of Wisconsin

The Tribes of present-day Wisconsin are descendants of peoples who lived on and cared for this land long before the arrival of Europeans. The Menominee, Ojibwe, Potawatomi, and Ho-Chunk people are among the original inhabitants of Wisconsin, while the Mohicans and the Oneida moved to Wisconsin following removal from their ancestral lands.



Figure 1. Historical Tribal Lands of Wisconsin (source: <https://wisconsinfirstnations.org/map>)



Figure 2. Current Reservations and Tribal Lands in Wisconsin (source: wisconsinfirstnations.org)



There are currently eleven federally recognized Tribes in the state of Wisconsin. They include:

- ❖ Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- ❖ Forest County Potawatomi
- ❖ Ho-Chunk Nation
- ❖ Lac Courte Oreilles Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe
- ❖ Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians
- ❖ Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin
- ❖ Oneida Nation
- ❖ Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- ❖ Sokaogon Chippewa Community (Mole Lake Band of Lake Superior Chippewa)
- ❖ St. Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin
- ❖ Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohican Indians

According to the 2020 census, there are 144,572 residents in the state of Wisconsin that identify as American Indian and/or Alaska Native (about 2.5% of the State's total population). 60,428 of these residents identify as American Indian or Alaska Native alone (about 1% of the State's total population). While there are only eleven federally recognized Tribes in Wisconsin, these estimated 144,572 residents represent a broad diversity of Tribal affiliations from Tribes located both within and outside the state, as shown in Figure 3.

Tribal Groupings In Wisconsin By Those Reporting As American Indian and Alaska Native Alone		
Label	Estimate	Margin of Error
Total:	43,759	±1,298
American Indian tribes, specified:	37,711	±1,304
Apache	161	±82
Arapaho	12	±16
Blackfeet	160	±81
Canadian and French American Indian	41	±25
Central American Indian	890	±364
Cherokee	554	±179
Cheyenne	2	±4
Chickasaw	52	±85
Chippewa	12,949	±629
Choctaw	190	±167
Colville	15	±29
Comanche	164	±154
Cree	7	±8
Creek	83	±66
Crow	24	±22
Delaware	1	±6
Hopi	1	±2
Houma	0	±22
Iroquois	4,915	±549
Kiowa	28	±28
Lumbee	37	±32
Menominee	6,530	±564
Mexican American Indian	2,056	±440
Navajo	317	±130

Figure 3. U.S. Census 2022 American Community Survey Data cont. on page 6



Osage	0	±22
Ottawa	208	±83
Paiute	21	±25
Pima	53	±38
Potawatomi	1,004	±195
Pueblo	1	±2
Puget Sound Salish	0	±22
Seminole	7	±13
Shoshone	7	±10
Sioux	391	±135
South American Indian	94	±110
Spanish American Indian	0	±22
Tohono O'Odham	22	±32
Ute	1	±2
Yakama	0	±22
Yaqui	6	±7
Yuman	0	±22
All other American Indian tribes (with only one tribe reported)	6,707	±557
American Indian tribes, not specified	1,126	±271
Alaska Native tribes, specified:	246	±95
Alaskan Athabascan	54	±36
Aleut	35	±50
Inupiat	92	±52
Tlingit-Haida	49	±46
Tsimshian	0	±22
Yup'ik	16	±19
Alaska Native tribes, not specified	34	±28
American Indian or Alaska Native tribes, not specified	3,764	±436
Two or More American Indian or Alaska Native Tribes	878	±239

Figure 3. U.S. Census 2022 American Community Survey Data

While these residents are dispersed throughout the state, the areas with the largest populations of Native peoples are Milwaukee, Brown, and Dane Counties (representing Wisconsin's largest metropolitan areas). Native people also represent significant segments of the population in Bayfield, Ashland, Sawyer, Forest, Vilas, Menominee, Shawano, Jackson, Brown and Burnett Counties.

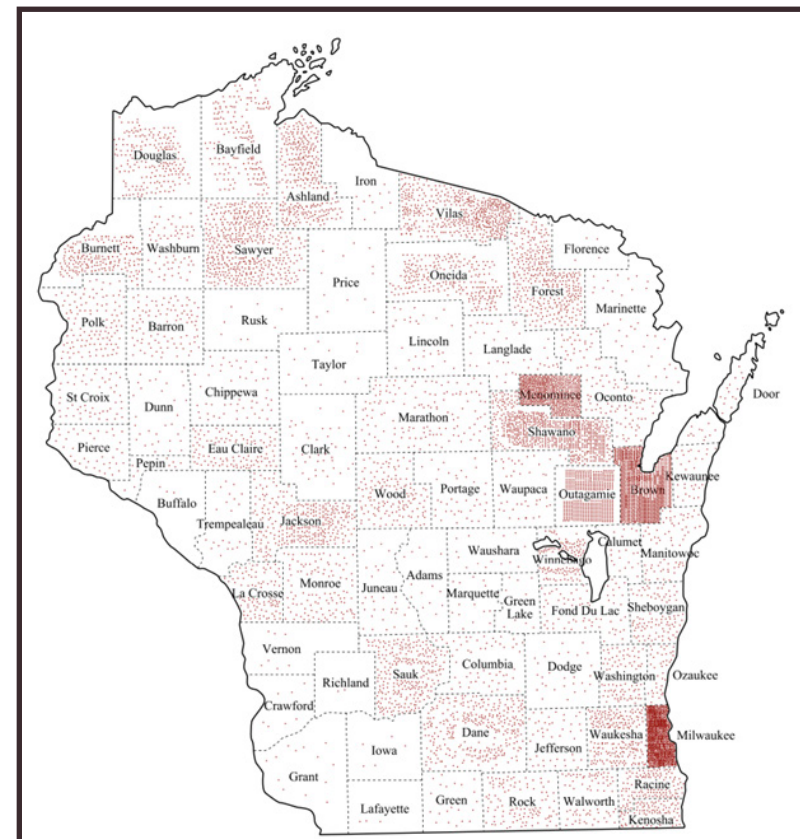


Figure 4. Population Distribution of Indigenous Public-School Students in Wisconsin; Source; American Indian Student Density Map of Wisconsin, 2013 <https://uwm.edu/eqi/research/publications/ai-student-map>

Economic Impact Analysis

In total, there were 177 complete survey responses from employer businesses, non-employer businesses, and Tribal enterprises that provided data on 2023 revenue, payroll, and number of employees, among other information.

There were 64 unique industry NAICS (North American Industry Classification System) codes represented in the survey results (see Appendix B for full list), each of which is housed under one of 17 primary industry categories. All 17 primary industries were represented in the survey results.

All Surveyed Businesses

The combined impact of the 177 survey responses are as follows. In 2023, these businesses:

- ❖ Earned **\$388.3 million** in revenue
- ❖ Directly employed 1,876 full-time equivalent (FTE) workers
- ❖ Paid **\$117.3 million** in payroll
- ❖ Produced **\$776.8 million** in economic output (the value of additional goods and services purchased in the state because of these businesses)
- ❖ Generated **\$256.3 million** in earnings for households in the state of Wisconsin
- ❖ Added **45,029** jobs to Wisconsin's economy

\$388.3 million
in revenue

1,876
full-time workers

\$117.3 million
in payroll

\$776.8 million
in economic output

\$256.3 million
in household earnings

45,029
new jobs

Projections

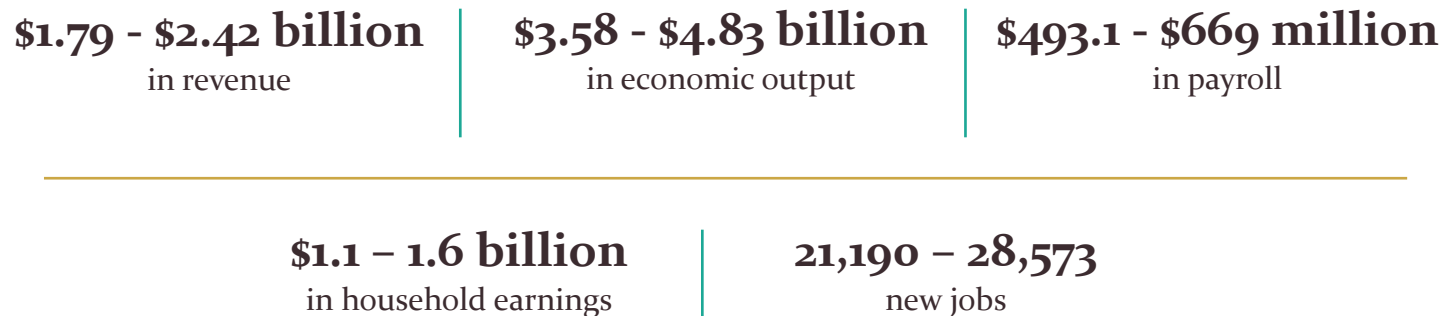
Based on our survey results and most recently available Census data on American Indian or Alaska Native-owned businesses in Wisconsin, we can project the economic impact of all Indigenous-owned businesses and Tribal enterprises in Wisconsin (an estimated total of 3,901 businesses). Our projections indicate that in 2023, these businesses:

- ❖ Earned **\$1.79 - \$2.42 billion** in revenue
- ❖ Produced **\$3.58 - \$4.83 billion** in economic output (the value of additional goods and services purchased in the state because of these businesses)
- ❖ Paid **\$493.1 million - \$669 million** in payroll
- ❖ Generated **\$1.1 - 1.6 billion** in household earnings
- ❖ Added **21,190 - 28,573** jobs in the state

Comparatively, Wisconsin's GDP (gross domestic product – the total value of finished goods and services produced in the state) in 2023 was \$428.447 billion. Our findings show that Indigenous-owned businesses and tribal enterprises in the state of Wisconsin make up about 1% of the state's total GDP.

When looking at statewide employment numbers for 2023, we find that Wisconsin's total employment was 3,855,150. This means that Indigenous-owned businesses and tribal enterprises in Wisconsin accounted for 0.5% - 0.7% of all jobs in Wisconsin in 2023.

In 2023, \$178,472,723,339 (\$178.47 billion) was paid in wages in Wisconsin across all industries. Our findings indicate that Native-owned businesses and Tribal enterprises likely accounted for 0.28% - 0.37% of that.



Geographic Distribution of Survey Responses

Our sample size of surveyed businesses shows a broad distribution throughout the state, with concentrations in Green Bay (10.3% of responses), Milwaukee (8.6%), Ashland (6.5%) and Keshena (6.5%). This sampling seems consistent with the pattern of the population density map (Figure 4) shown on Page 10 of the full report.

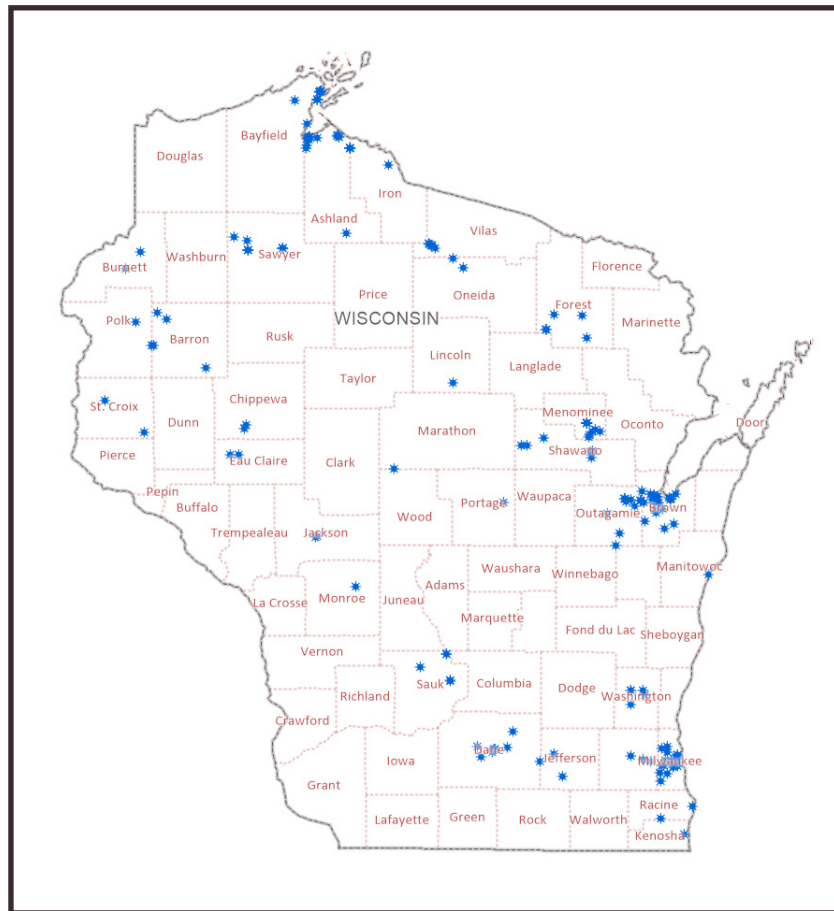


Figure 16. Map showing the geographic distribution of surveyed businesses. Darker blue symbols indicate higher concentration of businesses

Geographic Distribution of Survey Responses					
Business Location:	No. of Responses:	Percent of Responses:	Business Location:	No. of Responses:	Percent of Responses:
Green Bay	19	10.3%	Chetek	1	0.5%
Milwaukee	16	8.6%	Fort Atkinson	1	0.5%
Ashland	12	6.5%	Franklin	1	0.5%
Keshena	12	6.5%	Grantsburg	1	0.5%
Lac du Flambeau	11	5.9%	Greendale	1	0.5%
Hayward	10	5.4%	Greenfield	1	0.5%
Bayfield	9	4.9%	Hales Corners	1	0.5%
Odanah	7	3.8%	Hobart	1	0.5%
Madison	6	3.2%	Kenosha	1	0.5%
Seymour	5	2.7%	Lake Mills	1	0.5%
West Bend	4	2.2%	Leona	1	0.5%
Crandon	3	1.6%	Luck	1	0.5%
De Pere	3	1.6%	Manitowoc	1	0.5%
Onedia	3	1.6%	Marshfield	1	0.5%
Shawano	3	1.6%	Merrill	1	0.5%
Appleton	2	1.1%	Middleton	1	0.5%
Baraboo	2	1.1%	Montreal	1	0.5%
Black River Falls	2	1.1%	Nelsonville	1	0.5%
Chippewa Falls	2	1.1%	New Berlin	1	0.5%
Cumberland	2	1.1%	New Richmond	1	0.5%
De Pere	2	1.1%	Onedia	1	0.5%
Eau Claire	2	1.1%	Racine	1	0.5%
Turtle Lake	2	1.1%	Red Cliff	1	0.5%
Waukesha	2	1.1%	Reedsburg	1	0.5%
Webster	2	1.1%	Slinger	1	0.5%
Wisconsin Dells	2	1.1%	Spring Valley	1	0.5%
Wittenberg	2	1.1%	Sun Prairie	1	0.5%
Woodruff	2	1.1%	Tomah	1	0.5%
Black Creek	1	0.5%	Union Grove	1	0.5%
Bowler	1	0.5%	Wabeno	1	0.5%
Butternut	1	0.5%	Washburn	1	0.5%
Cambridge	1	0.5%	West Allis	1	0.5%

Figure 17. Table showing the geographic distribution of surveyed businesses.

Industries

Tribal Affiliation

The top industries represented by the number of survey responses are:

- ❖ Construction (13%)
- ❖ Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (13%)
- ❖ Wholesale and Retail Trade (13%)

Industries by Percent of Responses (All Surveyed Businesses)		
1	Construction	13.0%
2	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	13.0%
3	Wholesale and Retail Trade	13.0%
4	Other Services (except Public Administration)	10.7%
5	Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	9.0%
6	Manufacturing	7.3%
7	Accommodation and Food Services	6.8%
8	Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	5.1%
9	Health Care and Social Assistance	5.1%
10	Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	4.5%
11	Public Administration	2.8%
12	Educational Services	2.3%
13	Transportation and Warehousing	2.3%
14	Finance and Insurance	1.7%
15	Information	1.7%
16	Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	1.1%
17	Utilities	0.6%

Figure 8. Industries by percent of responses (all surveyed businesses) table.

Out of all 177 survey responses, approximately 20% were from businesses/ business owners affiliated with the Oneida Nation, 13% were affiliated with Bad River, and 12% with Menominee. Interestingly, 10% of survey respondents were affiliated with Tribe outside of Wisconsin's 11 federally recognized nations, 5% of respondents were affiliated with multiple Wisconsin Tribes, and 2% of responses listed an unknown tribal affiliation.

Percent of Surveyed Businesses by Tribal Affiliation	
Oneida	20%
Bad River	13%
Menominee	12%
Tribal Affiliation Outside of WI's 11 Federally Recognized Tribes	10%
Ho-Chunk	9%
Lac du Flambeau	6%
Red Cliff	6%
Multiple WI Tribes	5%
Lac Courte Oreilles	5%
St. Croix	3%
Stockbridge Munsee	3%
Forest County Potawatomi	3%
Sokaogon Chippewa	2%
Unknown	2%

Figure 18. Percent of surveyed businesses by Tribal affiliation (table).

Additional Findings

11.5% of the total survey responses (23 out of 200) were from new businesses started in 2024. While they were not included in our analysis because they were not in operation in 2023, this is worth noting and continuing to track going forward.

15% of survey respondents own multiple businesses, and in many cases, these businesses are in very different industries.

33% (66 out of 200) of all survey respondents have at least one type of certification for their business. Of those that have at least one certification, 67% are Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) certified, 30% are Woman-Owned Small Business / Women's Business Enterprise (WOSB / WBE) certified, and 20% are Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) certified. 5% of all survey respondents expressed that they were in the process of obtaining a certification or were interested and would like to learn more. 52% of survey respondents did not answer the question about whether they had any certifications.

86% of survey respondents said "Yes" in response to the question "Would you like to receive a follow-up email with information about business resources (e.g. grant opportunities, technical assistance, etc.)?"

40% of surveyed businesses reported that they are located on Federally-recognized Tribal Reservation/Trust lands, while 44% said they are not.

68% of respondents shared that their business is registered with the state, while 9% said their business was not registered with the state, 6% were unsure whether it was or not, and 19% did not answer the question.

11.5%
new businesses in
2024

15%
own multiple
businesses

33%
min. 1 certification

30%
WOSB-WBE
certified

67%
MBE certified

20%
DBE certified

Conclusion

This Economic Impact Analysis demonstrates the significant contributions of non-gaming Tribal Enterprises and Native-owned businesses on Wisconsin's economy. Despite the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic, as well as historic and contemporary inequities that persistently disadvantage Indigenous communities, Tribes and Native business owners have continued to launch and grow businesses with reverberating impact across their communities and the region.

As the first of its kind in the State of Wisconsin, this study will provide a baseline understanding of the economic impact of non-gaming Tribal Enterprises and Native-owned businesses. Beyond the analysis, this study also provided opportunities for increased engagement with organizational partners (Native CDFIs, WIHEDC, AICCW, Indigenous Business Group, etc.), new entrepreneurs, and established businesses within the Native business community, connecting them with technical assistance and resources and providing the opportunity to be listed in a non-membership-based statewide directory of Native-owned businesses.

While participation of non-gaming Tribal Enterprises and Native-owned businesses in this study was encouraging and supported a strong economic impact analysis, increased participation in future iterations of the study will lead to more robust results. Now that a first study has been completed, it can provide a reference point to encourage others to understand the purpose and impact of their participation.

Going forward, the following additional data points may be beneficial to gather through future surveys:

- Business owner demographic data (e.g. gender self-identification).
- Estimated total business expenses or estimated taxable revenue in order to calculate estimated impact on taxes in the state of Wisconsin.
- Qualitative data on challenges faced by the business/business owner and support they are looking for, and growth opportunities they are exploring.

In addition to providing a benchmark against which future studies can be compared, this Economic Impact Analysis also highlights some key opportunities to support Native-owned businesses in the near term. Service

providers/business resource organizations can immediately respond to the interest expressed by the majority of survey participants to learn about resources available to support and grow their businesses. Business owners we met with also indicated they would appreciate more opportunities for networking and mentorship.

The hope for this and continuing studies is that Tribes and other policymakers, Wisconsin's Native CDFIs, other economic development and entrepreneurial support organizations, and businesses themselves will use this data to both showcase the significant impacts of Indigenous-owned businesses and Tribal enterprises in Wisconsin and identify opportunities to provide additional support for these businesses.



Becker Professional Services was engaged by WIHEDC in 2024 to conduct this economic impact study. Becker is a planning and economic development services firm whose mission is to help communities thrive economically, socially, and environmentally, and that specializes in providing research and analysis, technical assistance, and community development services to nonprofits, local governments, and businesses in Wisconsin.

To view the full report, please visit wihedc.org.

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