



2024
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



NEBRASKA STATEWIDE
Arboretum

Mission

We plant Nebraska for healthy people, vibrant communities and a resilient environment.

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A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum is approaching 50 years of operation, and I don't think we could have achieved this long history without living out our values in our daily work.

Before we started to work on our five-year strategic plan in 2023, we took some time to reflect on NSA's mission and values.

We asked ourselves whether they still aligned with our work and the impact we want to have on the world. We made some tweaks here and there, but overall, we concluded that our organizational values continue to make us a stronger and more trustworthy organization. I'm pleased that this year's Annual Report illustrates how those values are evident in our day-to-day work.

Throughout the last year, we've continued to strive to create *purposeful beauty* while grounding our work in *science, evidence and reasoning*. We do this through our projects, partnerships and education, as outlined in the first two sections of this report. We also understand that landscapes have the power to *connect* people, and those people can *work together to make a difference*. And finally, we value *transparency and integrity*, which means we're happy to be an open book for our members and supporters.

Thank you for your ongoing support. I hope this Annual Report helps you feel confident that your time and investment in the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum are well-spent. If you have any questions or want more information about anything you see or read in these pages, please reach out at any time.

Hanna Pinneo
Executive Director



\$10 Million Grant Awarded to NSA to Support Community Forestry

This past year, NSA was awarded a \$10 million grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service and made possible by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) to strengthen Nebraska's urban forest infrastructure in disadvantaged communities across Nebraska. We are thrilled to be able to serve as a "pass-through" administrator of these funds, which will support tree planting, tree maintenance and removal and workforce development in both urban and rural areas of the state.

One hundred percent of the urban and community forest infrastructure work that will take place with the IRA grant funds over the next five years will bring resources to disadvantaged communities most impacted by climate change, pollution and environmental hazards.

More information about eligibility and the grant application process can be found at plantnebraska.org/ucf-grants.

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



It's been my pleasure over the past year to work alongside fellow board member Carol Thomas, Syracuse designer Brienne Wilhelm, Syracuse Area Health CEO Mike Harvey and other hospital officials, NSA landscape specialist Brad Kindler and many volunteers on a landscape project to beautify the Syracuse Area Health campus. In the fall of 2023, after months of planning and preparation, we planted hundreds of trees and shrubs and thousands of bulbs. In the spring of 2024, we finished the project by planting more than 600 perennials. Whenever I visit the hospital grounds, I'm overwhelmed by happiness to have been involved in the creation of our community's newest purposeful and beautiful garden.

As president of the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum board, I have the opportunity to see and hear about projects like this that are happening all across our state. I believe in our mission statement that drives the work, instills the goals and inspires countless Nebraskans. The folks who are the heart and soul of NSA are the folks who understand how native species contribute to a purposeful and beautiful landscape. These are also the folks who understand that this work is woven with a thread that connects us all, allowing the beautiful, native landscape to knit us closer together.

Julie Zahn
Board President



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Our Values

We believe in purposeful beauty. We create landscapes that heed sound ecological principles, celebrate native plants and encourage cleaner air and water, diverse habitats, healthier communities and a more resilient environment.

We believe in science, smart reasoning and sound evidence. We draw on our many decades of research and experience to make informed decisions about which plants and practices work best in Nebraska's diverse ecological regions and we strive to share this knowledge with others.

We believe trees and plants have the power to connect. Studies show that residents who live in areas with access to greenspaces know their neighbors better, have a stronger sense of community and feel safer and healthier. Planting Nebraska to encourage a healthier lifestyle and vibrant communities is at the heart of our mission.

We believe relationships matter. We value collaboration, diverse perspectives and partnering with communities, entities and individuals to achieve impactful results.

We believe individuals can make a difference. We know that through grassroots activism and hard work, individuals can make a positive impact on the environment and inspire change in others.

We believe in transparency and integrity. We strive to be transparent with our finances and to carry out our mission with integrity.



We believe in purposeful beauty

At Nebraska Statewide Arboretum, we strive to create landscapes that are both beautiful and that heed sound ecological principles, celebrate native plants and encourage cleaner air and water, diverse habitats, healthier communities and a more resilient environment. We believe beauty and purpose can and should go hand in hand.

Here are a few of NSA’s projects that created purposeful beauty around the state this year:



The entire campus promotes the health and wellness of our patients and visitors, our staff and our community.

Michael Harvey, CEO

Syracuse Area Health

Numerous studies have shown that nature can promote better physical and mental health. Syracuse Area Health staff and volunteers (including NSA Board President Julie Zahn and Board Treasurer Carol Thomas, both of Syracuse) have taken that research seriously. The hospital’s vision for a new landscape project—“to utilize nature to inspire a healthy and healing environment for our patients and community”—has resulted in more than 700 bulbs and perennials and 100 trees and shrubs planted around the hospital grounds and along a walking trail to create an outdoor sanctuary where patients, staff and visitors can benefit from the lasting positive impact of nature.

The new landscaping successfully contributes to the hospital’s “healing through nature” focus. “Our purpose was not just to beautify the campus,” said CEO Michael Harvey, “but to create an entire campus that promotes the health and wellness of our patients and visitors, our staff and our community.” The half-mile walking trail is enjoyed daily by staff and community members alike.

“It was wonderful to be involved in such a positive project in the community,” said Zahn. “It’s beautiful, and it’s only going to get prettier as time goes by and people recognize it for what it is.”



Photos on this page from the Syracuse Area Health planting



Students plant shrubs with Green Infrastructure Coordinator Justin Evertson at Clarks Library



Student volunteers from High Plains Schools

Clarks Public Library

Clarks Public Library Director Barbee Sweet applied for an NSA grant with the hopes of giving the library's curb appeal a facelift by transitioning a patch of turf grass and two planting beds into a more environmentally friendly landscape. She also wanted a landscape that would be inviting and eye-appealing to anyone passing by.

"I wanted to plant something that will be easy to maintain, because I'm a one-man show here," said Sweet. "But I also wanted something to get people's attention as they are driving through town."

Sweet's vision came to fruition with help from the local High Plains Schools National Honor Society. The students planted three beds of native shrubs and perennials, including coneflower, mountain mint, gayfeather and false blue indigo, that offer a lower-maintenance alternative to lawn and provide a feast for pollinators and for the eyes.

Steinauer Heritage House

NSA Sustainable Landscape Specialist Brad Kindler helped volunteers at the Steinauer Heritage House conceptualize a one-acre prairie planting behind their historical center. One of their main project goals was to (re)create the visual feeling of what early community settlers would have seen upon entering the area. In this part of southeastern Nebraska, that would have been a diverse tallgrass prairie.

Nebraska Game and Parks prairie ecologist Gerry Steinauer, whose family has roots in the town, analyzed the site and chose 60 species of plants to create the tallgrass prairie. In January, a group of hardy volunteers hand-broadcast seed, and by early spring, the plants were beginning to emerge.

It will take up to three years for the prairie to be fully established. But we know it will be well worth the wait and are looking forward to seeing the beautiful (and purposeful!) end results.

“

From the grant application process to the planting, it was an absolutely wonderful, smooth experience. Everyone worked together to make this prairie restoration happen. I can't wait to see what it looks like next spring.

Terry Wagner, board member Steinauer Heritage House



Volunteers plant a prairie in Steinauer



Floating wetlands planting project in Lincoln

We believe in science, smart reasoning and sound evidence

Education is a cornerstone of our mission. We strive to share our 45+ years of research and experience to help Nebraskans choose the plants and practices that work best across the state, and we endeavor to reach as wide and diverse an audience as possible through education, events, outreach, partnerships and publications.

Here are a few of the ways we connected with Nebraskans across the state this year through outreach, education and a unique partnership:

A Partnership to Improve Urban Wetlands

This year, NSA partnered with Dr. Steven Comfort, UNL professor of soil and water chemistry, to provide nearly 10,000 sedges for an innovative project that aims to decrease levels of nitrogen and phosphorus in urban ponds.

A variety of sedges were first replanted into specially designed pots by a crew of NSA volunteers and UNL students. The sedges were then transported from NSA's greenhouses to urban ponds, where they were snapped into large rubber mats, which were then anchored to the bottom of the ponds.

Suspended in the water, the plant roots absorb nitrogen and phosphorus. Microbes on the plant roots convert nitrate to nitrogen gas, which safely returns to the atmosphere. Too much nitrogen and phosphorus can lead to an over-abundance of algae, which can then kill fish and other aquatic species. Over time, the decrease in nitrogen and phosphorus allows oxygen levels in the water to increase, which results in less algae, clearer water and healthier fish.



“
Having the plant source readily available from the Statewide Arboretum was a big asset to the project.

Dr. Steve Comfort

Workshops, Plant Talks & Publications

Our in-person workshops and online plant talks offered expert advice to hundreds of participants on a variety of topics, from pruning young trees to planting a backyard rain garden. We also offered guided arboretum and garden tours at St. Leo Catholic Church and Metropolitan Community College in Omaha.

In addition to *The Seed*, our annual member magazine; our biannual newsletter, *Leafings*; and our twice-monthly free e-newsletter, we also created several new resources that we distributed free of charge at events around Nebraska.

Topics included: Top 10 Recommended Trees for Eastern and Western Nebraska, Watering Guidelines for Newly Planted Trees, Rain Gardens 101, Lawn Alternatives and Tree Planting Instructions. Handouts are available to download on our website, along with dozens of others. Several handouts are also available in Spanish, Vietnamese and Karen versions.

Video Resources

Our Waterwise Landscapes and Community Forest video series and accompanying resource webpages—plantnebraska.org/waterwise and plantnebraska.org/trees—reached more than 100,000 people via our social media channels, YouTube and outreach to our non-profit and municipal partners. The videos and webpages introduced the benefits of waterwise landscaping strategies and community forests and offered concrete action steps to encourage residents to make a difference in their own communities.

Wildflower Week

In June we traveled westward to Ogallala, Scottsbluff and Gering to celebrate Wildflower Week, a statewide initiative that shines the spotlight on Nebraska's unique and diverse native wildflower species. We hosted five free events in three days, including plant talks and guided wildflower hikes at Cedar Point Biological Station in Ogallala and at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area in Scottsbluff, a tree planting in Ogallala and a plant sale in Gering. Along the way we connected with Nebraskans of all ages who share our love for wildflowers and were eager to learn more.



Tree planting demonstration with Green Infrastructure Coordinator Justin Evertson at Schramm Park State Recreation Area



Shell-leaf penstemon (*Penstemon grandiflorus*) at Cedar Point Biological Station



Community Forester Chrissy Land leads a wildflower hike at Cedar Point Biological Station



Explorers enjoy a wildflower hike at Wildcat Hills State Recreation Area

We believe trees and plants have the power to connect

Trees and plants have the power to bring people together. Studies show that residents who live in areas with access to green spaces know their neighbors better, interact more with each other, enjoy a stronger sense of community and feel safer and healthier than those without access to green spaces.

Here are a few of the many ways our planting projects have resulted in healthier lifestyles, happier people and more vibrant communities this year:

Connecting Community

Five years ago, master gardener Annette Langan and a small group of volunteers envisioned a pollinator garden on the campus of St. Leo the Great Catholic Church in Omaha. The problem was, they didn't have the funds to bring their vision to fruition. Langan applied for an NSA Greener Towns grant, which enabled them to install 270 perennials, connecting the new pollinator garden with an already-existing older garden nearby.

This past year, a second Greener Towns grant for \$25,000 allowed St. Leo Catholic Church to add five more planting beds, additional walkways, seating areas and a pergola, as well as update signage and plant 24 trees to enhance the campus landscape.

Today, the St. Leo Pollinating Garden is a serene sanctuary in the city where church parishioners and visitors from the greater community connect with nature and have space to pray and reflect. The garden is also a Nebraska Extension teaching and demonstration site, bringing together master gardener and parish volunteers who work together to care for it.

“None of this would have happened without the Arboretum grants,” said Langan. “It’s been a wonderful, win-win experience for the church and for me personally as a master gardener and a parishioner.”



Photos on this page from St. Leo Catholic Church's garden in Omaha





Bloom Box @School tree planting at Northeast High School, Lincoln

“

It’s great for the students to have this very hands-on experience. This partnership with the Arboretum has been a great fit for us.

Bailey Feit, coordinator, Northeast High School STEM Focus Program

Connecting Older Adults

As a graduate student in horticulture and gerontology at UNL, Jane English focused her master’s project on helping to rejuvenate the outdoor space at Royale Oaks, an assisted living facility in northeast Omaha. In the fall of 2023 and spring of 2024, English planted 54 trees throughout 14 acres of landscaping. Funded by Greener Towns and Trees for Nebraska Towns grants, the goal of the plantings was to create a beautiful outdoor space that will help to support the health and well-being of the residents and staff.

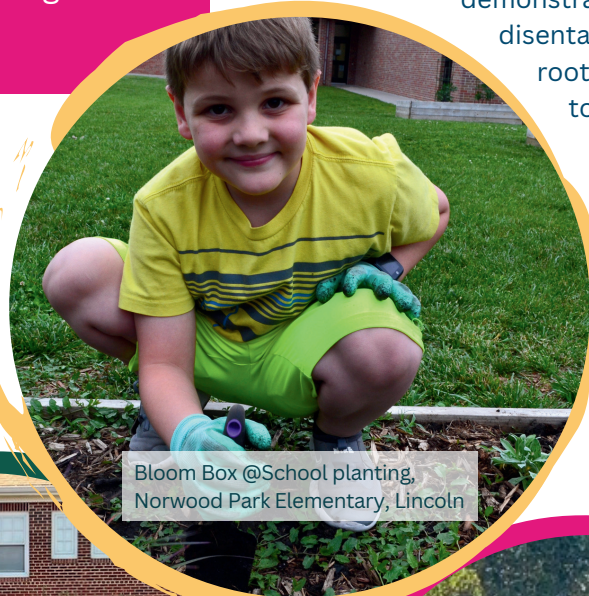
“These improvements do not go unnoticed by those who live and work in these spaces,” said English. “There is no denying that people understand and remember plants, even if their memory is failing. It really puts a smile on their faces.”

English also noted that getting the grants from NSA was a game-changer.

“A project like this doesn’t happen without the Arboretum, because a place like Royale Oaks, which is a not-for-profit facility, doesn’t have the budget for it,” she said.



Pollinator garden at Royale Oaks, Omaha



Bloom Box @School planting, Norwood Park Elementary, Lincoln

Connecting Kids

Through our Bloom Box @School Program, we collaborated with 26 rural and inner-city schools across Nebraska, providing gardening tools, plants and trees, a design plan and educational materials and outreach to help teachers and students learn about the benefits of sustainable landscaping.

Students in the STEM Garden Club at Northeast High School in Lincoln planted 10 trees on their school grounds as part of the Bloom Box @School program. Garden Club member Eva Urman, a sophomore, helped with the tree planting and is interested in a career in landscape design.

“We helped plan where to plant the trees and where we wanted more shade,” said Urman. “Eventually we hope this will help our school become a recognized tree campus.”

Green Infrastructure Coordinator Justin Evertson, Horticulture Program Coordinator Bob Henrickson, and Sustainable Landscape Specialists Sarah Buckley and Brad Kindler demonstrated how to

disentangle pot-bound roots and explained how to measure proper planting depth and stake the newly planted trees. The students then pitched in, helping to dig holes and plant, stake, mulch and water the new trees.



Planting day at Royale Oaks, Omaha



Students and city residents participated in the Arapahoe downtown revitalization planting project

We believe relationships matter and individuals can make a difference.

We value relationships, which is why we partner with dozens of municipalities, organizations and businesses every year to install green spaces across the state. We also know that change typically begins with individuals who have the vision, commitment and charisma to ignite passion in others. We appreciate and honor the efforts of all our partners as we work together to support the landscapes that add so much to our lives.

City of Arapahoe

After the City of Arapahoe completed a downtown revitalization project to replace old and damaged sidewalks, it was time to focus on beautification.

“We get a lot of traffic through the business district,” said Economic Development Consultant Bobbi Petit. “We want to encourage people to slow down and take a look around as they are coming through our community.”

The City of Arapahoe’s “green team” applied for and was awarded \$5,000 in Greener Towns and Waterwise grant funding for plantings in the beds along the main street. Western Nebraska Community Forester Chrissy Land led the team in a series of online brainstorm meetings to plan and design the beds.

More than a dozen volunteers turned out to pitch in on planting day. “We had so many volunteers, what was supposed to take three hours only took 45 minutes,” said Petit.

The volunteers planted nearly 450 trees, perennials and grasses and laid down pine needle mulch in 12 beds.

“Chrissy is the reason the people in Arapahoe will get to enjoy a nice downtown with beautiful shade trees in the years to come,” said Petit. “The trees and plants are amazing, but Chrissy’s guidance, expertise and wisdom were priceless.”



Planting a pollinator bed in downtown Arapahoe

New Landscape Steward Affiliate and Arboretum Sites

Beatrice High School, Evergreen Home Cemetery in Beatrice, Cody Park in North Platte and Tri Trails Park in Ogallala all joined the Nebraska Statewide Arboretum's network of more than 100 Landscape Steward Affiliate and Arboretum sites across the state that demonstrate regionally appropriate adaptability and sustainability. Aldersgate Gardens in Lincoln, which was previously a Landscape Steward Affiliate Site, also became an Accredited Arboretum this year.

Many of these gardens and arboretums are managed by volunteers who generously donate their time, talents and energy to maintain public spaces for the greater good of their communities.



Pollinator garden at Tri Trails Park, Ogallala



NSA Executive Director Hanna Pinneo with George Acker

Volunteer Spotlight: George Acker

Over the last 10 years, George Acker, of Ogallala, has led the transformation of Tri Trails Park into a local historical and horticultural treasure that highlights the unique history of the town—where the Pony Express Trail, the Oregon Trail and the Texas Trail all converge—as well as its bountiful prairie flora and trees.

With grant funding and assistance from NSA, George has installed a flourishing pollinator garden, planted 25 of the park's 50 trees and has spent hundreds of hours pruning, mulching, watering and maintaining the landscape. He was also instrumental in establishing Tri Trails as an NSA affiliate site.

It Takes a Village to Build a Greenhouse

NSA celebrated the grand opening of its new production greenhouse on UNL's East Campus in May. More than 250 donors contributed to the fundraising efforts that made the greenhouse possible.

"Some gave five dollars, some gave more, and we are grateful for every dollar donated that helped us reach this goal," said NSA Executive Director Hanna Pinneo at the celebration.

Prior to the construction of the new space, NSA Horticulture Program Coordinator Bob Henrickson and a cadre of volunteers drove to Mead several days each week from mid-February to April to plant and nurture thousands of seedlings in borrowed greenhouse space. Going forward, this new greenhouse will make plant production much more efficient.



Guests at the grand opening of the new NSA production greenhouse

NSA's Impact at a Glance

In FY 2024, Nebraska Statewide Arboretum completed dozens of tree-planting and garden-making projects in cities, towns and rural communities across the state. Here's a look at our impact by the numbers.



\$368,318
in project funds
granted



28,193

perennials, grasses, trees and shrubs planted statewide through Bloom Box, Greener Towns, Waterwise, Trees for Nebraska Towns and 10 Free Trees programs



97
communities
impacted across
Nebraska



54%
of project funds
supported rural
communities

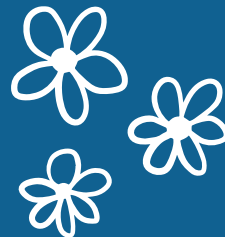


26

schools trained in Project Learning Tree and given free Bloom Box starter gardens and planting assistance from NSA



136
grant-funded
planting projects
completed



153

pounds of seed
sown in prairie
projects

FY 2024 Financial Overview



Living out our value of transparency, we want to be clear about our financial position. Our annual audits and 990 are available to anyone upon request. We are thankful to The Charity CFO, our accounting firm, for the daily work they do to keep NSA in good standing.

Revenue: These percentages are quite different than last year because we spent down a large portion of our grants, especially in distributing project funds this year. However, plant sales and donations remain our largest source of unrestricted funding, which is what pays the staff and keeps the lights on. While membership dues make up a smaller percentage, we did grow membership by nearly 30% this year compared to FY23. Welcome to all the new members who helped us accomplish this monumental goal this year!

Expenses: As a reminder, all plant materials including those for Spring Affair and grant project expenses, are listed under materials & supplies, which is why this is a large portion of our budget. Everything else is well in line for an organization of our size.

Grants Received in FY2024

Nebraska Environmental Trust

Trees for Nebraska Towns, 3-year grant
Year 2: \$325,855

Nebraska Environmental Trust

Greener Nebraska Towns, 3-year grant
Year 2: \$311,392

Nebraska Department of Environment & Energy

Waterwise Landscapes, 2.5-year grant . Year 2.5: \$219,180

Nebraska Department of Education Expanded Learning Opportunities, 2-year grant

Total: \$67,000

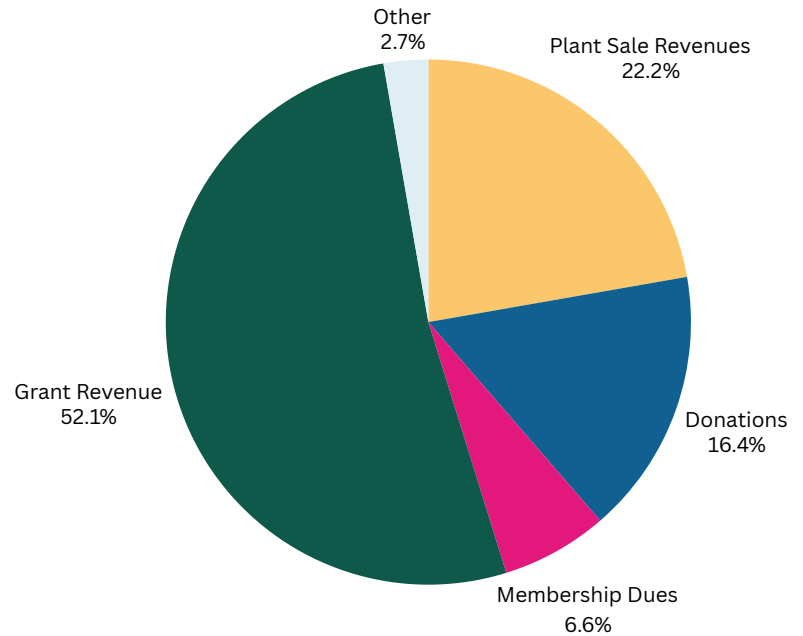
Department of Interior Cooperative Agreement

2-year agreement. Total: \$10,000

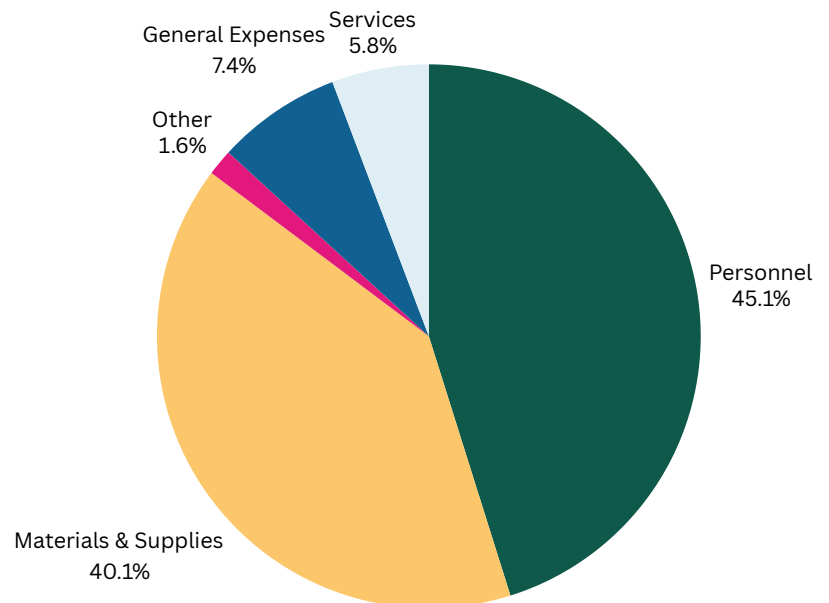
U.S. Forest Service Inflation Reduction Act

5-year grant. Total: \$10,000,000

FY 2024 Revenue



FY 2024 Expenses



Note: services refers to professional and contract services

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