Writers in Residence Evaluation Plan

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Program and Organizational Setting

Writers in Residence (WIR) is a student-run creative writing program delivered to incarcerated youth in several Ohio Department of Youth Services (ODYS) facilities. The program began at John Carroll University in 2017 and was built from an earlier program that recruited student volunteers to engage with youth at the Cuyahoga County Detention Center through playing basketball. Zach Thomas, alumni of John Carroll University and the creator of the WIR Program, noticed the large impact that this program had on the youth through positive relationships with young adult mentors, and hypothesized that a similar program that involved creative writing could have a similar impact while also improving the youth's literacy skills.

The organization currently serves male and female residents at 7 facilities throughout the state of Ohio. Creative writing programming is delivered in facility cohorts over the course of 10-12 weekly workshops led by volunteer student facilitators from John Carroll University, Oberlin College, Hiram College, College of Wooster, Marietta College, Heidelberg University and Niagara University. The purpose of the program is to increase the literacy skills of the youth to reduce their risk of recidivism. In addition, the program seeks to build community within the institutions and provide the youth with positive adult role models and supports. The youths' creative writing pieces are published into short chapter books that are sold in community bookstores and serve as a form of advocacy to free the residents' voices and remind the general public that individuals who are incarcerated deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

As WIR continues to expand its reach into ODYS facilities and grow as an organization, WIR is aiming to evaluate its writing programming, which will undergo a process and outcome evaluation. This evaluation seeks to determine the degree of consistency in program

implementation of the WIR program across cohorts, as well as, the degree to which the program is producing intended outcomes among the residents: an increase in literacy skills, improved attitudes towards writing, and an increase in self-esteem. The findings of the evaluation will be used to make improvements to the program, as well as, for reporting to WIR's funders and stakeholders.

Prior Research

Art programs, particularly creative writing and literacy programs, are common interventions in both juvenile and adult correctional facilities. There is variance in how the programs are implemented, what outcomes are predicted, and how those outcomes are measured. One example is the "A Changed World" program that facilitates art workshops in juvenile correctional facilities led by artists using a variety of mediums (poetry, plays, sketches, murals, etc). The overarching goal of the program is to "reduce recidivism by engaging youth in culturally relevant, experiential art activities" (Ezell & Levy, 2003). An evaluation of the program looked at if it's participants learned new academic and vocational skills, decreased anti-social behavior within the institution, and attempted to compare recidivism rates of participants to the non-participants at the facilities.

Data was collected via participant pre and post-tests, as well as, staff input, and included information on self-esteem, peer-relations, cultural awareness, and community identity. Self-esteem was measured by a variation of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, peer-relations were measured by the Hudson Index of Peer Relations, and observations program staff and self reports by participants were used to measure cultural and community identity. To measure skill development, staff observations were recorded weekly on participant's achievement of learning

goals, and participant self-reflections on skill acquisition were captured in the pre and post-tests. Evaluators also collected quantitative data from the facility regarding youth's interpersonal behavior reflected as incidents. To measure recidivism, evaluators reviewed the court records of youth that participated in the program six months post-release and compared those to a state report of juvenile offenders from the prior decade.

Due to the short and varying of the interventions, evaluators found that self-esteem, cultural awareness, and community identity did not increase significantly. However, observational and participant self-reports of skill acquisition did yield results with 60% of participants reporting they felt had learned a concrete vocational skill. Evaluators also found that on average participants' monthly rates of incidents decreased from 3.31 before programming to 1.21 post programming. In a sample of 24 released participants during the evaluation period, there was a recidivism rate of 16.7% at 6-months post-release where-as the state average from the prior decade was 32.9%. These results align with existing data that the development of academic, vocational, and socio-behavioral skills during incarceration reduces the risk of recidivism in youth. It also suggests that WIR may want to consider measuring peer-relations, as well.

A 2016 evaluation of a program titled WRITE ON (Writing and Reflecting on Identity to Empower Ourselves as Narrators) authored by Chloe Greenbaum and Shabnam reviewed the program's impact as a therapeutic, mental health intervention with justice-involved juveniles. WRITE On is a 6-week group intervention where participants meet twice a week to engage in creative writing programming that is based on trauma-informed and positive youth development

models. Each group was facilitated with a number of options to foster participant empowerment and choice. The program was evaluated using an experimental, multi-site design that attempted to measure fidelity of program implementation and participant mental health outcomes. 53 participants were included in the evaluation that were housed in 4 different facilities and their results were compared to a control group.

Program implementation fidelity was measured by looking at program design, training, and monitoring of delivery. Program design was measured by a satisfaction question following volunteer training, training was measured by volunteer attendance and reflections in weekly observation logs, and delivery was measured by volunteer weekly observation logs and an 8-question participant satisfaction survey. To measure mental health outcomes for participants a number of scales were used in a pre and post-intervention survey. These surveys included the Brief Resilience Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and subscales of the State Shame and Guilt Scale.

Evaluators found that 100% of volunteers reported finding the program training tools of benefit, volunteer logs indicated the correct number of length of sessions, and participants reported high (80+%) levels of satisfaction with the program delivery. In regards to negative mental health outcomes, evaluators did not find significant changes in participants' recorded levels of shame, guilt, and negative affect, and feelings of shame increased from program participants compared to the control group. In regards to positive mental health outcomes, evaluators found that program participants did experience significant increases, most notably in levels of reported resilience, in comparison to the control group. This study helps provide

information on how program implementation can be measured in nonintrusive ways such as

volunteer feedback on the usefulness of training materials, volunteer logs that capture the

number and length of sessions and participants' satisfaction with programming. This study also

links increases in self-esteem as a positive mental health outcome of writing-based interventions

with justice-involved juveniles which WIR also hopes to capture.

"Writing Our Stories" is a creative writing program in three Alabama Department of

Youth Services facilities that seeks to reduce violence. The program works with female and male

offenders aged 12 to 18, to provide creative writing interventions as a way to develop positive

self-expression and develop self-understanding. In 2002, the program underwent an evaluation

by Tracy Smitherman and Jeanie Thompson, in hopes to expand their programming to other

institutions with a high level of fidelity and include qualitative and quantitative data of

participant outcomes. Evaluators used a participant pre and post-test to measure knowledge of

effective communication skills and understanding of feelings and emotions.

The pre- and post-tests consisted of participants engaging in a 10-minute timed writing

prompt in which they are asked to consider two abstract emotions (i.g love and hate). The writing

style for participants' responses is not specified. Program facilitators are provided 5 criteria for

grading the prompts on a Likert scale including if students consistently use full sentences, use of

five sentences in imagery, knowledge of abstract vs concrete language, use of writing tools such

as analogies and similes, and lastly evaluators perception of participants ability to communicate

and engage readers. No significant findings were produced and the evaluators did not clearly

indicate how effective communication skills and understanding of feelings and emotions were

linked with reductions in violence. This evaluation served more as a cautionary tale in regards to the use of unvalidated, self-made measurement tools for assessment. It also demonstrated that while increased self-awareness may be an outcome of creative writing interventions, measuring self-awareness through qualitative analysis of participant writing is challenging, and validated scales such as the Reflection and Rumination Questionnaire may reduce bias and result in more accurate measurements.

Program and Logic Model

The WIR program encompasses the delivery of 10-12 weeks of creative writing workshops to incarcerated youth throughout Ohio that are facilitated by student volunteers from local partner colleges and universities. The theory behind the programs' model is that by engaging youth in creative writing and developing supportive adult relationships that participants will experience improvements in self-esteem, writing disposition, and literacy. Literacy is defined by the program as the ability to communicate and be understood through writing. The program believes that when participants are able to practice writing in a supportive environment they will experience reduced anxiety around writing and view writing as an avenue for self-expression and vulnerability that can lead to improved communication skills and perceptions of self. The overarching belief and proposed impact of the program is that the skills gained from creative writing programming are the same skills that youth will need in their return to the community to avoid further recidivism and be more successful upon release.

WIR partners with nine youth correctional facilities throughout Ohio to provide this program. Each year, a fall and spring cohort are offered at partner correctional facilities. Youth that select to participate meet once a week for a period of 10-12 weeks and engage in a range of

creative writing activities such as memoirs, poetry, nonfiction, lyrics, and others led by the student volunteers. Student volunteers provide each participant with individual attention and feedback on their writing during each session. The program seeks to have a ratio of 1 volunteer for every 3-5 participants to ensure that this occurs. Following the completion of each cohort, students are able to contribute their writing to a chapter book that is published and distributed by local book stores in Northeast Ohio.

New student volunteers from the program's seven partner colleges and universities and are recruited and trained in August and September of each academic year. Volunteer training includes introducing students to the values and philosophy of the program, engaging in scenarios to demonstrate their ability to uphold those values and philosophy in their workshop facilitation, and introduction into data tracking procedures such as the volunteer observation log. Volunteers are trained to model and encourage participant self-expression, creativity, and vulnerability during workshops to help participants reduce anxiety around writing and develop their self-esteem through confidence and enjoyment in writing. WIR program staff develop a new curriculum each year during the summer when cohorts are not in session that student volunteers follow in their workshops. The curriculum provides a theme for each workshop such as self-awareness, identity, and friendship and links the theme and a style of writing for each workshop that the participants will explore and practice.

Figure 1

Logic Model

Writers in Residence Logic Model:					
Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short Term Outcome	Med-Term Outcomes	Long Term Outcome
- 1 full-time Program Staff - Funding for program staff (Anisfield-Wolf - Book Awards Grant Fellowship) - 7 University Partnerships (Liaison Staff) - 56 Student Volunteers - Time/space for volunteer training - 9 DYS Partnerships (Volunteer Coordinators) - Time/space to meet at DYS facility - DYS resident participants - 2 Book retailer partnerships	- Recruit and train student volunteers in - Develop cohort writing curriculum - Develop relationships with DYS facilities - Develop relationships with Universities - Facilitate writing workshops - Monitor/report participant attendance and participation - Publish and market chapter books	# of student volunteers trained - # of participants that complete cohort - # of program facilitation hours - # of books published - # of books sold - # of new DYS partnerships - # of new University partnerships - # of participants that met with mentor post-release	- Participants demonstrate improved self-esteem - Participants demonstrate decreased writing apprehension - Participants demonstrate increased enjoyment of writing	- Participants demonstrate increased ability to communicate and be understood through writing	- Participants experience lower than state average recidivism rates

Evaluation Purpose and Questions

The evaluation of WIR's writing program will be a combination of formative and summative in order to assess the fidelity of the writing program's implementation and how the program affects residents' outcomes. As WIR continues to expand into other ODYS facilities and grow as an organization the findings of the evaluation will be used to make improvements to the program and maintain the integrity and values of WIR, representing the formative quality of the evaluation. It is also summative due to its usage for reporting program outcomes to WIR's

funders and stakeholders in order to increase investments into the writing program. Examining the outcomes of the program provides accountability and insight into how the program improves participants' writing abilities and self-perception. To this end, the following questions will be answered in the evaluation:

1.   Are the writing programs consistently implemented as planned across cohorts and juvenile detention centers?

      a.   Are volunteers upholding the values and essence of the program at each cohort?

      b.   Does the volunteer teaching style embody the philosophy of the program?

      c.   Does the training help the volunteers understand the values and philosophy of the program?

2.   Is the program improving the participants writing skills, writing disposition, and self-esteem?

      a.   Did participants experience an increase in writing and literacy skills?

      b.   Did participants demonstrate an improved writing disposition following the completion of the program (as evidenced by the writing apprehension test)?

      c.   Did program participants experience an observable increase in self-esteem (as evidenced by the Rosenburg self-esteem scale and volunteer observations)?

As the process component, the first question and its subtopics focus on the implementation process to direct program improvement. These questions examine whether WIR's values are upheld across all cohorts and DYS facilities as intended. By means of its creative writing workshops, WIR holds to principles of artistic self-expression and constructive

self-reflection. All student volunteer cohorts are expected to adhere to these values and instill them to participants through workshops at each DYS facility. The subtopics address specific aspects of the workshop, including teaching style and training, for their alignment.

The second question and its subtopics serve as the outcome component, targeting the program's short- and medium-term outcomes. WIR provides training in creative writing and literacy for the purposes of critical thinking, creative expression, and independent self-regulation. Thus, participants' abilities in writing disposition, self-esteem, and communication will be examined.

Evaluation Research Design

Type of Evaluation

Through a process/outcome evaluation, the study seeks to determine the degree of consistency in program implementation of the WIR program across cohorts, as well as the degree to which the program is producing intended outcomes among the residents. These outcomes include an increase in literacy skills, improved attitudes towards writing, and an increase in self-esteem. To answer the evaluation questions, a mixture of administrative, quantitative, and qualitative measures will be collected and analyzed.

Population Description

The units of analysis are university student volunteers facilitating WIR's writing program and residents participating in the program. All student volunteers and program participants from each of the nine correctional facilities and seven partner academic institutions during the stated cohorts will be invited to participate in the evaluation. Thus, the sample will be developed by convenience. The total possible sample includes 180 residents and 60 student volunteers, with an

estimated participation rate of 60%. Any participant pre- and post-test that cannot be matched will not be utilized; data will be analyzed so that the number of data points for each cohort is equal.

Timing and Comparisons

During the 2020-2021 academic year, the evaluation will take place between August 2020 to May 2021. WIR's writing program occurs over 10-12 weeks, with sessions in the fall and spring semester. A WIR staff member will administer a post-test to all student volunteers following the fall training. At the start of each session, the student cohort leader will also administer a pre-test for program participants during the first workshop and a post-test at the conclusion of the workshops for each cohort. Throughout the program, volunteers will collect data through weekly logs of observations after each 2.5-hour workshop.

Following the spring cohort in May 2021, these three unique data sets will be collected and analyzed by a WIR staff member. Participants' pre- and post-tests will be matched and scored. Comparisons between the pre- and post-test surveys will be made, paying close attention to changes in each unit of analysis. Qualitative data from both the participant and volunteer surveys and volunteer observation logs will also be tagged and analyzed for themes

Measures and Data Sources

For this evaluation three primary data sources will be utilized including a volunteer post-training survey, volunteer weekly logs, and participant pre- and post-surveys. The first data source is the volunteer post-training survey collected in September and includes questions regarding program values, mission, and vision-identification, as well as, short answer reflection questions on differing workshop scenarios. The volunteer post-training survey will be used to

measure if volunteer training helps volunteers understand the values and philosophy of the program.

The second data source is the weekly volunteer logs that are completed each week of the cohort by every volunteer. The volunteer logs include sections that capture the logistics of that workshop including length, theme and content covered, volunteer observations on participants' engagement and writing development, and lastly self-reflection on their facilitation of the workshop facilitation and how that aligns with the program's values and philosophy. These measures are utilized to answer evaluation questions regarding if volunteers are upholding the values and essence of the program if their teaching style embodies the philosophy of the program and participants' development of self-esteem.

The last data source is the participant pre- and post-survey which is collected at the beginning of the first workshop and conclusion of the last workshop for each cohort. This survey includes sections of the Writing Apprehension Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, self-reflections on their ability to communicate and be understood through writing, and their perceptions of student volunteer's embodiment of program values and philosophy. The Writing Apprehension Test (WAT) is a 26-question assessment that measures participants' relative anxiety or excitement regarding writing (Dickson-Markman & Richmond, 1985). The WAT assessment will be modified where appropriate to fit the participant population. An example of question modification will be adapting the question "I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication" to submitting writing to the WIR chapter book. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale is a 10-question assessment that measures participants' attitudes

towards self and associated confidence (Dziak, 2017). Self-reflection questions in participant

perceptions were used to measure literacy such as, "Do you feel able to share your thoughts and

feelings through writing?". WIR defines literacy as one's ability to communicate thoughts,

feelings, and beliefs through writing and have that communication be understood. Existing

measures on literacy focus on markers to identify learning disabilities and as such were not a

good fit for WIR evaluation. Lastly, participants were asked reflection questions on if volunteers

demonstrated the values and philosophy during their facilitation of workshops to help measure

program implementation. Reflections and volunteers were not included in the pre-participant

survey.

Figure 2

Data Collection Table

Processes/Outcomes	Indicators	Measures	Data Sources
Does the training help the volunteers understand the values and philosophy of the program?	Volunteers are able to articulate the values and philosophy of the program and know how to apply them in particular scenarios that might arise	Volunteer post-training survey	Volunteer post-training survey (Values identification and scenario reflection sections)
Volunteers are upholding the values and essence of the program	Volunteers encourage self-expression, creativity, and vulnerability during the class	Participant Post Survey, Volunteer self-reflection weekly log	Post Participant Survey, Volunteer weekly log (Self-reflection sections)
Volunteer teaching style embodies the philosophy of the program	Volunteers demonstrate self-expression, vulnerability, creativity, etc. during teaching	Volunteer self-reflection in modified weekly log	Volunteer weekly log (Self-reflection section)
	Participants feel comfortable with self-expression, vulnerability, and creativity	Participant post-survey	Participant Post Survey (Self-reflection section)
Participants experience improved literacy/ ability to communicate with others through writing	Participant improved ability to communicate and be understood through writing	Participant Survey (question on reported self-perception of the feeling that others understood their writing)	Participant pre/post survey, Volunteer weekly log (Participant observations section)
Participant experience improvement in writing disposition	Participant decreased anxiety towards writing	Writing Apprehension Test scores	Participant pre/post survey (Writing Apprehension Test section)
	Participant increased enjoyment of writing	Writing Apprehension Test scores	Participant pre/post survey (Writing Apprehension Test section)
Participant experience increase	Participant increased	Volunteer Observations,	Participant survey (Rosenberg

in self-esteem	confidence and attitude towards self	Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale	Self Esteem Scale), Volunteer weekly log (Participant observations section)

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

Data collection for this evaluation will occur from August 2020 to May 2021 to encompass this year's fall and spring writing cohorts. Data will continue to be collected annually after this school year. All program participants and student volunteers from each of the nine correctional facilities and seven partner academic institutions during the stated cohorts will be invited to participate.

To answer the four content areas of the evaluation a mixture of administrative, quantitative, and qualitative measures will be collected and analyzed. A WIR staff member will administer a post-test to all student volunteers following their training in the fall of 2020. Student volunteers will administer a pre- and post-test for program participants at the beginning of the first workshop and at the conclusion of the last workshop of each cohort. The pre- and post-test will be the same except that the post participant survey will include reflective questions on perceptions of student volunteers and the values they displayed in their workshop facilitations.

All volunteers will be directed to fill out observation logs at the end of each weekly workshop. Following the spring cohort in May 2021, these three unique data sets will be compiled and analyzed by a WIR staff member. Participant pre- and post-tests will be scored, and qualitative data from both the participant and volunteer surveys, and volunteer observation logs will be tagged using qualitative coding and analyzed for themes.

All pre- and post- tests will be coded by cohort, and combined into one data set. Data will be analyzed in a number of ways to determine overall outcomes for participants and fidelity of

program implementation. First, data analysis will be completed across all cohorts to examine overall trends. Then, data analysis will be completed within each cohort with comparisons made between cohorts of similar size to determine if there is identifiable variance within the program delivery between sites. Finally, to identify variance in program delivery that may be attributed to student volunteer's training and facilitation evaluators will match and review each cohort's pre- and post- test data to that of the student volunteer that facilitated the program at that site. Data analysis will link participant post surveys and facilitator post surveys to see if training and delivery of the program is equitable among youth groups.

It is important to attempt, as much as possible, to control for bias in the process of analyzing and deriving themes from the qualitative data. Therefore, multiple volunteers who are participating in data analysis will be asked to code the qualitative data, to ensure some agreement in the interpretations. These volunteers will not be able to see collected demographic information on which facility or school the data was received from and will be given clear guidelines for how qualitative data should be interpreted and coded. In addition, volunteer post-training surveys will be anonymous in a further effort to remove bias in reviewing their qualitative feedback.

Limitations of Evaluation Methods

Several limitations exist in this evaluation plan. First, there is potential for limited participation in the study due to restrictions at DYS facilities. WIR has encountered resistance in establishing its writing program in certain facilities. So some facilities may not only refuse to take part in the program but also the study. Second, DYS facilities may not permit the usage of commissary credit for participants' role in the evaluation. As a result, participants might be less inclined to complete an extensive pre- and post-test survey. Third, the study relies on

convenience sampling to identify residents to participate in the surveys, which may limit validity. This method can increase the potential for selection bias. For instance, residents who may feel strongly for or against WIR's program may be more inclined to provide feedback. Fourth, the use of observations from student cohort leaders can lend itself to bias. Although several other volunteers will code the observations for analysis, it does not completely remove potential bias. Fifth, it can be challenging to draw a clear connection between WIR's training and students' demonstration of WIR's values. If student volunteers hold to WIR's values and philosophy at baseline, it can be more difficult to conclude that WIR's training and methodology are influencing the volunteers' adherence to its principles.

Protection of Human Subjects

WIR staff will provide and ensure informed consent forms are signed by the Department of Youth Services, program participants, and volunteers prior to the start of this evaluation. The informed consent forms will state that the purpose of the evaluation is to assist WIR in determining the program's outcomes on participant's literacy skills, writing disposition, self-esteem, and the fidelity of program implementation across the various partner facilities. Evaluation participants will also be informed that the data collected is intended to improve program implementation, validate outcomes to assist in establishing relationships with additional partner facilities, and improve the organization's ability to seek additional funding. DYS will be informed that the aggregate program results will be shared with them so that they can see how well this program does relative to these outcomes for their residents, in exchange for their participation. Participants will use their institutional number as a random identifier to protect

their confidentiality and match the pre- and post-tests. Residents will be offered a $5 credit to their commissary to incentivize participation in evaluation data collection, both at pre- and post-program data collection times. Program volunteers will be entered in a raffle to win a $5 Amazon gift card to incentivize their participation, at the time of post-program data collection.

Evaluation Utilization

The findings of the evaluation will be used to make improvements to the program, as well as reporting to WIR's funders and stakeholders. As WIR seeks to grow as an organization, they will need to secure a larger base of stable funding. WIR will be more attractive to funders if they can show, through evaluation data, that the program is effective at achieving its intended outcomes. But as they continue to expand in DYS facilities, WIR may experience difficulties with gaining trust and credibility. Currently the program has some data to present their success at the Cuyahoga Hills facility, and this makes them more credible when approaching new facilities for expansion. However, county facilities are often reluctant to bring them in. Resistance on the county level may stem from the fact that there are many protection processes involved with accepting new volunteers into these types of facilities, resulting in extraneous work for the facility staff. Improved and more comprehensive evaluation data on the effectiveness of the program could increase the likelihood for DYS facilities to take on the additional work of onboarding volunteers.

Proposed Evaluation Budget

The evaluation budget is intended for the 2020-2021 academic year. An existing, full-time WIR staff member would be responsible for overseeing the evaluation during the time

frame. It is estimated that this work would occupy 10% of the staff member's time, at around

200 hours a year. This would include travel time. WIR's budget likely takes into account the

staff member's travel time and car expenses. But conducting the study may require at least one

additional trip to each of the DYS facilities. The total mileage for round-trips to each of the

facilities from Cleveland is roughly 1200 miles. With the federal mileage reimbursement at

$0.575 for travel expenses, this amount was used to determine the total cost of travel.

It is expected that WIR will continue to be responsible for recruiting student volunteers

and providing materials for its workshops. But WIR would need to account for additional

materials needed for the study. While the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale and the WAT assessment

are available at no cost, additional expenses would come from printing surveys and weekly logs,

as well as incentives for residents and volunteers. If the maximum number of residents and

volunteers participate in the study, it is estimated that 60 volunteers and 180 residents would

complete the surveys. So the quantity of incentives reflects this total.

	Units	Cost Per Unit	Total Cost
Personnel			
Evaluation staff salary (10% of time at $60,000 per year)	1	$6,000.00	$6,000.00
Fringe benefits (25% of salary)	1	$1,500.00	$1,500.00
Volunteer cohort leaders	7	$0.00	$0.00
Travel (miles by car)	1200	$0.58	$690.00
Printing and duplication			
Printed surveys (pre- and post-test)	360	$0.05	$18.00
Printed weekly logs	140	$0.05	$7.00
Materials & Supplies			

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale	180	$0.00	$0.00
Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension	180	$0.00	$0.00
Amazon gift cards	60	$5.00	$300.00
Commissary credit	180	$5.00	$900.00
Total Cost			$9,415.00

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