Gray Dot Catalyst

CREATING HOPE IN CONFLICT: A HUMANITARIAN GRAND CHALLENGE

BEYOND DATA

Communicating Evidence for Humanitarian Innovations

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Creating Hope in Conflict: A Humanitarian Grand Challenge (CHIC) is a partnership of the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Global Affairs Canada, and is implemented by Grand Challenges Canada. CHIC identifies and accelerates innovations that save and improve the lives of those living in humanitarian crises caused by conflict.

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INTRODUCTION

In the world of innovation, developing impactful solutions is only half the battle. The potential for uptake and scale often hinges on how effectively the evidence supporting these innovations is communicated. In this paper, we explore how humanitarian innovators can effectively communicate evidence of their innovation and why doing so is important. We cover the different audiences innovators may be communicating with, what types of evidence are needed for them, as well as how to harness storytelling and narrative to maximise uptake. We also look at some of the key challenges that real-life innovators face in this area and how they have been tackling them, drawing on the learnings of innovations supported through Creating Hope in Conflict (CHIC), implemented by Grand Challenges Canada, in partnership with the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and Global Affairs Canada.

WHY IS THE WAY WE COMMUNICATE EVIDENCE IMPORTANT?

Evidence is fundamental to responsibly developing, testing, and scaling innovations that improve outcomes for people affected by crises. It also ensures accountability and guides efficient use of resources. Simply having an evidence base, however, is not enough. True value comes from how evidence is translated, presented, and ultimately understood by intended audiences. Effectively communicating evidence **transforms data into actionable insights**, **fosters trust and buy-in, and drives informed decision-making**. But how does it work in practice?

In order to effectively communicate evidence, innovators need to:

1. Know their **audience**(s)
2. Determine the kinds of **evidence** needed to persuade their audiences, and
3. Decide how they will **communicate evidence** to audiences

1 IDENTIFYING AND UNDERSTANDING AUDIENCE(S)

There are a number of potential audiences that innovators will need, or want, to communicate with at different stages of their innovation and scaling journey. When trying to identify which audiences to target at any given point, it is important to zoom out and look beyond individual stakeholders, taking stock of the entire value network (ecosystem) that surrounds an innovation. While specific audiences will vary by innovation and stage, key groups that innovators will likely engage with include:

- **Consumers:** people who gain value from the innovation; those who buy, use, or are impacted by the innovation.
- **Investors:** donors and funding bodies who offer financial and in-kind support.
- **Cartographers:** entities such as policymakers, regulators, trade unions, etc., who determine if an innovation can be used, and how it is used, in a given context.
- **Co-Creators and partners:** organizations or individuals involved in co-creating, adapting, or implementing the innovation (this includes an innovation's own team and wider organization).

However, it is not enough to simply know who the audiences are. Understanding what motivates an audience is key to effective communication. Their background, existing knowledge, interests, and potential biases will dictate the language, level of detail, and importantly, the types of evidence to present to them. For example, a particular donor might need evidence of cost-effectiveness and scalability, while a frontline user might need evidence of ease of use, and a 'cartographer' may be most interested in evidence regarding adherence to regulatory rules. Even within the category of donor, different actors will have different needs and expectations that demand varied approaches, and within any given organization different personnel may have different questions and expectations.

CHIC-supported innovation team, Ogow Health, shares an interesting example of diversity of evidence needs within the same organization. In a meeting with a new partner: "Every single person [in the meeting] had a very different lens ... Some people were looking at cost effectiveness, others were interested in data security, others were focused on the programmatic side. So we were being pulled in lots of different directions...We learned a lot from that experience, including that you don't need all the answers straight away."

Getting to know an audience in as much detail as possible enables innovators to anticipate questions, issues, or areas of confusion that can then be proactively addressed in their approach to communication. However, the task of mapping and getting to know audiences can be overwhelming. It is important to note that this process does not need to happen all at once. There will be certain audiences that are more of a priority than others at each point in the innovation cycle. It is helpful to consider which audience, or couple of audiences, are a priority based on an innovation's strategy at a given moment and to invest the time in getting to know those audiences in detail.

Audience profile prompts: The following prompts can be used to build individual target audience profiles:

- ☐ **Who** are they? Be granular: geography, entity type, priorities, language, potential biases, affiliations.
- ☐ **What** are their needs and why? Understand their perspective, their concerns and incentives, what their drivers are, and what they need from you (as well as being clear on what you want or need from them).
- ☐ **How** to communicate? Where do they consume information (conferences, websites, groups)? What format, language, and level of detail are most accessible and impactful for them?

2 IDENTIFYING THE EVIDENCE THAT IS NEEDED FOR DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Understanding what types of evidence an audience requires to be convinced that an innovation is the product, service or process for them is fundamental to achieving success.

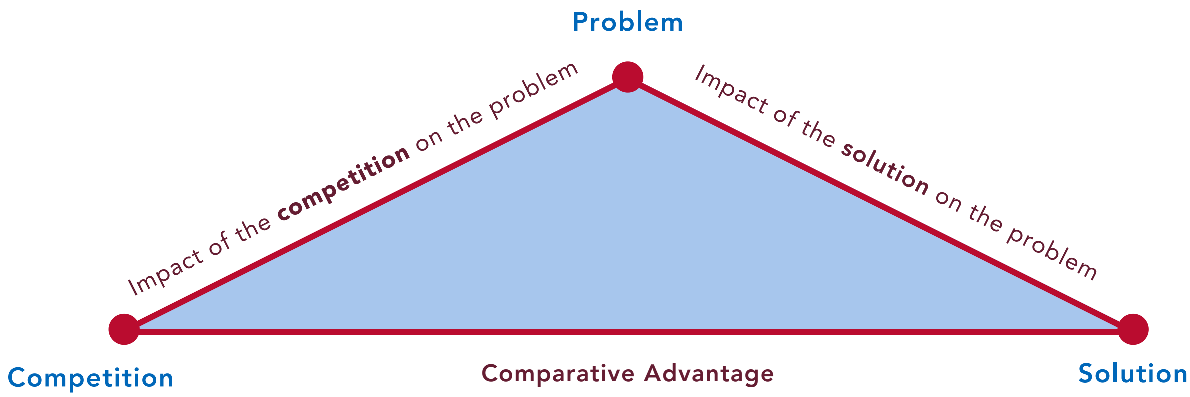
When it comes to innovation, there are **three primary factors** that your audience will require evidence of. These are:

- Evidence of the **problem**
- Evidence of the **solution's impact** on the problem
- Evidence of the **competition's impact** on the problem (and thereby the ability to understand the comparative advantage of your solution over the competition).

Being able to develop or find this evidence is critical to persuading key audiences.

Gray Dot Catalyst (GDC), CHIC's innovator support partner, has developed the Evidence Triangle to visualise each of these key evidence areas and how they interact.

Figure 1: The Evidence Triangle



EVIDENCE OF THE PROBLEM

Quantifying the problem that an innovation is seeking to address is crucial to understanding its impact. In many cases, problems will have already been quantified. For example, an innovation outside of CHIC, the well-known Plumpy'Nut, addresses a problem that has agreed-upon, consistent and standardised indicators for its measurement: rates of child morbidity and mortality from hunger and malnutrition. All health and child-focused funders agreed that it was a problem that needed to be addressed. Plumpy'Nut's task, then, was to articulate the problem in a way that highlighted the need for their specific innovation.

However, a number of social impact innovations are aimed at currently unaddressed social or environmental problems which are yet to be quantified or clearly understood. Highlighting a new problem that should be addressed by the state or civil society is a difficult task in a constrained funding environment. Translators Without Borders' *Words of Relief* innovation had to research and provide evidence for the negative impact that lacking vital, local-language lifesaving information on communities; this was necessary to convince funders to invest in local language information provision.

Proving that there is a problem is still not enough. It needs to be presented to audiences in a way that they understand (see section 3 below), and it needs to be something they both care about and can do something about. Using the examples of trying to attract funding from governments or institutional donors is instructive.

Problem Evidence Checklist: GDC has the following checklist that outlines how innovators should think about whether further evidence of the problem is required for funders or institutional customers, and what that will mean for the likelihood of their innovation being adopted and/or funded by them:

- [ ] Is the problem well understood, including its breadth (the number of people affected by it) and depth (the severity of the problem), causes, and symptoms?
- [ ] Is there a sector/industry that this problem fits into, e.g. health or education?
- [ ] Is this problem of concern to funders/investors/customers in that industry or sector?
- [ ] Is there a budget set aside for addressing this problem?
- [ ] Is the budget accessible to your organisation and innovation type?

Each question builds on the previous answer. The fewer of these questions that the innovator can answer yes to, the harder it will be to access funding from government and institutional donors.

The innovator's answers to the above checklist will determine what they need to do if they want to build an evidence base for a problem. For example, if an innovator can't answer even the first question, they will need to carry out further research. In the earlier Translators Without Borders example, they had to carry out research and then use the evidence from that to advocate for funders to take on this problem, allocate funding to it, and make that funding available to organizations such as theirs. This can be a long and difficult journey, but one that is required if an innovator is committed to solving a problem with donor funds.

EVIDENCE OF THE SOLUTION'S IMPACT

Proving that an innovation is having an impact on the problem, or symptoms of the problem it is trying to address, is the most obvious area for innovators to focus on when it comes to developing evidence.

The key questions this evidence should answer include:

- What does the solution do?
- What value does it create for consumers (buyers/users and target impact groups)?
- What is its reach?
- Is it scalable?
- Is it value for money?
- Does it have any negative impacts?

There are different approaches to evidence generation based upon the needs of audiences, what their ‘evidentiary requirements’ are (i.e., what type and level of evidence they need), and whether there are regulatory standards or industry benchmarks that need to be met. The key is not to waste time building evidence that is not required by innovators' key audiences (including themselves). For example, if the evidence is for the innovator's own team to understand user acceptance of their prototype, then there are numerous light-weight user-centred design approaches and methods that can generate sufficient evidence. If the evidence required is to convince investors that they have a viable business model, then there are a number of ways to carry out business model experiments to create early proof points. Whereas, if the innovator's product needs to be approved by a regulatory body, there is likely to be an extremely high threshold for evidence that may require quasi-experimental research or even several successful randomised controlled trials.

The key is to build evidence as an innovation develops at a commensurate level to what is required at that stage of its maturity for the particular audience they are trying to convince.

Tip: When assessing the evidence that audiences need, it is important to challenge assumptions and consider what is possible at a given time and given available capacity and resources.

EVIDENCE OF THE COMPETITION’S IMPACT

For many audiences, knowing that an innovation is going to work is not sufficient, because they don’t view the innovation in isolation; they compare it to the alternatives. These alternatives range from addressing the problem as they always have done, using workarounds, or comparing them with ‘indirect’ or ‘direct’ competitors. What are the measurements that an audience will use to assess whether an innovation is better for them than its rivals? For investors, it will be things like the profit margin or return on investment the innovation makes compared to the competitors, or the potential percentage of the market it can capture from its competitors.

For a user of the innovation, there will be numerous dimensions that they will assess. There is the near-universal comparator of price, but what else is important to the consumer? Understanding the factors they will be judging an innovation on in comparison to its perceived competitor (which might not be who the innovation team sees as their competitors) is crucial to generating the right evidence to convince them to purchase and use the innovator's product or service.

The key is to provide evidence of an innovation's comparative advantage over its competitors.

Some examples of questions regarding comparative advantage are:

- Is the solution cheaper?
- Is it more durable?
- Is it faster?
- Does it have greater efficacy?
- Is its perceived user value better on the most important dimensions for the consumers?

For innovators, it is critical to understand what dimensions of value are most important to their chosen audience and how their innovation compares with the competition.

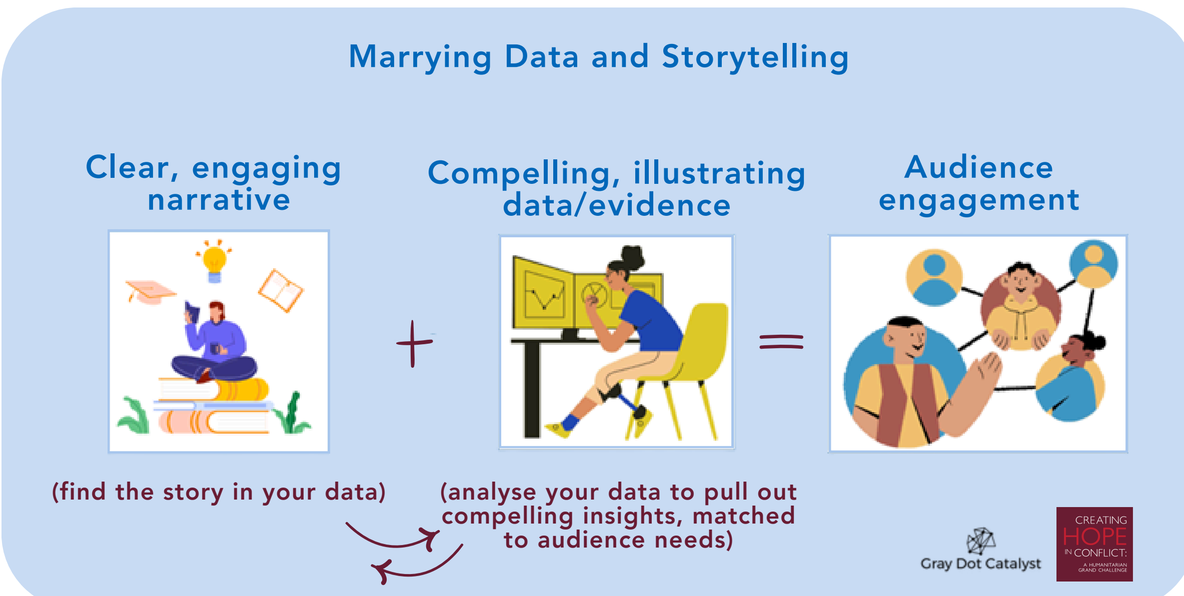
3 COMMUNICATING DATA EFFECTIVELY: MARRYING DATA AND STORYTELLING

It is often the case that certain audiences appear to have a preference for hard, quantitative data based on specific indicators, while others might be more interested in the stories behind that data. These two types of evidence can be categorized as 'head' evidence (the quantitative and rigorous analysis) and 'heart' evidence (the more human qualitative data, stories and testimonials).

However, the two do not have to be mutually exclusive, and storytelling can play a crucial role in effectively communicating either category of evidence. While data and statistics are crucial for establishing validity, alone, they can often fail to resonate emotionally or translate into understanding or action for diverse audiences.

Meanwhile, the human brain is wired to respond to stories. When humans process factual information, it is primarily the language processing centres in the brain that are activated. However, when listening to an engaging story, studies using MRI scans show that a much broader range of brain areas "light up," including the sensory motor and emotional cortices. This happens because the brain simulates the events and emotions of the story as if the listener were experiencing them firsthand. As a result, we remember and engage with stories much better than with simple facts or abstract data. **The benefits of marrying both data and storytelling are therefore significant.**

In the context of communicating evidence, storytelling can bridge the gap between data and lived experience, making evidence **easier to understand, more memorable, and ultimately, more persuasive.** By framing evidence within a compelling narrative, innovators can highlight the human impact of an innovation and inspire audiences to not just understand, but to care and even act.



So what does this actually look like? Again, Plumpy'Nut provides a good example. The innovation created a clear narrative: a simple, effective solution to a devastating problem, which was delivered using a combination of human-interest stories of children recovering from malnutrition and compelling data demonstrating Plumpy'Nut's effectiveness. Cash and voucher assistance (CVA) is another good example. Its proponents effectively used evidence that illustrated the cost-effectiveness of CVA in comparison to traditional aid (evidence of its comparative advantage), supported by storytelling (via CVA recipient testimonials) to humanize the impact. This combined approach proved useful in countering the skepticism that the innovation initially faced.

Engaging communications checklist: Regardless of the chosen format or target audience, there are some universal principles that will give innovators the best chance of landing key messaging with an audience:

- ☐ **Build a clear narrative:** a clear structure with a beginning that outlines the problem/context, a middle that presents the evidence and analysis, and an end that concludes things, provides recommendations or contains a call to action.
- ☐ **Simplify:** clear language and concrete examples are crucial.
- ☐ Tailor: A technical report for experts will differ significantly from a summary for the general public or a briefing for decision-makers. Adjust tone, language, complexity, and framing accordingly. Identifying needs and concerns, including questions the audience may have and/or problems they may need to solve, is also key. Framing the evidence to address these points can be an effective way of tailoring messaging.
- ☐ **Make it human:** Where possible, translate abstract data into tangible impacts on people or situations. Consider who is telling the story and how relatable they are for the audience. Are they the best person to convey the story - there are ethical considerations here too. Try using comparisons that are relatable for your audience to understand the scale of a number - for example by comparing a figure to the amount of people populating a specific city or that would fill a certain sports stadium 'x' number of times. Ensure the comparison is something the audience can relate to.
- ☐ **So What?:** Clearly explain why the evidence matters to the audience, their goals, or the problem at hand. Where possible, explain how the evidence can inform decisions or actions. How can the audience use this information? Or more to the point, what do you want them to do with it?

4 LEARNING FROM CHIC INNOVATORS

In the following case studies, we look at how two of CHIC's cohort of innovators - THRIVEGulu and Ogow Health - are tackling challenges around communicating evidence to different audiences, the approach they have taken and what they have learned.

THRIVEGulu

THRIVEGulu is a Proof of Concept (PoC) team within the Creating Hope In Conflict (CHIC) cohort of innovators.

The Innovation: THRIVEGulu's novel Dance + Therapy approach seeks to address the mental health challenges faced by South Sudanese refugees in Uganda. Led by displaced communities through a peer-led model, the program combines counselling with dance movement to heal trauma and promote community cohesion.

LEARNINGS

Peer-lead Communications

The Dance + Therapy (D+T) approach is co-designed and delivered by displaced communities. THRIVEGulu saw their peer D+T leaders as vital in communicating both the evidence of the problem the solution at the community level. Empowering the peer D+T leaders to speak about their own mental health and the impact of the innovation on them, through their own community networks, has been effective in building trust in the solution within the community, as well as increasing its legitimacy. It has also allowed THRIVEGulu to open up a wider conversation around mental health at the community level, spreading awareness of the problem the innovation seeks to address. This is a great example of the concept of 'homophily', where an audience's connection with the messenger or conveyor of the evidence is just as powerful an ingredient for their engagement and trust as the evidence itself.

Accessibility

Within their model, THRIVEGulu has considered accessibility from the outset, in terms of meeting audience needs related to language, format and the channels for dissemination of information. The South Sudanese refugee community includes over ten different spoken languages. THRIVEGulu's approach focused on ensuring that the peer D+T leaders they selected spoke at least one, if not two, additional languages aside from Juba Arabic. They also took care in understanding where they could reach the community, mobilizing peer D+T leaders and participants who have completed the 12 weeks of the program to do mental health outreach at places of worship, reception centres, markets, schools and other key locations. They were additionally mindful of the formats used for presenting evidence to the community. THRIVEGulu learned through its early testing that the community responds positively to storytelling presented through video, radio, television and in-person verbal communication. They have therefore invested in these areas.

> **"...people [sometimes] don't have the time to read, but when they see a five-minute clip, at least they can have a feeling of the impact of your innovation....we need to document success stories, voices from our D+T team members, so that they can be able to speak for us in the different forums" - Joyce Stella Aciro, Program Officer, THRIVEGulu.**

This is not to say that written communications do not also have a role. THRIVEGulu have created an array of resources on both mental health (the problem) and their innovation (the solution) that are available to the community through a free library - an open resource to anyone in the community and a space for further conversation.

Data & Storytelling:

THRIVEGulu have built their capability to ensure they have quality data to bolster the stories they tell. For example, they moved away from paper-based data collection to digital data collection, which has helped improve data quality and the availability of more periodic data. They also use globally recognized tools for the measurement of depression, trauma, anxiety, resilience and self efficacy to build impact data.

Multi-Audience Level Communication:

From inception, THRIVEGulu have ensured the participation of different stakeholders from the community, district and national level, in the design through to the collection and dissemination of evidence. They have been intentional in how they convene stakeholders and ensured that the voices of the community are a common ingredient in how they combine data and storytelling, to address the needs of other audiences, while also creating space for cross learning.

> **"My main learning in communicating evidence is that we need to use a multi-blended approach in terms of the channels or the means to communicating evidence. We shouldn't stick to just meetings or having workshops, there are a number of things we can do at community level, at district level and at national level" - Denis Lokoroma Okello, MEAL Officer, THRIVEGulu**

Ogow Health

Ogow Health is a Transition to Scale team within the Creating Hope In Conflict (CHIC) cohort of innovators.

The Innovation

Ogow Health's innovation is a mobile-health solution that focuses on digitising medical records, promoting public health interventions, such as maternal and infant health, and providing easy-to-access, timely care and patient information to healthcare providers, for informed decision-making. Ogow Health currently operates in underserved communities in Somalia.

The Communicating Evidence Challenge

The problem that Ogow Health's innovation first set out to address - low immunisation rates - is a **well-documented and understood problem** by the audiences they are currently targeting - in-country partners and traditional funders. Their focus, therefore, is primarily on collecting and **communicating evidence of their solution** and its impact. As Ogow grows and goes through the process of transitioning to scale, they are facing an interesting challenge around how to marry rigorous quantitative data and storytelling to effectively communicate that evidence to new audiences.

> **"If we're speaking to foundations or philanthropists, they care heavily about ... [storytelling], and then the [institutional] donors care a lot more about the research piece" - Khalid Kashi, Founder, Ogow Health.**

The team is also asking itself questions about what stories they want to tell now, given the different needs of the audiences (investors) they are trying to reach.

LEARNINGS

From Stories to Rigorous Data

In the early piloting stages of Ogow's journey, the team placed significant focus on storytelling that emphasized the human impact behind their innovation. This was in keeping with the human-centred design approach they took to developing the innovation and helped Ogow to reach a range of audiences, including consumers, co-creators and partners. However, over time, the team noticed that storytelling alone was not necessarily the best tool. As the team began to transition to scale, the audiences they were speaking to shifted to different investors, typically large donors, who were asking for evidence of impact backed by more rigorous research and data. In response, Ogow started to invest more capacity and effort into building their M&E capability, including developing systems and processes, focusing on communicating harder data to meet the expectations of these donors.

Marrying data & storytelling

This shift made sense for the team at the time; however, more recently, they are recognising that an either/or approach to how they communicate evidence isn't a long-term solution, particularly as the breadth of their target audiences expands even further. As Ogow explores how to diversify its donor base, in engaging with foundations and philanthropic organizations who are also interested in hearing about the human impact behind the data, they are seeing a renewed need to blend the two approaches to communicating evidence - rigorous data and storytelling. This requires putting more capacity back into storytelling, as well as thinking through the types of stories they should tell at this point in their organizational and scaling journey.

Different Stories for Different Audiences and Stages of Innovation

Khalid also reflects that in the early stages of the innovation, his story as a founder with a personal connection to Somalia, and a deeply personal experience supporting his grandmother through the country's fragmented healthcare system, caught the attention of his target audiences.

Navigating health facilities that relied on analog, paper-based registers gave him first-hand insight into the inefficiencies and gaps that patients and caregivers regularly face. sustainability as the innovation scales.

Over time, he realised that this personal focus became less useful, and could in fact be a threat to organizational sustainability as the innovation scales.

> **"I felt comfortable sharing that story in the early stages of my innovation, and then I realised that people were so interested in my story that it took away from the organizational product side. I felt almost like I'm not doing the organization justice, because I need to start selling the product and impact."**

This change in messaging is matched by a move away from founder-focused forums to more technical, high-level platforms where deeper conversations around systems innovation, digital health, and cross-sector collaboration are taking place. This is an example of not only adapting messaging to the audience and innovation stage, but also re-evaluating the platforms used to reach new audiences. Finding the right balance between different types of messages, matching them to the needs of target audiences and delivering them through different channels and fora is an evolving challenge that should be reflected upon and revisited in each stage of the journey.

CONCLUSION

In the above case studies, we see how THRIVEGulu and Ogow Health, two innovations in CHIC's cohort, communicate evidence to different audiences, the approaches they have taken, and what they have learned.

In this paper, we have looked at effectively communicating evidence based on three crucial pillars: **understanding the audience, identifying the right type of evidence for them, and weaving that evidence into a coherent and engaging narrative that resonates with the chosen audience, through storytelling.** These pillars provide innovators with a guide for their evidence generation efforts, and on translating often complex data and information into a clear story to create understanding of - and buy-in to - their innovation.

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