



venturetrust

**Strategic
Plan
2022-25**



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Foreword



My name is Shaun, and I am proud to be part of the Participant Panel at Venture Trust who are commending this 3-year strategy to you.

I wanted to do this because the amazing team of people in Venture Trust believed in me at a time when I had almost given up on myself.

I was introduced to Venture Trust by Combat Stress in 2016, my keyworker thought I needed a rest from all my troubles. I quickly got on board with the Positive Futures programme, which is specifically for veterans. Not only did I gain amazing life skills it was one of my best decisions I have ever made. A week in the wilderness was my prize, though in hindsight I wish this had been in May and not August during midgy season!

This strategy sets out Venture Trust's plans to grow and to help others like myself with very complex needs. Venture Trust staff do this seamlessly, with a huge amount of effort in the background, to help lay the foundations for people to thrive, gain skills from outdoors and use these skills going forward. They research their work to quantify

the impact they have and put their expertise in communities that need it most.

They will share best practice by networking with other agencies as a recognised leader in their field. They will show sustainable changes.

Venture Trust believe that early intervention is much better than the cure. We do not need to wait until the person has lost all hope, interventions can be provided before an adult is fully disadvantaged and unequal in our society.

By delivering the great programmes that Venture Trust have become known for, more people like me can have a much better destination and a more positive future.

We can do even more with your support, partnership and help...

Shaun
Venture Trust Participant Panel

Strategy on a Page

- **What we do**
Intensive long-term personal development for people, at any stage in their life, struggling with complex life issues

- **The difference we make**
Robust data and evidence to demonstrate life changing impact



- **Where we work**
In communities and the outdoors, harnessing the benefits of green and outdoor spaces for wellbeing
- **Who we work with**
Those who experience significant adversity and are furthest from opportunity

Our vision

Everyone, irrespective of their past, can achieve their potential for a healthy, happy and fulfilling life. More people, who are ready for change, are able to build the foundations to thrive and succeed for the long term.

Our mission

To help people to realise their potential by providing life-changing personal development. By offering intensive learning and development in communities, greenspaces and Scotland's wilder places, we support people to gain life skills, stability and confidence. Our work aims to end cycles of disadvantage and adversity for individuals, their families and in communities.

What will be different?

- **A focus on collaboration** – to deliver local, accessible and consistent provision of our personal development programmes and focus on early intervention as part of the pathway to more positive destinations
- **A stronger, more authoritative voice** – not just reacting to the environment but helping to shape it to ensure our evidence-based interventions are available to those who need us most
- **Moving further upstream** – working with younger people and earlier, because we believe prevention is better than cure



Five Aims

1.

We deliver exemplary person-centred programmes, working with those who struggle the most with transitions in life, using the outdoors to make long-term sustainable positive change.

2.

We are recognised leaders in our field, extending our reach by sharing practice, developing the evidence base and building the capability of others.

3.

We are an organisation fit for the future, delivering an impactful journey for all our people.

4.

We are an authoritative voice on the issues affecting those most in need, influencing positive change in society to improve life choices and chances.

5.

We have a robust and sustainable funding model, increasing income from a range of high-value public and private sources, adapting to the changing socio-economic landscape.



Section 1: Introduction

We support people who need it most, to gain life skills, stability and the confidence to help them reach their potential.

We remain firmly committed to working with people with multiple and complex challenges in their lives, working with them in their communities, building trusting relationships and using the outdoors as a therapeutic means to support people to venture out into the world.

The outdoors provides a unique environment for individuals to reflect on beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. With time and space away from influences at home, individuals can unlock skills and learn new, more positive ways of approaching situations.

At any stage in life, people can struggle with life circumstances. We focus on the path to a positive future, without forgetting what led people to us. Many people we work with are surviving outside mainstream support, are unemployed, or they may have never been in employment. Most have faced trauma, may be living in poverty, or have had limited access to the opportunities most of us take for granted.

Each person's circumstances and needs sit at the centre of our approach. By recognising the impact that trauma or adverse childhood experiences or other adversity plays, we can adapt our support to maximise people's strengths, equipping them with long-term solutions.

It simply isn't right that where someone grew up, their family background or previous negative and damaging experiences create barriers to progressing in life. Everyone deserves a fair chance, compassion and access to opportunity. We believe and advocate for wider change in our society and greater equity of support and opportunity for those who need it most.

Our programme is voluntary, where an individual chooses to change and feels ready for a programme of learning and development. We use experiential learning with cognitive and therapeutic developmental techniques to build skills and unlock confidence. This offers support and challenge, so individuals make sustained progress towards their goals. This can take time; we help people build the right foundations and protective factors to succeed for the rest of their lives.

We've been delivering our outdoor personal development interventions for 40 years now and we have had to continually change and adapt to the world we are living in, more so recently than ever before.

We have stayed true to our core values throughout.

Courage

We remain brave when things are tough

Care

We will attend to people and place

Curiosity

We are thoughtful

Collaboration

We work together for greater impact

The Big Picture

In early 2019 we published an ambitious five-year strategic framework and three-year business plan. We outlined our aim to support 2,000 people and attract £9m of investment between 2019-22. Despite significant change and unprecedented challenges, we are forecasting 1,779 people supported, with an investment of £8.37m, in the three years to March 2022.

As we enter the next three years of our journey, we face further uncertainty in terms of recovery from the pandemic, climate change and increasing political and cultural division both domestically and globally.

These challenges are not felt evenly – they highlight and exacerbate inequalities in our society. Those who were already the most disadvantaged have suffered disproportionately. They have been the hardest hit socially, educationally, economically and in terms of health and wellbeing.

Our ambition is for growth, not just for the sake of it but because it's clear that more people than ever before will benefit from our unique support and interventions. Our focus will be on working with people earlier to prevent them from ending up in more challenging life circumstances down the road.

“I want to break-away from people who are dragging me down and stay positive and believe there is a way out of this dark barrel. Life does not always have to be like this, and I feel like I’ve been given a new life”

Participant, Jacqueline Donnelly,
Next Steps



What Difference Do We Make?

The combination of our personal development programmes and use of the outdoors provides a way of working that allows participants space and time to explore who they are, and crucially who they want to be in a safe supported manner.

That this works, is evidenced most recently in the results of the FOLM programme (From the Outdoors to the Labour Market¹), where five European partners have implemented from scratch our ‘Edinburgh Model’ with the evaluation showing a significant level of success.

Evidence shows that our programmes provide fundamental and transformational interventions for participants which help them to develop their skills and realise their potential. This is paired with opportunities for practising and nurturing support from other group members and our experienced staff.

The intensity and duration of the programmes provide a unique experience that enables participants to learn and grow in an experiential and holistic way, unusual in other types of learning or personal development programme.

The outdoor space enables us to work with our participants to reduce the ‘external noise’, whether that’s negative peer groups or the pressure of social media. It simultaneously offers the challenges and health benefits that simply being outdoors provide.

That all these challenges and learning opportunities occur in a ‘safe-space’ that is held by the participants and the staff team, mean that they can take risks that they would not normally; asking for help – could be seen as being weak – but now they have had the opportunity to see it in a positive light.

Our evidence shows that our approach leads to an increase in self-agency and awareness of what the individual can influence in their lives.

The sense of achievement, of overcoming these varied challenges, is directly linked to the growth in confidence in their own skills, competency and agency. When they return to their home environment, and with the continued support from our outreach teams, they build on this further by setting out goals and milestones for the future. This further reinforces the confidence in self that they have gained.

¹ www.folmweb.com/en

Section 2: Who We Are and What We Do

“Venture Trust didn’t just change my life it saved my life.”

Who We Work With

We believe that anyone would benefit from our services. However, given our limited resource we need to focus on those who have greatest need and are furthest from opportunity.

We can have greatest impact where we can support people as early as possible, through difficult transitions in their lives, as we know this is when things can go wrong. Particularly when they may be leaving the settings of care, prison, school or the Armed Forces.

We focus upstream – because prevention is better than cure. We understand the impact that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma can have on people’s life chances and choices, and we embed that understanding in our approach and interventions.

We have a particular locus in work around the justice system in Scotland. The Scottish Government’s 10 Year ‘Vision for Justice in Scotland’ mirrors our view on prevention.

“We know that in order to prevent people coming into contact with justice services, we have to tackle long-standing societal issues which exist beyond the boundaries of what we think of as the justice system. The causes of crime are many, varied and complex. Some of the factors that influence whether a person will come into contact with the justice system, such as poverty and inequality, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), attachment to school, and drug and alcohol use, are often experienced from early life.

We also know that for some of those who have offended they have also been victims themselves. Many of these factors are interlinked and a person can be affected by one or many. We need to address harmful experiences and behaviours at the earliest possible opportunity and take a preventative approach which allows for people to be considered as individuals with complex needs. We should always be treated as a person first and be supported to improve our life chances. Our public services should therefore assess and respond to our needs and any associated risks proportionately.”

The Vision for Justice in Scotland (2022)





“I don’t think I would have got to where I have been, in the space of time that I have, without Venture Trust.”

Participant, Declan Davidson

What We Do

3-Phase Journey

Most participants engage in our 3-phase programme for around 9 months where they are supported in their communities with the help of a dedicated and trusted outreach worker. At the heart of our unique offer is the journey (between 5 and 10 days duration) delivered in the Scottish Highlands and led by expert outdoor development practitioners.

This journey acts as a catalyst for change, creating time and space away for development and to harness the powerful, restorative benefits of being in nature.

Our approach is based on an understanding that all behaviour is driven by an individual attempting to meet one or more of the five needs – belonging, power, freedom, fun or survival. It is not hierarchical and different needs can oppose each other. Our work helps each participant explore how different choices and behaviours can help meet their needs more positively.

We use experiential learning with cognitive and therapeutic developmental techniques to build skills and unlock confidence. This offers support and challenge, so individuals make sustained progress towards their goals. This can take time; we help people build the

right foundations and protective factors to succeed for the rest of their lives.

Outdoor Therapy

As well as our 3- phase journey we have a team of specialist outdoor therapists / counsellors who are trained in using the outdoors to help break down the traditional barriers and preconceptions of ‘therapy’. Often these preconceptions lead to people shunning traditional services, but we are able to contact them and can start to build positive therapeutic relationships which may lead on to positive destinations.

Employability

For those in a position to take the next steps towards employment, we have an employability team. Through our Change Cycle programme, this team support our participants to build aspiration, motivation and self-confidence while developing key employability skills. We can offer core employability skills such as CV writing, interview techniques, IT skills, and they gain accredited SQA and other qualifications.

The service is currently aimed at young people aged 16-25 who are not in work, education or training and are facing long-term unemployment and disadvantage or potentially are at risk of (re-)offending or anti-social behaviour.



Why the Outdoors?

There is plenty of evidence showing that spending time in the outdoors is good for us. The reported mental health benefits of spending time in green and open space are striking, from reducing anxiety, to boosting your natural immunity to improving your diet. Not everyone has the opportunity to benefit from being outdoors. Underlying inequalities in the use of green and open spaces remain and may have widened during the pandemic. For those who live with constant stress in their lives it is even more important to ensure they are getting the benefits that being outdoors can bring.

Our People

Alongside our staff team we are supported by our Participant Panel, our Board and our Ambassadors.

Our Participant Panel brings user involvement into the heart of decision-making. They have been central to interviews and the selection of our senior team, to the review of our programmes and they have added a huge amount of insight into this plan.

Our Board bring a wide variety of experience and expertise to our organisation. Their dedication and commitment to our work and vision, mission and values ensures we operate to our full potential.

Our Ambassadors help us communicate the work we do to a much wider audience. They dedicate their time, wealth of knowledge and support to our organisation which benefits the people we support.

Section 3: Strategic Context

“Why did it take me being involved in the criminal justice system before I could get help – if I had been supported by Venture Trust sooner, I could have made different choices.”

Linda, Venture Trust Participant



The external context in which Venture Trust operates has changed significantly over the past few years, with the pandemic, climate change and wider global tensions and divisions impacting those who are poorest, hardest.

The 3 key areas where we believe we can have the greatest impact are in relation to creating safer communities, improving mental health and wellbeing and tackling inequalities and promoting social mobility.

Creating safer communities – prevention, reducing reoffending, rehabilitation

‘Hard Edges’ (2019)² reported that many people in contact with the criminal justice system have already experienced severe and multiple disadvantages, including homelessness, substance misuse, mental ill health and domestic violence or abuse. Individuals from the 10% most deprived areas are over-represented in prison arrivals by a factor of three – a finding consistent across the last decade.

² [Hard Edges Scotland full report – Lankelly Chase](#)

Care experienced people are disproportionately represented within the prison population. Around a quarter of the prison population in Scotland report being in care as a child, rising to just under half when looking specifically at young people in custody.

Despite the Scottish Government’s long held objective to shift the balance of sentencing, from prison sentences to community-based sentences, Scotland still has one of the highest incarceration rates in Western Europe. The Justice system is facing unprecedented backlog in unpaid work hours and court business which could last until 2025.

All the evidence suggests that community-based interventions are a better option than short-term prison sentences for many individuals in the criminal justice system. We believe there should be a far greater emphasis on prevention and rehabilitation alongside unpaid work and other measures of support in community sentences. Investing in reliable and effective community support and a collaborative public and third sector approach will help people get their lives back on track and away from potential involvement in crime.

Improving mental health, wellbeing, relationships and belonging

We are facing a mental health crisis when Scotland’s mental health services are already overstretched and under-resourced.



Research suggests that Covid-19 has had a significant adverse impact on mental health key indicators that form the basis of mental health statistics including: depression and anxiety; substance abuse; suicide; self-harm; other common mental health problems based on score on the General Health Questionnaire.

Key results from the Mental Health Foundation’s pandemic study include (surveys completed in Mar-20 and Feb-21):

- Anxiety is decreasing, but still high (64% vs 44%)
- Loneliness is increasing (11% vs 29%) and has not returned to pre-lockdown levels at any point
- Hopelessness is rising in Scottish adults (15% vs 20%)
- Thoughts of suicide are increasing (10% vs 13%)

11% vs 29%
loneliness is increasing

15% vs 20%
hopelessness is rising

10% vs 13%
thoughts of suicide are increasing

We aspire for everyone to enjoy better mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. With support, tackling social isolation, the underlying causes of alcohol or drug misuse or the stress of living in poor quality housing, is possible. The people we support show positive self-confidence, improved relationships and stability. Everybody relies on public services. We believe individuals should be able to access support and advice when they need it from specialist providers in local authorities, the NHS and charities to overcome barriers.

With the successful development and launch of Venture Trust’s Outdoor Therapy services, we aim to be sector leaders and extend our reach, developing the workforce and outdoor therapy practices nationally. With the growing need for mental health support this service can be blueprinted and rolled out nationally.

We are also keen to build on our current Outdoor Therapy Service offer by delivering Therapeutic Wilderness Journeys to the clients we work with. This will allow our clients to benefit from an immersive therapeutic process in a natural environment. The journeys will combine an individual and group therapy process, interwoven with the experiential element of journeying through the wilderness.

Tackling Inequalities and promoting Social Mobility

The wedge of social inequality has driven deeper and the need for Venture Trust’s services has never been greater.

- Child poverty rates (24%) are lower in Scotland than in England, but they have been growing in recent years and remain a strategic focus for Scottish government.
- Around 10% of the Scottish population aged 16-64 years old have low or no qualifications
- 43% of jobs are low/medium low skilled
- Whilst these have decreased over time, they are significant

10%
of population have low or no qualifications

29%
of jobs are low/medium skilled

Venture Trust can help support participants to take control and move onto a more positive future. Our priority is on supporting those most in need and furthest from opportunity. For those participants who are able, we will seek to create opportunities ourselves, such as with our Change Cycle programme or an apprenticeship with us, or we will refer on to other agencies for more formal learning and to experience work.

We can reduce stigma for individuals with previous convictions. We believe support for employability skills, finding work and employment should reflect the foundations some people need to build. This takes time and is vital for sustained positive progressions and to build a decent standard of living.

Funding

As we enter the next 3 years of our journey, we alongside every other charity, face numerous financial challenges. Cost of living increases, uncertain global pressures and those who are wealthiest cutting their typical donation to charity by more than a fifth in recent years, despite enjoying a 10% increase in income over the same period³.

Our ambitions need to be caveated in the context of the funding challenges faced. We will need to continually review our plans to ensure we offer the most effective and impactful interventions for our funders and most importantly for our participants.

³ Charity donations from UK's richest down 20% despite rising income | Commission on Civil Society



Our Response

Set in this challenging context, with such clear demand and growing need, our aim is to be able to provide consistent, accessible, early and effective interventions, supporting those who need it most and are least likely to be able to access support through the difficult transitions in their lives.

Our ambition is for growth. We want to be able to significantly increase the number of people we can offer support to, because the demand is there.

To do this we need to:

- build stronger collaboratives to have the reach we need geographically and across all local funding partnerships

- look to organise ourselves differently, testing out new ways of working in areas where we currently have a limited footprint
- work with younger people earlier, believing that prevention is better than cure
- keep strengthening our own evidence base, to clearly demonstrate our impact to participants, referral agencies and funders
- play our part in creating a fairer, safer and greener future
- develop our funding strategy to encompass the shift to local community partnerships, whilst at the same time engaging new corporate partners

“It’s great to have a life back. To not feel hopeless or like you are nothing or useless. Venture Trust has helped me to become somebody again. It’s still a daily struggle at times but I now have the skills to deal with life.”

Participant, Stephen Whiteside, Living Wild



Section 4: Our Aims

“I used to think people couldn’t change, but now I do. I could have just been another statistic, so now I feel grateful for my time... The staff at Venture Trust restored my faith in humanity.”

Participant, Laurence Young, Living Wild



Delivery – Participants and Programmes

Aim 1

We deliver exemplary person-centred programmes, working with those who struggle the most with transitions in life, using the outdoors to make long-term sustainable positive change.

Building on our established outdoor personal development model and responding to the strategic context in which we are operating, we will seek opportunities to develop new programmes of work focussed on prevention, working with younger people to help them avoid engagement with the justice system and to open our services further to men as we do with women in our Next Steps journeys.

We will also seek opportunities to develop and grow our Change Cycle skills programme, with a focus on skills that are environmentally positive. We will also seek to build on our Outdoor Therapy model, growing across other areas of Scotland and developing Outdoor Therapy group Wilderness journeys.

What does that mean?

- We improve life outcomes in more communities for those who most need our support
- We will provide earlier interventions to divert more people from the justice system
- We support more young people, be it those excluded from school, involved in the justice system, or leaving care, to achieve better outcomes

By 2025

- We will have a visible ‘presence’ in local communities
- Outdoor therapy is a successful service that we are recognised for
- Earlier community based interventions in Justice
- Clear communities identified and articulated for referrers
- Success in reducing school exclusions, re-offending and relapses for our participants



People & Footprint

Aim 3

We are an organisation fit for the future, delivering an impactful journey for all our people.

We have learned to be much more flexible and agile in how we work and where we work. As with every other business globally, we will look to build on what has worked well and build that into our future strategy in terms of our locations and our infrastructure. We will ensure our people are properly skilled and supported, have the best tools for the job, are able to work flexibly and have in place practices which will help to address our carbon footprint.

What does this mean?

- We recruit and retain the best people
- Our locations are fit for purpose
- We have the infrastructure we need
- We move towards net zero

By 2025

- We will have a learning and development pathway for all of our team, with clear criteria for progression at each level
- Our locations align to our participants' needs
- We have the right technology and infrastructure to support our ways of working
- We are measuring our emissions and taking meaningful steps towards reducing these to net zero and beyond

Delivery – Extend Our Reach

Aim 2

We are recognised as leaders in our field, extending our reach by sharing practice, developing the evidence base and building the capability of others.

As recognised leaders in the world of outdoor learning and personal development, we will build on our recent FOLM⁴ project, to establish ourselves as a national centre for learning, standards and evidence. With the successful development and launch of Venture Trust's Outdoor Therapy services there is an opportunity to be sector leaders, developing the workforce and outdoor therapy practices nationally. We will continue to offer student placements and apprenticeships.

What does that mean?

- We will establish a Training and Development function providing internal and external training
- We will build the Outdoor Therapy Community by providing practitioner training
- We will be seen as a leader in evidence-based practice and will work with others to develop the evidence base
- We will deliver an excellent Student Placement programme

By 2025

- We will be the 'go to' organisation for applied Outdoor Therapy training
- We will be sought out as an expert in supporting people struggling with trauma and chaotic life circumstances
- Sustainable income stream from training products



4 From Outdoors to Labour Market (folmweb.com)

External Affairs – Advocacy and Influence

Aim 4

We are an authoritative voice on the issues affecting those most in need, influencing positive change in society to improve life choices and chances.

Building on our strong track record, we will ensure our external engagement - be that through our Social Media presence, our Bothy Book blogs, our marketing or our engagement on the key policy issues of the day - is clearly focused on influencing the change we believe is necessary to create an environment where our participants and indeed Venture Trust can thrive. We will ensure our Participant voice is central to this aim.

What does this mean?

- We will create positive change in society for those most in need
- We will actively lead and participate in movements to give a voice to those most in need
- We will ensure everything we do is informed by our participants, giving them a voice and telling their stories
- We will be recognised as a credible, specialist delivery organisation

By 2025

- Demonstrable success in influencing policy and practice (alongside partners)
- Recognised as a credible, specialist delivery organisation
- Mature user involvement model embedded
- Embedded with influential networks/forums/consortiums

“I saw a huge difference in one young woman’s behaviour. She came back motivated, her attendance with social work improved, her drug use decreased and overall she appeared to care for herself more. One young man said that it was the best experience of his life and another said the experience changed his life. None of my clients who completed the programme did not enjoy it or regard it as worthwhile.”

Referrer, Cara Gibson, Aberdeen Council



External Affairs: Income

Aim 5

We have a robust and sustainable funding model, increasing income from a range of high-value public and private sources, adapting to the changing socio-economic landscape.

The challenges in the funding landscape are not to be underestimated. We need to be able to clearly demonstrate our value for money and the social value we provide for every pound invested. As well as working more collaboratively with partners to ensure we are able to access local funding, we believe we have a unique offer we can make for the right corporate partners.

What does this mean?

- We will develop long term funding and partnership relationships
- We will create a significant increase in local funding streams
- We will aim to develop a significant income from corporate partnerships and philanthropy

By 2025

- Long term funding/partnership relationships
- Significant increase in local authority funding streams
- Larger average income from grant makers
- Increased voluntary income from a range of sources
- More successful corporate partnerships

Section 5: Measuring our Success

**“For all I thought I was, I wasn’t.
Because now I know I am:
powerful, strong, and brave.”**

Participant, Mags Miller, Next Steps



For each of our aims we have developed clear impact statements which will be measurable across each year of our plan. This will allow us to keep a clear line of sight between our daily activities and our strategic aims.

Key Performance Indicators will be agreed with our Board on an annual basis and will form the basis of our Quarterly Performance Dashboard, alongside the oversight of our Strategic Risks.

We have also assessed our aims against Scotland’s National Performance Framework (NPF), to ensure that our efforts align with those of Scotland’s other key public and third sector bodies. We share the NPF’s aims which are to:

- create a more successful country
- give opportunities to all people living in Scotland
- increase the wellbeing of people living in Scotland
- create sustainable and inclusive growth
- reduce inequalities and give equal importance to economic, environmental, and social progress

To help achieve its purpose, the framework sets out ‘National Outcomes’, which describe the kind of Scotland it aims to create. Below is a summary assessment of how our aims will help to achieve those outcomes.

National Outcome	Aim 1	Aim 2	Aim 3	Aim 4	Aim 5
<u>Children and Young People</u> We grow up loved, safe and respected so that we realise our full potential	●	●		●	
<u>Communities</u> We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	●	●		●	
<u>Culture</u> We are creative and our vibrant and diverse cultures are expressed and enjoyed widely			●		
<u>Economy</u> We have a globally competitive, entrepreneurial, inclusive and sustainable economy	●	●	●		●
<u>Education</u> We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society	●	●	●		
<u>Environment</u> We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment	●	●	●	●	●
<u>Fair Work and Business</u> We have thriving and innovative businesses, with quality jobs and fair work for everyone	●		●	●	
<u>Health</u> We are healthy and active	●		●	●	
<u>Human Rights</u> We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination	●	●	●	●	
<u>International</u> We are open, connected and make a positive contribution internationally		●			●
<u>Poverty</u> We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally	●	●	●	●	●



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