

Harlem African Burial Ground Cultural Education Center RFP

Information Session #2

February 2026



Welcome to the Harlem African Burial Ground Operator RFP Info Session!

As you're waiting for the meeting to start, please take a moment to share your **name, pronouns, and any organizational affiliation in the chat.**

A few requests for the info session:

- Please **keep yourself on mute** during the presentation. If you have any questions, please add them to the chat
- There will **be time at the end for a question-and-answer session**; during that portion if you would like to speak, **please raise your hand and wait to be called on by the moderator.** You may also add **questions to the chat**
- We encourage you to turn on your camera if you can!
- Please note that the session will be recorded for internal records

Agenda

- Project Overview
- RFP Overview
- Q&A

Key Dates and Events



RFP Release: December 17th, 2025



Info sessions: Virtual on January 26, 2026 and virtual on February 2, 2026

- Info session materials will be posted to EDC website by March 2



Question submission deadline: February 23, 2026 at 5pm

- Questions should be sent to HABGOperator@edc.nyc
- Questions submitted past the deadline regarding technical assistance should be sent to RFPRequest@edc.nyc



Responses to questions posted: March 2, 2026 at 5pm

- Responses will be posted on the project website



RFP submission deadline: April 6, 2026 at 4pm

- Submit via electronic upload
- Please submit all documents in a single zip file labeled with your company or organization's name

Project Overview

The Harlem African Burial Ground

As a cemetery for free and enslaved Africans from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s, **the Harlem African Burial Ground is a sacred site of New York City's early history**, with great significance for communities of Black and Indigenous descent. For decades, the site was forgotten and disrespected, but tireless **research and advocacy brought this history to light**.

Now the **New York City Economic Development Corporation** is leading efforts in partnership with the Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative and NYC Department of Cultural Affairs to properly memorialize and honor the people buried there.



Project Location

2460 2nd Avenue in East Harlem (MN Block 1803, Lot 1)

- **City-owned, full-block site**, a portion of which is the historic Harlem African Burial Ground (HABG)
- Occupied by **decommissioned MTA bus depot**; MTA has transferred ownership to the City

Upcoming nearby projects:

- New waterfront open space (Manhattan Waterfront Greenway)
- Over 1,000 new residents (affordable housing development on nearby vacant lots)
- New transit connections (2nd Ave subway extension)



History

The Harlem African Burial Ground dates to Harlem's earliest days:

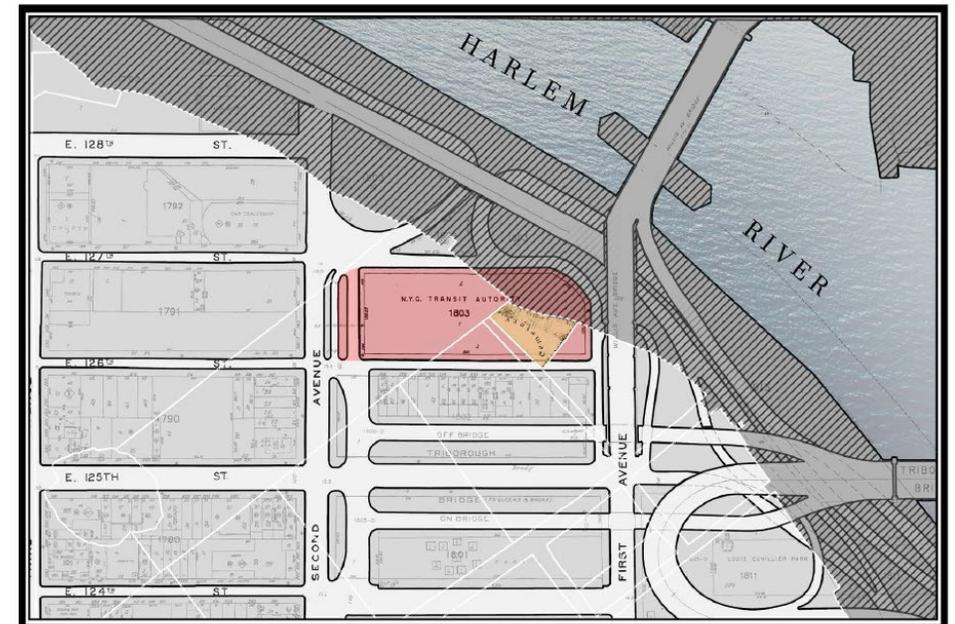
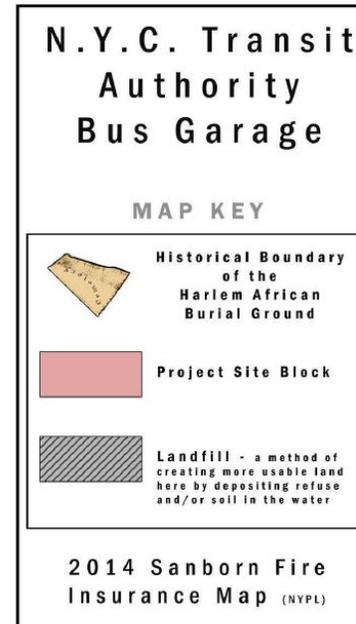
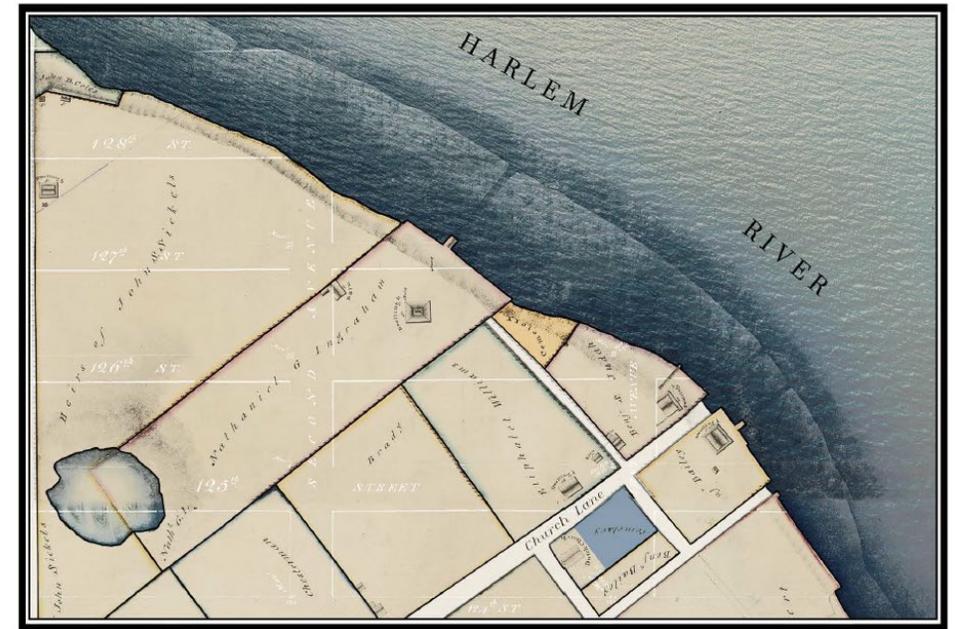
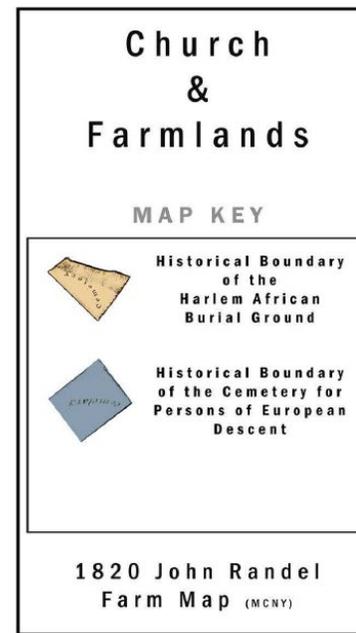
- 1660: Nieuw Haarlem is chartered by the Dutch on indigenous land with Low Dutch Reformed Church as founding church.
- 1869: Prompted by northward expansion of the city, church leaders begin transferring human remains of white Europeans to new plots. Those buried in the HABG are left behind.

Several uses occupied site of the Harlem African Burial Ground:

- 1885-1917: Beer garden and casino
- 1917-1918: 15th New York National Guard Infantry Regiment barracks
- 1918-1945: Movie studios
- 1945-1962: Third Avenue Railway Company trolley barn; Current depot built in 1947
- 1962-2015: MTA/NYCT 126th St bus depot

Present day efforts for memorial and mixed-use program:

- 2009: Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force (now Initiative) founded to advocate for memorial
- 2015-16: First phase of archaeology, and East Harlem Rezoning engagement
- 2017: Public land use review and approval (ULURP)
- 2024-25: Second phase of archaeology, engagement



Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative

The Harlem African Burial Ground Task Force was **founded in 2009** to advocate for a memorial after documentary study for Willis Avenue Bridge reconstruction uncovered evidence of the HABG. The successor of this group is the **Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative (HABGI)**, which includes:

- Rev. Dr. Patricia A. Singletary, Pastor Emerita of Elmendorf Reform Church (co-chair)
- Melissa Mark-Viverito, former District 8 Councilwoman and City Council Speaker (co-chair)
- Sharon Wilkins, former Manhattan Deputy Borough Historian and former President of the NY chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society
- Melinda Velez, former New York City Council Legislative Assistant for Melissa Mark-Viverito

EDC has partnered closely with the HABGI since 2015, including to determine a vision for the redevelopment project, guide archaeological work, and co-host community events



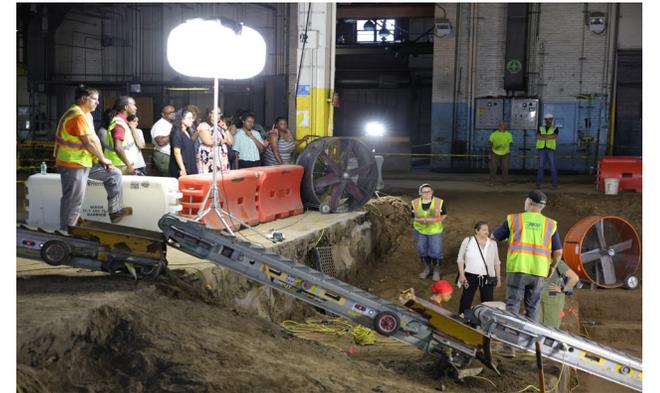
Archaeology & Engagement Work

An in-depth archeological process kicked off in 2024, building on the work done nearly a decade prior. The Archeological team has expanded to include two Black bio-archaeologist consultants **with expertise in human remains of African descent**, Dr. Rachel Watkins and Dr. Aja M. Lans

Concurrently, NYCEDC and the HABGI partnered with Harlem-based Bridge Philanthropic Consulting for a wide-reaching engagement and education campaign entitled "**History Beneath Our Feet: Unearthing Our Legacy**", which involved over 20 events and reached over 1,000 people across East and Greater Harlem.

Key takeaways included:

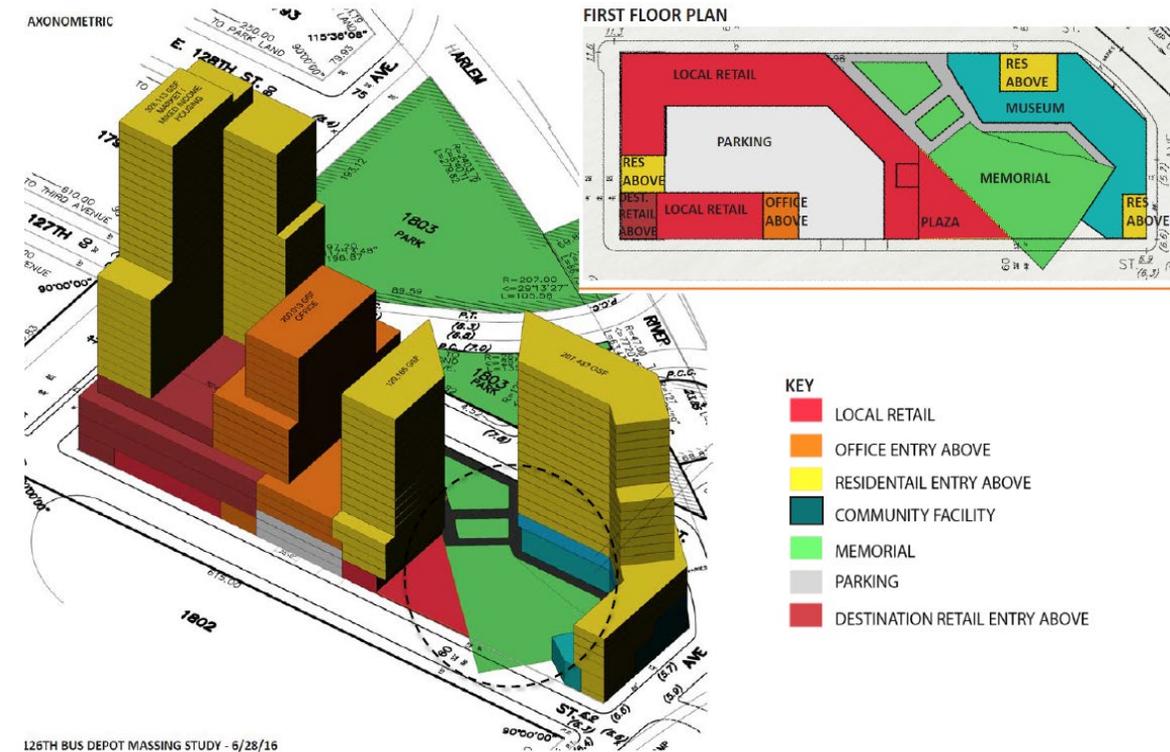
- The Burial Ground and Harlem's history should be centered and developed as an accessible teaching resource.
- Descendant and community voices are critical in shaping the future and stewardship of the site.
- Collaborations with community, faith, and cultural partners should be expanded and can be formalized into a long-term network.



For more information on the archaeology and engagement work, please visit the HABG website to review the latest summary report

Overall Project Objectives (from 2017 Commitments)

- Establish a permanent outdoor memorial and cultural education center to commemorate the HABG's history and honor those who were buried there through a variety of programmatic uses, not limited to:
 - museum/exhibition space
 - community space
 - visitor center
- Develop a mix of uses on the remainder of the site, including mixed-income affordable housing and job-creating commercial uses
- Enhance the streetscape and pedestrian connections to the surrounding neighborhood
- Advance a financially feasible project that can support the cost of constructing and operating the memorial and cultural center



Note: This site plan is **not** the final proposed development plan. The following image was created as a part of an initial environmental review for the site.

RFP Overview

HABG Cultural Operator Opportunity

NYCEDC, in connection with DCLA, is **seeking proposals from Respondents interested in conceptualizing and operating the Cultural Education Center** and providing programming about the history of the Burial Ground and its continued relevance.

In proposals, Respondents should anticipate that **approximately \$12.5 million of the available City capital funds committed to this project will be allocated towards the Cultural Education Center**. It is expected that the Designated Operator will collaborate with the developer of the mixed-use program on the design and construction of the Cultural Education Center, and either lease or purchase the facility from the developer.

It is expected that **up to \$1M annually towards eligible operating costs** will be provided to the Designated Operator by the developer.



Pictured above: BPL New Lots Library, African Burial Ground National Monument, Abolitionist Place

Cultural Operator Experience

It is expected that **Respondents will act as a single Designated Operator with nonprofit status.**

Respondents may be, among others:

- existing nonprofit organizations
- proposed new nonprofit organizations
- consortiums or partnerships that include individuals, nonprofit organizations or for-profit entities.

At least **ten years of demonstrated experience** from Respondents in operations, management, and programming of arts, cultural spaces, and/or educational institutions is **preferred**.

Respondents should create a proposal for the Cultural Education Center that is responsive to the needs and desires of East Harlem, **demonstrates knowledge of the neighborhood's** socioeconomic and demographic context, and outlines clear mechanisms for residents' continued engagement.

Cultural Operator Responsibility

Within the Mixed-Use Project, **the Cultural Education Center will play the crucial role of contextualizing the Burial Ground and the Outdoor Memorial.** The Designated Operator will be responsible for preserving and promoting the Burial Ground as a space to honor and remember the New Yorkers buried there and celebrate the contributions of Black and Indigenous New Yorkers to the city's history, including but not limited to East Harlem. High-quality programming is expected to incorporate some portion of the following visitor experience types:

- Program-driven community center
- Visitor center
- Museum-oriented

The Designated Operator may be asked to work with NYCEDC and DCLA to facilitate a to-be-determined public design process for the Outdoor Memorial, expected to follow DCLA's Percent for Art process. It is anticipated that the City will retain ownership of the Outdoor Memorial, but **the Designated Operator may be required to oversee maintenance of the Outdoor Memorial** either directly or in partnership with the Developer.

Response Requirements & Assessment Criteria

Complete proposals will include the following response requirements:

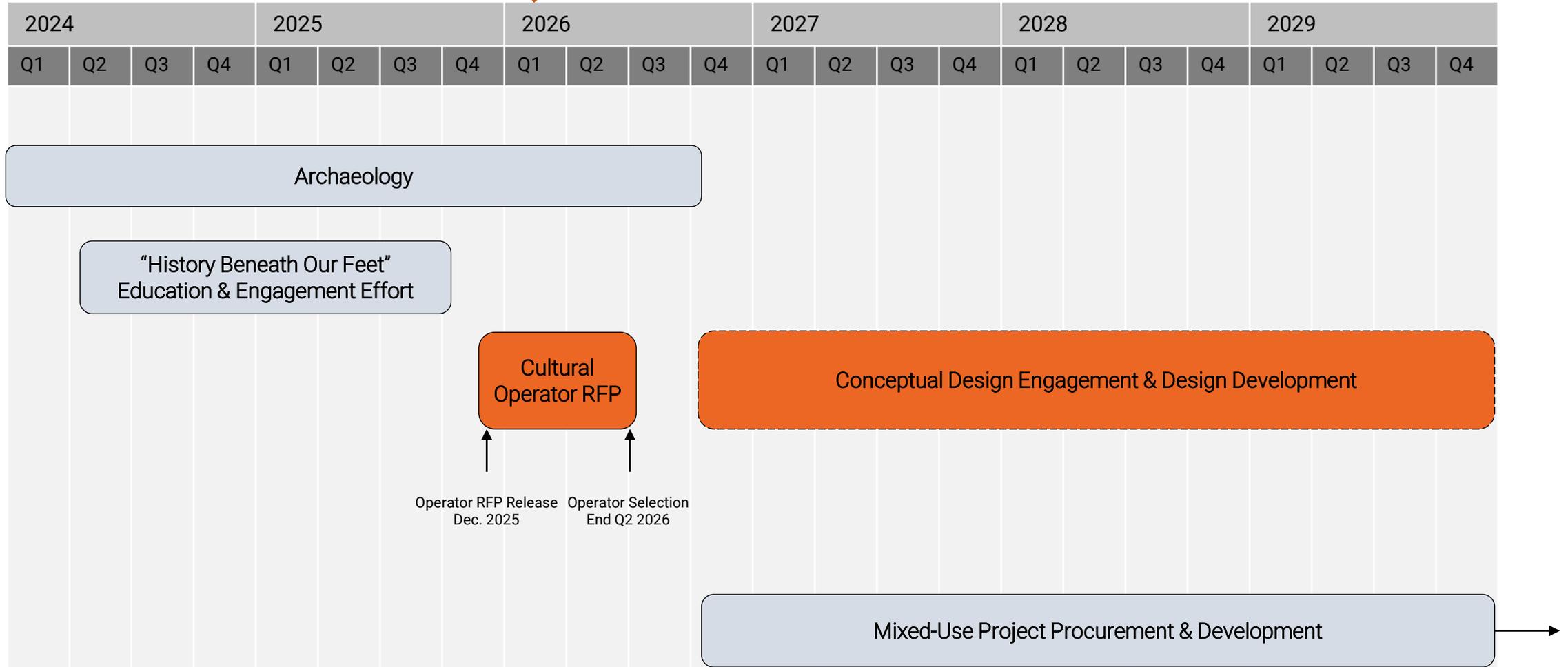
- Background Information
- Statement of Interest, Organizational Plan and Budget
- Experience and Capabilities (Readiness Statement, Operations Experience)

Submissions will be assessed according the following criteria:

- Completeness and Quality of Overall Response (10%)
- Respondent Readiness (30%)
- Financial Capacity (30%)
- Respondent Experience (30%)

Project Timeline

We are here



Key Partners

City Team

- NYCEDC
- Department of Cultural Affairs (DCLA)

Community Partners

- Harlem African Burial Ground Initiative
- Elected Officials: CM Encarnacion, AM Gibbs, BP Hoylman-Sigal, Sen. Serrano, Sen. Cleare, Rep. Espaillat
- Community Board 11
- Community Board 10

Archaeology Team

- AKRF and bioarchaeologists



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Questions?

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