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34th Annual NADF AWARDS

Celebrating Indigenous Prosperity

October 22, 2026 | Thunder Bay, Ontario | Delta Hotels by Marriott

Souvenir Program Booklet

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Celebrating TRAILBLAZERS

At Perimeter Aviation, we believe in the strength, resilience, and economic development of Indigenous-owned businesses.

We are proud to support the NADF Awards and recognize the achievements of the nominees and winners. Your hard work, passion, and dedication is inspiring. Congratulations!

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Group photo of Award Winners at the 34th Annual NADF Awards.
Hosted by Delta Hotels Thunder Bay | October 22, 2026

Nishnawbe Aski Development Fund (NADF), together with **Perimeter Aviation**, proudly celebrated Indigenous entrepreneurship and leadership at the 34th Annual NADF Awards on Thursday, October 22, 2026.

Held at the Delta Hotels Thunder Bay, the gala welcomed more than 200 guests for an evening dedicated to honouring Indigenous business success across Northern Ontario.

Since 1991, the NADF Awards have recognized outstanding achievements that contribute to strong economies and thriving communities. This year, six exceptional recipients were added to that legacy, bringing the total number of award honourees to 211 over 34 years.

Awards were presented in six categories:
- Partnership
- Startup Business
- Young Entrepreneur
- Small Business
- Excellence in Leadership
- Business Excellence

34th Annual
NADF
AWARDS

Congratulations to Our Winners!

Congratulations once again to this year's NADF Award recipients! Your hard work, innovation, and dedication are a testament to the strength of Indigenous entrepreneurship in Northern Ontario. Through your achievements, you continue to inspire others, create opportunities, and make a positive impact on your families, communities, and the regional economy.

As we reflect on this year's celebrations, we are proud to recognize the talented individuals, businesses, and organizations that are helping shape the future of Indigenous business. We also extend our congratulations to all the nominees and thank everyone who took the time to submit a nomination and recognize these outstanding accomplishments.

A BIG thankyou to our sponsors for their continued support and for helping make this celebration possible. Your contributions allow us to showcase the excellence, innovation, and leadership found throughout our communities.

Together, we continue to strengthen Indigenous business, celebrate success, and create meaningful opportunities for future generations.

Thank You Nominators!

We recognize the important role nominators play in the success of the annual awards gala. By submitting your nominations, you help to ensure that the remarkable achievements of individuals and businesses within our communities are seen and celebrated. Each nomination highlights a story of success and impact, and this year's award recipients represent the incredible accomplishments being recognized at this event.

Thank you to all who contributed. Your efforts are essential to making this celebration of excellence possible and showcasing the positive change happening across our communities.

Award Categories

Partnership of the Year

This award recognizes two or more individuals or entities who have formed a partnership built on mutual respect and common goals, and who have demonstrated innovation, leadership, thoughtful planning, and growth potential. These partners best exemplify the true meaning of partnership. Partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners are eligible provided the Indigenous partner is the majority partner (minimum 51%).

Startup Business of the Year

This award recognizes a startup business that has shown significant promise through their growth since starting their business. Businesses operating for less than 2 years, but for more than 10 months, are eligible to be nominated in this award category.

Young Entrepreneur of the Year

This award recognizes an Indigenous youth (Status, Inuit, or Métis) under the age of 39, who has paved a space for themselves through their hard work and dedication to their business. This entrepreneur shows us why you should never give up on your goals and is an inspiration for others. The nominee must be 39 years and younger to be nominated in this award category.

Small Business of the Year

This award recognizes a small business that has demonstrated innovation, leadership, thoughtful planning, and growth potential.

Excellence in Leadership

This award will recognize an individual who has demonstrated excellence in leadership involving people, events, programs, projects, and/or teams. Passionate and creative, they take the initiative and think outside the box when running their business or managing their team. Through their strong leadership skills, and innovative management strategies, this leader will be an inspiration for all leaders to follow. Leaders of non-profits are eligible to be nominated in this award category.

Business Excellence Award

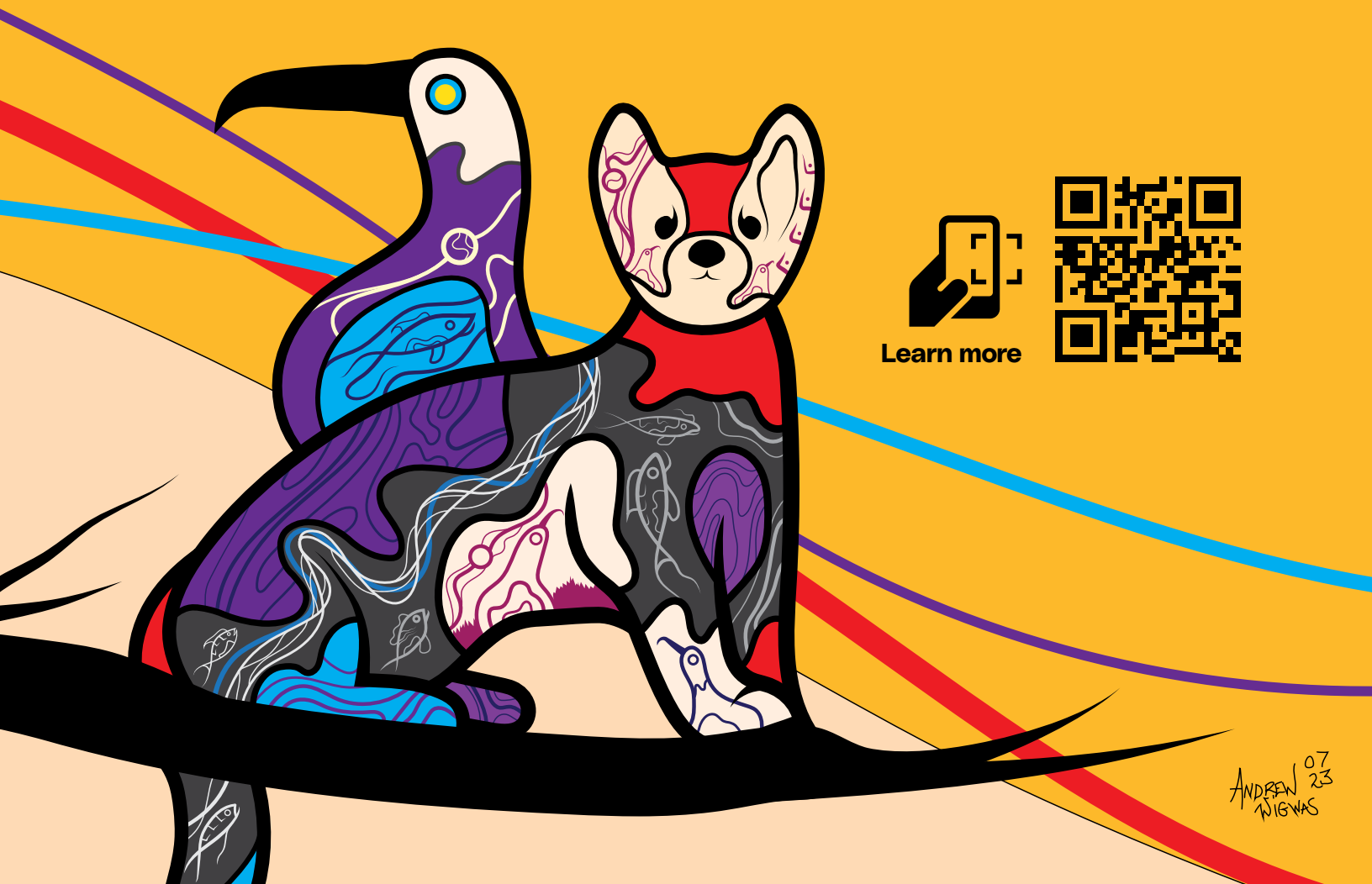
This award will recognize overall achievements and excellence in company growth including sales, profitability, employment creation, and innovation.

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Building *Ontario's future* together.

OPG is committed to building and growing long-term, mutually beneficial working relationships with Indigenous communities near our current and future operations.

The road map set out in our *Reconciliation Action Plan* outlines our goals to grow the company's economic impact for Indigenous communities and businesses by $1 billion by 2031 through Indigenous procurement and equity partnerships with our Indigenous partners, funding for Indigenous community initiatives, and our *Indigenous Opportunities Network (ION)*.



Learn more

Winner Profile

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ONTARIO POWER GENERATION

Partnership of the Year

The HT Group



L to R: Erin Moore, Vice-President of Business Development, HT Group; Luke Reynolds, CEO, HT Group; and Mike Woodcock, Director of Operations, OPG.

THE HT GROUP

The HT Group is a 100% First Nation-owned group of companies headquartered in Thunder Bay, Ontario. With a strong foundation in Indigenous ownership, collaboration, and entrepreneurship, The HT Group demonstrates the value of working together to build successful businesses and create lasting economic opportunities.





The HT Group has grown through collaboration among First Nations and Indigenous partners, with businesses that support travel, logistics, real estate, hospitality, and community-focused development across Northwestern Ontario. By bringing together shared resources, knowledge, and expertise, these partnerships help strengthen Indigenous participation in the regional economy.

Its operations include Happy Time Tours & Travel, Carrick Express, Happy Time Real Estate Holdings, and the Best Western Plus Nor'Wester Hotel & Conference Centre, alongside a growing portfolio of community-aligned ventures.

The diversification of its business portfolio reflects a forward-thinking approach to economic development. By investing across multiple industries, The HT Group is building a stronger and more resilient economic foundation while creating opportunities for employment, business development, and future investment.

At the heart of The HT Group's success is a commitment to collaboration and collective prosperity. Its business model demonstrates how First Nations can work together toward common goals while maintaining Indigenous ownership and building capacity within their communities.

Built on shared vision and long-term commitment, The HT Group demonstrates how meaningful partnerships can create sustainable business growth, support employment, and strengthen the economic foundations of Indigenous communities.

Through its continued growth and diversification, The HT Group serves as an example of what can be achieved through Indigenous leadership, strategic investment, and Nations working together to create lasting opportunities for future generations.


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Neegani Investment Management Inc. is a fund focused on small to medium-sized enterprises, primarily in Northern Ontario but open to opportunities elsewhere if criteria are met. It provides equity or debt financing for start-ups, acquisitions, and expansions, with investments up to $300,000 and a typical exit strategy within seven years.
Transactions may involve share or business asset purchases, often in collaboration with strategic investors, banks, Aboriginal Financial Institutions (AFIs), or mainstream funds. The fund also partners with AFIs and government programs offering grants, interest rate buy-downs, and non-repayable loans.
www.neeganiinvestments.com

Winner Profile

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NEEGANI INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT INC.

Startup Business of the Year

Savion Nakogee, CEO, Wabusk Data Solutions



L to R: Chelsea Nakogee, Co-founder of Wabusk Data Solutions; Savion Nakogee, CEO of Wabusk Data Solutions

WABUSK DATA SOLUTIONS

Savion Nakogee is a member of Fort Albany First Nation, with paternal connections to Moose Cree First Nation and maternal connections to Mocreebec Eeyoud. He is an Indigenous technology professional, community educator, and Co-Founder and CEO of Wabusk Data Solutions.

Wabusk Data Solutions is an Indigenous-owned data governance, privacy, and cybersecurity consulting business founded in 2025. The business works with Indigenous communities and partner organizations to support culturally respectful approaches to data, privacy, security, and technology.



L to R: Savion Nakogee, CEO of Wabusk Data Solutions; Brian Davey, Managing Director, Neegani Investment Management Inc.

Savion's path into technology grew from a desire to serve his community in a different way. After beginning as an entry-level computer technician, he continued to build his skills through self-directed learning, professional certifications, and hands-on experience in computer systems, programming, cybersecurity, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.



In its early years, Wabusk Data Solutions has developed training and assessment tools to help organizations better understand Indigenous Data Sovereignty, while also securing projects with the First Nations Technology Council and The Nature Conservancy. Savion has also shared this work through conferences, community presentations, and partnerships focused on digital safety and responsible technology use.



Through Wabusk, Savion is helping communities strengthen their ability to protect their own information and make informed decisions about their digital futures.

His work reflects a thoughtful commitment to community care, learning, and accountable partnerships.


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Young Entrepreneur of the Year

Delores Wesley, Owner, Wesley's Takeout



L to R: William Wesley; Delores Wesley, Owner of Wesley's Take Out.

Delores Wesley began her business journey with a kitchen mixer, selling birthday cakes from her parents' kitchen. What started as a small home-based business laid the foundation for her entrepreneurial future. After moving home to Fort Albany and continuing her education in Culinary Arts and Business Accounting, she returned to selling cakes and food from home while raising her children.

In 2021, Delores and her family took a major step by privately financing the purchase of Wesley's Take Out, a restaurant and convenience store. What began as a significant financial risk has grown through hard work, sacrifice, and reinvestment into a much stronger operation.



L to R: Delores Wesley, Owner of Wesley's Take Out; Terry Copenace, Senior Regional Manager, TD Bank

Her entrepreneurial journey has since expanded to include property investment, a short-term rental, and a heavy equipment business supporting projects in her community. Her willingness to explore new business opportunities demonstrates her ambition, adaptability, and commitment to financial independence.

Through each step, Delores has focused on creating stability for her family, building new sources of income, and contributing to local economic development.

Delores' story is also one of personal transformation and resilience. She has spoken openly about choosing sobriety, continuing her healing journey, and managing serious health challenges while building her businesses. Despite these challenges, she continues to invest in herself, her family, and her future.

From selling birthday cakes in her parents' kitchen to becoming a diversified business owner, Delores demonstrates what can be achieved through perseverance, determination, and a willingness to take risks.



Her story inspires aspiring Indigenous entrepreneurs and reminds young people that where you begin does not determine where you can go.



Building a better and brighter future

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Hydro One is proud to sponsor the 34th Annual Nishnawbe-Aski Development Fund (NADF) Awards. Our commitment is to increase Indigenous procurement spend to 5% of the company's purchases of materials and services by 2026.

We are looking to build long-standing, mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous businesses to achieve this target. Our dedicated team is eager to work with Indigenous-owned businesses, economic development corporations, and Indigenous communities.

To learn more, please email Indigenous Supply Chain Services:
IndigenousProcurement@HydroOne.com

HydroOne.com/IndigenousRelations

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Winner Profile

Small Business of the Year

Marie Burke-Lecours, Owner, Necessities



L to R: Rob Lecours; Marie Burke Lecours, Owner of Necessities

Marie Burke-Lecours is originally from Fort Severn, Ontario, and now calls Moosonee home, where she has built her life, raised her family, and established strong connections within the community.

In August 2020, Marie and her husband, Rob, became the owners of Necessities, a family-run convenience store that had been serving the community since 1991. What began as a long-held dream of owning a business became a new chapter built on faith, hard work, and determination. Together, they have built upon the store's established foundation while introducing new products and services.



L to R: Marie Burke Lecours, Owner of Necessities; Rob Lecours; Chris Bell, Manager of Customer Service, Health/Safety & Environment at Hydro One Remote Communities

Today, Necessities offers confectionery, snacks, healthier options, soft serve ice cream, in-house subs, daily lunch specials, catering, pizza, evening orders, and its popular in-house fried chicken, Mom's Chicken.

Marie is a dedicated, hands-on owner who can often be found serving customers, stocking shelves, cooking, cleaning, or doing whatever needs to be done. Her involvement in daily operations reflects her strong work ethic and commitment to her customers.

Over the past year, Marie has continued to grow her entrepreneurial work through Lil' Necessities at the local arena, where a portion of revenue supports children's programs, and by opening Bare Necessities Massage & Spa. These ventures demonstrate her ability to recognize new opportunities and provide services that respond to local needs.

Giving back is central to Marie's approach to business. Her businesses have supported food banks, churches, schools, hockey teams, community events, local families, and causes close to the community. Her generosity demonstrates how small businesses can make a meaningful difference beyond their everyday operations.

Through her dedication and entrepreneurial spirit, Marie continues to build a business legacy rooted in family and community.

Marie's commitment to service, community, and sustainable business growth reflects the spirit of Indigenous small-business excellence and serves as an inspiration to aspiring entrepreneurs.

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Excellence in Leadership

Peter Collins, CEO, Chi Mino Ozhitoowin



L to R: Team at Chi Mino Ozhitoowin: Ginger Randle; Sherry Pelletier; Angela Collins; Peter Collins, CEO; Craig Hardy; Wendy Roberts; Chief Michele Solomon; Kristy Boucher.

Chi Mino Ozhitoowin

Peter Collins is an Anishinaabe leader from Fort William First Nation with decades of experience in Indigenous governance, economic development, and community advocacy. He currently serves as Chief Executive Officer of Chi Mino Ozhitoowin, where he continues to advance opportunities for First Nations and their communities.

Throughout his career, Peter has focused on advancing Indigenous sovereignty, economic self-determination, and long-term well-being for First Nations in Northwestern Ontario. His commitment to public service includes serving 10 terms as Chief of Fort William First Nation after first being elected to Council in 1986, while continuing to serve on Council today.

As CEO of Chi Mino Ozhitoowin, Peter guides work connected to major infrastructure development, including the Waasigan Transmission Line Project. The organization supports meaningful First Nations participation through employment, capacity training, environmental stewardship, procurement, and partnerships with industry, government, and educational institutions. This work helps create opportunities for Indigenous communities to participate in and benefit from major regional developments.

Peter's accomplishments include helping lead Fort William First Nation through three historic settlement agreements, supporting First Nations equity participation in major transmission developments, and advancing training initiatives that help community members gain industry-recognized skills. His efforts demonstrate the importance of Indigenous ownership, strategic partnerships, and investing in community capacity.







His leadership and dedication have also been recognized through the 2024 Anishinabek Nation Lifetime Achievement Award and the 2026 Confederation College Community Partner of the Year Award.

Throughout his career, Peter has demonstrated a strong commitment to building relationships, strengthening Indigenous economic participation, and creating opportunities that benefit current and future generations.

Peter Collins' career reflects sustained leadership in governance, economic development, infrastructure, training, and community advocacy. His contributions demonstrate the lasting impact of Indigenous leadership and a shared vision for stronger, more prosperous First Nations communities.



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Business Excellence Award

ThawiKayhiGan Group (TKG Group)



L to R: Carlos Castillo, Vice-President, Community and Government Affairs, Perimeter Aviation; Jonathon Mamakwa, President of Thawikayhigan Group

TKG GROUP

ThawiKayhiGan Group, also known as TKG Group, is a 100% First Nation-owned business development group established in November 2018. It is owned equally by six shareholder First Nations, working together to create economic opportunities and strengthen the long-term prosperity of their communities.



Since its early work supporting the Wataynikaneyap Power Project, TKG has grown through contracting, camp services, logistics, supply, retail, health services, training, and new fuel and procurement initiatives. Its diversified business portfolio reflects a commitment to building capacity and increasing First Nations participation across multiple industries.

TKG's growth includes partnerships with organizations such as Valard Construction LP, Dexterra, Moncrief Construction, and Centerfire LP. These strategic relationships help strengthen business capabilities while maintaining a focus on employment, skills development, training, and long-term economic benefits for its shareholder communities.

Recent milestones include the 2023 acquisition of Oshtugon Computers Inc. and the development of the Pipestone Fuels and Supplies LP fuel depot in Pickle Lake, which is intended to support bulk fuel delivery and help reduce costs for northern communities. These initiatives demonstrate TKG's ability to identify new business opportunities while responding to the practical needs of the region.

Through strategic investment, collaboration, and business diversification, TKG continues to strengthen its economic foundation while supporting greater Indigenous ownership and economic self-determination.

Grounded in community ownership, reinvestment, and sustainable business growth, TKG Group demonstrates the strength of First Nations working together to build meaningful opportunities and lasting benefits for current and future generations.







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Thank you! NADF extends our gratitude to the **Delta Hotels Thunder Bay by Marriott** for their exceptional hospitality in hosting the **34th Annual NADF Awards**. Your support made this celebration unforgettable!

Master of Ceremonies

Patrick Cheechoo



Patrick Cheechoo is a Cree (Mushkego) comedian and professional emcee from Constance Lake First Nation in Ontario. He is married to Dr. Keri Cheechoo, who also helps co-write his material, and is a proud father of five and grandfather of three. He has also had the pleasure of watching his daughters, Caitlin and Nadia, perform and share their own unique styles of humour.

Patrick performed his first comedy set in 2012 and was named Thunder Bay Comic Idol in 2014. Since then, he has performed across Canada and the United States, earning a reputation for connecting naturally with audiences through his confidence, adaptability and relatable humour. He has also supported and headlined Got Land?, an Indigenous comedy showcase produced by comedian Janelle Niles.

With more than 20 years of experience as an emcee, Patrick brings humour, professionalism and strong audience engagement to every event.

Comedian

Ron Kanutski



Ron Kanutski is a late-blooming comedian who turned a midlife crisis into a new career. In 2009, he decided to revisit a middle-school passion and enter a local comedy competition. After finishing as runner-up, comedian John Caponera encouraged him to return the following year and win—which he did in 2010.

Rather than follow the traditional comedy-club circuit, Ron began producing his own shows, creating opportunities for himself while discovering new talent along the way. He soon moved into corporate and casino comedy and has since worked with several rock and country music festivals across the United States.

Along the way, Ron has had the chance to meet and become friends with many of his musical heroes from the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. He was crowned Thunder Bay's King of Comedy in 2015 and kept audiences laughing through the COVID-19 pandemic with online performances.



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Head Office

Orion Building
100 Little Lake Road, Suite 101
Fort William First Nation, ON
P7J 0L2

Tel: 807-623-5397
Toll-Free: 1-800-465-6821

Timmins

150 Brousseau Avenue, Unit A
Timmins, ON
P4N 5Y4

Tel: 807-623-5397
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