A Donor-Focused Fundraising Model:  
An Essential Tool in Community College Foundations’ Toolkit  
Linnie S. Carter  
Linnie Carter & Associates LLC, Middletown, Virginia  

Author Note  

Linnie S. Carter, President & CEO, Linnie Carter & Associates LLC, Middletown, Virginia.  

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Linnie S. Carter, Linnie Carter & Associates, LLC, P.O. Box 249, Middletown, VA 22645. E-mail: linnie@linniecarter.com  

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Abstract

The increased focus on private fundraising poses challenges for community colleges (Jackson & Glass, 2000). A challenge is a lack of fundraising experience within community colleges and their foundations. There now exists a donor-focused fundraising model for community colleges to use to enhance their fundraising initiatives and increase the amount of funds raised. The model is based on the outcome approach logic model, which is a road map of how organizations do their work and achieve their goals. First introduced by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the outcome approach logic model consists of inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impacts (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The model illustrates that no single input or activity contributes to the outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Instead, all of the inputs and activities are necessary for the outputs, outcomes, and impacts to occur. Existing literature and a recent study on the philanthropic motivations of community college donors (Carter & Duggan, forthcoming) were used to develop the model.

Keywords: donors, fundraising, model, community college, foundation
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Dwindling support from state legislatures (Evelyn, 2004a; Sheldon, 2003; Sullivan, 2001) and burgeoning student enrollment with no increase in funding or space capacity (Evelyn, 2004a; Hebel, 2003; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005) threaten the future and viability of community colleges. These colleges, which used to receive almost all of their funding from their states, are now operating with decreased state funding and minimal local funding (Bass, 2003; Hearn, 2003; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Virginia community colleges, for example, faced significant budget cuts in 2002 (Larose, 2003), receiving an 8% state budget cut, eliminating 270 full-time positions and increasing tuition by more than $15 per credit hour. Forty three additional states suffered budget shortfalls in 2002 (Roueche, Roueche, & Johnson, 2002). Although $42 billion was spent on higher education nationwide in 2002, one year later funding was cut by approximately $1.2 billion (Potter, 2003). Then, in September 2007, Virginia community colleges were among the state-supported agencies asked to prepare for budget cuts up to 5% to make up for a $641 million shortage in the Commonwealth of Virginia budget (Sluss, 2007). These types of budget cuts continue to present serious challenges for community colleges.

Figure 1 illustrates the diminishing government funding and reports the sources of revenue for public two-year institutions for fiscal year 2006. At that time, less than 50% of funding came from local, state and/or federal government appropriations.
Figure 1. Sources of revenue for public two-year institutions, fiscal year 2006 (Knapp, et. al., 2008).

With community colleges educating almost half of the nation’s undergraduates, these institutions can no longer afford to do more with less (Hebel, 2003). Therefore, the traditional forms of community college funding are no longer sufficient. Instead, community colleges must tap into private funding sources to maintain basic services and programs and institute new ones (Hearn, 2003). Contributions from donors may allow community colleges to fund programs and services that could help the institutions serve more students. Also, these contributions could provide assistance for unfunded projects that support community colleges’ missions. This renewed direction and focus must include key partners such as the community college president, chief development officer, various college employees, and foundation board members. These partners must research their donors to effectively cultivate, solicit, and maintain relationships with them. Without donor demographics, information about which key messages
resonate with them, and data about what motivates donors to contribute funds, community colleges’ fundraising efforts will be wasteful, less effective, and less successful (Williams, 1997). Demographic information helps community colleges determine which fundraising initiatives, such as planned giving and online giving, to promote to certain donor segments. Better understanding donor motivation will help nonprofit organizations determine the appropriate time to solicit contributions, the types of fundraising requests to make, the amount of funding to request, how donors would like to be thanked and recognized, and the types of projects for which to seek funding (Pezzullo & Brittingham, 1993). This article proposes a donor-focused fundraising model to assist community colleges foundations in achieving, and possibly exceeding, their fundraising goals.

The Rise of the Community College Foundation

Historically, community colleges have not focused significant time, money, or human resources on private fundraising because state funding, student tuition and fees, and local funding met their budgetary needs (Anderson, 2004/05; Keener, 1982; Miller, 1994). To address the reduction of traditional sources of funding, community colleges first established foundations to raise private funds (Glass & Jackson, 1998; Robison, 1982) when the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (now called the American Association of Community Colleges) encouraged community colleges in the 1970s to develop fundraising initiatives (Glass & Jackson). The next impetus to establish foundations came with the establishment of a professional association for two-year colleges’ fundraisers and grant writers in 1973 (Glass & Jackson; M. Kuhn, personal communication, March 31, 2008). The Council for Advancement and Support of Education, an institutional advancement association, allowed community colleges to join in 1974 after primarily focusing on private and public four-year institutions (Glass &
Jackson). Also, Florida elected officials offered to match the private funds raised by Florida community colleges, resulting in an increase in the number of foundations established (Glass & Jackson). Furthermore, the IRS’s tax benefits related to charitable contributions also spurred the creation of community college foundations in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, with 496 community college foundations being established between 1971 and 1987 (Angel & Gares, 1989; Luck & Tolle, 1978). The impact of these events was most evident between 1987 and 1997 when almost 90% of the nation’s community colleges had instituted foundations (Phillippe & Eblinger, 1998).

While some community colleges thrive in fundraising, most of them still lag behind four-year institutions in the amount of money raised. In 1996, the average value of community college endowments was $2.1 million, while that of four-year institutions was $350 million (MacArthur, 2000; Van Der Werf, 1999). This gap in private funding was due in large part to community colleges’ lack of fundraising activity. Specifically, most of them were not aggressively and proactively raising money in the 1990s. Therefore, between 1965 and 1997, community colleges’ fundraising income did not exceed 1% of the colleges’ total budget (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The Voluntary Support of Education Report for Fiscal Year 1998 included 20 community colleges with the largest fundraising totals for 1998-99. Each institution raised more than $1.5 million that year (Lively, 2000). Considering that, over a 32-year period, community college fundraising income was not greater than 1% of total budgets (Cohen & Brawer), raising more than $1 million is noteworthy for many community colleges.

Community colleges continue to raise fewer private funds than four-year institutions. No community college appeared on the Voluntary Support of Education Report for Fiscal Year 2006 top 20 list. On the report list that included institutions’ self-reported 2006 fundraising totals, only 122 community and technical colleges throughout the United States appeared. This number is
minimal considering there are more than 1,200 community colleges in the country (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.-b). The fundraising totals of these 122 community and technical colleges ranged from $89,980 raised by Northwest Iowa Community College in Iowa to $15.2 million raised by Indian River Community College in Florida (Council for Aid to Education, 2007).

**The Donor-Focused Fundraising Model for Community Colleges**

The Donor-Focused Fundraising Model for Community Colleges (see Figure 2) is designed to enhance fundraising programs. Although many community colleges have made great fundraising progress in the 21st century (Council for Aid to Education, 2007), the continuing reductions of traditional funding sources necessitate an even greater reliance upon private fundraising for the future. Because the community college mission of providing affordable, flexible and accessible higher education is just as compelling as that of other nonprofit organizations, the fundraising potential of community colleges is unlimited. Once community colleges gain the necessary tools to secure additional private funding from donors, including information about donor motivation, they will achieve even more fundraising success. The donor-focused fundraising model could be an essential tool in other community college foundations’ toolkits.

The logic model, which is a road map of how organizations do their work and achieve their goals, was used to develop this fundraising model. First introduced by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 1998, the outcome approach logic model concept consists of inputs (what is needed to accomplish the activities), activities (what needs to occur to address the problem), outputs (what will result from the activities), outcomes (the changes that will occur as a result of the program), and impacts (the long-lasting changes that will occur as a result of the program).
(W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004). The model illustrates that no single input or activity contributes to the outputs, outcomes, and impacts. Instead, all of the inputs and activities are necessary for the outputs, outcomes, and impacts to occur. An explanation of each of the model’s components follows.
Donor-Focused Fundraising Model for Community Colleges

Situation: Increase the amount of charitable contributions received by a community college foundation

**Inputs**
To accomplish our work, we will need the following:
- IRS 501(c)(3) status
- College president
- Team of employees
- Foundation board members
- Operating budget
- Donor files

**Activities**
To address our problem, we will accomplish the following activities:
- Hire a vice president of college advancement and/or foundation executive director
- Develop and implement a board recruitment, retention, training, and evaluation plan
- Develop and implement a development plan
- Develop and implement a marketing plan
- Compile data about major gift, current, lapsed, and new donors
- Maintain accurate financial records
- Review donor lists regularly
- Develop policies, procedures, and processes
- Evaluate board, development, and marketing plans

**Outputs**
We expect that once accomplished, the activities will produce the following evidence:
- Number of charitable contributions will increase
- Number of donors will increase
- Number of lapsed donors will decrease
- Quality of board members will improve

**Outcomes**
We expect that, if accomplished, the activities will lead to the following changes in one to six years:
- Number of academic programs will increase
- Number of athletic programs will increase
- Number of cultural events will increase
- Number of employee positions will increase
- Number of employee professional development opportunities will increase
- Number of scholarships for students’ tuition and books will increase
- Number of special events will increase
- Quality of facilities will improve

**Impacts**
We expect this, if accomplished, the activities will lead to the following changes in seven to 10 years:
- Amount of endowments, and thus potential funding, will increase
- Number of renovated facilities and new buildings will increase
- Reliance on government funding will decrease
- Sources of funding for the community college will expand
- Student enrollment, especially among underrepresented populations, will significantly increase

**Your Planned Work**

**Your Intended Results**

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*Figure 2. Donor-focused fundraising model for community colleges*
**Inputs.** Community college foundations traditionally raise private funds for public community colleges in the United States. To implement their fundraising activities, foundations need inputs. The inputs include dedicated and well-trained board members; a database comprised of donor information, including names, mailing addresses, and the dates and amounts of charitable contributions made to the foundation; and print files that include more comprehensive information about the donors, including copies of correspondence that has been sent to donors. Without these inputs, which are fundamental to nonprofit organizations, community college foundations will be ill-prepared to achieve their fundraising goals.

**Nonprofit status.** To be considered nonprofit organizations and authorized to accept charitable contributions, foundations must have 501(c)(3) status from the Internal Revenue Service. Nonprofit organizations with this status are exempt from paying taxes, and their donors receive tax benefits as a result of contributing. In addition, the nonprofit status protects charities from personal liability (Mancuso, 2009).

**College president.** College presidents are typically some of the most important people in donor relationships as reflected in the increasing importance of fundraising in their professional responsibilities (American Association of Community Colleges, n.d.). In fact, in most instances, the community college presidents are the chief fundraising officers for the community college foundations (Moore, 2001). The presidents must be flexible, progressive, supportive of the community college foundation goals, and actively engaged in fundraising activities.

**Employees.** Employees assigned to the foundation are key to the success of the foundations. Qualified and competent employees must be hired to achieve the goals of the foundations. Due to the changing demographics, needs, and expectations of donors, today’s community college foundation employees must have characteristics that were not necessarily
expected of past fundraising professionals. They must be entrepreneurial, possess analytical skills and be able to relate to and communicate with individuals from different cultures (Hall, 2010).

Foundation board members. Dedicated and well-trained board members are needed to help the president and employees identify, cultivate, solicit, and steward donors. The board members should have experience serving on other nonprofit organizations’ board, have skills that complement the needs of the community college foundations and have access to individuals who can contribute to the community college foundation (Smith, 1994). These skills are necessary for the board members to perform their responsibilities, which include making contributions themselves, asking others to contribute, engaging new board members, and supervising the organizations’ fundraising efforts (Zimmerman & Lehman, 2004).

Operating budgets. Foundations need separate operating budgets to cover expenses such as office supplies, publications, mileage reimbursements for donor visits, and handouts for board members. Funding for these expenses is typically not available from the community colleges due to dwindling monies from traditional sources of revenue (Bass, 2003; Hearn, 2003; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005).

Donor files. Community college foundations need comprehensive donor records that include data in electronic and print formats. Donor databases should be comprised of donor information, including names, mailing addresses, and the dates and amounts of charitable contributions made to the foundation. Databases can even be integrated with the foundations’ Web sites to allow donors to complete online transactions such as contributing and updating their contact information (Wallace, 2000). Donor print files should include more comprehensive information about the donors, including copies of correspondence sent to donors.
Activities. Foundations need to complete a variety of activities to increase the amount of private funds received. These activities are not in any particular order and should be accomplished based on the needs and financial resources of the community colleges and their foundations.

**Hire a vice president of college advancement and/or foundation executive director.**

Hiring a vice president of college advancement and/or executive director to serve as the chief executive officer of the foundation is one of the first activities a community college should undertake. The executives will need to be extremely skilled in matching donors’ interests with nonprofit organizations’ projects, developing entrepreneurial projects, developing relationships with people with diverse backgrounds, and using online tools in new and creative ways (Hall, 2010).

**Develop and implement a board recruitment, retention, training, and evaluation plan.**

Another activity is to develop and implement a plan to recruit, retain, train, and evaluate foundation board members. In addition to college president and vice president of college advancement, these individuals will play essential roles in the achievement of the fundraising goals. The recruitment and orientation aspects can be developed in five steps: develop desired qualifications and characteristics of board members, write position descriptions to reflect the responsibilities of board members, seek and identify board members who possess the qualifications and fit the position description, develop an application form to use to screen prospective board members, and groom the new board members to lead (Gottlieb, 2008). Training strategies could include planning retreats, training sessions, and fundraising scripts for the board members.
The roles of the foundation board members should be considered when this plan is created and implemented. The community college foundation staff will need to create fundraising teams and require all board members to serve on one. There are many ways to organize the teams, including based on where the board members live and what fundraising projects are most important to them. The fundraising teams should hold regular meetings to discuss their contacts with donors, challenges they may be experiencing, and assistance they may need.

In addition, the community college foundation staff will need to assign donors and prospective donors to board members. Interacting with donors is essential to maintaining meaningful and long-term relationships (Burk, 2003). Donors report four communication activities improve their relationships with nonprofit organizations: (a) regularly having an opportunity to express their opinions, thoughts and fears about the organization to its leadership and receiving a reply; (b) being invited to participate in projects closely connected to the mission and purpose of the nonprofit organization; (c) having a toll-free number to call at any time for information about initiatives at the nonprofit organizations; and (d) being asked how they would like to interact and communicate with the nonprofit organization and having their communications distributed according to their preferences. While many donors prefer newsletters, they are often not as interested in using online bulletin boards (Burke; Russ Reid Company and the Barna Research Group, 1995). Preferred forms of communication differ by donor type, with current donors preferring letters from the community college president and foundation staff, student testimonials, college annual report, and student profiles as opposed to major gift donors’ preferences of student profiles, telephone calls and letters from the president, and letters from foundation staff (Carter & Duggan, forthcoming). Community college
foundation staff will need to include this type of information in the board members’ training program.

**Design and implement a development plan.** A development plan is the document that will guide the fundraising efforts of the community college foundation. The plan should begin with an assessment of the organization and include goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, deadlines, the persons responsible for each action in the plan, and the budget (Lysakowski, 2007). Also, the development plan should include the four steps of the fundraising process, identifying donors, cultivating donors, soliciting donors, and stewarding donors; strategies for moving donors from the identification phase to the stewardship phase; information about the fundraising projects for which funds are being raised; and the possible sources of private revenue. The development plan should include detailed information about the strategies that will be used to raise funds and how much time and how many resources will be committed to them. The strategies may include meeting face-to-face with donors, writing grant proposals, hosting special events, and sending fundraising letters and e-mail messages. The plan should also include an evaluation component to determine how the plan can be enhanced (Lysakowski).

**Develop and implement a marketing plan.** The marketing plan is essential since most community college foundations are fairly new (Angel & Gares, 1981) and thus may not be as well known as other community organizations. The marketing plan should include goals, objectives, strategies, tactics, deadlines, the persons responsible for each action in the plan, and the budget. The marketing plan should delineate donor communication tactics that a recent donor study found to be important, including newsletters and annual reports (Carter & Duggan, forthcoming). The plan should also include a foundation Web site, which should have online giving capability.
Compile data about major gifts, current, lapsed, and non donors. Staff members should survey, meet with and conduct focus groups with, as appropriate, current, lapsed, and major gift donors to learn more about them and what motivates them to contribute. Research suggests that few community college donors are alumni (Glass & Jackson, 1998; Carter & Duggan, forthcoming). Exploring why more alumni do not contribute to their community colleges and developing strategies to address their responses may result in an increase in the number of charitable contributions from alumni. Prince and File (2001) suggest donors fit one of seven profiles: The Communitarian: Doing Good Makes Sense; The Devout: Doing Good is God’s Will; The Investors: Doing Good is Good Business; The Socialites: Doing Good is Fun; The Altruist: Doing Good Feels Right; The Repayer: Doing Good in Return; and The Dynasts: Doing Good is a Family Tradition. The researchers go on to describe donor motivation, decision-making, and expectations, and specific strategies to garner philanthropic support. Still other research suggests that different types of donors are attracted to different publications (Carter & Duggan, forthcoming). Identifying donor profiles and implementing their recommended strategies to improve donor communication would greatly benefit community colleges (Prince & File, 2001). If resources are available, non-donors who are included in the community college foundation database and files should be surveyed as well. Also, a 2009 survey found that institutions of higher education that employed more prospect researchers tended to raise more money than those that employed fewer researchers (WealthEngine, 2009).

Maintain accurate financial records. Because the aforementioned activities may result in greater public awareness and scrutiny, the foundations will need to maintain complete financial records to ensure transparency, completeness, and accuracy (Dropkin & Halpin, 2005). The foundations may need to explore and fund systems that allow separate databases to be more
compatible. For example, if contributions are entered in the donor database and then entered as income into the fundraising management database, the foundations may need to invest in a system that allows the two databases to sync, thus saving time and resources, alleviating duplication of effort, and enhancing accuracy.

**Review donor files regularly.** In addition, foundations should review and purge printed donor files, being sure to shred information that no longer needs to be retained. Information that is not reflected in donors’ print files should be added in a systematic way, focusing on updating the files of current and major gift donors first. The foundation should also ensure that confidential print and electronic information about donors is secured, protected, and accessible to only authorized individuals (Hogan, 2008). A thorough review of electronic and print donor and prospect files may reveal a void in the donor information. To fill this void, foundations should partner with a vendor to update electronic files with the mailing addresses and e-mail addresses of donors, prospects, and alumni (Wallace, 2000). Also, if the electronic files include information about individuals who are now deceased, the files should be updated accordingly so that correspondence is not sent to the deceased individuals. The documents review conducted for this study demonstrated the importance of donor records, so this activity is essential.

**Develop policies, procedures, and processes.** Nonprofit organizations are increasingly being scrutinized by the federal government, making policies, procedures, and processes more important now than ever before (Michaels, 2007). The checks-and-balances offered by the policies, procedures, and processes will allow nonprofit organizations to better monitor their financial and donor record keeping and better leverage their limited financial and human resources. In addition to financial and donor record keeping, the functions for which policies,
procedures, and processes would be appropriate include alumni affairs, Foundation Board activities, fundraising and grants.

*Evaluate board, development, and marketing plans.* While developing board, development, and marketing plans is important, evaluating the plans for effectiveness is equally important. Community college foundations should evaluate their fundraising initiatives and the aforementioned plans, share the results with their internal and external stakeholders, use the results to make enhancements to programs and future plans, and use the assessment to distribute financial and human resources to initiatives (Mattessich, 2003).

**Outputs.** The aforementioned activities include the evaluation of the board plan, development plan, and marketing plan. The results of the evaluation, along with the data received from surveying the donors, should provide ample information for the community college foundations to determine the activities’ effectiveness. If the activities are effective, many outputs may occur. Along with the number of charitable contributions, the number of donors may increase. In addition, more donors may be retained, thus decreasing the number of lapsed donors. Also, the quality of foundation board members may improve.

**Outcomes.** Over a one- to six-year period, if deemed to be effective, the activities may lead to an increase in charitable contributions and thus an increase in the number of initiatives funded by donors. The initiatives may include academic programs, athletics, cultural events, employee positions, employee professional development activities, student scholarships, special events, student activities, and facilities. Finally, the cumulative and collective impact of the inputs and activities may lead to long-term enhancements.

**Impacts.** The impacts, changes that may occur over a seven- to 10-year period, may include an increase in the amount of permanent endowments, where the accrued interest would
be used but not the principal; an increase in the number of buildings renovated and built; an increase in the number of sources of funding on which community colleges could depend; and less reliance on government funding. These impacts could be substantial, positively altering the financial landscape of community colleges for years to come and allowing them to serve more students, including those from underrepresented populations. Many four-year institutions already enjoy the long-term impacts of successful fundraising. Community colleges, with the appropriate inputs and activities, could experience the same level of success and thus impacts.

**Fundraising Potential of Community Colleges**

With traditional sources of funding continuing to dwindle for institutions of higher education (Bass, 2003; Hearn, 2003; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005), many institutions have had to shift their focus to include private fundraising (Anderson, 2004/05; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Hearn, 2003) and, as a result, have made great fundraising progress in the 21st century (Council for Aid to Education, 2007). Because the community college mission of providing affordable, flexible, and accessible higher education is just as compelling as that of other nonprofit organizations, the fundraising potential of community colleges is unlimited. Once community colleges gain the necessary tools to secure additional private funding from donors, including information about what motivates donors to give, they will achieve even more fundraising success.

Nonprofit organizations in the United States have enjoyed a remarkable level of support from philanthropists, who have contributed record amounts of money (Giving USA 2006, 2006). There is no reason that, with the appropriate level of resources and donor knowledge, community colleges cannot experience the same level of fundraising success and gain a greater percentage of these contributions. For instance, in 2005, donors contributed more than $260 billion to more
than one million nonprofit organizations throughout the United States (Giving USA 2006). This was an increase in funding of more than 15,194% since 1921, almost 90 years ago. Also, while religious organizations received the largest percentage of contributions, educational institutions received the second largest percentage of donations (Giving USA 2006). For educational contributions, this was an increase of 9.4% from 2004 (Blum & Hall, 2006).

Experts expect this astronomical level of charitable giving to continue. In 1993, researchers at Cornell University indicated that older generations would transfer more than $10 trillion in wealth to younger generations during a 55-year period (“Brief history of philanthropy,” n.d.; Nicklin, 1995; Tempel, 2003). In 1999, researchers at Boston College conducted a study and countered that the transfer of wealth would be much greater than what was originally predicted. In fact, they revealed that between $41 trillion and $136 trillion may be transferred from older to young generations between 1998 and 2052 (Ciconte & Jacob, 2005; Schervish & Havens, 2001; Strom, 2002; Tempel, 2003), providing nonprofit organizations unique opportunities to secure a significant portion of this wealth. One of the Boston College researchers, Paul Schervish, pointed out that existing nonprofit organizations will not benefit from transfer of wealth if they do not learn how to meet the needs of new philanthropists, whose needs may greatly differ from their parents and/or grandparents. Nonprofit organizations that encourage and allow for greater involvement by donors will be more likely to benefit from the considerable transfer of wealth (Strom). Community colleges also can benefit from this transfer of wealth.

**Implications for Practice**

Community colleges should consider using the donor-focused fundraising model to enhance their fundraising programs. The model includes elements from which all types of
community college foundations, from those that are underdeveloped to those that are well-run, could benefit. Researchers have found that with traditional sources of funding continuing to dwindle for institutions of higher education (Bass, 2003; Hearn, 2003; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005), many institutions have had to shift their focus to include private fundraising (Anderson, 2004/05; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Hearn, 2003) and, as a result, have made great fundraising progress in the 21st century (Council for Aid to Education, 2007). Because the community college mission of providing affordable, flexible and accessible higher education is just as compelling as that of other nonprofit organizations, the fundraising potential of community colleges is unlimited. Once community colleges gain the necessary tools to secure additional private funding from donors, including information about what motivates donors to give, they will achieve even more fundraising success. The donor-focused fundraising model could be an essential tool in other community college foundations’ toolkits.
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