
SolutionSERIES

NEW FEDERAL OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE
TWO-GENERATION APPROACHES TO IMPROVING THE
LIVES OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Two-generation systems innovation is challenging, given the myriad of legal, cultural, budgetary, and technology barriers that inhibit collaboration, data sharing, and successfully working with a family. When government leaders are consumed by day-to-day crises, have to focus first on compliance, and lack flexible resources for innovation, progress is slow and barriers to replication are not easily overcome.

Because of recent legislation passed in February and March of this year, the federal government will be providing significant new funding to state and local governments in 2018 and future years through an array of programs serving low-income children and parents. These new funding streams, and the legislations' increased focus on improving outcomes using evidence-based approaches, create a remarkable opportunity for path-breaking governors and local leaders to transform how government tackles intergenerational poverty. By weaving together new and existing funding streams, they can pursue aggressive two-generation (2Gen) system reforms that create more efficient ways to improve economic security, education, health, and well-being for low-income parents and children.

Imagine this: Over the next five years, influential state and local leaders cooperate across states, counties, systems, and party lines to:

- Build on successful, evidence-based approaches used by pioneering state and local leaders to help families achieve their full potential;
- Institute new governance processes that integrate services funded by different government agencies, putting the focus on helping families rather than compliance with program rules;
- Use data, evidence, and innovative experimentation to assess the needs of different populations and determine what strategies work best for each, while tracking outcomes for the entire family as a whole;
- Continuously adjust how resources and services are used to increase taxpayers' return on investment while improving outcomes for children and families;
- Create feedback platforms to draw upon parent and family expertise to strengthen human services design and delivery; and
- Track and improve outcomes for children, parents, and other caregivers, individually and together.

This may sound fanciful, but the conditions to enable bold human services innovations to support both children and their parents are coming into place.

- **New federal funding opportunities.** Beginning in 2018, an infusion of new federal funding across a range of human services programs will provide resources that state and local governments can use for outcome-focused and evidence-based 2Gen approaches.
- **Incoming leaders.** This November, gubernatorial elections will occur in 36 states and three territories, with as many as 19 new governors predicted. In addition to governors, many county and city leaders will be elected, entering office next year with plans for increasing prosperity in their states and communities. Improving job opportunities and strengthening early childhood development and child well-being are bipartisan priorities that can be pursued simultaneously and cost-effectively using 2Gen strategies to support families.
- **State and local exemplars and 2Gen models.** Highly effective governors and county leaders — Republicans and Democrats — have begun to demonstrate how 2Gen, outcome-focused strategies can improve the lives of parents and children, blazing a trail for other jurisdictions to follow. They have found novel ways to overcome bureaucratic program silos that frustrate citizens and impede results. Some are putting a focus on social determinants of health to guide coordination of health, housing, education, workforce development, and other social services. They are using up-to-date tools and approaches — such as integrated data systems, outcome- and incentive-focused contracts, and partnerships with researchers — to achieve better outcomes for at-risk populations. Ascend at the Aspen Institute recently highlighted many of these innovations in [*States Leading the Way: Practical Solutions that Lift Up Children and Families*](#) and [*Making Tomorrow Better Together*](#).

This document explains how state and local leaders across the country can take full advantage of these federal funding opportunities to create better ways to tackle intergenerational poverty. Specifically, it:

- Summarizes the most significant new funding streams available to support groundbreaking 2Gen approaches, which will provide over \$4.6 billion in additional 2018 funding and potentially much more in future years;
- Highlights how leading states and counties are already preparing to tap these new funds to test or scale up evidence-based 2Gen strategies; and
- Offers concrete steps that all jurisdictions can take to leverage these new federal resources to improve outcomes for children and families while improving government efficiency.

NEW AND EXPANDED FEDERAL FUNDING STREAMS

Under the February bipartisan budget agreement, Congress and the president agreed to substantial increases in federal spending in discretionary programs (governed by annual appropriations) and a small number of entitlement programs (whose funding levels are

locked in for multiple years). The first set of programs below received significant new funding, compared to 2017 levels, through annual appropriations:

- **Preschool Development Grants (Administration for Children and Families [ACF]):** In 2018, ACF was appropriated \$250 million for a new round of competitive grants to states to improve collaboration and coordination among existing early childhood education programs in public schools, home-based child care, center-based child care, Head Start, and other early childhood programs. ACF will administer the program in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education, which operated a similar program by the same name from 2014 to 2017. The new program, authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act, will provide states with initial one-year grants focused on coordination and strategic planning. Provided Congress appropriates funding in future years, states may apply for a three-year renewal grant focused on coordination as well as improving access to high-quality early childhood education programs. States must provide a cash or in-kind match of 30 percent of the grant amount. Priority will be given to states that have not received a previous Preschool Development Grant from the Department of Education.
- **Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) (ACF):** The 2018 appropriation provides a \$2.37 billion increase over the 2017 level of \$2.86 billion, increasing total CCDF funding to \$5.23 billion. Formula grants to states provide financial assistance to help low-income families access quality child care so that parents can work or receive education or training. With the 2014 Child Care and Development Block Grant reauthorization, states must also use a significant portion of their allocation to improve overall program quality, such as by developing or improving Quality Rating and Improvement Systems.
- **Head Start (ACF):** The 2018 appropriation increased funding to Head Start, which provides early childhood and comprehensive services for children and their families, by \$610 million, to a total of \$9.863 billion. This includes a \$115 million increase for competitive grants through Early Head Start Expansion and Early Head Start Partnerships to expand access to infant and toddler care and increases for staffing costs.
- **Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) (Department of Education):** The 2018 appropriation is \$50 million, a \$35 million increase over 2017. Competitive grants to institutions of higher education support or establish campus-based child care programs serving low-income parents enrolled in postsecondary education.
- **Programs to address the opioid epidemic:** Roughly \$4.7 billion in 2018 federal appropriations are focused on addressing the opioid epidemic. This includes a \$1 billion increase for State Opioid Response grants administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that will be available to all states and tribes through a formula. (This is in addition to the \$500 million in 2018 formula funding provided to states under the 21st Century Cures Act). Also, ACF will help states fight the opioid crisis through new funding for three programs: \$39 million for Regional Partnership Grants to support community collaborations among substance abuse treatment providers, courts, and child welfare agencies; \$60 million for Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act state grants focused on improving safe care for infants born with neonatal abstinence syndrome and their families; and \$20 million to improve kinship navigator programs that help grandparents and other relatives care for children whose parents are struggling with addiction.

Future year funding levels for the above programs will be set through subsequent annual appropriation acts. Because the February bipartisan budget agreement sets higher appropriations targets for 2019 than those for 2018, Congress is likely to sustain, or possibly increase, funding for these programs next year.

The next set of programs are considered entitlements (mandatory) and fall under the jurisdiction of the House Ways and Means and the Senate Finance Committees. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018, enacted in February, created authority and funding for these programs to operate in 2018 and future years, providing a greater degree of fiscal certainty to state and local governments than the programs above, which are governed by annual appropriations laws. All of these programs strongly emphasize using and building a robust research base about what strategies work best for different populations.

- **Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program (MIECHV) (Health Resources and Services Administration):** MIECHV, a hallmark of both the 2Gen and the evidence-based policy movements, is the outcome-focused home visiting program that awards funds to states through a formula. The reauthorization extends the current funding level — \$400 million per year — through 2022 and includes an explicit authority for states to allocate up to 25 percent of their funds for outcomes payments using outcome-based contracts.
- **Family First Prevention and Services Act (ACF):** Beginning October 1, 2019, the Family First law creates a new federal match for states and localities that invest their own funds in evidence-based prevention services to reduce the number of children entering the child welfare system. From 2019 to 2026, the federal match will be 50 cents per dollar; beginning in 2026, the federal match will be the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage rate (between 50 and 76 percent, depending on the state). Eligible services, which can support parents, children, and relative caregivers, include mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment, in-home parent skill-based programs, and kinship navigator programs. To qualify for federal matching funds, the services must be trauma-informed and meet the law's standards for programs that are "promising," "supported," or "well-supported" by evidence. These standards closely approximate the [scientific rating scale](#) currently used by the California Clearinghouse on Evidence-Based Practices. At least half of the federal share must be spent on services that meet the highest (well-supported) evidence standard. There is no cap on the amount of federal funding a state or locality can receive, which will enable evidence-focused jurisdictions to draw down substantial new resources for high-impact prevention services.
- **Re-employment Services and Eligibility Assessment Grants (Department of Labor [DOL]):** This program will provide formula funding to states for evidence-based reemployment services to help people receiving unemployment insurance find jobs. DOL is required to define evidence standards for what constitutes "high or moderate causal evidence," which will likely be based on standards that are now used for DOL's [Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research](#). Any funded intervention that does not meet the law's standards for high or moderate evidence must be evaluated, and states may use up to 10 percent of federal grant funds for evaluation. Annual grant funding of \$117 million is provided in 2018, increasing each year to reach \$750 million in 2027. Starting in 2023, at least 25 percent of funds must be used for reemployment services backed by high or moderate evidence. This increases to at least 50 percent after 2026.

- **Social Impact Partnerships to Pay for Results Act (SIPPRA) (Department of the Treasury):** SIPPRA provides \$100 million to Treasury, which will collaborate with other federal agencies to provide competitive awards to state and local governments to advance the use of outcome-based “pay for success” contracting. The bill lists a wide range of eligible outcomes that produce social benefits and government savings, including increased employment and earnings, reduced homelessness, improved birth outcomes, reduced child abuse and neglect, and improved health. Among the outcomes that qualify for partnerships are interventions that produce measurable improvements in *family* outcomes, such as reduced rates of asthma, diabetes, and other preventable diseases, and that avoid the placement of children in foster care by ensuring they can be cared for safely in their homes. The vast majority of the funds will be used for outcome payments under state or local contracts that incentivize providers to achieve quantifiable results, which must be measured using experimental or quasi-experimental designs through random control trials or other evidence-based research methodologies. Of the \$100 million available, up to \$10 million may support feasibility studies to help states develop proposals for pay-for-success projects and up to \$15 million may support evaluation.

All these new mandatory entitlements incorporate an outcomes-focused approach to federal program design. Instead of traditional legislative provisions that prescribe specific activities that all jurisdictions must carry out, the new programs identify specific goals to achieve and then provide grantees with substantial flexibility to choose interventions, provided they are backed by strong evidence of effectiveness or are highly promising innovations based on preliminary evidence. Larger funding amounts are reserved for approaches that have the strongest evidence, but funds are also available to test promising innovations that can be rigorously evaluated. The end goal is for programs to move from a stage where they have preliminary data on their effectiveness to one where they have more solid results showing impact. Federal funds may be used for outcome payments and for high-quality evaluation.

STATES AND COUNTIES PREPARING TO USE NEW FUNDS FOR EVIDENCE-BASED SYSTEMS REFORM

Strong governors, given their reach and authority, can lead the way in reforming how state and local governments deliver services to low-income families and children. Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper (a Democrat) and Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant (a Republican) have launched major systems reforms to simultaneously strengthen early childhood development while helping parents find meaningful work. Both have created integrated, cross-agency governance structures and processes to improve the lives of children and parents and have formed strong coalitions of government, business, service providers, academic institutions, and philanthropy.

Mississippi: Gen+ Innovation

In Mississippi, the State Early Childhood Advisory Council and the Mississippi Department of Human Services co-designed Gen+, a family-based early childhood system that integrates services for parents and children funded by TANF, SNAP, Head Start, CCDF, public pre-K, WIC, Medicaid, and other low-income programs. When a family enrolls to receive child care assistance, case managers work with both the child and the parent(s) to find high-quality child care and appropriate wrap-around services. Using the state's longitudinal data system (originally developed for education) as a backbone, the state government has partnered with Mississippi State University to develop a state-of-the-art data platform to

integrate early childhood, K-12 education, higher education, workforce, and health and human services data, while protecting individual privacy. The integrated data can be used to facilitate interagency service coordination for both children and parents and to conduct high-quality, low-cost evaluations.

Colorado: Leveraging Evidence and Innovation for Youth, Parents, and Families

In Colorado, Governor Hickenlooper is cementing cross-sector, evidence-based reforms so that, beginning in January 2019, his successor will be poised to make further improvements in early childhood, workforce, and other programs to improve outcomes for low-income families. The governor has empowered his cabinet officials to design cross-sector solutions within state government and in partnership with counties. For example, the Colorado Parent Employment Program helps noncustodial parents find work and reconnect with their children. The state has pioneered pay-for-results contracting to incentivize improved outcomes for families while lowering taxpayer costs. For example, two projects included in the governor's 2019 budget and funded for this coming year will provide evidence-based in-home services to high-risk youth and their families, with state success payments subsequently released for proven reductions in youth justice involvement and removals from the home. To strengthen the state's capacity to use data and evidence for improvement, the governor has launched the Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab through a partnership with the University of Denver and highly qualified researchers at other universities.

Connecticut: Outcome-based Contracts to Improve 2Gen Impacts

In Connecticut, the Department of Children and Families is using an outcome-based contract to scale up Family-Based Recovery (FBR), an evidence-informed substance abuse treatment program to help parents struggling with addiction. A rigorous evaluation will build evidence about the impact of FBR on reducing unnecessary foster care placements and parental substance abuse, helping build strong evidence that can inform nationwide implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act. To improve the impact of home visiting services, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) has implemented a "rate card" procurement model that provides bonus payments to nonprofit service providers that achieve measurable improvements on the following key outcomes: avoidance of pre-term births, emergency room visits, and substantiated child maltreatment; improvements on family stability indicators; and increased caregiver employment or training completion. OEC developed the model with input from families and home visiting programs.

County Leadership: Data Integration and Evaluation for Improved Services

In Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, the health and human services agency has become a national exemplar for how to use integrated data and research studies to improve outcomes for low-income parents and children, particularly in child welfare programs. To augment its internal analytical and evaluation capacity, the agency partners with outside researchers to continually test and fine-tune its approaches. Over several decades, the county built and maintains its centralized data and research capacity by tapping into programmatic funding, a financing model that other jurisdictions can copy using existing and new federal funding streams. Other counties, such as Montgomery County, Maryland, are building sophisticated integrated data systems for health and human services programs that can be used for predictive analytics, case management, and evaluation activities to improve the impact of services for both parents and children.

These state and local pioneers have developed cross-sector governance systems, integrated data and evaluation capacity, and outcome-based procurement strategies

that serve as models for other jurisdictions that want to fully harness new federal resources to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and parents. Many of these services have built upon the work from [Making Tomorrow Better Together](#) and [Practical Solutions That Lift Up Children and Families](#), both published by Ascend. With these building blocks in place, these jurisdictions are poised to think creatively about how to advance high-impact, 2Gen strategies and evidence-building capacity with new federal funding.

STRATEGIES TO HARNESS NEW FEDERAL RESOURCES TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND PARENTS

Every state and county in the nation can make faster progress in tackling intergenerational poverty by coupling new federal resources with innovative, outcome-focused 2Gen strategies. Below are some key steps that state and local jurisdictions can take to maximize their capacity to draw down new sources of federal funding and use them for greatest impact.

- **Establish new governance models.** Program-centric, compliance-focused approaches to delivering human services impede outcomes, frustrate intended beneficiaries as well as staff members, and create unnecessary costs to taxpayers. Achieving better outcomes for low-income families more efficiently can only be accomplished through governance processes focused on improving outcomes for similar target populations, irrespective of where the funding originates. Because fragmented federal program laws give responsibility for different programs to different levels of government, effective governance requires effective collaboration horizontally (across agencies) as well as vertically (across levels of government).

Better governance processes can facilitate:

- ▲ **Blending and braiding funds** to improve the impact of federal, state, local, and philanthropic investments. For example, agencies overseeing substance abuse, Medicaid, and child welfare should be working together to align Family First, SAMHSA, Medicaid, MIECHV, and other child welfare funds around evidence-based substance abuse treatment and referrals that will help parents with addiction issues achieve health and self-sufficiency while preventing spikes in child welfare caseloads. Early childhood and workforce agencies could align funding for pre-k, child care, workforce development, and re-employment services to ensure that low-income parents seeking work or related training have access to convenient, high-quality early childhood services.
- ▲ **Leveraging Performance Partnership Pilot (P3) authority.** Since 2014, Congress has annually authorized Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth, allowing up to 10 state, local, and tribal pilot sites to blend funds across youth-serving programs and receive waivers from federal program requirements that impede outcomes. The authority covers programs funded in annual appropriations acts that are administered by HHS, DOL, the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Pilots must serve youth between 14 and 24 who are low-income and either homeless, in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, unemployed, or not enrolled in or at risk of dropping out of school. In exchange for flexibility, pilot sites commit to achieve significant outcome improvements for disconnected youth in education, employment, or other key areas. A number of current pilot sites support youth

parents. For example, the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services is combining Head Start and Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act funding to provide comprehensive services to young mothers and their children.

New legislation, the Two-Generation Economic Empowerment Act, has been introduced by Senator Collins (R-ME) and Senator Heinrich (D-NM) and would expand P3 to cover a broader set of programs serving both parents and children. States, localities, and tribes that forge strong cross-agency governance processes are well positioned to develop bold, outcome-focused 2Gen strategies that could be supported through the existing P3 authority for disconnected youth. They could also build compelling use cases for other 2Gen strategies that could be supported through the Two-Generation Economic Empowerment Act, generating bipartisan support for the bill's passage and potentially attracting philanthropic investment.

- ▲ ***Intergovernmental collaboration.*** Responsibility for federally funded early childhood programs is dispersed across federal (Head Start), state, and local governments. Some of the most innovative early childhood strategies that help both children and parents are coming from local governments that partner with business, community-based organizations, housing authorities, private sector providers, public schools, Head Start providers, and even corrections departments. Effective models for systems change, created with strong stakeholder engagement, could be successfully replicated elsewhere through active engagement with state and federal decision-makers.
- ▲ ***Data integration across programs.*** Many state and local efforts to improve data capacity have been stymied by perceived legal barriers to sharing data across programs and by system interoperability. As Allegheny County, Mississippi, and other jurisdictions have demonstrated, a strong state or county executive can establish common data-sharing and privacy protocols across multiple agencies so that data on individuals can be used to improve program coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- ***Strengthen capacity for evidence-based decision-making.*** As demonstrated by the new entitlement programs described above, Congress and federal agencies are allocating an increasing share of their funding to state and local jurisdictions that demonstrate they are using evidence-based approaches and conducting evaluations to build evidence about what works best for whom and under what circumstances. Few state and local governments have created the capacity to discern what research studies are rigorous and relevant to their own needs, which vary considerably across urban, suburban, and rural communities and across racial and ethnic groups. Very few state and local governments have developed the integrated data systems and evaluation capacity needed to routinely use data and evidence to measure and evaluate what's working and inform adjustments. Until this deficiency is addressed, state and local governments will continue to waste resources that could be redirected to more effective approaches. For example, the solution to the nation's opioid crisis and its ravaging effects on families is not to simply spend more on strategies that are failing or unproven. Instead, government decision-makers, practitioners, and researchers should be working together to examine the existing evidence about effective approaches and how to scale them and to embed evaluations into innovative and promising approaches that could help stabilize families struggling with addiction.

To efficiently and quickly build capacity to use and generate evidence, state and local governments can:

- ▲ **Tap existing research clearinghouses** to learn what strategies are evidence-based and match the needs of communities. Some of the most relevant to 2Gen approaches are the [Pew Results First Clearinghouse](#), the [California Clearinghouse for Evidence-Based Practices](#), the [Department of Labor's CLEAR](#), [ACF's research and evaluation clearinghouses](#), the [Department of Education's What Works Clearinghouse](#), and the [Laura and John Arnold Foundation's Social Programs That Work](#).
- ▲ **Assess the internal capacity to analyze data and conduct research and evaluations.** For government leaders committed to building strong capacity inside government, Allegheny County's human services agency provides a stellar example. Where it is infeasible for a state and local government to build robust internal capacity, it can form partnerships with research universities or participate in multi-site evaluations. Jurisdictions that invest in coordinated data and evaluation capacity to support multiple agencies will be able to conduct high-quality, low-cost analyses and studies that foster continuous improvement and learning about how to address the needs of children and parents.

- **Modernize contracting for human services using an outcomes mindset.** A number of 2Gen leaders, such as Colorado, Tennessee, Georgia, and Connecticut, have developed new approaches to procuring services that incentivize providers to achieve better outcomes for children and families while producing savings to taxpayers (by improving efficiency and lowering families' needs for other government services). These jurisdictions are prepared to share best practices, including how to draft outcome-focused RFPs, directly engage high-performing service providers in active contract management, utilize high-quality administrative data to measure outcomes, and attract investment from philanthropic organizations and impact investors to augment government funding. Resources to support this work include *Making Tomorrow Better Together*, *Building a Thriving Tennessee*, and *Reinventing the Way We Measure Family Outcomes*.

- **Leverage networks and affinity groups to build capacity quickly.** State and local governments will accelerate their progress by forming partnerships with other jurisdictions tackling similar challenges and pioneering new approaches. The Ascend Network of over 250 partner agencies and 40 states is well prepared to help with implementation. Through national convenings, including the 2Gen Policy Institute and Solution Series, state, county, and local teams are already working together to improve outcomes for children and parents. Ascend publications, ranging from *Making Tomorrow Better Together* to *States Leading the Way: Practical Solutions to Lift Up Children and Families*, are available to support innovation that can bring together systems on behalf of families.

In addition, [Actionable Intelligence for Social Policy](#), based at the University of Pennsylvania, is helping state and local governments develop integrated data systems that cross health, human services, education, and other policy domains. Third Sector Capital has launched the [Empowering Families Initiative](#), which is assisting five states and two counties in developing outcome-based contracting mechanisms to support 2Gen approaches. The [Colorado Evaluation and Action Lab](#) is part of a network of policy

labs around the country, including the [Lab @ DC](#) and the [California Policy Lab](#), that are sharing best practices for how researcher-government partnerships can help state and local governments harness data and evaluation to produce measurable improvements. For jurisdictions that lack research partners, the MIT-based [J-PAL North America](#) and [Research 4 Impact](#) have organized networks of respected researchers from across the U.S. who are eager to partner with state and local governments to conduct policy-relevant studies. The [National Governors Association Center for Best Practices](#), [Center for Law and Social Policy](#), and [Ascend at the Aspen Institute](#), through their Parents and Children Thriving Together initiative, are supporting a network of five states to develop best practices for 2Gen systems reforms. Ascend has also worked closely with state teams from 12 states on their systems reforms via Ascend's annual [2Gen Policymakers Institute](#) and ongoing technical assistance and leadership investments. The [American Public Human Services Association](#), the [National Association of Counties](#), the [National Association of State Workforce Agencies](#), and other government associations are committed to helping their state and local members learn about successful, outcome-focused strategies that jurisdictions may wish to support with new federal funding.

TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE

Federal agencies are racing against their own deadlines for issuing program-specific solicitations, guidance, and rules that adhere to the law, and much of the new federal funding must be obligated before October 1 of this year. Federal agencies are not organized to see and promote all of the exciting possibilities available to state, local, and tribal leaders that can advance systems reforms by drawing upon multiple funding streams to improve the well-being of children and their parents.

State, local, and tribal leaders should be strategizing now about how to seize this remarkable opportunity for innovation. They will miss the boat and reinforce existing program silos if they take the passive approach of waiting for federal agencies to issue grant solicitations and guidance and then developing narrow, program-specific proposals in response. The most promising innovations are likely to come from states and localities that are ready to take a holistic approach to serving low-income families by weaving together federal, state, and local funding streams to achieve the best possible outcomes in the most efficient ways.

In the coming months, the Aspen Ascend Initiative will continue to seek ideas, input, and new partners that will help state and local leaders advance 2Gen strategies. We plan to involve federal partners that can help create the enabling conditions for state and local innovation, building on the important legislation highlighted in this report.

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