

Case Study:

Chicago Apprentice Network Scaling and Replicating a Successful Apprentice Network Model

December 2023

Chicago Apprentice Network

100+ participating employers, 1,700 apprenticeship commitments

Introduction

Professional apprenticeship programs are an innovative method of talent acquisition that mirror apprenticeships historically used in fields such as advanced manufacturing and other skilled trades. Apprenticeship programs help address today's skills needs and talent shortages while furthering efforts around diversity, equity and inclusion. By recruiting from highly diverse sources such as community colleges and technical bootcamps, companies can utilize an apprenticeship program as an alternate entry point for roles that traditionally require a specific degree or professional experience. An apprenticeship is an opportunity for motivated, high-potential individuals to gain the required training, professional skills development and experiential learning to fill open roles. Such programs can also offer reskilling opportunities to people interested in changing careers, re-entering the workforce and/or whose jobs have been—or will be—disrupted by technology.

To meet emerging talent demands in the Chicago area, Accenture and Aon independently developed professional apprenticeship programs. Accenture launched its apprenticeship program in 2016, hiring candidates from City Colleges of Chicago. Accenture's one-year program focuses on in-demand technology roles including cybersecurity, data analytics, software engineering and business operations. Aon implemented its DOL-recognized apprenticeship program in 2017, partnering with City Colleges and local non-profit One Million Degrees, which provides wraparound support to apprentices and managers. Aon's 24-month program focuses on roles in its insurance, information technology and human resources departments.

“ Apprenticeship required us to rethink and redo our talent strategy—it has to be embedded in what you do, the way you recruit, the way you train—embedded in your business.”

— Julie Sweet, Chief Executive Officer, Accenture

Both programs allow apprentices to earn and learn by receiving paid, structured training and valuable work experience and mentorship while earning a competitive salary. The goal is for apprentices to gain relevant credentials, lay the foundation for future opportunities applicable to their roles and continue as full-time employees upon completion. Ultimately, these programs can increase employee productivity and fill talent needs.

To expand beyond each individual company's commitment to professional advancement through apprenticeships, Accenture and Aon came together with Zurich to co-found the Chicago Apprentice Network (CAN) in August 2017. Apprenticeships in the U.S. workforce can be both registered and non-registered by the DOL. CAN includes both types. CAN convenes Chicago companies that already have or are interested in creating their own apprenticeship programs. The launch of the Business Roundtable Workforce Partnership Initiative (WPI) in 2018—supported by the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF)—provided major momentum toward the announcement of CAN's landmark goal of 1,000 apprenticeships created in the Chicago area, a goal CAN quickly surpassed.

In collaboration with Business Roundtable, CAN launched its national [Apprenticeship Playbook](#) in 2019, which includes key steps, considerations, examples and case studies to help other employers launch their own programs. As Accenture and Aon expanded their apprenticeship programs outside of Chicago, expansion of the apprentice network model to engage other employers and community organizations closely followed.

Role Of Chicago Apprentice Network

Facilitate employer-to-employer resource sharing to engage more companies in leveraging professional apprenticeships via:

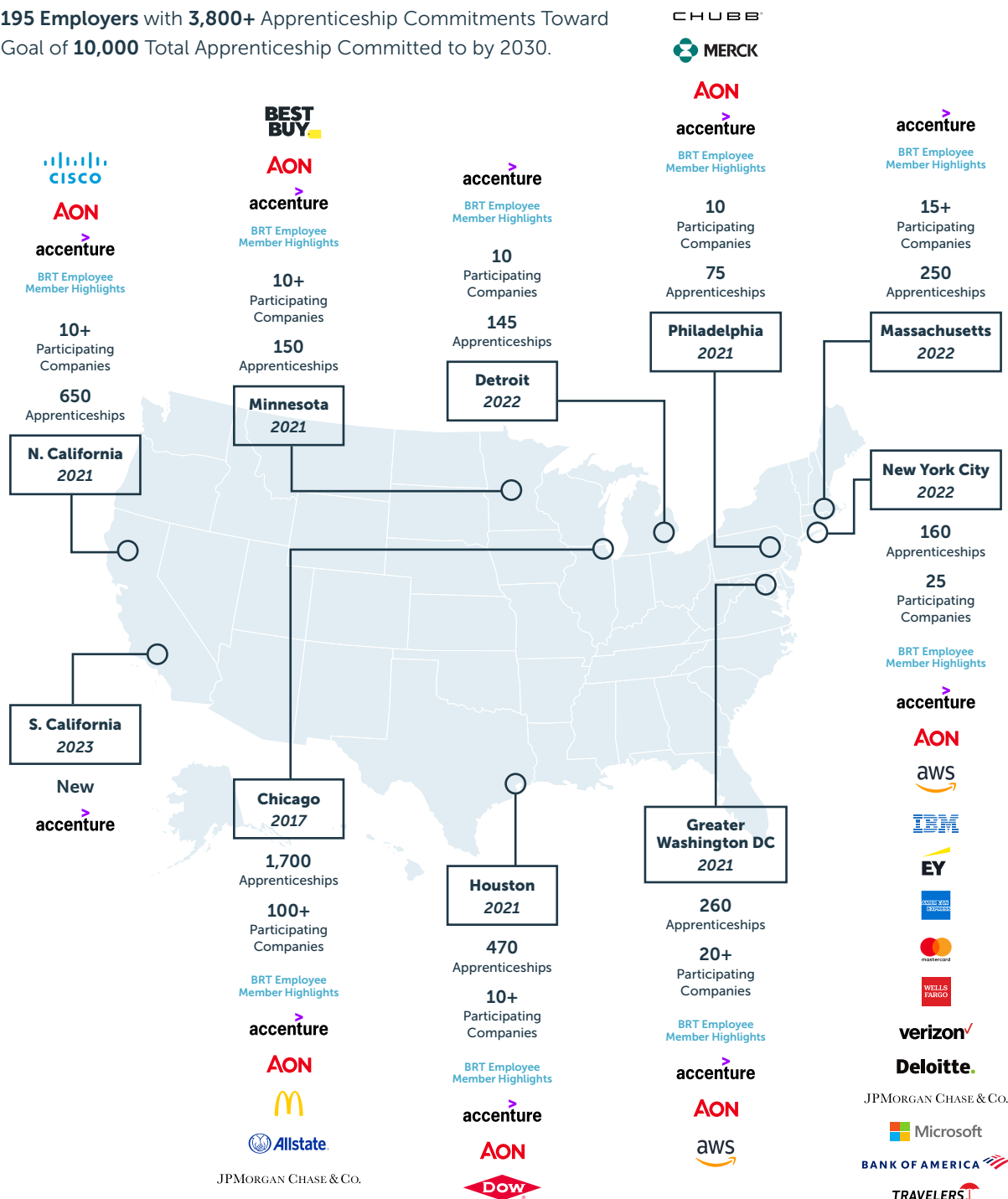
- Quarterly meetings
- Networking opportunities
- Sharing resources, including the Apprenticeship Playbook and lessons learned

National Apprenticeship Week 2023 marks the launch of the 10th apprentice network in the United States. The networks have engaged more than 195 employers across the country that have collectively generated 3,800 professional apprenticeships.

CAN has shared leading practices on the apprentice network model with other networks across the country to increase uptake of the professional apprenticeship model to help bridge skills, recruitment and retention gaps. Each network is tailored to regional needs, with a common focus on increasing the availability and diversity of talent with in-demand skills through a network approach.

This case study focuses on five "Apprentice Network Success Factors," which are aspects of each network that are key to their success and integral to their growth and replication in new regions. Within the document, current networks serve as exemplars of each Network Success Factor. The purpose of this case study is to offer insight into the nine apprentice networks and to illustrate the importance of non-traditional work-based learning programs that leverage local talent—particularly underrepresented groups—and contribute to the growth of regional economies.

195 Employers with 3,800+ Apprenticeship Commitments Toward Goal of 10,000 Total Apprenticeship Committed to by 2030.



Expansion Summary and Collective Impact

Since its origination in 2017, CAN has expanded nationwide and served as the foundation for nine additional networks in:

- [Northern California](#)
- [Greater Houston](#)
- [Greater Washington, D.C.](#)
- [Michigan](#)
- [Massachusetts](#)
- [Minnesota](#)
- [Philadelphia](#)
- [New York](#)
- [Southern California](#)

Network Success Factors

Work with local sustainability partner(s) to complement existing local skilling initiatives.

A sustainability partner is an entity within the region with experience in workforce development and/or higher education that can help convene partners, identify realistic goals and amplify the work. A sustainability partner is a fundamental part of an apprentice network.

Northern California

Launched April 2021 | 10+ participating employers, 650 apprenticeship commitments

Accenture's apprenticeship program launched in NorCal in 2019, and Aon launched its NorCal apprenticeship program in August 2021. Alongside the apprenticeship programs, Mark Noriega, Sacramento Office Managing Director for Accenture, and Michael Mahoney, West Region Leader for Aon, joined forces with the Bay Area Council, a business association dedicated to economic development, and created the Northern California Apprentice Network (NCAN) for the purpose of bringing other organizations together. NCAN not only serves as an open forum and call to action for the region's employers to expand their historical employment practices beyond considering only four-year degree holders, but also as a platform to broaden awareness of these programs and attract more applicants.

A key tenant of NCAN is to coordinate initiatives with the region's workforce development boards and apprenticeship intermediaries to "make apprenticeship opportunities visible, accessible, and equitable for all job seekers in the region" ([NCAN](#)). NCAN has partnered with TechSF, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, the Greater Sacramento Economic Council and other public organizations with coinciding goals of increasing apprenticeship opportunities to further advance ongoing efforts and ensure an aligned effort.

Since the Network's inception, members of NCAN have become attuned to the immense amount of talent in the region that does not hold a traditional degree. The Network has gained traction with large employers in the region like LinkedIn and Adobe, and it has established the apprenticeship model as an effective way to address the region's talent needs.

Greater Houston

Launched August 2021 | 10+ participating employers, 470 apprenticeship commitments

The [Greater Houston Apprentice Network](#) (GHAN) launched as a post-pandemic recovery effort aiming to address skills shortages and help generate apprenticeship opportunities for displaced workers, particularly individuals of color and those without a four-year degree. Dawn Spreeman-Heine, Aon's Managing Director of Commercial Risk for Houston, and Mary Beth Gracy, Houston

Office Managing Director for Accenture, engaged with GHAN's sustainability partner, the Greater Houston Partnership. The [Greater Houston Partnership](#) has a long history of convening local business leaders dedicated to Houston's economic growth and investing in training opportunities for local individuals. As a well-established, trusted name in this space, the Greater Houston Partnership helps amplify GHAN's complementary efforts, attracting more cross-sector partners while raising awareness of apprenticeship opportunities among people living in the greater Houston area.

GHAN's founding employers, including Amazon Web Service, Dow Chemical and the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, along with Aon and Accenture are committed to the apprenticeship model to foster local talent and grow a strong, sustainable workforce for the region.

Show the business value of apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship offers value not only to apprentices, but also to the businesses that sponsor the programs. Identifying local talent with non-traditional educational backgrounds, investing in their development and providing a structure for upward mobility ultimately leads to long-term retention, increased interest in the employer's entry-level position and greater contributions to the local economy.

Greater Washington, D.C.

Launched April 2021 | 20+ participating employers, 260 apprenticeship commitments

Employers in the greater Washington, D.C. area have struggled to find talent to keep pace with the rate of growth, partly due to talented people in lower-income brackets often lacking access to four-year degree programs, still a requirement for many technology-enabled jobs.

To address local talent needs internally, Aon worked with the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), one of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the United States, and CityWorks DC to develop an associate degree curriculum and start its apprenticeship program in the D.C. area. Janet Osborn, East Region Leader for Aon, collaborated with Marty Rodgers, South Market Unit Lead and D.C. Office Managing Director for Accenture, to extend beyond each company and bring the apprentice network model to D.C. to bridge regional talent gaps and provide alternative pathways to great careers. Aon and Accenture came together with sustainability partners the Northern Virginia Chamber and Federal City Council and met with other companies to form a group of founding employers, which includes Amazon Web Services, Appteon, NTConcepts and Nestle.

“Local sustainability partners are critical to the success of apprentice networks. These non-profits bring deep connections to the business community and educate employers on the apprenticeship model as a solution to workforce challenges. These partners also sustain the networks by convening employers regularly, sharing best practices and influencing policy makers to expand opportunities for apprentice models to thrive.”

— **Janet Osborn, East Region Leader, Aon**

Michigan

Launched July 2022 | 10 participating employers, 145 apprenticeship commitments

Accenture's Detroit office was among the first outside of Chicago to hire apprentices in 2017. During this time, Detroit had a technology talent shortage and needed an innovative way to fill open roles. After internal conversations determined a four-year degree was not the only path into these entry-level jobs, the Detroit office embraced apprentices as a solution, including by creating the Detroit Digital Delivery Center to further enable on-the-job learning.

In July 2022, Accenture, in collaboration with founding employers Aptiv, OneMagnify and the State of Michigan, launched the Detroit New Apprentice Network. The Network also includes two local civic organizations, Detroit at Work and the Detroit Regional Chamber. In November 2023, the Network recognized the expansion of its scope and reach across the state and rebranded as the Michigan Apprentice Network.

“This is how we at Accenture show up differently in the communities we serve because we are creating more than jobs, we are creating pathways to lifetime opportunities. This is a powerful model and we have seen how Accenture plays a pivotal role as a convener in this space through the Network.”

— **Lisa Cawley, Detroit Office Managing Director, Accenture**

With the rise of electric vehicles and green technology, the value of an IT apprenticeship has significantly increased in Detroit and across Michigan, and, in response, the Network's apprenticeship model has continued to adapt to changes in the market. Individuals without a four-year degree now have an opportunity to follow a well-structured, highly supportive pathway to in-demand technology

jobs in Detroit, which have historically been limited to those with advanced degrees. The Network is helping to connect the talent ecosystem and introduce employers across Michigan to talent channels they “may not have recruited from before, and [that] often bring a more diverse group of talent” to their entry-level roles (Lisa Cawley, Accenture).

The Network aligns with Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s 60 by 30 initiative that aims to increase the number of Michigan’s working adults with a postsecondary credential to 60 percent by 2030. The Network has raised awareness of the apprenticeship model as an innovative talent strategy and has drawn other employers to incorporate the approach for their own recruitment efforts.

Drive employer-to-employer dialogue.

Apprentice networks are an excellent forum for employers to communicate with one another about goals, priorities and resources related to innovative workforce development. Networks thrive when employer members take advantage of this coalition to share best practices and adjust their apprenticeship programs to ensure a successful experience for both apprentice and employer.

Massachusetts

Launched March 2022 | 15+ participating employers, 250 apprenticeship commitments

Employers in the greater Washington, D.C. area have struggled to find talent to keep pace with the rate of growth, partly due to talented people in lower-income brackets often lacking access to four-year degree programs, still a requirement for many technology-enabled jobs.

The concept of the Massachusetts Apprentice Network began when Pallavi Verma moved from Chicago to Boston in 2020 to serve as the managing director of Accenture’s Boston office. To initiate the Network, Verma worked with Jim Rooney, chief executive of the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, and Lauren Jones, who was, at the time, Executive Vice President of the Massachusetts Business Roundtable and now serves as Massachusetts Secretary of Labor and Workforce Development. By March 2022, in partnership with other large employers Wayfair, Cengage, Liberty Mutual and Beth Israel Lahey as well as community colleges, nonprofits and technology academies, the Massachusetts Apprentice Network was launched.

The Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce and Massachusetts Business Roundtable help facilitate and sustain the Network, providing a forum for communication and collaboration to build successful programs. Employer-to-employer dialogue is supported via quarterly Network meetings, virtual learning sessions and C-suite roundtable discussions.

More than 80 percent of apprentices from Network employers completed their program and were hired into full-time positions post-apprenticeship.

Engage cross-sector organizations to connect local resources across business, talent, higher education, etc.

An important factor in creating a sustainable apprenticeship network is consistent cross-sector communication.

Minnesota

Launched June 2021 | 10+ participating employers, 150 apprenticeship commitments

As Aon began planning to bring its apprenticeship program to its Minneapolis, Minnesota office, Ray Longo, Aon's Upper Midwest Leader, met with Accenture's Christy Sovereign, Minneapolis Office Senior Managing Director, and GreaterMSP Partnership, a Minneapolis-Saint Paul economic development organization, to join and scale their efforts. [ConnexMSP](#), powered by the GreaterMSP Partnership, is their sustainability partner and has developed a cross-sector network of young professionals of color, employers and recruiters, college and career readiness programs, and higher education institutions with the goals of hiring and supporting young professionals while growing its coalition of employers and other organizations.

From the start, the Network involved senior leadership in all facets. "It's important [that senior leadership is involved] because the larger system of companies that initiate apprentice programs within their ... organizations, the better the community [becomes]" (Longo). Multiple employers joined the Minnesota Apprentice Network to leverage a largely "untapped talent pool" of individuals without a traditional four-year degree (Longo). The Network continues to grow as more employers are committing to offering apprentice opportunities.

“

There is so much opportunity [when] learning this way—you get to gain your degree while working the job.”

— Oladi, Aon apprentice, New York

Philadelphia

Launched August 2021 | 10 participating employers, 75 apprenticeship commitments

In February 2021, over 66,000 Philadelphia residents, namely individuals of color, lost employment as a result of the pandemic. The Greater Philadelphia region is home to talented and willing workers, but access to opportunity is not equitable across communities. To help address these disproportionate employment outcomes, Mark Armstrong, Managing Principal and Enterprise Client Leader for Aon, and Jordan Rambo, Accenture Philadelphia Office Managing Director, came together with other local employers, business organizations, nonprofits, government allies and skilling partners and launched the [Philadelphia Apprentice Network](#) (PAN).

“From the People Leads, Peer Mentors, Local Champions, my peers and my team, I had support on top of support on top of support [throughout my apprenticeship].”

— Lex, Accenture apprentice, Houston

PAN partners span across sectors to include Philadelphia Works, the city’s workforce development board, Montgomery College, the Community College of Philadelphia and major employers, including Merck and Chubb. In addition, City Council Member Katherine Gilmore Richardson, a long-time advocate for apprenticeships, leads the annual publication of Philadelphia’s Apprenticeship Guidebook that includes information on local apprenticeship opportunities and ways to apply. Councilwoman Gilmore Richardson’s goal with this document, which was first published in 2020, is to close “the information gap that has kept people from applying to these programs” and promote skills-based learning opportunities as onramps to successful careers (Philadelphia City Council, 2022).

Collaborate to increase and amplify collective impact.

Aligning with ongoing state, regional and/or local initiatives is a great way to spread the word about apprenticeship programs and inspire involvement from more employer partners as well as individuals interested in becoming apprentices. Further, operating as a collective, rather than individual operators, best serves the network as a whole and lays the foundation for long-term success.

New York

Launched September 2022 | 25 participating employers, 160 apprenticeship commitments

The coalition launched in November 2022 in partnership with the New York Jobs CEO Council with a goal of convening and engaging employers that already have or are interested in creating corporate apprenticeship programs. The initiative aligns with the New York Jobs CEO Council's mission to create sustainable career pathways and advance economic opportunity for low-income New Yorkers, as well as with New York City (NYC) Mayor Eric Adams's initiative to create 30,000 apprenticeships by 2030.

Accenture's NYC office hires not only postsecondary apprentices, but also youth apprentices in partnership with CareerWise New York and through the New York Jobs CEO Council's partnership with Mayor Adams and Chancellor Banks that connects NYC public school students with paid apprenticeships at some of the city's largest employers. There are several onramps to professional apprenticeships, all with the purpose of recruiting skilled individuals without a four-year degree into well-paying, rewarding careers. Each employer has its own focus—youth apprenticeship, college apprenticeship in collaboration with The City University of New York (CUNY) or other models of postsecondary apprenticeship. Each model exposes employers to a wide range of diverse talent that brings new perspectives and skillsets to the work environment.

New York's efforts are unique in its ties to the mayor's workforce initiatives as well as historic public-private partnerships among NYC's public schools and employers. The Council, employers, CareerWise New York and CUNY are working in partnership to make the region's workforce more inclusive and attuned to non-traditional, entry-level talent. Key champions include: Kiersten Barnet, Executive Director of the New York Jobs CEO Council; LeAnne McCorry, Chief Executive Officer of the greater New York region for Aon; Laura Peterson, New York City Office Managing Director for Accenture; and Paul Lavelle, head of U.S. National Accounts for Zurich North America.

Southern California

Launching November 2023

The newest apprentice network, set to launch in November 2023 during National Apprenticeship Week, is the [Southern California Apprentice Network](#) (SCAN). SCAN is a consortium of partners interested in growing and expanding apprenticeship in the region. SCAN provides a forum where business, government, educators, workforce boards, community-based organizations, labor and other stakeholders can come together to share information, access resources and collaborate on how to grow apprenticeship programs across Southern California and the state. "We're excited for the momentum building on the success of the Northern California Apprentice Network and look forward to growing the program quickly, and with impact, and doing even more across California with the launch of the Southern California Apprentice Network. This collaboration between Accenture, Aon

and several local employers, business organizations, government and skilling partners is a powerful amplifier of something that we've proven to work" (Mark Noriega, Accenture).

Call to Action

Within the technology sector, the availability of jobs is growing significantly faster than in other sectors (BLS, 2023). However, most of these jobs require at least a four-year degree, a factor that excludes individuals who have the necessary skillset or potential to develop it but not a traditional academic credential. By limiting talent pools to bachelor's degree holders, employers routinely deny lucrative career opportunities to those who can meet or exceed skills demands, despite their differing resume.

“ Our Accenture apprentices inspire us with their drive, persistence and ability to navigate life circumstances that might derail other people. Apprentices bring incredible value in making our workforce culture more diverse, inclusive and innovative.”

— **Mark Noriega, Sacramento Office Managing Director, Accenture**

Professional apprenticeship programs benefit job candidates, employers and communities alike. With today's talent shortages, employers must implement new recruitment, development and retention methods that include additional educational opportunities to stay abreast of new technologies and, in turn, build a pathway to success for both employer and employee. Apprentice networks open the door to a talent pool of individuals with diverse educational backgrounds who bring unique perspectives and experience to their employers.

Moreover, through the apprenticeship model, individuals are trained for the roles they will occupy, helping employers avoid mismatched hiring for key entry-level positions. Nearly half of Accenture's entry-level positions in the United States are open to individuals who do not have a four-year college degree. In North America, the company has also committed to hiring 20 percent of its entry-level positions as apprentices. Interestingly, Accenture has found that the retention rates for those who come through the apprentice program are higher than the broader entry-level population. At Aon, the program's success is evident: about 80 percent of apprentices complete their program and are promoted out of their apprentice role into an on-going position with the company.

To start a program or join a network, see the [Apprenticeship Playbook](#), which includes information on each network location.

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