

Comparable Communities Assessment

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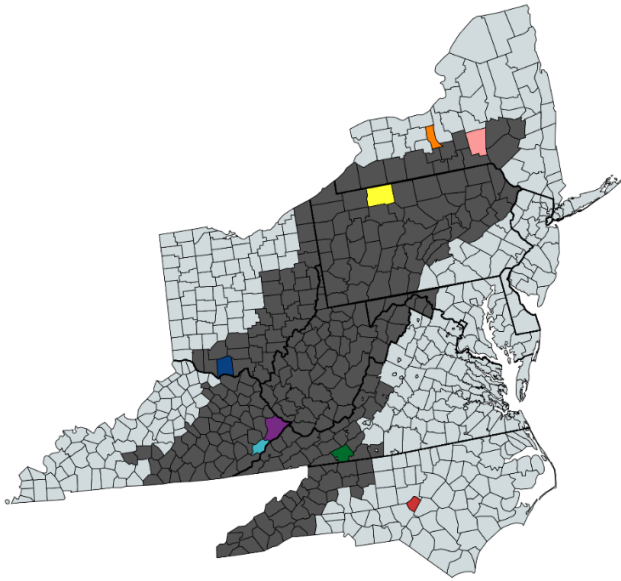
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Introduction

The closure of two coal-fired power plants in Adams County represents a unique regional challenge. However, there are communities elsewhere in the United States from which economic and community development insights may be drawn when guiding Adams County and regional efforts. A series of short case studies were developed to identify current best practices and facilitate learning from other communities. These case studies explore approaches used by other communities/counties with similar populations to Adams County challenged with closures and declines in industry. We mainly investigated communities with different strategic approaches to add to the richness of lessons learned. The findings of the identified case studies provide useful strategies that apply to the Adams County effort, despite not being exact matches.

Strategies Used

- Attracting new major employers
- Supporting existing businesses
- Diversifying the local economy
- Developing workforce development and training programs
- Collaborating with...
 - educational institutions
 - local businesses
 - regional partners
 - the local community
- Enhancement of natural assets
- Blending/mixing of multiple strategies



- Adams County, OH
- Seneca County, NY
- Carroll County, VA
- McKean County, PA
- Lee County, NC
- Chenango County, NY
- Pike County, KY
- Letcher County, KY
- ARC Counties

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Case Study 1: Industrial Redevelopment-Seneca Army Depot Closure (Seneca County, New York)¹

Seneca County (pop. 34,843)² is similar in size to Adams County (pop. 27,926), and although Seneca County is not in the Appalachian region, it borders the northern boundary of the region. Like Adams County, Seneca County had struggled with issues of poverty, limited amenities, aging and insufficient infrastructure, lack of broadband access, and inadequate funding from state and other sources. Furthermore, Seneca County has abundant natural resources very similar to those found in Adams County. Seneca County's resources include unique tourism features like the Seneca White Deer herd, a large amount of cheap and available land, and the potential for waterfront development along Seneca Lake and Cayuga Lake, which are two Finger Lakes in the county. Additionally, Seneca County's experience with the closure of the Seneca Army Depot corresponds well to the closure of the DP&L plants in Adams County. The Seneca Army Depot was the largest employer for Seneca County before closing in 2000. In 1992, Seneca County first experienced a shock as the Depot eliminated over 550 civilian jobs and 500 military jobs. Therefore, it was not a surprise when the US Army placed the Depot on the 1995 Base Realignment and Closure list. The Depot further reduced employment from 1200 to 140 over five years. The base retained some staff to oversee the property and to begin site remediation and clean-up.

By 2016, the Seneca County Industrial Development Agency (IDA) had gradually obtained as much as 10,000 acres of the Depot's property throughout the remediation efforts led by the US Army. The IDA was tasked to redevelop the property on behalf of Seneca County. The IDA looked at the current assets that existed on the Depot and leveraged those assets to attract businesses. Those assets included the barracks, cold storage igloos that once housed chemicals and munitions, open land with natural amenities, and much more. The barracks and the native facilities of the location were used to attract programs for troubled youths. In 2000, the KidsPeace Seneca Woods Campus was opened as a residential program for troubled children and became the Hillside's Children Center in 2004.

Similarly, the IDA was able to attract the Five Points Correctional Facility to locate on the property in 2000, creating 600 direct jobs. The establishment of a training center for state and local police and a training tower for volunteer firefighters was an essential project for the IDA as well. The igloos on the property were perfect for data and server storage. The igloos, given their past of nuclear storage, were relocated away from all flooding dangers, are temperature-controlled, and are incredibly secure. The IDA included this knowledge in their marketing strategy and was able to attract the Finger Lakes Tech Group.

Additionally, the IDA sold around 7000 acres, which became the Deer Haven Park. The Deer Haven Park was established to preserve the rare Seneca White Deer herd that lives on the Depot property. The Deer Haven Park offers tours that allow people to see these uncommon deer, provides the military history of the area and features a tour of one of the ammunition bunkers on the property. Additionally, the

¹ From MacCarald 2014, Roth 2018, Seneca County IDA 2011, Seneca County, NY 2014, and Seneca County Planning and Community Development Department 2014.

² All population estimates are based on the 2017 estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

establishment of a visitor center for the unique feature of the Seneca White Deer has drawn people to the Deer Haven Park and boosted the tourism industry in the county and the region.

Like Adams County, Seneca County experienced the loss of a major employer in the county. After the closure, the Seneca County IDA focused on bringing in new large employers. They matched the existing infrastructure and special features of the Depot to benefit potential businesses. In addition to industrial development, the IDA sold part of the Depot to strengthen the tourism industry in the county. Adams County could investigate what businesses could use some of the specialty features of the DP&L sites to attract potential companies that could inhabit or redevelop the site.

Additionally, Adams County could look at more out-of-the-box approaches to use the land along the Ohio River to strengthen tourism. However, one key difference exists: The Army gave the area to Seneca County, but DP&L have not sold their sites to the county or another business. This fact impacts what Adams County can do directly regarding the sites. However, the county may be able to act as an intermediary to bring the type of businesses they would like to see in the area to the attention of DP&L. The county may also be able to offer financial incentives to those businesses that will then allow them to make more competitive offers to get DP&L to sell.

Case Study 2: Business Retention, Small Business Support, and Economy Diversification-Declining Textile and Furniture Manufacturing Industry (Carroll County, Virginia)³

Carroll County (pop. 29,767) is a small Appalachian county in southwest Virginia, historically known for its textile and furniture manufacturing industries, which experienced long-term declines. In 1998, the Basset-Walker sewing plant in Carroll County closed. This closure resulted in 294 direct job losses. Additionally, Cross Creek Apparel, another textile manufacturer, closed in 2000, resulting in 245 jobs lost. During the early 2000s, Carroll County continued to face reductions and closures in their manufacturing industries. Carroll County's strategy for economic development was to retain their existing businesses while encouraging entrepreneurship and developing new industries to diversify their economy.

Carroll County implemented business retention strategies to keep businesses in the county. For example, in 2009, Mohawk, a carpet backing manufacturing plant and one of the county's largest employers, was having infrastructure problems that could have forced the plant to relocate. However, the Carroll County Board of Supervisors and Industrial Development Authority intervened and helped the company purchase a needed industrial power backup system. Additionally, Carroll County installed a natural gas line to help power the Mohawk plant. This gas line lowered the energy costs not only for Mohawk, but for many businesses in the area which helped ensure these businesses would remain long term.

Carroll County also focused on developing entrepreneurship programs to strengthen the economy and to raise the county's resiliency. To support entrepreneurship and small businesses, Carroll County created the Crossroads Small Business Development Center in 2006 in partnership with the Wytheville

³ From Istrate, Mak, & Nowakowski 2014, Plan Carroll County 2010, Business Facilities 2018, Krouse 1998, and Town of Hillsville, Virginia 2014.

Community College. This center was created to serve businesses with less than 50 employees and assists potential and existing small business owners with business planning, financing, and navigating laws and regulations for development. Additionally, they formed a joint public-private partnership, the Crossroads Institute, which focuses on many aspects of economic and community development, including workforce training and community education.

Carroll County recognized the need to diversify their economy from the textile and furniture manufacturing industries and to grow the economy from sales outside the county. In 1994, county officials along with representatives from the Southwest Virginia Farmer's Market, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and Virginia Cooperative Extension Services met with local farmers and representatives from large retail chains located in the Mid-Atlantic region. They discovered that the county would be a prime location to serve as a pumpkin supplier to the region. Since then, pumpkin production has increased to several thousand acres and has added an estimated \$15 million to the local economy through pumpkin sales.

Like Adams County, the main factors driving population trends in Carroll County are the out-migration of young adults and the in-migration of older age groups. While Carroll County has an older median age than Adams County (47 and 42.2 respectively), Carroll County has a higher median household income, higher median property value, lower poverty rate, and larger ratio of the number of employees to the population size (0.44 and 0.36, respectively)⁴. This ratio means that for every 100 people residing in each county, there are 44 people employed in Carroll County and 36 people employed in Adams County. This fact demonstrates Carroll County's ability to thrive, even while facing disadvantageous population trends.

Additionally, like Adams County, Carroll County does not have a college or university. However, Carroll County was able to work with a community college in a neighboring county to help create the Crossroads Small Business Development Center. Southern State Community College operates campuses in two counties adjacent to Adams County: Brown and Highland Counties. Additionally, Shawnee State University operates in Portsmouth in the neighboring Scioto County. Therefore, Adams County could consider partnering with one or more of these local institutions to provide support to small businesses in their community.

While there are still many differences between the two counties, the key strategies utilized by Carroll County provide lessons for Adams County. Like Carroll County, Adams County can strengthen their community by working to provide strategic infrastructure and support to key businesses in the County to ensure that these businesses remain in Adams County. At the same time, Adams County can take steps to support new and small businesses and to diversify the industrial make-up of the community to become a more resilient economy in the future.

⁴Data from <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/adams-county-oh?compare=carroll-county-va>.

Case Study 3: Tourism, Asset Development, and Regional Strategy- Declining Oil and Timber Industries (McKean County, Pennsylvania)⁵

McKean County (pop. 43,640) is an Appalachian county in Pennsylvania that has experienced declines in the timber and oil industries following the 2008 recession. In response to the decline in industries following the recession, McKean County relied on strengthening its natural assets and tourism industry to improve economic resilience. Additionally, McKean County has utilized a regional strategy working with nearby counties to create a more buoyant region and to have greater access to more resources.

To strengthen its tourism industry, McKean County took advantage of the Pennsylvania Wilds program created by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. Pennsylvania Wilds consists of 12.5 counties (Warren, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Lycoming, Clinton, Elk, Cameron, Forest, Clearfield, Clarion, Jefferson, and northern Centre). The collaboration with nearby counties has brought more people to the area, helping grow rural businesses in McKean County. Additionally, by joining this regional collaboration, McKean County has gained access to regional marketing efforts, the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team, and a Design Guide. These resources give businesses insight into improving their properties and attracting visitors. The Pennsylvania Wilds program helps shape development in the region in a consistent manner.

With the support of their region and the Pennsylvania Wilds program, McKean County was also able to identify and grow their community's particular assets. When a tornado destroyed the Kinzua Bridge and Viaduct in 2003, the state of Pennsylvania abandoned its plans to repair and restore the bridge. McKean County worked with the Kinzua Bridge State Park to turn the Kinzua Bridge into a tourism destination. The county built an observation deck, hiking trails, the Kinzua Sky Walk, and a Visitor Center with a gift shop. Additionally, McKean County recognized the visitor center located in the adjacent Elk County. The visitor center in Elk County had already been drawing in visitors to the region to see and learn about the largest elk herd in the northeastern United States. Elk and McKean Counties designated their visitor centers as sister centers and worked to promote each other's sites to tourists. Together, they pull even more people to the region.

Like Adams County, McKean County has abundant natural resources and beauty that was perfect for strengthening their outdoor tourism. Like the Kinzua Bridge, Adams County also has a unique site in the Great Serpent Mound as well as having sites with cultural and historical significance, such as the Underground Railroad or the Amish population. Adams County could work to enhance their assets to create a stronger tourism industry in the county.

While there are many similarities between the two counties, there is one significant difference worth mentioning. There is not an existing regional program, like Pennsylvania Wilds, for Adams County to take advantage. However, this does not mean that the lessons learned from this case study are unimportant. Instead, Adams County could strive to create a regional program with neighboring counties or with the entire OVRDC region to pool resources and strengthen the region's tourism industry. Additionally, Adams County could work with state-wide programs like TourismOhio to better market the county's assets. Likewise, there are funding opportunities that exist at the state and national levels, such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund or the Clean Ohio Fund programs. These sources

⁵ From Boettner et al. 2019, McKean County Planning Commission 2007, and Allegheny National Forest Visitors Bureau (n.d.).

can be used to strengthen the natural assets of Adams County by creating trails for walking, hiking, biking, and much more.

Case Study 4: Workforce Development-Declining Manufacturing Industry (Lee County, North Carolina)⁶

Lee County (pop. 59,805) is a small rural county in central North Carolina. While the county has a larger population and is not in Appalachia, it still provides valuable lessons to learn. Lee County relied on the manufacturing industry and experienced a significant downturn in its economy as the industry declined following the 2008 recession. Lee County identified a deficit of educated and trained labor in their community, which was contributing to the decline of the manufacturing industry and the inability to attract new businesses. In response, the county developed robust workforce development programming to create a competitive advantage in attracting new businesses.

Lee County collaborated with the Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) to develop their Innovation Center that operated as both an industrial incubator and a workforce training facility, which opened in 2011. The Innovation Center offers businesses and local start-ups the opportunity to launch ideas. Lee County purchased the site and also funds the utility and maintenance costs. The CCCC provides cutting edge training designed to meet the specific needs of the local companies.

One such company is Caterpillar. The county worked with Caterpillar on an expansion project for the Innovation Center and developed an apprenticeship program for high school students. The expansion project helped to teach welding, a skill that was lacking in the local labor force. Other manufacturers in the area also started taking advantage of the training offered. The apprentice program provided at the center is an award-winning collaboration between the county, CCCC, and Caterpillar. Each year, the program offers 15 high school juniors a career pathway at Caterpillar. Students graduate with their high school diplomas, college credits, their welding certification, and are guaranteed an interview for full-time employment at Caterpillar. In return, Caterpillar receives a steady supply of trained workers that meets their specific needs.

Following the success of the Caterpillar Apprenticeship Program, the Central Carolina Works program was developed to inspire high school students to pursue career development training. This program, also partnered with by CCCC, places a career guidance counselor at local high schools providing advice and mentorship to students. The program aims to build a solid foundation for the county's future workforce by inspiring students to pursue vocational training as part of their education

Like Adams County, Lee County needed a workforce trained in the specific skills required by their major employers. Adams County should identify the skills required by employers in the area and work with nearby community colleges and high schools to offer training in these skills. Additionally, it would be mutually beneficial for Adams County and the major employers to establish an apprenticeship program. An apprenticeship program would allow businesses to tailor training to the skills they need and give them access to a steady supply of skilled workforce. Additionally, the apprenticeship program would encourage high school students to remain in Adams County after graduation by offering an interview for full-time employment.

⁶ From Istrate, Mak, & Nowakowski 2014.

Case Study 5: Flexible and Responsive Strategies -2008 Economic Shock (Chenango County, New York)⁷

Chenango County (pop. 48,763) is an Appalachian county in New York with a rich manufacturing history. Chenango County experienced a shock with the 2008 recession but has used flexible and responsive strategies to recover. In particular, the county focused on workforce and industrial development.

Chenango County's economic development organization, Commerce Chenango, recognized the importance of their county's agriculture and manufacturing industries. Commerce Chenango worked with its well-established foundation of small manufacturing businesses to draw more small businesses to Chenango. Additionally, to be more attractive to companies, the county focused on improving the quality of life and the business climate in Chenango. The county was able to use this improved attractiveness to get large employers to relocate to the county. In 2010, Chobani expanded its operations, and the Raymond Corporation relocated to Chenango County.

Furthermore, Chenango County recognized the need for flexible strategies that can respond to changes as they arise in the county. The county specifically avoided "one size fits all" types of strategies in favor of approaches that consider Chenango County's particular strengths and assets. The county identified workforce development as a priority. To maximize the impact for Chenango County, their workforce development program incorporated support services such as daycare, transportation, and counseling to assist residents of the county.

Chenango County was able to respond to changing economic conditions with flexible strategies that consider the specific resources, needs, and assets of their community. In that way, Chenango County was able to limit the impact of the 2008 recession and recover much faster than similar communities. Likewise, Adams County should develop flexible strategies that can adjust as economic conditions change. The presence of such strategies would allow Adams County to be responsive to the needs of its citizens and local businesses and industries. Additionally, Adams County should learn from Chenango County's recognition of the importance of economic development strategies that encompass a holistic, rather than piecemeal, approach to economic development. In this way, Adams County could create a similar workforce development training center that also incorporates transportation and daycare programs, which were identified as needed in task three: Community Engagement in Economic Development Priorities.

Case Study 6: Creative Place-Making and Transitioning from Coal Jobs-Mine Closures and the Declining Coal Industry (Pikeville, Kentucky; Whitesburg, Kentucky)⁸

In this case study, we are looking at two cities in adjacent counties in eastern Kentucky: Pikeville in Pike County and Whitesburg in Letcher County. Although comparing cities and not counties, there is still valuable information from this case study that could be helpful to Adams County. Pikeville (pop. 7,065) is more similar to the size of Tiffin Township (pop. 5,440), and the Pikeville Census County Division (pop.

⁷ From Boettner 2019.

⁸ From Stone 2016, Andrus 2018, City of Pikeville 2013, Semuels 2015, Appalshop (n.d.), Smith 2016, and Economic Empowerment & Global Learning Project 2016.

15,743) is more similar to Adams County as a whole, while the total population of Pike County is 61,586. Whitesburg (pop. 2,230) and Letcher County (pop. 23,011) are more comparable to West Union (pop. 2,997) and Adams County.

Pikesville and Whitesburg are bright spots in a significantly disadvantaged region of Appalachia: eastern Kentucky. According to the ARC FY2020 County Economic Status designations⁹, eastern Kentucky has the most counties in Appalachia with a Distressed Status, both in percentages and absolute terms with 38 of 54 Kentucky counties ranking as Distressed. In fact, 47.5% of all distressed counties in Appalachia are in Kentucky. It is no wonder that eastern Kentucky became the symbolic representation for Appalachian poverty after President Johnson declared “War on Poverty” in 1964. Because of this, eastern Kentucky has had a long, complicated, and contentious history with economic development efforts in the region.

Eastern Kentucky has historically suffered from a lack of essential investment. The region has suffered from chronic underfunding of social services like education and healthcare and is underdeveloped in critical infrastructural systems, such as highways and broadband. Additionally, it has been unfairly stereotyped as backward and ignorant, is situated at the heart of the opioid epidemic, along with Ohio, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania. Eastern Kentucky has also relied heavily on the boom-and-bust cycling of the coal mining industry. However, it seems that the current condition of the coal industry is not just experiencing a temporary bust in the cycle, but a continued decline with no end in sight. Mining operations continue to be shut down in the region, which may be contributed to higher costs associated with environmental regulations, the falling costs for alternative energy sources, such as the Marcellus and Utica Shale Region, and a shifting socio-political climate that does not support the coal industry the way it once did. The region lost over 8,000 coal industry jobs from 2012-2016.

Both Pikeville and Whitesburg have become examples of success in an otherwise depressed area. While their implementation varies, both cities have used creative place-making strategies and have worked to transition from relying on the coal industry. In particular, Pikeville has worked to help transition from the coal industry by encouraging businesses that will repurpose closed mining sites and provide transitional jobs to former coal industry workers. For example, EnerBlue, a battery manufacturing company, is building a facility on the site of an old coal mine. The plant will bring an estimated 800 jobs with an average salary of \$39 per hour to Pikeville.

Similarly, in 2015, BitSource, a startup tech company, opened in Pikeville. This company was created as a direct response to the community devastation from the declining coal industry. BitSource hired those who had been laid off from the coal industry and provided them with 22 weeks of training to become coders. These former coal industry employees now develop websites, augmented reality coding, and mobile applications.

Unlike in most of Appalachia, Pikeville’s population is growing. This growth has been contributed to the University of Pikeville. Although the university is small, with only around 2500 students, the university attracts individuals to fill faculty and staff positions. The university also attracts business owners who want to take advantage of research, knowledge creation spillovers, and have access to an educated population. Also, as Pikeville has grown, county officials and economic development professionals have ensured that the city is becoming amenity dense. Specifically, they have begun revitalization efforts for the downtown area, are increasing and supporting attractions, like the Hatfield and McCoy Cemetery,

⁹ Data from https://www.arc.gov/research/MapsofAppalachia.asp?MAP_ID=149

and encouraging new businesses like bourbon distilleries and restaurants. Having these amenities will help safeguard that the growth is permanent and continues.

Additionally, Pikeville is undergoing efforts to integrate art and culture into the city and the community. The city has supported the Pikeville/Pike County Artisan Alliance, the construction of a new theater with year-round performances, various arts education opportunities, and much more. By recognizing its assets as an education center and developing a unique cultural and amenity-rich experience, Pikeville has separated itself from most of eastern Kentucky by experiencing growth in an otherwise depressed area.

Likewise, Whitesburg has been engaging in creative place-making since the late 1960s. In 1969, Appalshop was founded to train the local community in media skills and bolster economic development efforts by creating new jobs and new markets in the community. Appalshop has been essential in creating a unique identity for Whitesburg and for bringing in economic development projects and grant funding for the community. In fact, Lafayette College partnered with Appalshop to determine how communities can leverage their existing assets to strengthen their community with the goal of applying these lessons to communities around the world.

Another key aspect of economic development and creative place-making in Whitesburg is that it has been a collaborative and grassroots effort. Community revitalization efforts have come forth from the community itself. Many of these efforts focus on building up the cultural and artistic assets in the community by supporting artisan associations and local entrepreneurs that add to Whitesburg's cultural identity. Some of these entrepreneurs have focused on traditional crafts of the region such as woodworking. One artisan group in the area has formed the Route 7 Antique Alley. This collaboration created a listing of entrepreneurs, antique sellers, musicians, and other artists that tourists can use to create a unique shopping experience as they follow the route from business to business. This collaboration not only helps create the identity Whitesburg wants for the community, but actively increases tourism in the region.

Like Adams County, Pikeville and Whitesburg have felt the impact of the declining coal industry. Pikeville has worked to bring in businesses and transition workers into new sectors. Both cities have implemented creative place-making strategies branding the towns as somewhere enjoyable for both tourists and residents. These strategies diversify the cities' economies from reliance on the coal industry. Both cities also recognized the importance of collaboration among local officials, economic development professionals, business owners, state and federal representatives, and the community as a whole. Adams County could look to attract businesses that align with the skill set of laid-off workers or that are willing to train employees with new skills. Additionally, Adams County could begin to implement creative placemaking strategies. Adams County could re-brand its own distinct identity in the region by revitalizing the main street areas of the villages, and by supporting unique cultural attractions, festivals, and businesses. Collaboration is even more critical as a county than a city. Adams County should strive to engage representatives at the county, township, and village levels, but also engage with business owners and other community members. This will assist Adams County in creating an identity that is authentic to all involved parties. The county should also follow Whitesburg's model from Appalshop by supporting grassroots efforts to encourage entrepreneurs, artisans, or other organizations to identify their community. By encouraging collaboration and ideas from within the community, Adams County works to become amenity dense, which will help attract tourism and promote sustainable growth.

Findings

The approaches that communities have taken in the wake of major employers closing or an industry declining are varied. Some communities focused on gaining new major employers, while others supported their remaining businesses. Still, others sought to diversify their economies away from the industries that were declining. Several communities looked to workforce development and training programs for their communities, also many communities recognized the importance of collaboration with educational institutions, local businesses, regional partners, and the community itself. Additionally, quite a few communities recognized the importance of developing the natural assets that made their community unique. Although each case study focused only on the key strategies utilized by each community, it is essential to note that these strategies were taking place among other economic development strategies. Therefore, Adams County does not have to choose just one approach but can mix and match the strategies that they find beneficial.

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