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# PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

2025 - 2026





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# A LETTER FROM YOUR VICE PRESIDENT OF MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

**Hello Wisconsin DECA!**

**My name is Victor Essoka, and I am beyond excited to be serving as your Vice President of Membership Development this year. My goal is to help each of you build strong connections within DECA that will not only benefit your chapters but also set members up for success for many years to come.**

**This guide has been written to clarify what it means to be a "professional member" within DECA. What professional membership entails may sometimes seem vague or overwhelming. Nevertheless, the resources in this guide will break down the process into clear, actionable steps that will help you leverage potential opportunities. Whether you're looking to bring in judges, network with industry professionals, or secure sponsorships that will support your chapter's activities, this guide will provide you with the tools and techniques to do so effectively.**

**Through professional memberships, you can build relationships that will influence your DECA experience and beyond. I hope that this guide not only clarifies what professional membership entails but also encourages you to fully embrace and explore the potential it holds.**

**Thank you for your commitment to making the most of your DECA experience. I'm excited to see the growth and success you'll achieve this year. Don't hesitate to reach out with any questions or ideas.**

**Victor Essoka**

**Vice President of Membership Development**





# PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Professional membership is the term used to encompass all members who come from businesses or outside organizations to benefit DECA chapters. This concept usually coincides with business partnerships, especially at the high school level. Most chapters utilize professional membership by bringing in mentors, speakers, and volunteer judges from local businesses and corporations to heighten the experience for their members.

Professional membership is important because it opens many doors for DECA members. The mission statement of DECA is to "Prepare emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management in high schools and colleges across the globe." Working with professionals with experience in these fields provides invaluable information to students that would otherwise be inaccessible. Professional members also count toward your total membership numbers, meaning that your chapter can earn more state spots and complete more expansive state-wide initiatives.

Quick tip: Yes, professional members count towards total membership, so you can earn more spots at SCDC!

FIRST PLACE

DECA  
INTERNATIONAL  
CAREER  
DEVELOPMENT  
CONFERENCE

2025

ORLANDO | FLORIDA

# GAINING MEMBERS

**Quick tip:** Think of who you are marketing to, and then develop an in-depth plan selling DECA to your targets!

Although it may not seem like it, many businesses and professionals would love to work with a DECA chapter but simply *have not been asked about it*. The way to approach that situation is to develop a plan to reach out to businesses in your area, making it easy for people to become professional members.

Get your best marketing team to work on this project - because this task is all about marketing!

## 1. Start by identifying the target market in your area

Which business or organizations include the group of people that you want to involve?

## 2. What is in it for them?

Think about why they would be interested in being a professional member. Perhaps they want to see their local school develop emerging business students. Maybe they were in DECA in the past and know the value. Curate a message that addresses some of these reasons.

## 3. Create a simple marketing piece

Utilize your creativity by making something that can be left with people after speaking with them so they have something to refer to as they consider membership, like an impact paper.

## 4. Gain visibility!

Write an article for the local newspaper. Contact local business and social organizations (i.e. Lions Club, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce) and ask if you can give a presentation to the members.

## 5. Create a goal

Publicize the goal and get the entire community to know about the goal. Use social media to your advantage, whether that's following their social media or reaching out to ask for a partnership. Recognize that the target audience may spend more time on Facebook than TikTok—but get the message out!

## 6. ASK FOR THE SALE!

After every presentation, provide the opportunity to sign up at that time. Make signing up easy so people who are on the fence don't miss the chance because it is too difficult.

In the following sections of this guide, we'll explore the real benefits that can come from cultivating a strong community of professional members. Remember, if at first you don't succeed, try, try again! Once you gain momentum, you'll be surprised at how effortlessly you can build professional-level membership. More information on professional membership can be found on [wideca.org](http://wideca.org) and [deca.org](http://deca.org).



# ALUMNI MEMBERS

## ALUMNI MEMBERSHIP

One of the easiest ways to grow your membership (and earn additional spots for state) is to focus on adding Alumni Members.

These leaders know the value of DECA — they participated in events and activities, and they still have connections to your specific chapter. It doesn't take a tremendous amount of explanation for these members to understand the value of DECA, but they still have reasons why they might not automatically join. Once again, growing this base takes a little marketing.

First, understand if your chapter has ever made a concerted effort to grow this segment of membership. Create a strategy for reaching this audience and inviting them to become alumni. Is cost an issue? Some chapters cover the dues while others equate it to 3 Starbucks drinks over the course of a year.

Discuss the relevance of continuing to support existing members. Plant the seed now that you want them to stay involved.

For recent alumni, focus on how active participation is a great talking point in interviews and might resonate with someone looking at their resume. It's all about knowing your audience.

Just like with the professional members, **set a goal that you publicize and measure your progress**. You could potentially host a contest to see how many alumni each can recruit (with prizes!).

**Quick tip:** Create a chapter alumni Facebook group, and/or ask your advisor if you can accept payments online for alumni dues.

Once you start to build this membership, engage them! Ask them to be speakers at your meetings. With the rise of video-calling platforms, alumni can still take part in meetings even from college or abroad!

Finally, utilize alumni to help at Districts! Most alumni will be on break during that window, so it is an easy way to stay involved.



# ADDRESSING QUESTIONS

Many people who say they cannot join often have very similar reasons. These may include: “I don’t have time,” “I can’t afford it,” and “I don’t think I’d be much help.” Here’s how you can effectively counter each of these statements to help put their minds at ease:

**“I don’t have time.”** - College students and business professionals often lead busy lives, so it’s important to acknowledge and respect that. Let them know that even the most basic membership level helps the chapter and doesn’t require attending meetings or events. This can help make joining feel more manageable.

**“I can’t afford it.”** - This is a common issue for college students on a tight budget and can be an issue in places with expensive membership dues. Wisconsin DECA alumni dues are \$8 plus \$8 DECA Inc. fees. However, this does not include any additional chapter fees for items like shirts. The low cost of joining a Wisconsin DECA chapter makes this relatively attainable for all. However, if all else fails, some chapters have chosen to waive fees for alumni members and utilize chapter funds to pay the necessary dues.

**“I don’t think I’d be much help.”** - Because some chapters are quite large, people might underestimate the impact they can have on their chapter. However, alumni members possess what many members may lack: experience. Alumni who have competed in the past or work in relevant fields can offer significant support, such as serving as mock judges or guest speakers, to enhance members’ experiences. Additionally, simply joining as a member helps students gain more opportunities to compete at the state level, as mentioned earlier. With a heightened exposure to DECA, leveraging alumni purposefully can help your chapter excel. For more details on Alumni Membership, visit [wideca.org](http://wideca.org) or [deca.org](http://deca.org) under “High School Membership”.





# FUNDRAISING

Now that we have taken the steps to build chapter membership, let's look at some ways to add value to the community through involvement.

DECA conducts amazing fundraisers throughout the year, and many Wisconsin chapters have had huge success building these events into annual traditions. Chapters often participate in the statewide events, such as Trick-or-Can, Service Fest, and Miracle Minutes. However, each school has its own unique culture and set of events.

For example, LHS DECA in Wisconsin Rapids sells "Raider Cards," filled with discounts at local businesses. Every year, they send out letters to various businesses seeking to create a partnership. The letter outlines discounted Raider Cards and social media recognition for all partners. The combination of fundraising with the community and businesses results in large amounts of returning professional members.

**Quick tip:** Involve professional members with fundraisers and local events, as well as statewide initiatives.

If your chapter hasn't executed statewide events or is struggling to brainstorm new fundraising ideas, reach out to other chapters to ask for help. Utilize Leadership Council members or State Officers to garner more information!

*WI DECA posts about various fundraising opportunities, so make sure to stay up to date with social media for more info!*

## Where to start:

**Start small** - Having a successful event can build the confidence to work on the next one. Keep great information regarding what went into each event, so next year you have good records and can set a goal to improve on the prior year.

Consider the target market of the event that you want to conduct/perform at. For example, if you want to conduct a Miracle Minute at your school's volleyball game, what age ranges usually show up? Are students more or less likely to contribute based off of past Miracle Minutes? These are the questions to ask!

Don't be afraid to broaden your horizons and consult other associations to see what they have done!

Professional Members can help out fundraisers in many ways, so be creative! Through a business partnership (page 16), chapters can create resources that could provide materials for events (does your community have a print shop?), workers/volunteers, or simply a venue.

<b>Taco John's</b>  Buy 1 combo meal and get 1 at equal or lesser value FREE  (one use only)	<b>Caribou Coffee</b>  Buy 1 handcrafted beverage, get 1 at equal or lesser value FREE  (one use only)	<b>Ridges Golf Course</b>  Buy an XL pizza and get a free cheese bread appetizer  (one use only)	<b>Tropical Smoothie</b>  Buy 2 smoothies, get 1 FREE  (one use only)	<b>Dairy Queen</b>  Buy 1 medium shake or malt, get 1 FREE  (one use only)
<b>Cravings</b>  Buy 1 medium beverage, get 1 at equal or lesser value FREE  (one use only)	<b>Anchor Bay</b>  FREE 7" Pizza w/equal or greater purchase  (one use only)	  X  X		<b>Newman's Mini Golf</b>  \$1 off any one ice cream product (two uses only)  X  X
<b>Domino's</b>  FREE medium 1-topping pizza, carryout only 9-1-24 to 5-31-25  (one use only)	<b>2024-2025 RAIDER CARD</b>  100% of Proceeds Benefit the LHS DECA program Valid THRU 9/30/2025 \$10 each			<b>Chips-WR</b>  Buy any sandwich and large fries, get same FREE  (one use only)
<b>Ida's</b>  FREE appetizer up to \$5 with purchase of entree and beverage  (one use only)	<b>Romano's Pizzeria</b>  \$5 off a 16" pizza  (one use only)	<b>Rocky Rococo</b>  Buy 1 slice, get 1 FREE  (one use only)	<b>Out of The Box Coffee House</b>  Buy 1 large specialty drink, get 1 bakery item FREE  (one use only)	<b>Italia's Restaurant</b>  \$5 off a 16" pizza 715-423-8259  (one use only)
<b>Quality Foods</b>  \$5 OFF purchase over \$50  (unlimited use)				



# SCHOLARSHIPS

ICDC is often a hallmark of achievement for DECA members, but getting there can be a challenge. However, there are numerous scholarship opportunities available in the DECA world! DECA.org contains a variety of useful corporate scholarships that you can apply for before competition season. Additionally, DECA Inc. offers college scholarships for its highest achievers as a reward for their outstanding work.

Does your chapter offer any scholarships for graduating seniors? Wouldn't it be great if they did? One way to build engagement from all members is to earmark a portion of fundraising efforts towards scholarships.

But don't limit your pursuit of scholarship money to the traditional fundraising efforts. Every community has various businesses or philanthropists that are willing to support higher education. Consider creating a marketing piece to start a fund that businesses can contribute to. State clearly how much each recipient will receive (\$500 is a good starting amount) and the criteria that will be used to award scholarships.

By creating a solid story behind the effort and a clear definition of how awards will be granted, it is easier for potential donors to feel that their funds will be utilized appropriately.

**Quick tip:** You could try to get a financial management or accounting business to offer scholarships to a senior who is planning on majoring in finance or accounting.

Make sure you talk to your school administration to understand how to structure such a fund, as many booster clubs have done something similar, and there is a specific way these must be set up.





# VOLUNTEERING

Once a chapter has a solid base of alumni members and business partners, it can call on both groups when the need for volunteers arises. As stated earlier in the guide, people can volunteer in countless ways. Here are a few:

**Guest Speakers** - The goal of bringing in alumni and professional members is to utilize their experience. Many DECA alumni end up finding successful careers that align with DECA's competitive events and can provide invaluable insights into the functions of real-life businesses.

**Quick tip:** Send a handwritten thank-you note to any volunteers to help deepen your relationship with them!

## **Coaches/Mock Judges** -

Professional members can act as judges in practice scenarios within chapters, as well as at competitions all across the state.

Returning members make great judges because of their extensive competition experience. This experience also makes them extremely valuable in mock role play competitions, as they can better educate students on improvements that can be made in order to mold them into DECA champions.





# VOLUNTEERING

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**Judges** - Professional members can act as judges at competitions all across the state. Returning members make excellent judges due to their extensive competition experience.

**Assistant Advisors** - This is a great option for alumni or business partners who have more time to dedicate to the program than the average member. This works well for students who attend a local college or for graduates who have decided to take a gap year. Having a former student as an advisor can enhance current students' experiences by providing them with a mentor figure they can more closely relate to than their normal advisor. As always, more information on volunteering and getting involved with Wisconsin DECA is available at [wideca.org](http://wideca.org).

As the "Gaining Members" section of the guide (page 5) describes, there are a variety of ways you can recruit professional members. Once you have them as members, it can be very easy to forget to maintain interaction with them. Through volunteering opportunities, you can help to foster strong relationships and open the door for more potential opportunities in the future.

**Quick tip:** Create a database of your alumni and professional members with their contact info and grow it every year!

Professional members are typically more than willing to help out chapters, and such volunteering is a truly crucial aspect of DECA. Through it, chapters open a door to new opportunities and create a wide network of resources for their use. Without volunteering, it is a struggle to organize and implement events and projects. When approaching professional members to volunteer, try to have an idea of what you want the collaboration to look like, and communicate it with them.



# BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Thus far, we've explored how chapters can find opportunities to learn, collaborate, and even secure scholarships. But who is best positioned to provide these resources? The answer is simple: businesses!

Building connections with businesses can open up endless possibilities for your chapter, offering not only valuable resources but also real-world professional experience. However, many chapters find it challenging to establish and maintain these partnerships. Like all things in DECA, success comes from being well-prepared.

When beginning this process, look at your local businesses. See which ones would work well with your chapter. Maybe you have existing connections with some, or maybe a business has strong ties with DECA. Whatever it may be, strategize with your chapter and determine what you are seeking to get out of the partnership, such as guest speakers or judges. Additionally, think of what you can offer the business in return! From there, develop a well-thought-out pitch for you to approach the business with.

Reach out to the business and seek to implement your plan. Remember to stay flexible—plans may evolve, but a solid strategy will make the process smoother. And that's it!

Through the initiative you show, many businesses will be overjoyed to connect, and if not, keep your head up- there will be more opportunities.





# IMPLEMENTING PARTNERSHIPS



When developing a business partnership, there are endless possibilities of what the relationship will look like. You could have a set plan outlining their role, you could simply partner with them for one event, the list goes on. Here, we'll be going over two prospective models that chapters can use to establish year-long partnerships with businesses. Both models have been tried and true, having been used successfully by several Wisconsin DECA chapters in the past. Take a look at the table below to learn more about both models and find out which one would work best for your chapter!

TIERED BUSINESS MEMBERSHIP	BUSINESS SPONSORSHIP MENU
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Businesses choose their level of involvement</li><li>• Examples would be bronze, silver, gold, and platinum tiers</li><li>• The higher the tier, the larger the involvement, and the larger the rewards for the businesses</li><li>• Possible upper-level rewards could be:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ logo on chapter t-shirt</li><li>◦ shoutout on social media</li></ul></li><li>• Very flexible model</li><li>• Gives a clear understanding of both parties' involvement</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Businesses are given a list of all the sponsorship opportunities offered by a chapter</li><li>• Each list name has a name and an assigned price<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>◦ ex. Logo on chapter t-shirt (\$__)</li></ul></li><li>• Businesses go through the menu and check off the opportunities they're interested in</li><li>• The total sponsorship amount would then be summed at the bottom</li><li>• Great for chapters with lots of smaller, more distinct sponsorship offerings</li><li>• Extremely flexible system</li><li>• Gives businesses freedom of choice</li></ul>

# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

## *Elevating Business Sponsorships Into Community Partnerships*

Business sponsorships go a long way in helping DECA chapters hold events and achieve their goals throughout the year. They represent a generous contribution from the community to their local DECA chapter. But what if we could advance that relationship? What if we could create an even more mutually beneficial relationship between chapters and communities? What if we could elevate our standard businesses sponsorships into full-on community partnerships?

**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP:** A NEW KIND OF COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DECA CHAPTERS AND THE BUSINESSES IN THEIR COMMUNITIES, ALLOWING FOR STRONGER DECA INVOLVEMENT IN THE COMMUNITY.

## HOW DO WE CREATE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS?

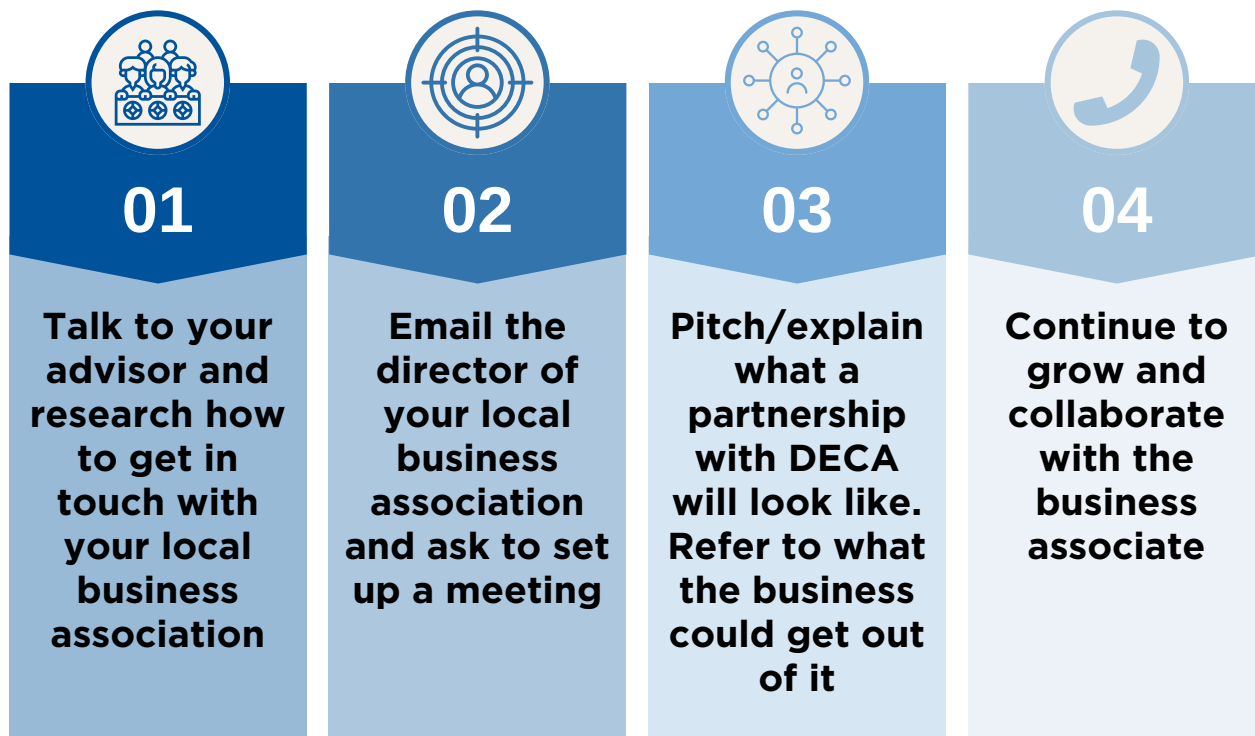
As the name suggests, community partnerships are collaborative relationships between DECA chapters and their *entire* communities. So, in order to effectively craft community partnerships, DECA chapters must target local groups of businesses, known as business associations, rather than try and go door-to-door.

There are two main types of business associations in Wisconsin: **Business Improvement Districts (BIDs)** and **Chambers of Commerce (CoCs)**. Both are made up of local small businesses that come together to pool their resources and achieve common goals. Because of this, they serve as a valuable gateway for DECA chapters to forge stronger ties to their communities.

By reaching out to BIDs and CoCs, you could start one or more new partnerships with your chapter. Community partners aren't about the monetary donation—it's about **using them as a resource**. Maybe you use them for your DECA project and learn more about their business. Find a way for your chapter to be just as much of a resource within the partnership.



# HOW DO WE CONNECT WITH BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS?



## BENEFITS

By working with business associations, we create a mutually beneficial relationship for chapters, members, and business associations. Take a look at the chart below to find specific examples of real benefits:

### For DECA Chapters

- Local business sponsors
- Closer ties to their communities
- Volunteering opportunities

### For Student Representatives

- Learn about entrepreneurship by working with real entrepreneurs
- Apply learning to the real world
- Networking opportunities
- Intern/job opportunities

### For Business Associations

- Increase in community engagement and awareness of local businesses
- Large, responsible corp of volunteers
- Fresh ideas

# RESOURCES

**Quick tip:** Team 60 is always available if you need any help with projects or activities, so feel free to reach out!

To give you an idea of what a business partnership inquiry might look like, included is the Appleton East template for Business Partnership letters as an example. You'll also find links to any other resources mentioned throughout the guide. With that, thank you so much for reading through this guide. I hope it sparks some great ideas and helps you in your professional membership journey. If there are any questions about the content of this guide don't hesitate to reach out via my contact info on the next page.

-Victor Essoka

Dear Potential Business Partner,

The Appleton East DECA Chapter has grown immensely over the past fifteen years. We thank you for your past support of our chapter. As you may remember, DECA is "An Association of Marketing Students." It helps develop emerging leaders and entrepreneurs in marketing, finance, hospitality and management, while taking time to help out in our community. Within the next year, we will be taking part in different community service efforts in partnership with MDA-Muscular Dystrophy Association, Special Olympics, St. Joseph's Food Pantry, Pillars, Feeding America, The Salvation Army, and many other local charities and organizations. We will also participate in marketing competitions at the district, state, and international level against other DECA member.

The experience we have gained thus far through DECA helps us prepare for our dreams and goals in our future careers. Our chapter officers will soon be attending summer workshops where we will create great plans for this upcoming school year. Many of our initiatives will require some financial backing for things such as bus rentals, volunteer meals, and printing. We would also like to reduce the expense of competition and travel so that these opportunities are open to more students. By creating business partnerships with businesses like you, our success is made possible.

Last year we had partnerships with a variety of local businesses. Partnerships help make the majority of our chapter's budget, which is used to prepare future leaders in marketing. By contributing just \$200 to our chapter, you will obtain the following benefits:

- A logo of your business will be placed on the back of our frequently worn DECA t-shirts - a great way of advertising! Close to 300 East

students & faculty, business partners, and Appleton Area School District board members and administrative personnel wear these throughout the school year.

- An Appleton East DECA shirt and framed certificate of appreciation to display in your place of business.
- Recognition in our East Parent's Newsletter that is sent to every student's residence.
- Recognition in our DECA display case on the first floor at Appleton East High School. This is a highly visible display that most of the students view daily.
- Recognition on the Appleton East DECA Facebook page, Twitter page and Instagram account. Combined we have over 5,000 followers
- Recognition in our promotional kit given to influential people within the Appleton Area School District during Career & Technical Education Month.
- Recognized by National DECA, an organization of approximately 200,000 members, as a professional member. As a professional member you will receive a quarterly magazine - DECA Direct.
- Recognized on our Appleton East DECA website with a short bio about your company/links to our website.
- The opportunity to interact more closely with students from Appleton East through guest speaking, judging, job shadowing, etc.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We hope we will be able to begin our business partnership with you in the near future! You can expect a call from me within the next few days to answer any questions you may have. If you have any specific questions, feel free to reach one of us at the number below. You can also call my advisor, name at (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,  
Name/DECA Advisor ( XXX) XXX-XXXX  
Name/Position (XXX) XXX-XXXX

WI DECA Professional Membership blog post: <https://www.wideca.org/why-join-answers-for-alumni-and-professional-members/>

DECA Direct alumni involvement article: <https://www.decadirect.org/2015/07/20/how-to-stay-involved-in-deca-no-matter-what-age/>





**FEEL FREE TO REACH  
OUT WITH ANY  
QUESTIONS!**

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