



# Relocation Assessment Study

Virginia Center for the Creative Arts

May 28, 2013

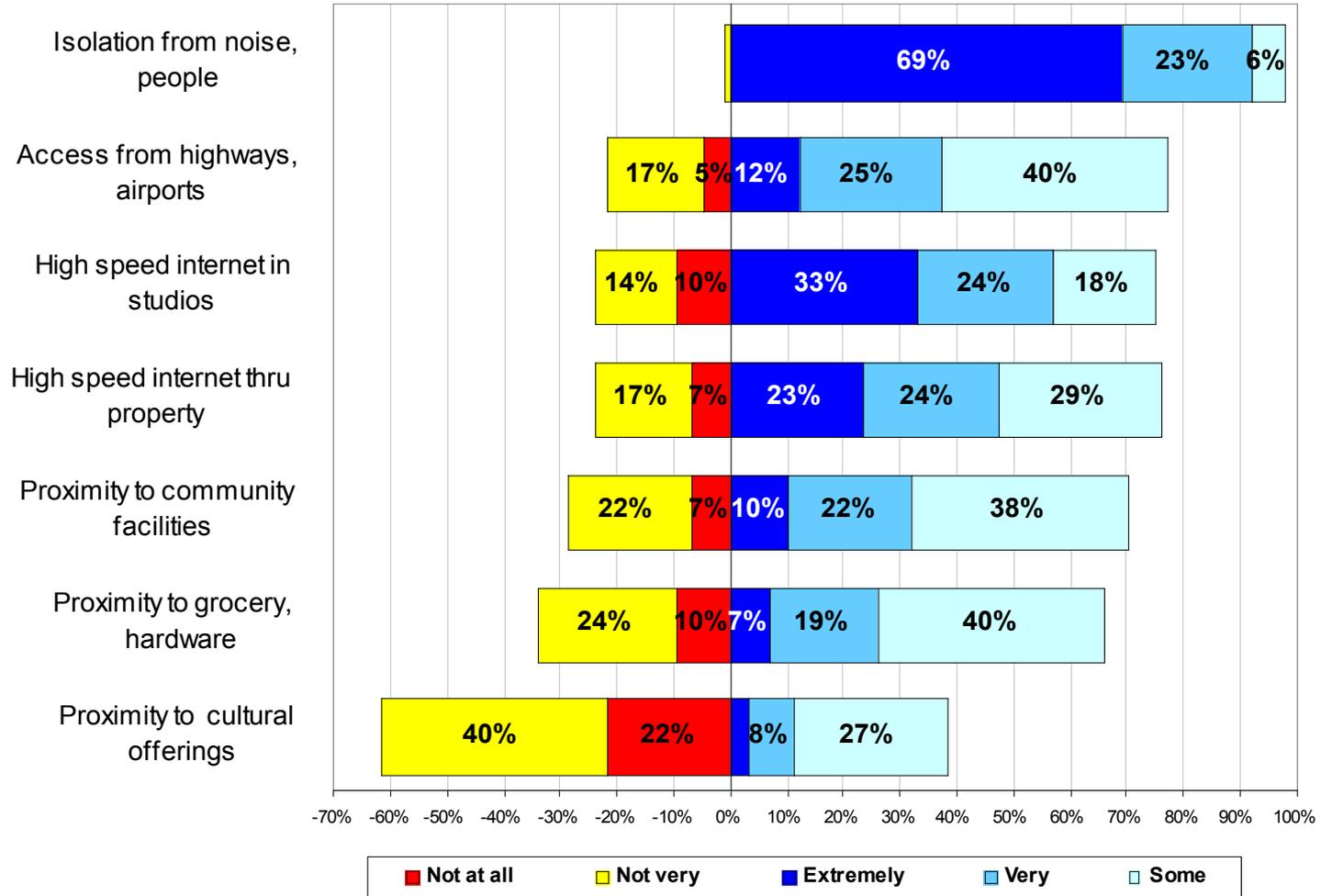
# Key Issues of the Study

- ✓ Importance of various location aspects
- ✓ Physical layout preferences
- ✓ Importance of different food service options
- ✓ Preference for size of residency program
- ✓ Attitudes toward VCCA partnership possibilities
- ✓ Desirability of more interaction with community
- ✓ Reaction to potential change
- ✓ Concerns about potential physical relocation of VCCA

# Methodology

- ✓ Online survey among 1,063 VCCA Fellows, Board, contributors, and staff (primarily fellows – only 31 fell into the other groups combined)
- ✓ All Fellows, supporters, and staff with an email on file were sent an invitation to participate in the survey
- ✓ YMR refined the questionnaire originally developed by VCCA
- ✓ Online interviews were conducted between April 23<sup>rd</sup> and May 17<sup>th</sup>

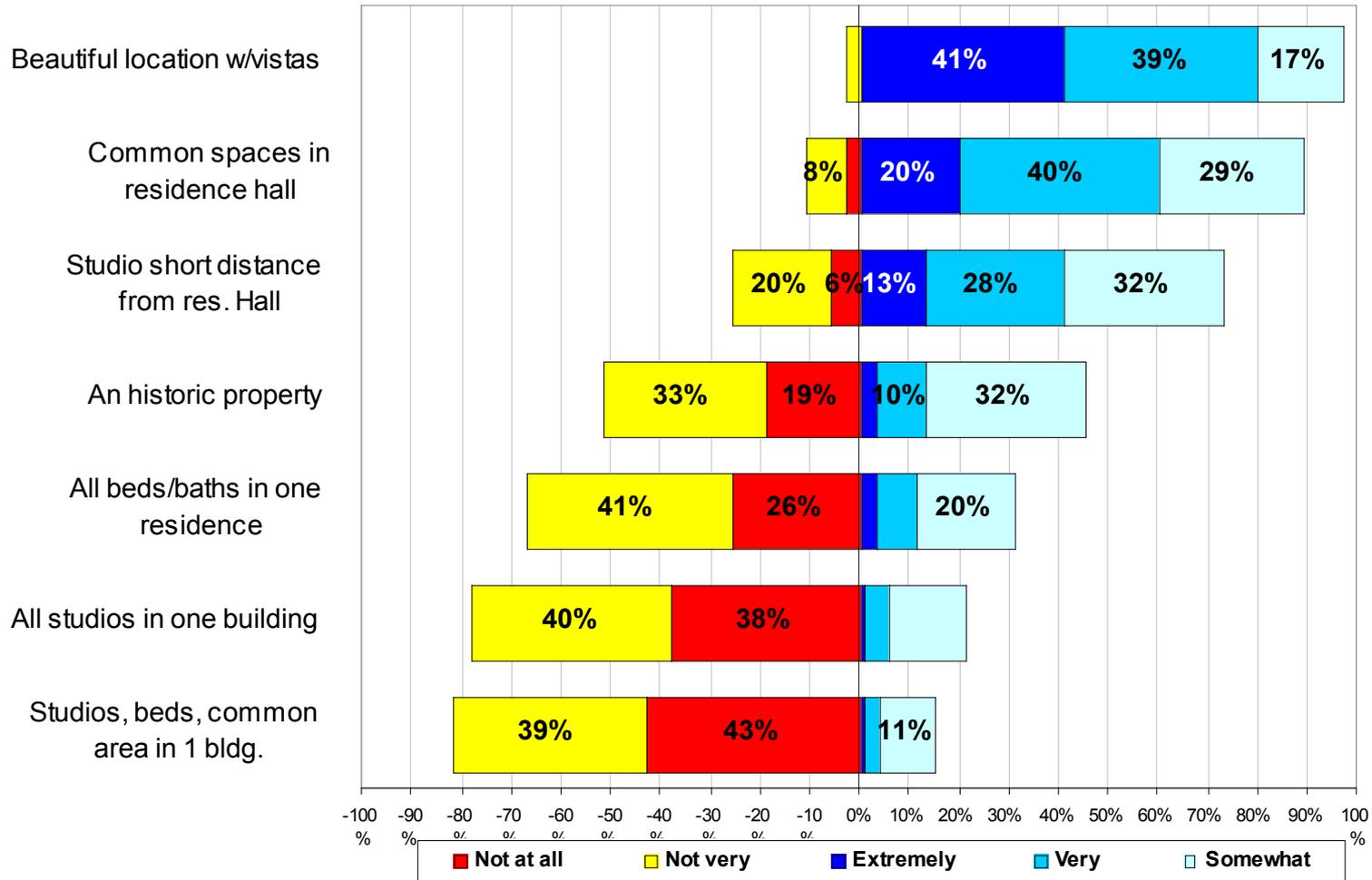
# Isolation, accessibility, and internet are the most important aspects, while proximity to cultural offerings is far less important



## Open-ended comments reveals that the current location is ideal regarding it's isolation

- ✓ I think that the current location of VCCA has tremendous strengths. Beyond the things that can be directly measured, the place has "aura." It has history. I would hate to lose that.
- ✓ My feeling is the more isolated the better. As a creative writer, I come to VCCA to work without disturbance, not to make friends or network.
- ✓ VCCA is as much about the location and the history of it as anything. It would be a terrible shame if it were not at the present location. Also the facility and the lake at Sweet Briar make VCCA so very special...
- ✓ The seclusion of VCCA is so important to the whole idea of getting away to focus on work. However, I can no longer work without internet service, even though I am a visual artist, I rely on that access.
- ✓ The residency experience would be marred without removal from daily concerns in the studio environment and thus from noise, traffic, etc.
- ✓ I think that there should be a hot-spot in the dorm where we can get great wi-fi, but I don't think there should be any in the studios at all.
- ✓ The idea is to be isolated, so having lots of distractions (lectures, cultural offerings, even a fitness center) nearby would seem to defeat the purpose. Yet having internet access and computer capability is essential these days.
- ✓ Isolation is the big thing for me. I have used the internet for my writing, but I don't necessarily need a connection in my studio or bedroom.

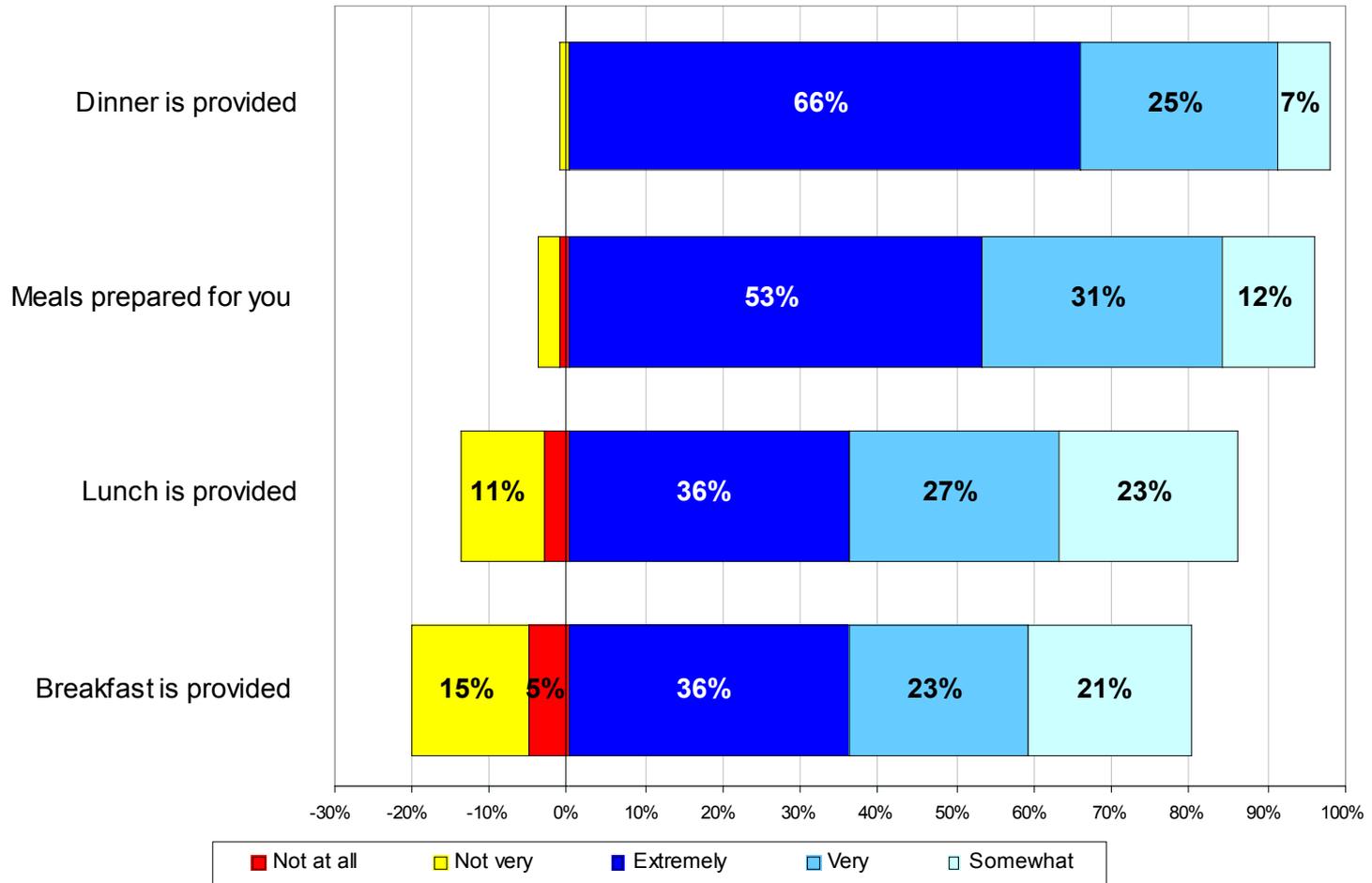
# The most key aspects for the layout is the scenery and having common spaces in residence hall as well as a short walk to studio



## Several areas of suggested layouts are given including communal spaces, access to kitchens, and soundproofing

- ✓ Communal spaces to gather feels very key to the kind of community that is built while on residency at VCCA. But having all together (studios, bedrooms, shared space) is not important to me.
- ✓ Without faultless soundproofing, the idea of lumping all the studios together is a little worrisome.
- ✓ An updated, simple, well-designed common kitchen for Fellows to access any time.
- ✓ Access to a kitchen for preparation of snacks 24 hours/day.
- ✓ I think quiet is so important in the studios.
- ✓ I really like the bathroom for every studio idea. Also, a thickness of walls between studios to keep noise out.
- ✓ I think residence and studios should be separated from each other. Artists need "offices".
- ✓ I like some separation of work and living space.
- ✓ Walking trails /paths! Crucial! Much of my deep work happens on the hoof--so this, and beautiful location, really matter.
- ✓ The opportunity to be alone when wanted and to be with others when wanted.
- ✓ The importance of the communal dining room is very important. That's the one place where you are sure to see people during the day, if you so choose, and it is conducive to relaxation, discussion, and a change of scenery from one's own work.
- ✓ The pool was a very nice place for me to regroup.
- ✓ Ping pong! pool! piano! TV/DVD facilities.
- ✓ A simple workout room (i.e., mats, hand weights) and a sauna.

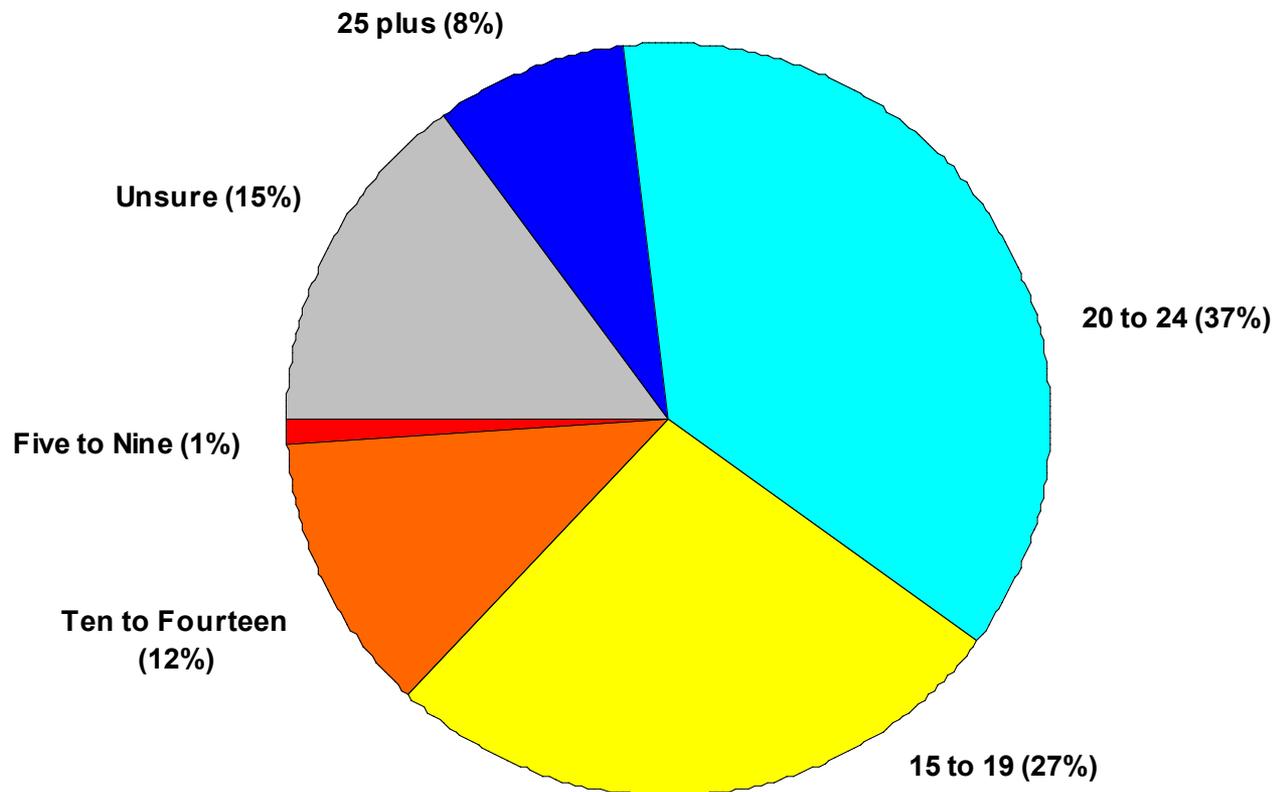
# The most important meal Fellows prefer prepared for them is dinner, but others are not far behind



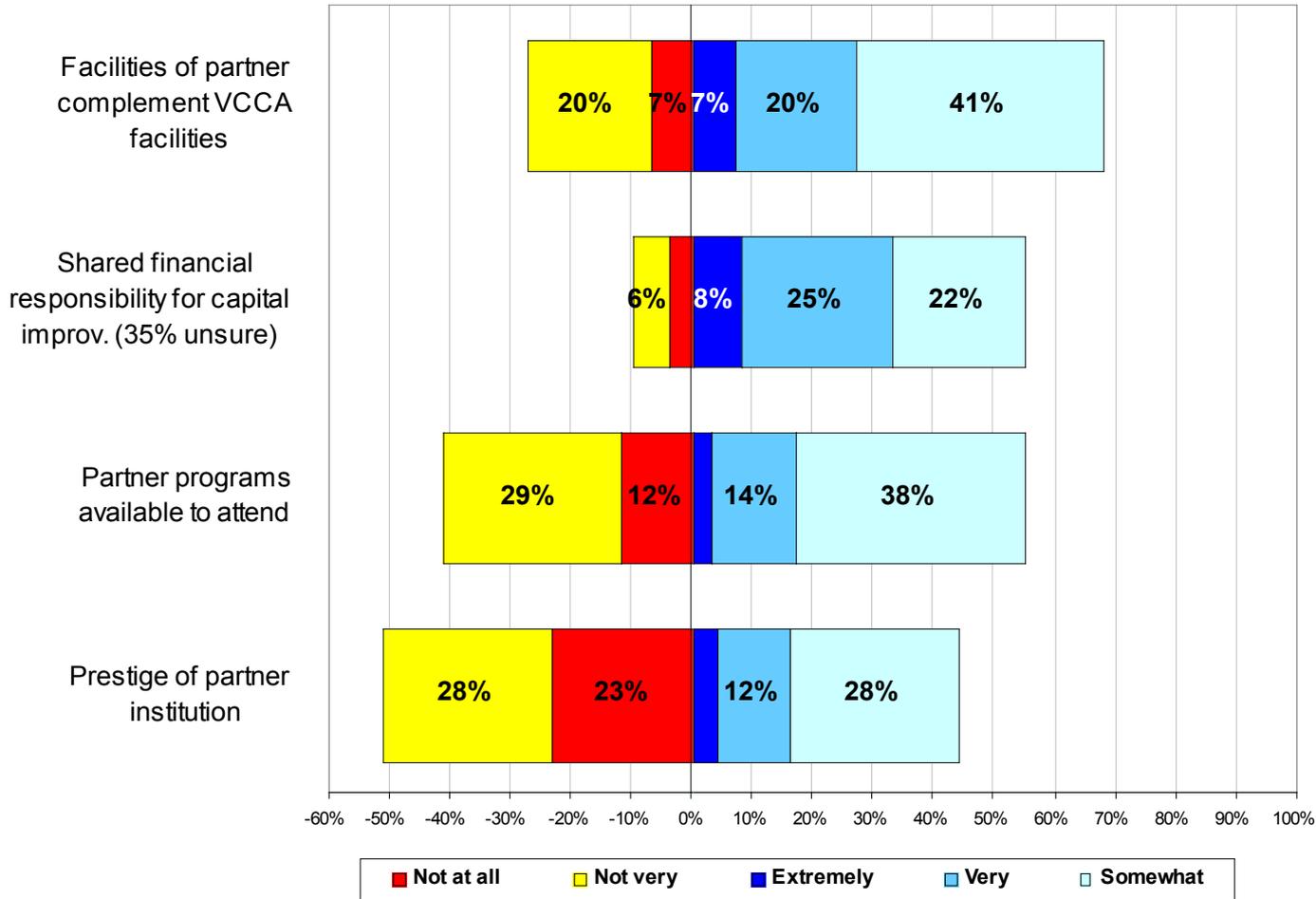
## Comments highlight the importance of being able to focus on their work and not on meals—especially dinner, but want options

- ✓ Not having to think about food is a huge luxury and relief from the everyday and adds to the unique nature of an artist colony.
- ✓ Healthy choices. Local fresh seasonal food. Good chef.
- ✓ An open kitchen with readily available snacks and drinks (juice, tea etc.), might be a nice addition. Also, it would be nice if fellows could have their lunch anytime.
- ✓ We are told before we arrive that special dietary needs cannot be accommodated. but while there, I learned that some people were able to establish a relationship with the chef so that their needs were met. It's confusing. I would love to see the reality and the expectation match up.
- ✓ Extremely important to have wheat-free alternatives, and vegan or vegetarian alternatives; to have special dietary needs taken into consideration, and have access to alternative milks, breads, etc.
- ✓ I'm perfectly happy to fix my own lunch and breakfast. In fact, I work best when I can start work before talking to anyone. Dinner with the other residents, though, is important to me.
- ✓ Shopping and cooking are among the things that make it hard to get work done in normal life, and I think this is of particular concern to women artists. Having meals taken care of is one of the major benefits of a colony.
- ✓ Food prep eats into work time, so having meals prepared is one of the biggest benefits of VCCA.
- ✓ At least one meal provided per day allows for the development of a "community." The chance to decompress and to talk informally.
- ✓ My memory of the food at VCCA is that it is excellent. Escape from a kitchen and its duties is a prime reason to go there. Need access to a refrigerator (to store beer, etc.).

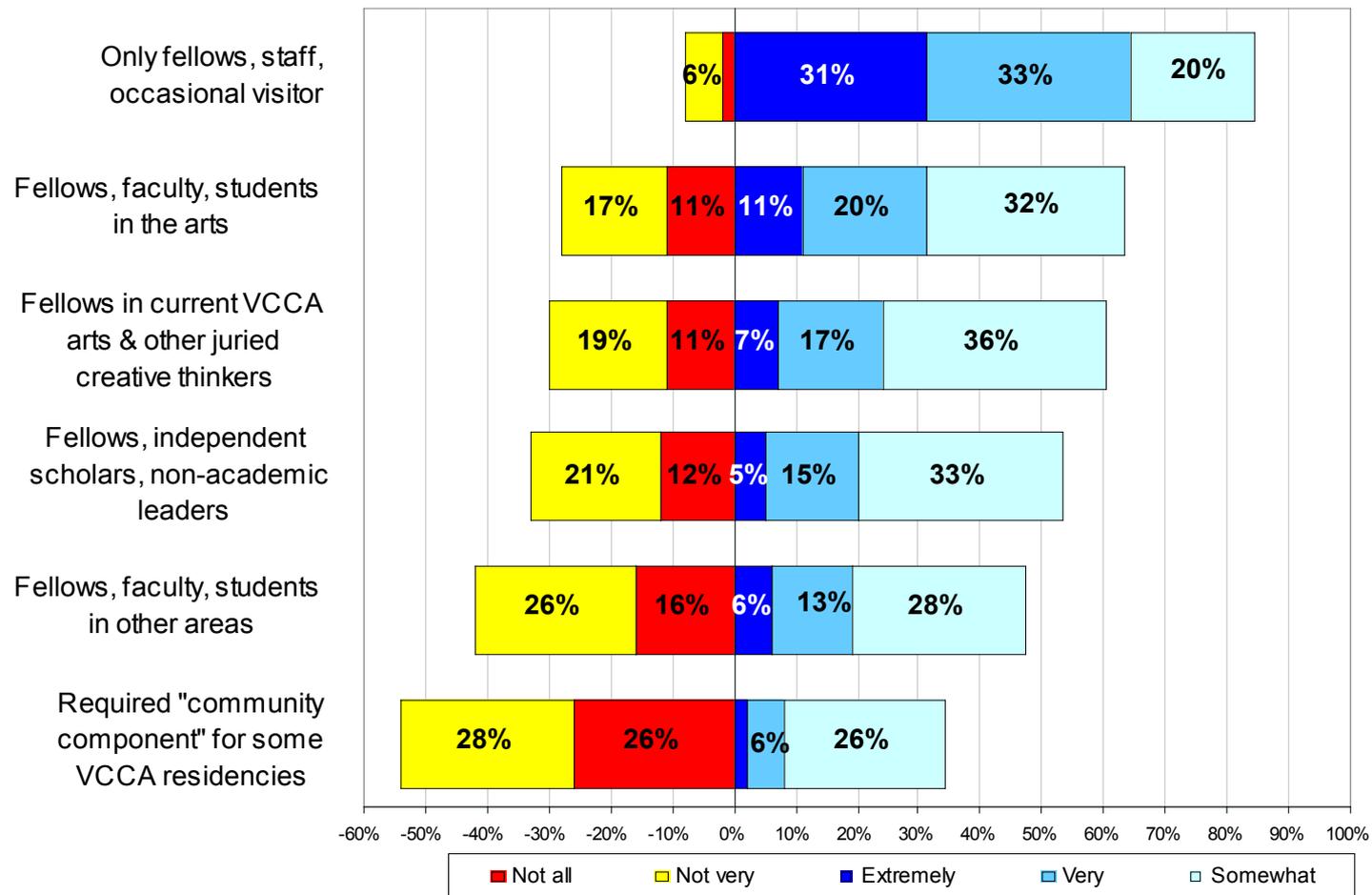
# Fellows seem open to larger residency, with nearly half saying 20+ is optimum



# There's not a strong sense of importance for VCCA to partner with other organizations, but the most important is one that can provide facilities



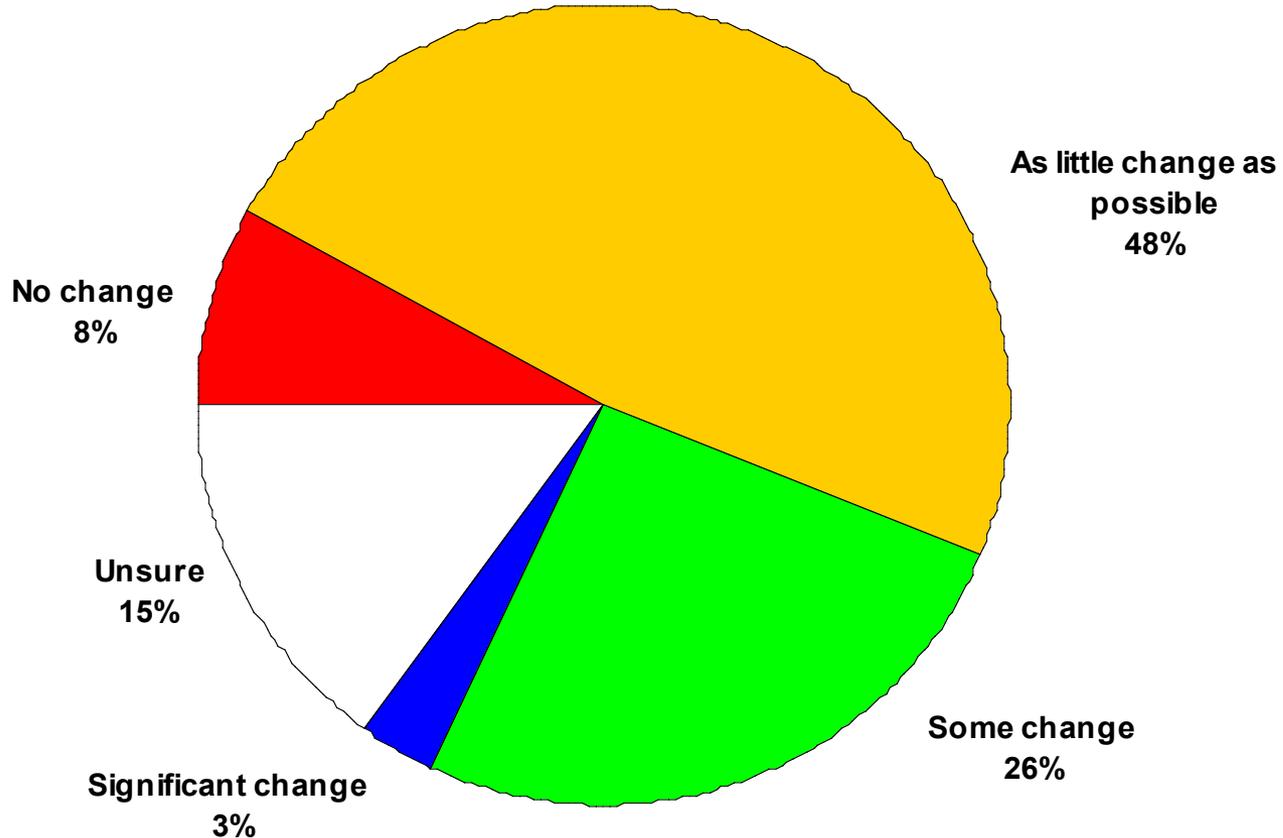
# As shown with previous results, Fellows prefer solitude over relationships with other entities while at VCCA



## Comments indicate that additional people on campus could be a distraction

- ✓ Having sat for 5 years on a University board, I get what you guys are struggling with. I think you have to decide what you want to be. As a fellow, I want a creative community and don't mind outsiders, but I want to spend my time here writing and networking and collaborating with people also here for that purpose.
- ✓ While I am open to occasional contact with other people outside the VCCA community during a residency, the amount of this needs to be severely limited so as not to distract us from getting work done. I am concerned that opening up VCCA to be more like a "think tank" will interfere with getting work done.
- ✓ When I was a resident, I enjoyed socializing with other fellows, but would have resented the obligation to attend lectures, or to mentor students. This is a special opportunity to focus solely on one's work.
- ✓ It's an interesting idea, bringing in scientists, etc. I just worry that it would alter the creative dynamic among the fellows.
- ✓ If there is a required community component, it needs to be planned carefully. I don't like community service, teaching or other time-intensive activities at residencies, because the main reason to go is work time.
- ✓ A little unclear on this. I like the community of fellows, artists, writers and composers.
- ✓ The purpose of the VCCA is to allow privacy and time. Basically, I see all of the proposed "interactions" as taking away both.
- ✓ Keeping "critics" and "intellectuals" away from the makers helps us create without all those contextualizing voices in our heads. That said, listening to other "makers" from other fields, architects, scientists, activists might be appealing.
- ✓ Having "juried creative thinkers" in other disciplines would considerably change VCCA's mission, I can't say whether for better or worse.

# More than half prefer no or as little change as possible to the current VCCA operation



## There are several views of the potential change—some want an upgraded facility while others want everything to stay the same

- ✓ I understand that VCCA may not be able to stay in its current location, but I do feel that its location has been ideal--seclusion in a beautiful environment without the need to prepare one's own meals was very conducive to getting work done.
- ✓ The current property is in need of restoration and physical improvements.
- ✓ Facilities upgrade would be great but love the tranquility and ability to focus. Would miss the horses :(.
- ✓ I loved my experience at VCCA. So far it is my only experience at an artist colony, but it was wonderful. On the other hand, I can imagine that a variety of circumstances would also be great. But why mess with success?
- ✓ The idea of VCCA being somewhere else is sort of impossible to imagine. I do realize that times change and there are financial considerations (others too I bet), but VCCA up there on the hill IS the "prominent" institution in my mind. I do hate to see things change.
- ✓ VCCA is perfect as is. Importance of isolation and beauty in the environment, as well as a close cadre of arts professionals, should be maintained.
- ✓ I love VCCA as it is, and I love the surrounding landscape and access to Sweet Briar, but I really don't have a picture of what the alternatives might be.
- ✓ I realize it may not be possible to have no change... that said, I like the size, the lay out, and the location very much. Of all the many colonies I have had the privilege to have a residency in, VCCA is my favorite.

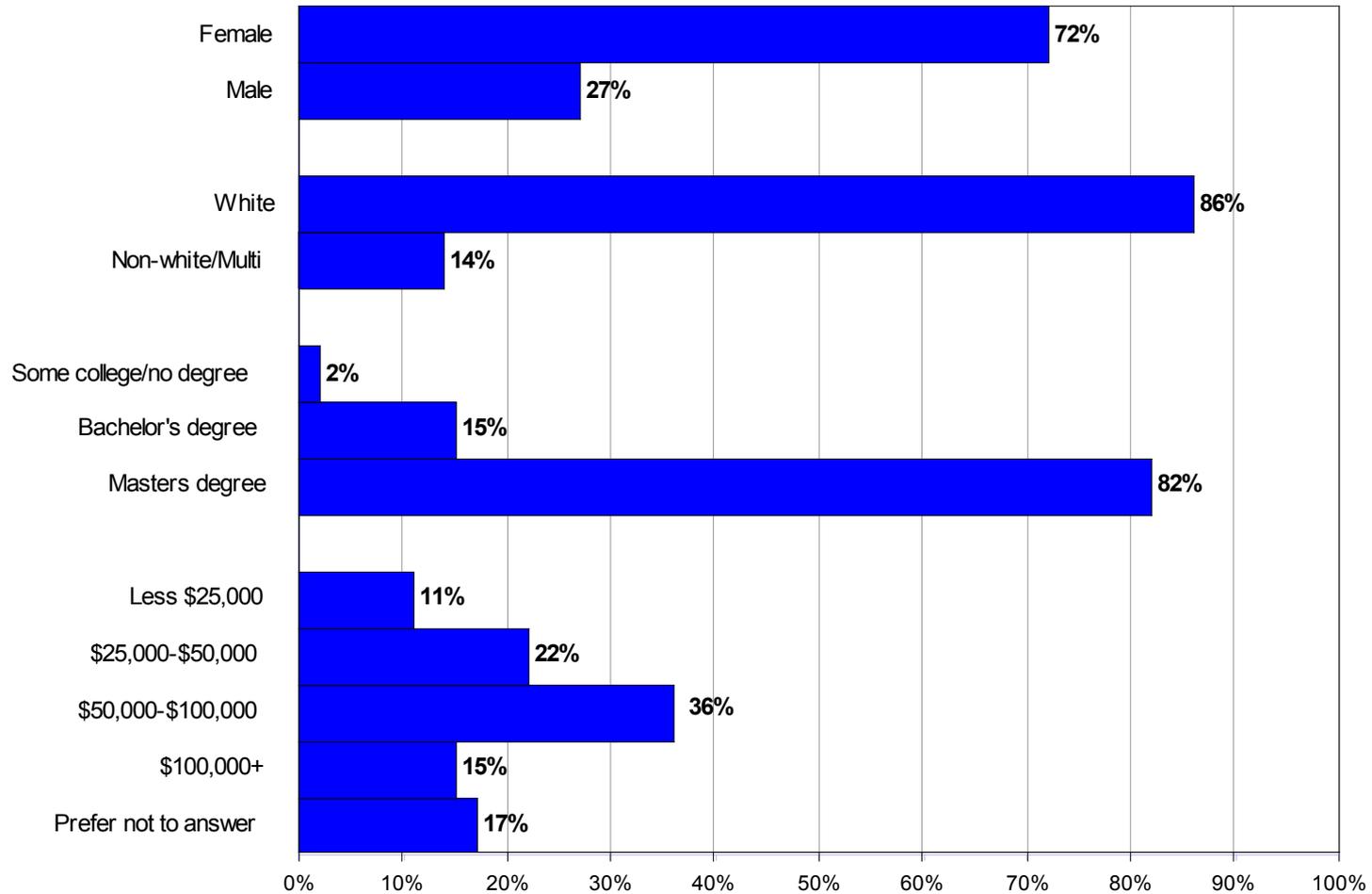
## The current VCCA location is a common theme of what is most important about VCCA along with solitude and relaxing setting

- ✓ Love the sense of community!
- ✓ Community of fellow artists from different disciplines and isolated space.
- ✓ The combination of solitude for work among a community of similarly motivated artists.
- ✓ The opportunity to work supported and uninterrupted in a community of creative peers.
- ✓ Rural location. Large visual art studios. All meals provided.
- ✓ The people who run it, the bucolic location, the quiet, the pool at sweet briar, meals.
- ✓ The feeling of being apart from the rest of the world. The scenery, the artistry.
- ✓ It made me believe in myself as an artist and in the value of my work. Nothing could be more important.
- ✓ Solitude and being able to focus.
- ✓ The friendly relaxed atmosphere that allows residents to choose the level of privacy ideal for them.
- ✓ The beautiful and peaceful location, proximity to Sweet Briar, the space to write.
- ✓ The location is lovely. I was delighted to have the mountains for a view from my bedroom window.
- ✓ The time to do one's own work. The good will of the staff.
- ✓ Great studios, uninterrupted time in studios, self-directed, comfortable common areas, and great meals.
- ✓ The simple gift of space, quiet, meals, and the wonderful staff.
- ✓ The kind and attentive staff.
- ✓ The beautiful setting. However, the stink bugs need to go!

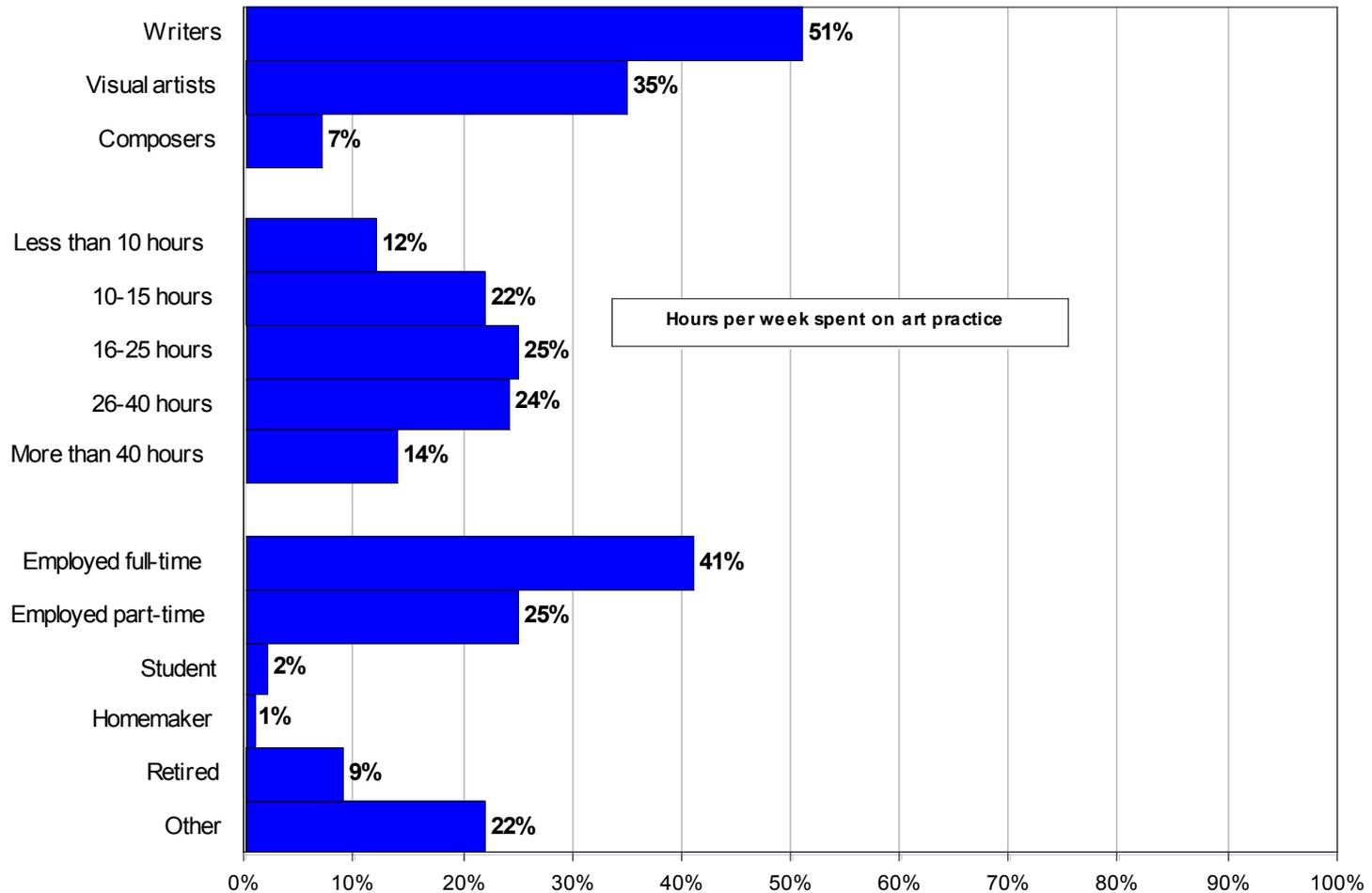
## There are many concerns with a potential location change including losing the solitude, beautiful setting, and history

- ✓ The current location is lovely beyond words, and it just WORKS. Why mess with something that is working? Studios are near one another in proximity yet are very private and separate, and the design is really hard to pull off.
- ✓ Disruption of the existing pastoral seclusion is what would make me the most anxious.
- ✓ That VCCA will no longer be the special creative place that has nurtured my work over the course of many years, resulting in six books.
- ✓ I love the beauty of the current setting. I love the sense of remove. Moving to a place like, for instance, Sweet Briar's would completely disrupt the things I value most.
- ✓ If VCCA were located on a campus (such as Sweet Briar), I would be concerned about too many distractions for the fellows.
- ✓ The solitude to work; companionship when wanted.
- ✓ That it will lose its magic, lose its history.
- ✓ It will lose its pastoral setting/quiet beauty, and become a more corporate environment.
- ✓ The quality of the studio space. Having the isolation and the mutual respect of quiet.
- ✓ Too much interaction with a partner community could break one's focus on work.
- ✓ That a new location won't have the charm and grace of the old.
- ✓ Losing the identity of VCCA, that particular place unlike anywhere else.
- ✓ The insinuation that it would involve demands for resident fellows to meet the needs of another institution.
- ✓ Perhaps the character of VCCA will fundamentally change...I will miss the cows/horses.

# Respondent Characteristics



# Respondent Characteristics (con' t)



# Suggested Actions

- ✓ Recognize that the primary focus of VCCA is to provide a quiet haven for artists to be productive (isolation from noise and people is far and away the most important issue to Fellows, and there is little support for placing all studios—or beds—in one building).
- ✓ Give priority to privacy/quiet over common areas. Fellows are open to socializing with other residents, but this is of secondary importance, as their overriding priority is being able to focus on their work.
- ✓ Promote VCCA's pastoral location by featuring multiple pictures of the VCCA grounds on the website ("beautiful location with vistas" is clearly the most important issue relating to physical layout, and VCCA's idyllic setting is referred to over and over again throughout the survey).

# Suggested Actions (con't)

- ✓ Continue to offer a prepared dinner where residents can come together and enjoy a meal and company. Two-thirds rate a prepared dinner as extremely important, while less than four in ten say it is extremely important for lunch or breakfast to be provided.
- ✓ Target potential partners whose facilities complement VCCA facilities (this emerged as the most important factor that might result from partnering with an institution that has property).
- ✓ Proceed with caution into options with “institutions that may want greater connections between their constituencies of faculty and students or with their community at large.” Many feel that the “purpose of VCCA is to allow privacy and time”, and they view the “proposed interactions as taking away both.”

# Suggested Actions (con't)

- ✓ Also proceed with caution in making significant operational changes since a majority want either no change or as little change as possible.
- ✓ In weighing any changes, consider that there is very high satisfaction with VCCA as it is now, and “why mess with something that is working?”
- ✓ Give priority to options that are tied to the current location because residents have strong feelings toward the pastoral seclusion of VCCA—and there are major concerns that a change in location will result in VCCA losing its identity and character (magic, charm, history, sense of community, that “particular place unlike anywhere else”).

# Questions?

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