Story Maps

A story map is a unique digital presentation tool that pairs multimedia such as photos, diagrams, and text with the functionality of a Geographic Information System (GIS) map. Story maps present technical information in an intuitive, organized way that can help readers better understand the choices at hand in a project or planning study. When used in long-range planning, story maps can help agencies gain valuable information from the public for later use in the environmental phase of project delivery.

**BEST SUITED FOR:**
Planning Products and Projects, All Phases

**CASE STUDIES:**
**Utah Department of Transportation (DOT), Payson I-15 Interchange Environmental Impact Statement**

The Utah DOT used a story map to convey detailed information about a proposed interchange upgrade on I-15, intended to improve safety and traffic capacity in the growing community of Payson. The story map helped UDOT communicate with the public during the project’s Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and it served as the executive summary for the Draft EIS. During initial outreach, the final page linked to a comment form where viewers could provide feedback on the features most important to them. Once UDOT selected a preferred alternative, new pages were added showing its design features and impacts. Users could select a type of impact to view on the map, and zoom in to see details, such as right-of-way impacts on specific properties. Approximately 1,400 people visited the story map, and about half returned for a second visit.

Utah DOT’s story map for the Payson I-15 Environmental Impact Statement allowed users to toggle between alternatives and zoom in to locations of interest. The story map served as the Executive Summary for the Draft EIS. Images courtesy of Utah Department of Transportation. [http://gis.hwlochner.com/payson/](http://gis.hwlochner.com/payson/)
Snapshot

Advantages

• Easily integrate existing graphics, text, and maps in a coherent framework that “tells the story” of a project
• Meets today’s need for visual alternatives to conventional technical reports
• Versatile tool can be used in meeting presentations, as an online resource, and provided to partner agencies such as local governments
• Users can interact, on their own time, with the materials best suited to their interests and learning styles, whether viewing maps, infographics, visualizations, videos, explanatory text, or project documents
• Well-suited for presenting multiple alternatives for comparison at different scales; users can zoom in to the locations that interest them
• Easily updated with new pages as a project or plan evolves
• Effective tool for gathering public comment to be used for planning and environmental linkages (PEL) purposes

Disadvantages

• Information may appear too technical to some readers, despite explanatory text
• Requires lead time to develop

Outcomes

• Increases readers’ understanding of project issues and choices, enabling them to provide more informed, useful feedback
• Provides a “self-serve” information option for persons unable to attend public information sessions

Tips for Success

• Know your audience; determine how much technical information they can absorb and how much interpretation must be provided
• Build the narrative in advance – emphasis on the “why,” but also include the who, what, where, and when (if appropriate)
• Include both public involvement staff and GIS staff in developing the story map
• Determine the expected “shelf-life” of the story map at the outset—will it be used for a relatively brief public comment period, or as part of a living document, such as a long-range transportation plan?
• To attract visitors, provide prominent links to story maps on websites, social media, and at meetings
• As with websites, keep story maps fresh with new information to encourage repeat visitors
• Include links to comment forms, surveys, or other feedback opportunities within the story map

Resources Required

• GIS and graphics expertise