free-range THINKING ™

free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact

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Add Maps to Make Your Stories Stickier

Among the questions that good stories must answer, some of the most important begin with the word *where*. Where does the journey begin? Where are the high and low points along the way? And perhaps most critical of all, where does the story take us in the end? It should come as no surprise, then, that maps - those age-old answers to where questions - can be a useful tool for storytellers. Recently, we learned about a web-based tool called Story Maps that makes it possible for anyone to create interactive, multimedia stories with beautiful map components. After looking at only a few Story Maps, we were convinced that Story Maps can help public interest organizations tell their stories in a uniquely powerful way. Read more. *Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.*

You Have Your Stories. Now Get Better at Telling Them.

If your organization is like most we encounter these days, you don't need to be told that storytelling is important. Not only have you gotten that message, you've been diligently collecting the stories that define who you are, what you do, and why it's worthy of support. But now that you've gathered your stories, are you confident that everyone who represents your organization is telling them as effectively as possible?

"ALOUD: A Workshop for Live Storytelling" has been designed to help your staff, board members, and the beneficiaries of your services do just that. ALOUD debuted in October in Waterloo, Ontario as part of a special communications training co-sponsored by Capacity Canada and the Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation, and you can read about the participants' enthusiastic responses here. To find out if ALOUD is right your team, watch our video or contact us directly (aloud@thegoodmancenter.com) for more information.

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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Allen Carroll, founder of Esri's Story Maps team, got the idea for a storytelling tool incorporating maps while working as Chief Cartographer at National Geographic. In 2010, he left Nat Geo to join Esri, a leading provider of location analytics and services, where he would begin working with a team to make Story Maps a reality. To Carroll, the connection between maps and stories has always been obvious. "Maps themselves *are* stories," he writes on Esri's blog, "they're simplifications, distillations, and interpretations of a hugely complex world. Maps provide meaning and context; they reveal patterns and relationships."

Allen Carroll

Since becoming available to the public in 2012, Story Maps have been embraced by a wide variety of users to tell stories about everything from a refugee crisis in Bangladesh to the high cost of higher education. Today, ArcGIS, Esri's cloud resource, hosts nearly 700,000 Story Maps. Even more noteworthy, Story Maps are proving to be much stickier than typical webpages. By most estimates, the average webpage retains viewers for well under a minute. According to analytics collected on the stories published by Carroll's team, people spend an average of nearly six minutes on a Story Map.

Carroll and his team designed Story Maps to be easily accessible to non-GIS professionals, and equally important, Esri has made the tool free for non-commercial use. To get access to the half dozen web applications that make up the Story Maps tool, all you need to do is sign up for a free ArcGIS account and then choose which web application best suits your storytelling needs. While some of the applications are fairly simple ("Map Tour," for instance, is just a sequence of geo-tagged photos, videos, and short-formed text), others are much more versatile, carrying greater potential for emotional impact. "Our favorite within our team is the 'Cascade' app," Carroll says. "That app allows for the whole screen to scroll and makes it easy to mix full screen background images, or maps, or videos, with narrative sections. We feel it is the most immersive and versatile and can have the biggest emotional punch."

To help users and potential users see the possibilities, Carroll's team has put together a gallery of their favorite Story Maps.

Friends of the Verde River
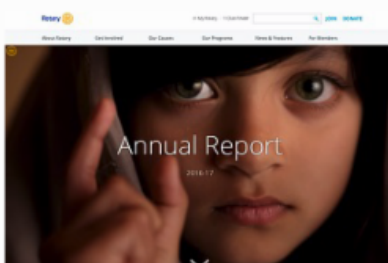By Friends of the Verde River, AZ

At Nature's Crossroads
By The Nature Conservancy

Virginia Preserves
By The Nature Conservancy

2016–2017 Annual Report
By Rotary International

The power of speech
By Translators Without Borders

The Fight for Fair Housing in the United St
By NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Thurgood

Though this tool counts The Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund, and Amnesty International among its many users, we believe there are many more nonprofits of all shapes, sizes, and causes that would benefit greatly from telling their stories with Story Maps. To see how this tool might work for your organization, we've curated our own mini-gallery below. Each Story Map included was created for a nonprofit and each tells their story in a unique way.

The Blue Ocean Society of Marine Conservation uses a "Map Series" Story Map application to show the journey of some very specific pieces of trash after a spill. Not all stories need to star people, and these storytellers have figured out a clever way to make trash and conservation the star here. What's more, they've even built in a strong call to action at the end.

Amazon Conservation Team created a Story Map with the "Cascade" application about the life and work of an indigenous cartographer. It is a great example of how to tell a complex story about land conservation while still remaining focused on an individual.

The NAACP Legal Defense Fund has created a compelling Story Map using the Cascade application that tells the story of the fight for fair housing in the US. We love this Story Map because rather than list a boring chronology about the LDF's past, they tell an immersive story that both speaks to their history as well as the context for their work.

Finally, like several other Story Maps from nonprofits we've seen, Rotary International turned their annual report into a Story Map using the Cascade application.

Carroll is thrilled that Story Maps have been so widely embraced, and, like us, sees the potential for them to help more organizations tell their stories. "We're working on a next generation Story Map application where the process of making a map will be even easier for non-GIS people," he says. They plan to release this more robust and user-friendly tool by next summer, with a public beta version debuting even earlier than that. Meanwhile, their existing web applications will remain available.

"It's great to tell our stories and preach from our own pulpit," Carroll says, "but enabling hundreds of organizations to tell their own really important and interesting stories has just been incredibly exciting and gratifying."

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DESIGN BETTER CAMPAIGNS
Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter

December 6 & 7
11am - 12pm PT

PRESENT BETTER
Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes

December 11 & 12
11am - 12pm PT

TELL BETTER STORIES
Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative

January 10, 17, 24 & 31
9am - 10am PT

Click on the class title to read more!

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