Story Mapping

Telling your municipal story in a snappy way!

City of Battle Creek

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Communicate & tell stories

- Communications Manager position

- A media background is a plus

  - Knowing the questions to ask – an internal reporter

  - Working with the media where they are

  - Familiar with the various platforms & opportunities to tell your stories

- We'll say it again later… **humanize your organization**!

Grabbing the Goldfish

- 2015 Microsoft study: A person's attention span last about eight seconds, down from 12 seconds in 2000.
  - A goldfish's attention span averages nine seconds.
- Precious little time to capture people's interest…
  - Sometimes you're required to produce a 200-page report, but if you're not, try something else!
- United Nations & U.S. Census statistics show about 75 percent of people are online

Trying new formats & upping engagement

- As we make efforts to reach people where they are, neighbors are in a LOT of places…
  - 2015 citizen survey was mailed to random sample (3,000), then put online; online version scored 864 responses
  - Recent medical marihuana survey = 500 online & 200 paper responses
  - Late 2014 Community Development survey = over 1,000 responses combining online & paper
- Hadn't produced an annual report in recent memory
  - Proactive & progressive IT Department suggested the story map format
  - People WANT to know & understand what local government is doing
 - Easy, interactive solution

What's a story map?

- From ArcGIS:
  - *"…simple yet powerful way to inform, engage, and inspire people with any story you want to tell that involves maps, places, locations, or geography."*
  - *"…web applications that let authors combine beautiful maps with narrative text, striking images, and multimedia, including video."*
- More at storymaps.arcgis.com/en/faq
  - FAQs on best practices, each type of story map, managing, and more
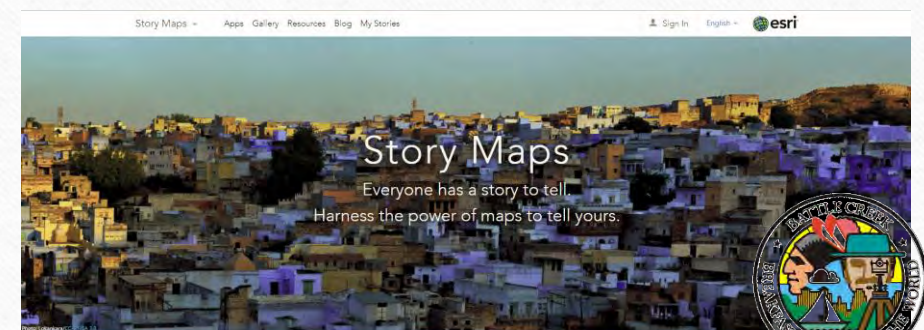
Our first go at a story map
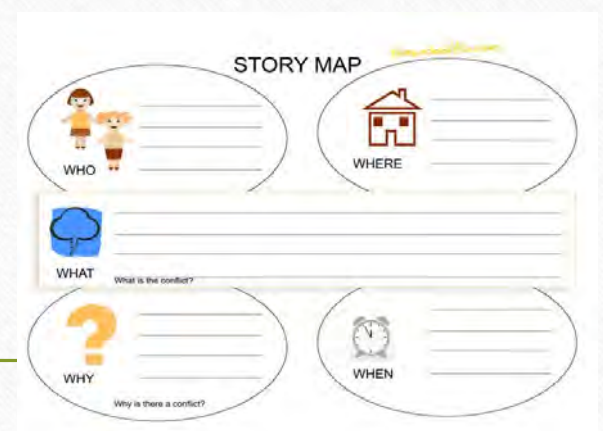
- Started late summer – **Lesson #1**: Start sooner. Start now.

- Asked our middle management group to come up with the top two projects of the year, after explaining the project – **Lesson #2**: Go with one project.

- Indicated that we wanted projects from every department and/or division, depending on the group and its work – **Lesson #3**: Don't force it. Include items that are most meaningful & important.

- Asked for content, photos, video when possible, anything multi-media – a much easier task with fewer projects to handle

- A challenge we faced was that we transferred to an https security certificate in the middle of this project, which gave us lots of errors as we worked. We had to ensure all links were https, and our server, too. Helpful to have that taken care of ahead of time.

City of Battle Creek
2017 Year in Review story map

- https://arcg.is/1i8HfL
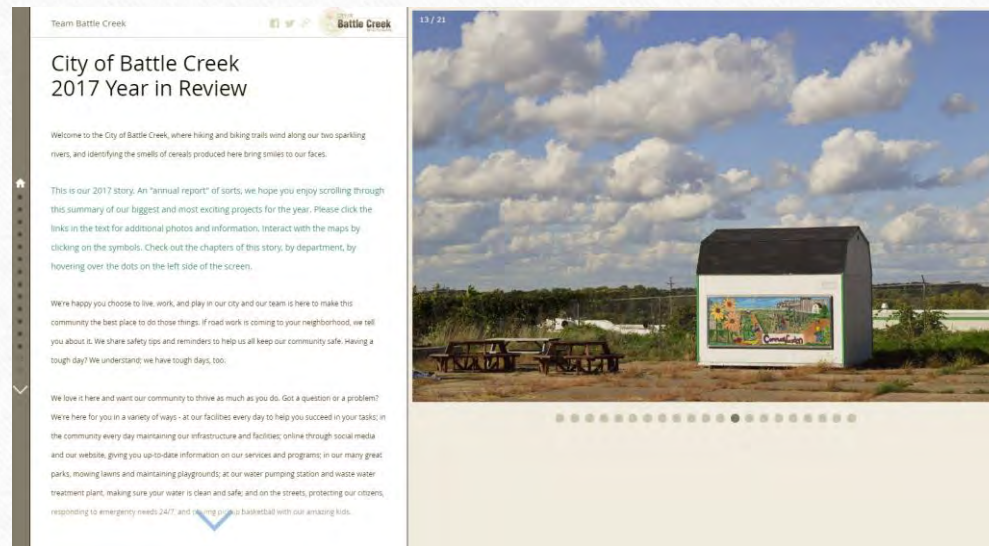
- Story Map Journal (two options)
  - Eight formats in ArcGIS

- City has an ArcGIS organization account – custom administrative levels – ArcGIS can host
  - Industry standard for GIS work

- Esri moving to **https**, meaning more work for municipalities to get a certificate, but better security

Story map thoughts…

- "This is so much work."
- "Why did we ask for two projects?"
- "Project" is a limiting word. Ask for the best thing the department did – host an event? Get a huge survey response? Get a huge award?
- Should've included our budget – that's a huge part of local government that could be condensed & creative in this format.

- Two people created ours. Have lots of teammates look at & read it – our entire IT Department & Communications Team.
- Consider how you want to order items for best flow – chronological felt random for us. Final is mostly alpha, with a couple exceptions that make sense – PD building and chip seal.
- No time for photo captions…

Technical tips
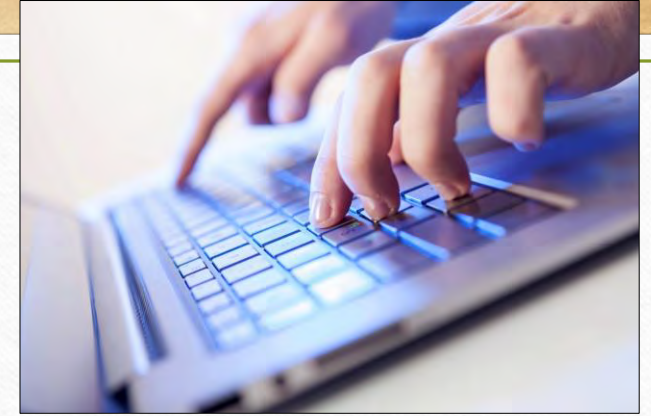
- Don't use too much text. More than two or three scrolls = too much.

- When making maps, customize pop-ups so they're accessible to viewers – no ALL CAPS.

- Think outside the box! Our goal was to use as many maps as possible (mattress bags).

- Can't directly upload a PDF, but you can use accompanying URL, like if it's on a website.

- Can't embed PowerPoint slides, but you can export to JPG or PNG and use that.

- Use Google to figure things out – photo slideshows using flickr.

More tips!

- Don't worry about intro/finale until the end. It comes easy then, & will give you work block at the start.

- Simple changes make a big impact – change the text color to stand out. We made hyperlinks a dark teal so it's easy to find where to click.

- Test it in different locations, on different devices. Ours isn't ideal on mobile. Google errors you get.

- Decide ahead of time the two places you'll store content. We had email, OneDrive, our server, flickr… it was all over, & a bit messy.

Final thoughts – big picture

- Give your team – and yourself – lots of time. This takes some work, but is worth it.

- Use this to encourage every team member to take on the side gig of photographer – phone pics are winners!

- Think visual, or something that involves lots of people.

- It's OK if you come across a project that can't be displayed in an interesting way – attorney work.

- Not every item has to be heavily interactive. Alternate short and long text; alternate interactive maps with single photos.

- Staff doing something is compelling – Children's Water Festival. HUMANIZE your government entity!

Questions?
How do you tell your story creatively?

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