So, you’re wondering if you can build a story map.

The answer is a resounding “Yes.”

If you can insert a photo in a text document, create an Internet link, or put together a Power Point presentation, you can create a story map.

What is a story map?

A story map is an interactive, multimedia tool you can use to communicate with your audience. Unlike a website that allows people to meander through your information in any direction, a story map helps you distill your message and thoughtfully guide your reader from beginning to end as you direct the flow.

Story maps can be simple or complex. You can take people on a tour of a property that has limited access, present your annual report, or animate watershed flooding predictions. Your story map will be unique to your story, your land trust, and your mission.

Do you need special knowledge before building a story map?

No. A few online tutorials, recorded webinars, and reviews of existing story maps and you will have the knowledge you need to begin. It’s a matter of knowing which tools to use, when to use them, and how to craft an effective story.

Plan with the end in mind

Most of the work needed to create a great story map happens offline. Start by defining what you want your audience to learn or do after viewing your story map. Develop a plan for the story you want to tell. Answering the questions below will help.

1) Why do you want to tell this story? Do you want to...

- take people on a virtual tour
- show them highlights of your event
- present your annual report
- build awareness about your organization
2) Who do you want to impact with this story? Is the purpose of your story map to...

- engage your members
- motivate your donors
- promote an event or activity
- recruit staff or volunteers

3) What digital assets do you have to build your story map?

- photos
- audio recordings
- maps
- illustrations
- interviews
- video clips
- animations
- quotes

4) What is your call to action? What do you want people to do...

- call your office
- contact a legislator
- make a donation
- sign up for an electronic newsletter
- write a letter to the editor
- like your page on social media

5) How will you publish or promote your story map...

- present it at a conference
- embed it in a website
- share it on social media
- send it as a link in an email
- invite a legislator or editor to view it on your website

Answering these questions before you begin will help frame your story. It will also help you choose the best template for your story map.

Choose a story map template

Esri knows that one template does not fit every story. That’s why they’ve created eight unique formats with unique functions. Select the best fit for the story you’re telling.

*Story Map Tour℠* provides the best format for photos and captions linked to an interactive map. You can use it to create an overview of hiking trails, land holdings, and other identifiable public areas.
**Story Map Journal℠** creates rich, multimedia narratives that showcase images, audio, and video components. It’s organized into sections, which are great when describing individual land projects.

**Story Map Cascade℠** allows users to create full-screen scrolling experiences. The Cascade format is versatile and allows you to jump between formats where necessary while providing smooth transitions from screen to screen.

Or, you can choose from other **Story Map templates Esri features online.**

As you think about your story, choose the appropriate format and assemble your assets. Now, you’re ready to create.

**Build your story with a reader in mind**

Sometimes it’s helpful to review other story maps that use the template you’ve chosen. Esri has made this easy by holding story-telling contests and choosing monthly winners. Look at the examples as a guide for word count, photo choice, and functionality.

Storytelling is as old as campfires and candlelight, but there are some basic guidelines to keep in mind as you write, edit, proof, and publish your story map.

**Choose a catchy title.** Who will read your story? What will tickle their interest? “Tichora Conservancy” is an adequate title, but “Explore the Treasure of Green Lake” may create more curiosity. Some people title their work at the beginning of the writing process to help them maintain focus, others let the title emerge while crafting the content.

**Become a “jargon-slayer.”** That doesn’t mean you “dumb-down” your message. On the contrary, you’ll need to distill each idea into a power-packed paragraph that an average sixth-grader can read and understand. For instance, instead of using a broad concept like “conservation,” get specific about “land and water protection.”

**Make sure you story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.** Good stories, whether long or short, form an arc with carefully defined points. Hemingway once wrote a six-word story with a well-defined arc: “For sale: baby shoes, never worn.”

If you need assistance identifying the pieces of your story, sites like Reedsy can help you identify characters and plot points as your create a logical flow.

**Call out your story’s impact.** Why did you tell the story? What do you want people to do after interacting with your words and pictures? A great story will be memorable, but memories don’t increase donations or the number of people who support your efforts.

**Craft a story that lets your reader become part of it.** Let your reader know they can do something to make a difference. Make it specific with a call to action to join your mailing list, volunteer, make a donation, or ask for more information.

Your organization’s story is important. Story maps give you a flexible communication platform to add to your toolbox.

**SOURCES:**
ESRI posts an abundance of resources on their website, storymaps.arcgis.com/en/resources/