13 October 2016

Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Curating Physical and Digital Exhibits: A Case Study on the Northwestern University Transportation Library

SPEAKERS: Roberto Sarmiento and Rachel Cole, Northwestern University Transportation Library

Best Practices and Lessons Learned for Curating Physical and Digital Exhibits: A Case Study Northwestern University Transportation Library

Rachel Cole and Roberto Sarmiento
Transportation Library, Northwestern University

Transportation Librarians Roundtable
October 13, 2016

Northwestern

Roberto Sarmiento

Head, Transportation Library

Rachel Cole

Public Services Librarian, Transportation Library

Presentation goals and format

- Share our experience/knowledge
- Inspire
- Less technical focus, perhaps a little fun
- Parts:
  - Framing NUTL
  - Physical exhibits: what we learned
  - Digital exhibits: our next frontier
  - Questions (or use chat box at any time)

Principles of NUTL Exhibits

Why exhibits?

- Required & expected
- Support Main Library programs
- Support our Center
- Highlight collection(s) or items
- PR
- Honor donors
- Drive traffic (to library, collections or website)
- Requested by masters
- Push design envelop/ raise bar
- For fun!

KAP-KAIRO

Types of NUTL exhibits

- 1 book within large exhibit
- 1 case within large exhibit
- Tabletop within NUTL
- Large multi-case, multidimensional
- Fully digital
- +15 in last 12 yrs

- Part of a team or main producer
- Solo or with partner
- Partners: staff, faculty, librarians, gov, corp, individuals, orgs, etc.
- Multi formats: paper, artifacts, video, sound & presentations

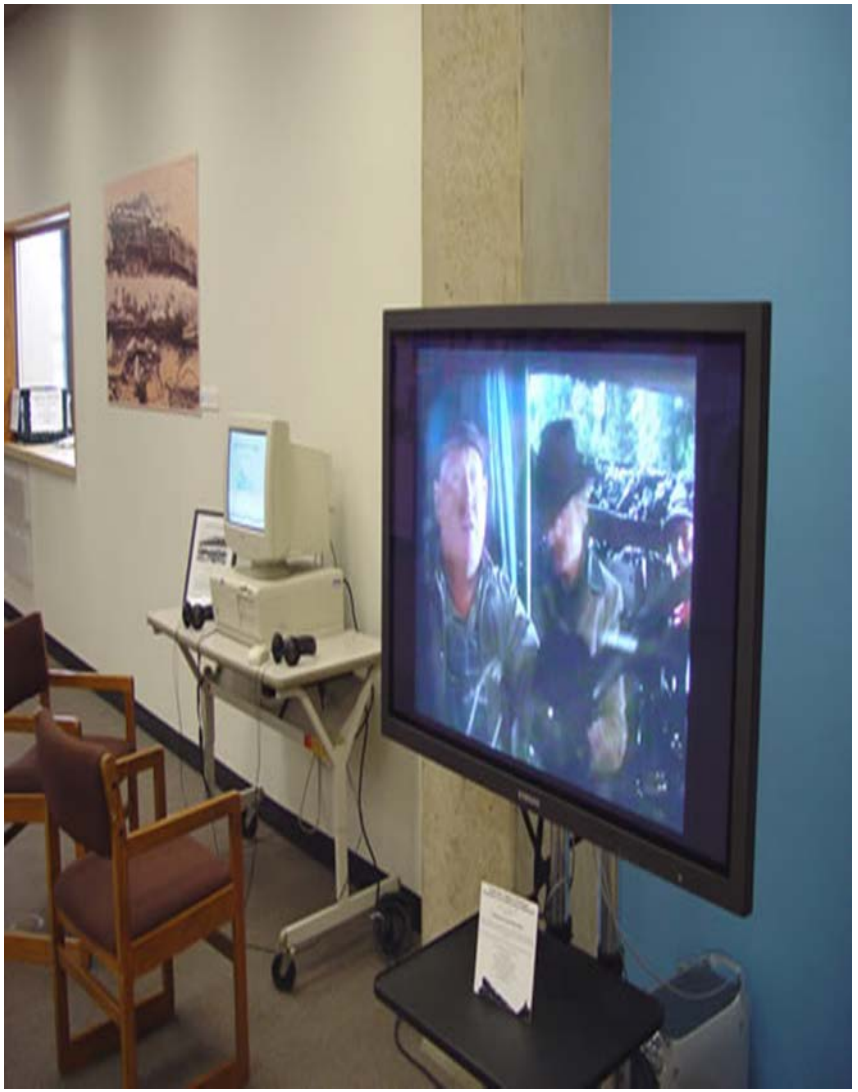
Physical Exhibits

Lessons learned: Start

- Have a solid VISION and GOALS (but prepare to be flexible)
- Make sure you'll have items and select more than you'll need
- Will need lots of time
- Create a schedule and stick to it
- Start "collecting" early
- Settle early on who's paying for what

- Know the collection well
- Look for connections, make connections, show connections
- Bring PR staff ASAP
- Line up partners early and keep them in the loop: PR, bosses, lib. staff, Center, speakers, preservation, digitization, internal/external partners, facilities, committees, etc.

Santa Fe de luxe
California
TRANS-CANADA LIMITED
TRANS-CANADA

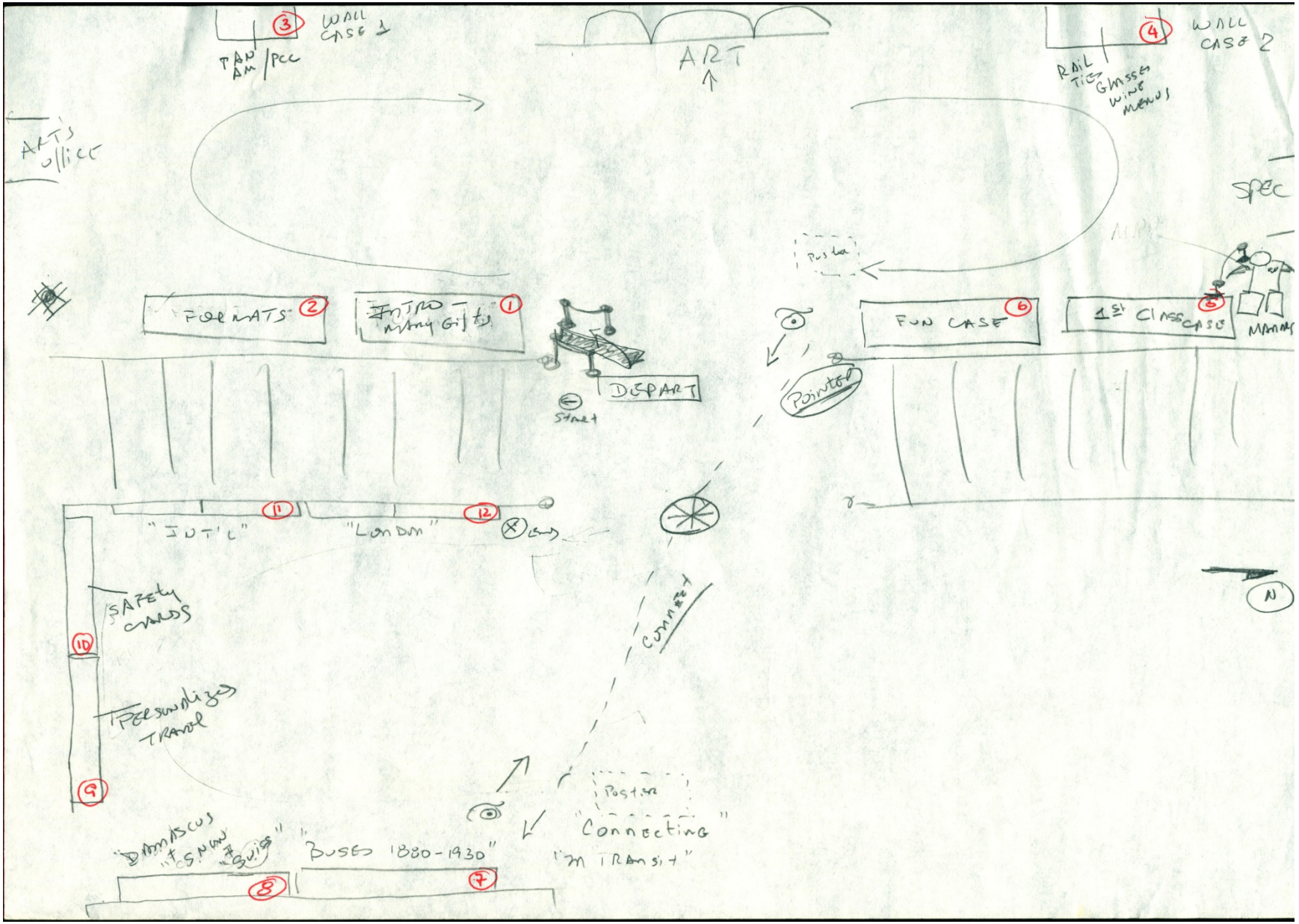


Lessons learned: Planning

- Walk the hall
- Sketch line of sights, traffic, doors, walls, etc.
- Attempt to bring exhibit out of cases: use monitors, walls, columns, ceiling, etc.

Be creative

- Develop vision/mission for each image/item in each case, wall, column, etc.
- Then, arrange cases to make visitors experience exhibit as an unfolding story
- Minimalist or stuffer?
- First do exhibit on paper
- Measure cases to create mockups
- Use replicas and/or originals to visualize cases
- Take photos of full mockups and sketch a map of cases and items within
- Print & arrange photos in order of exhibit plan (don't loose them)
- If item(s) don't "fit"…
- Label everything you use (in back)

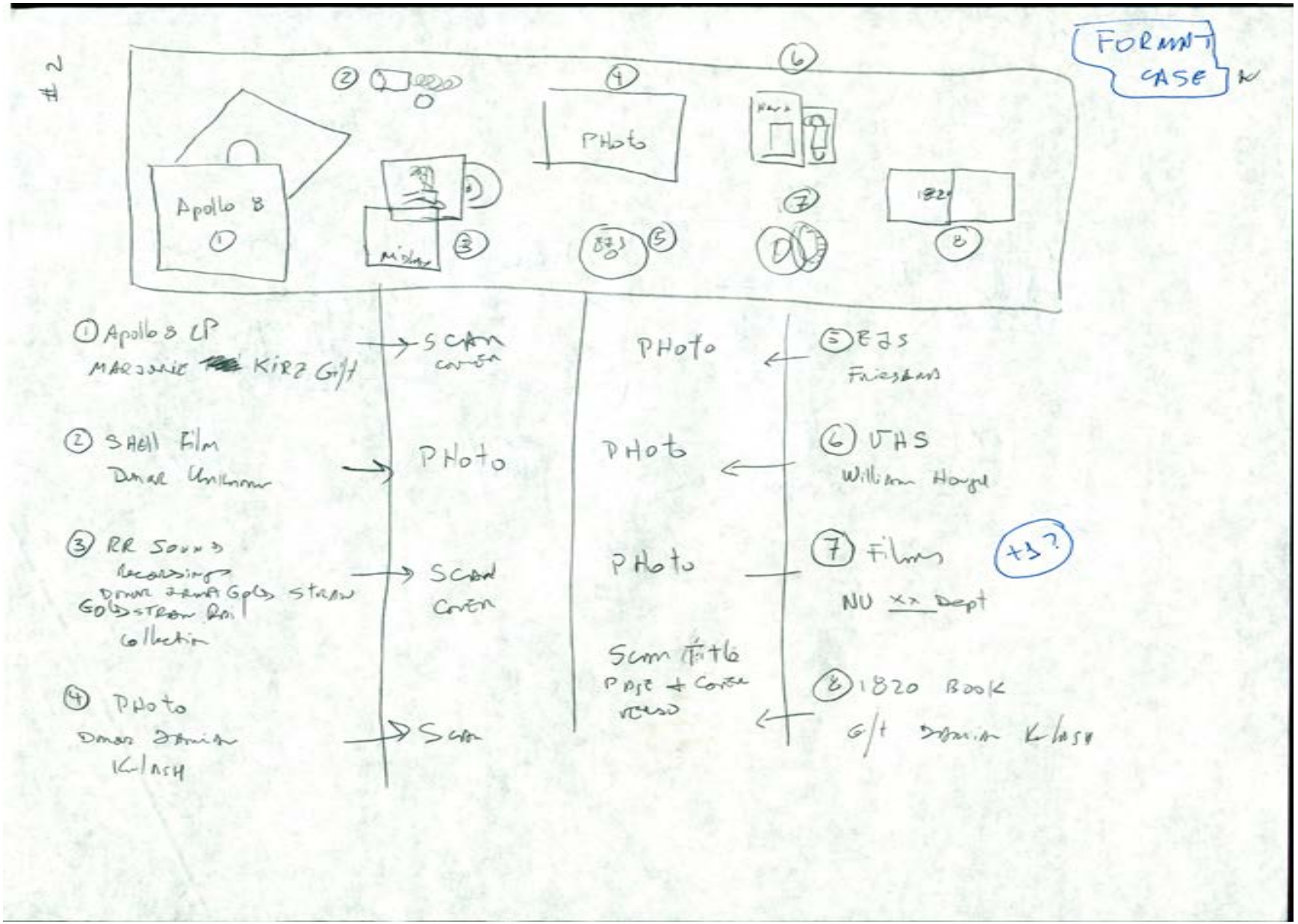

WALL CASE 1
TAN AM / PCC
ART
WALL CASE 2
RAIL TIES GLASSES WINE MENUS
ARTS office
SPEC
Poster
FORMATS
INTRO - MANY GIFTS
DEPART
START
FUN CASE
1st CLASS CASE
MANAGE
POINTER
"INT'L"
"LONDON"
END
SAFETY CARDS
PERSONALIZED TRAVEL
CONNECT
Poster
"Connecting"
"In Transit"
"DAMASCUS"
"BUSES 1880-1930"
N

MAKING
CONNECTIONS
NOW
DEPARTING
A Transportation Library Exhibit

CANAL to PANAMA CANAL
COLORING BOOK

Lessons learned: Preservation

- Assess Preservation needs early
- Digitize everything you can and more than you'll need
- Stay away from natural light, heat vents and water drips
- Do not let original papers touch
- Do not "hard" fold fabrics
- When in doubt: use replicas
- Use book cradles or replicas
- Do not use anything "permanent" on originals
- Use lots of "Velcro" and sewing pins (do not use tape)
- Use cloth (velvet) as background


#2
FORMAT CASE
Apollo 8
PHoto
1820
① Apollo 8 LP
MARJORIE KIRZ G/t
SCAN COVER
PHoto
② SHELL Film
Donor Unknown
PHoto
PHoto
③ RR SOUND
Recordings
Donor Frank Gold Straw
Goldstraw Rail
collection
SCAN COVER
PHoto
④ PHoto
Donor Damian
Kulash
SCAN
Scan Title
Page + Cover
verso
⑤ EJS
Friesland
⑥ VHS
William Hough
⑦ Films
+1?
NU xx Dept
⑧ 1820 Book
G/t Damian Kulash

APOLLO 8
Man's first journey to the moon
EXHIBITIONIST ENGINES
NEW MEXICO

Lessons learned: Mounting

- Spend time on “talking exhibit” to refine message
- Develop a compelling “story” and become a good storyteller
- Make the story personal, connect with visitors
- Write down good sound bytes from “talking exhibits” to use as text for labels, captions, articles, etc.
- Edit, edit, edit…be concise
- Labels: attractive, concise, consistent and correct credits
- Listen to advice, but be firm
- Be prepared for changes
- Exhibit poster MUST match your vision
- PR the heck out of it!
- Provide group & individual tours
- Ask for feedback
- Make extra sure you thank everyone. It takes a village!

I.C.C.TRAMS
CORONATION
London's Railways

Lessons learned: Afterwards

- How not to make it ephemeral:
  - Securely archive produced slide shows, photographs, videos, sound files, etc.
  - Keep posters as decorations (Better: gift them to partners)
  - Re-use images, etc.
  - Do TLR!
- Save all emails
- Save all plans, photos, notes, etc.
- Do a post-mortem with team, be honest
- Keep notes of what worked or didn't
- Plan to raise the bar higher next time

Lessons learned: Things do go south

- Everything can and may go south
- “Offensive” content
- “Missing” research
- Less than perfect partners
- Hijacking attempts
- Copyright
- Fighting the Man

“Success has many fathers,

Failure only one”

Chicago Police Doll
WARNING
The Perspective of Playthings
A thorough collection of historical artifacts often contains unconventional, unpredictable and sometimes downright amusing perspectives. The items in this case come from many donors and collectors, representing the playful ways we can capture the history of travel and commemorate public fascination with the institutions that transport goods and people safely.
Chicago Police Department doll, n.d.
Donor Unknown
Playing cards, n.d.
The Lawrence M. Nagin Airline Menu and Memorabilia Collection
Golf balls, n.d.
The Lawrence M. Nagin Airline Menu and Memorabilia Collection
Toy buses, n.d.
The William Luke Transportation Collection

Vin Fiz
Necktie, n.d.
William A. Luke, a life-long transportation enthusiast and former bus industry executive, founded BUSRide Magazine in 1983. His donated collection consists of more than 1,000 local transit maps, travel tickets, timetables, and unique materials such as these necktie, issued as part of a uniform for various bus lines.
The William Luke Transportation Collection
Vin Fiz Wine, mid-20th Century
The Art of Promotion
Many artifacts of transportation history show companies promoting a brand, projecting an image, selling a product, or providing travelers with souvenirs of their experience. This case is filled with many of the unusual items that dot the Transportation Library, from clever multi-purpose menus to the whimsical but tidy neckties issued to professional bus drivers.

Final takeaways

- Have a vision
- Give yourself and partners lots of time
- Know the collection
- Tell a story that connects
- Document the plan
- Be creative, push the envelop
- PR, PR, PR
- Have fun

Online Exhibits

Why Online?

- Increased reach
- Longer lifespan
- Interactivity
- Direct links to collection, reading lists
- Space considerations

Exhibition Policy

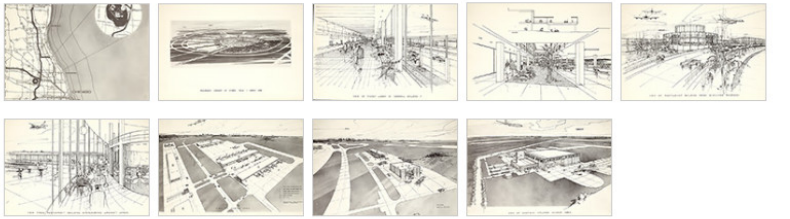
Transportation Library exhibitions will use our collections to tell stories that inform and inspire exploration and research from Northwestern University students, faculty, and staff, as well as the transportation community and audiences worldwide.

Goals

- Bringing awareness to our unique collections—both in the NU community and with a broader reach
- Creating a semi-permanent resource that promotes user access, research, and education
- Making connections between items from diverse areas of the collection in order to present materials to users in a new light
- Encouraging engagement, interaction, and conversations among our users

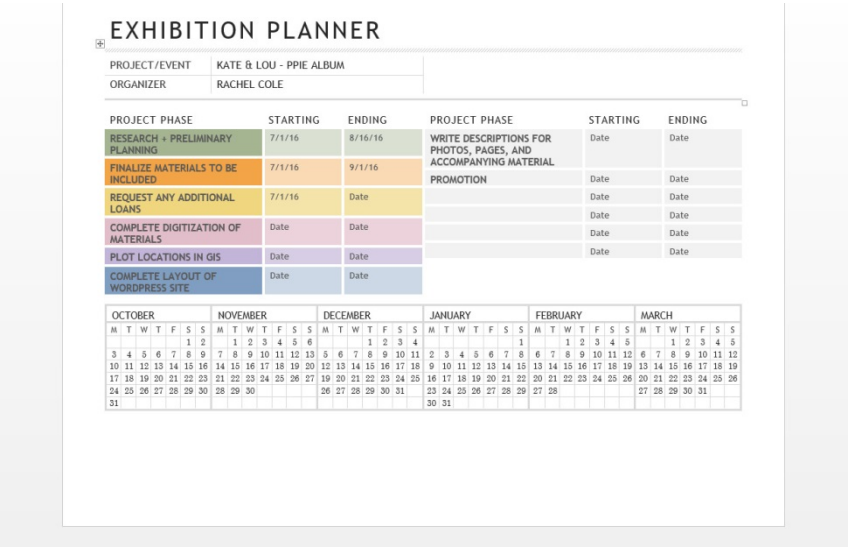
Images from Master Plan of Chicago Orchard (Douglas) Airport

Images from Chicago O'Hare International Airport Engineering Report: First Stage Development Program



Planning

- Proposal
- Selection of material
- Writing labels
- Digitization
- Design of site
- Review
- Promotion
- Assessment



EXHIBITION PLANNER

PROJECT/EVENT	KATE & LOU - PPIE ALBUM
ORGANIZER	RACHEL COLE

PROJECT PHASE	STARTING	ENDING
RESEARCH + PRELIMINARY PLANNING	7/1/16	8/16/16
FINALIZE MATERIALS TO BE INCLUDED	7/1/16	9/1/16
REQUEST ANY ADDITIONAL LOANS	7/1/16	Date
COMPLETE DIGITIZATION OF MATERIALS	Date	Date
PLOT LOCATIONS IN GIS	Date	Date
COMPLETE LAYOUT OF WORDPRESS SITE	Date	Date

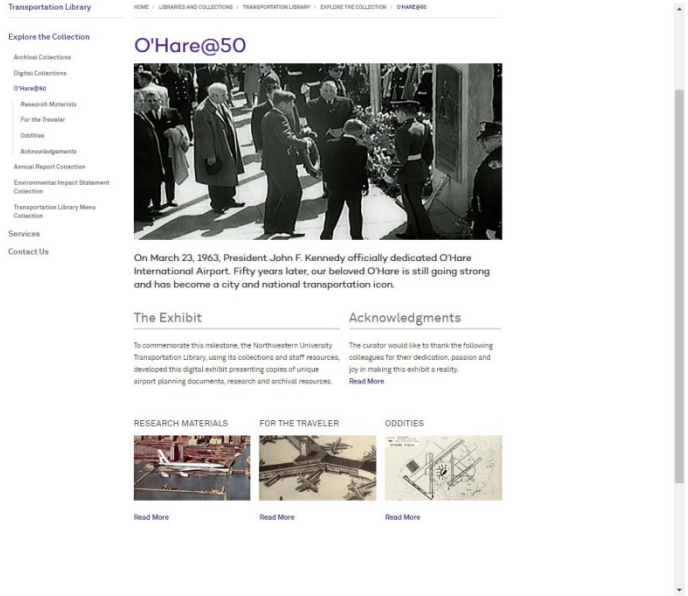
PROJECT PHASE	STARTING	ENDING
WRITE DESCRIPTIONS FOR PHOTOS, PAGES, AND ACCOMPANYING MATERIAL	Date	Date
PROMOTION	Date	Date
	Date	Date
	Date	Date
	Date	Date
	Date	Date

OCTOBER							NOVEMBER							DECEMBER							JANUARY							FEBRUARY							MARCH						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S
					1	2		1	2	3	4	5	6				1	2	3	4							1			1	2	3	4	5			1	2	3	4	5
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	28	29	30					26	27	28	29	30	31		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	27	28							27	28	29	30	31		
31																					30	31																			

Content

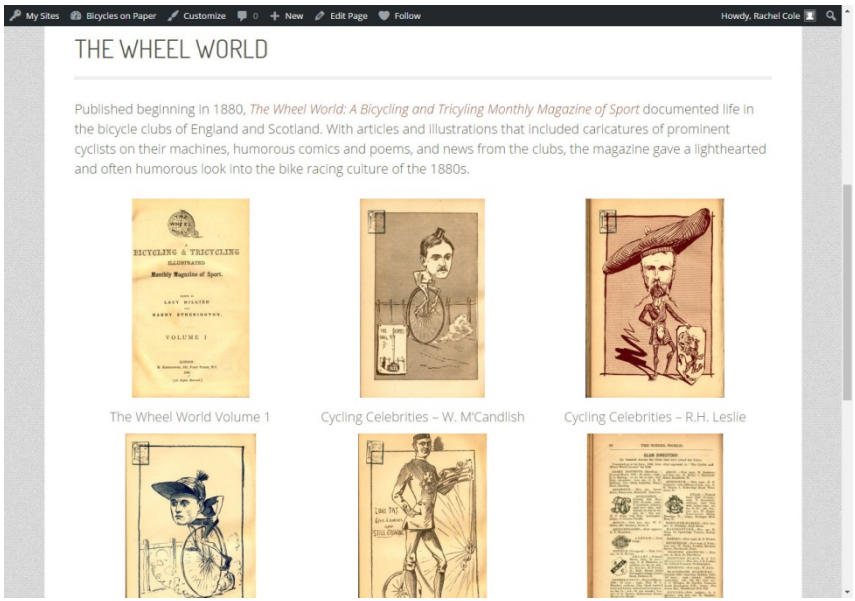
Laid out in our exhibition policy

- All exhibitions will be based on subjects related to transportation
- Emphasize primary sources
  - Tell a story that emphasizes the unique nature of your collections
- Compelling narrative
  - Important to select visually appealing content, but that should be secondary to your exhibit's goals
- Making connections



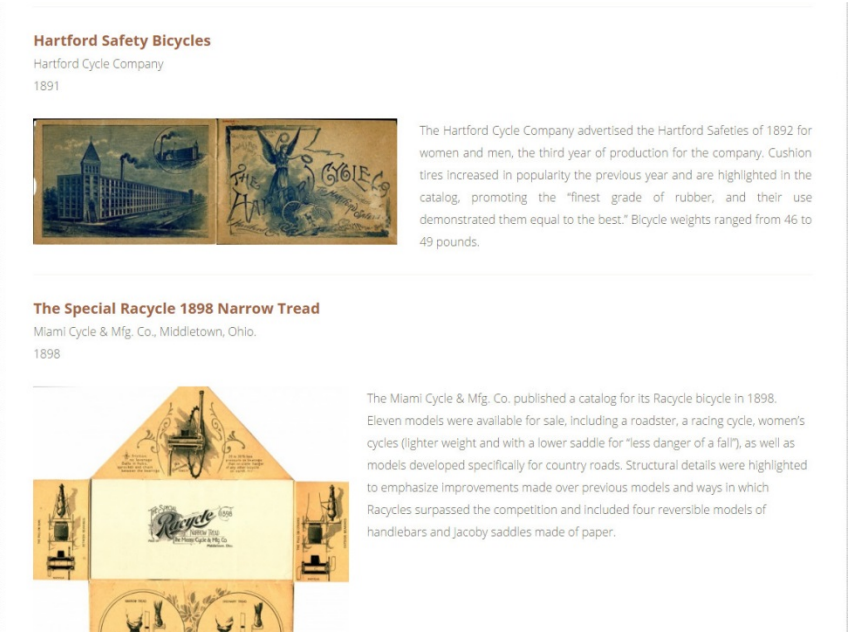
Labels

- Your content has a story to tell—but it can't speak for itself.
- Labels should:
  - Provide context
  - Be concise
  - Have a consistent tone
  - Be easy to follow
- Written for the general public
  - Not jargon
  - Assume that your readers have no background in the area
- Balance between interesting and educational



Labels

- **Introductory text**
  - Landing page: overview of exhibition, reasons for putting it together. background.
- **Section text**
  - On each page of the exhibition, a brief statement of what the section is about
- **Image text**
  - Captions for each image.
  - Citation information, description of what they're seeing.
  - Link to materials in catalog and full text if available.

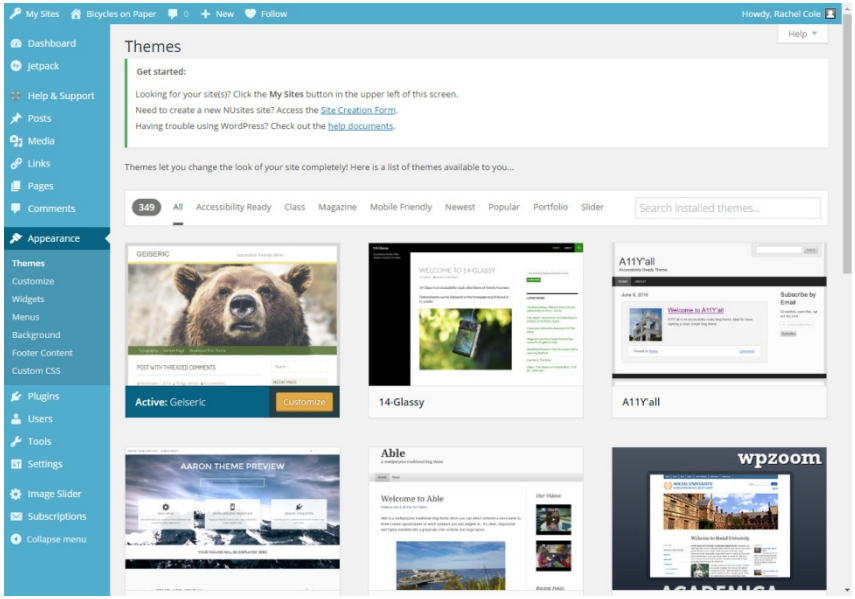


Layout

- Look at each page like a case in a physical exhibit
- Page layout may largely depend on the web design software template used
- Organizing offline
  - Index cards

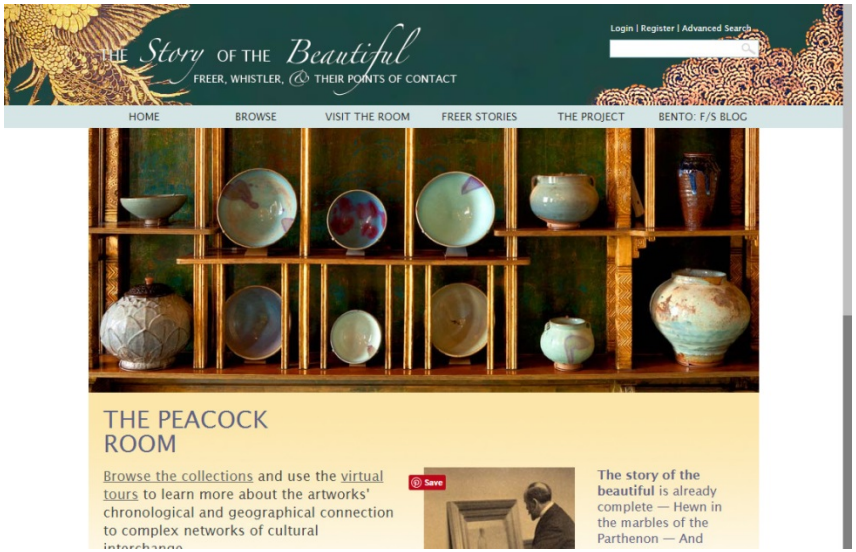
WordPress

- Design tool for non-designers
- Basic templates for publishing online—can be very prescriptive
- For examples: see WordPress showcase
- Designed for the general public
- Free versions
  - Might include ads
- Paid versions
  - Range of plans
  - More control
  - Unique domain names
  - Additional features
- Helps to have HTML/CSS background to customize



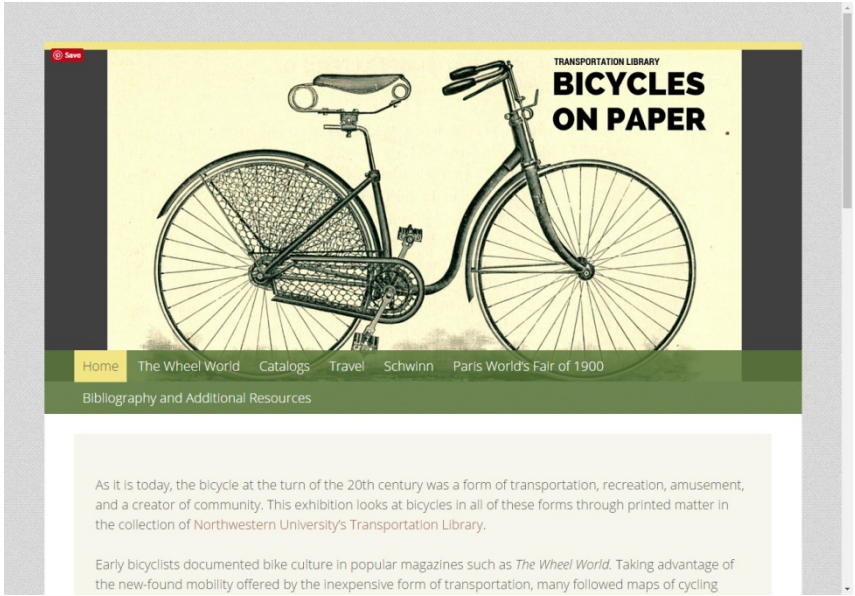
Omeka

- Free, open-source tool
- Designed with scholars, librarians, museum professionals, archivists in mind
- Controlled vocabularies
  - LC Subject Heading plugin



Canva

- A design tool for non-designers
- Create headers, banners, logos, and promotional materials
- Free account available at canva.com



Copyright

- Fair Use
  - Checklist from Columbia University
    - Purpose
    - Nature
    - Amount
    - Effect
- Is there an expert at your institution? Use them!

Fair Use Checklist
Copyright Advisory Office
Columbia University Libraries
Kenneth D. Crews, Director
http://copyright.columbia.edu

Name: _____

Institution: _____

Project: _____

Date: _____

Prepared by: _____

Purpose

Favoring Fair Use

- ☐ Teaching (including multiple copies for classroom use)
- ☐ Research
- ☐ Scholarship
- ☐ Nonprofit educational institution
- ☐ Criticism
- ☐ Comment
- ☐ News reporting
- ☐ Transformative or productive use (changes the work for new utility)
- ☐ Restricted access (to students or other appropriate group)
- ☐ Parody

Opposing Fair Use

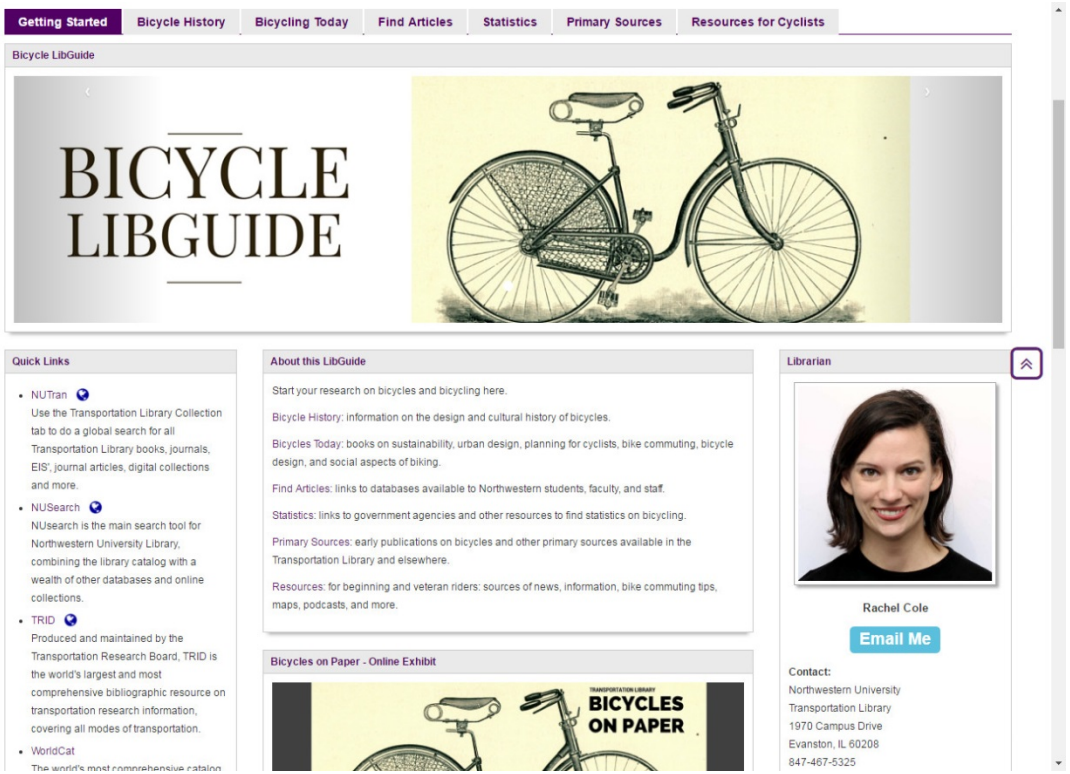
- ☐ Commercial activity
- ☐ Profiting from the use
- ☐ Entertainment
- ☐ Bad-faith behavior
- ☐ Denying credit to original author

A unique case…

Copyright implications for historical newspaper advertisements published in a proprietary database?

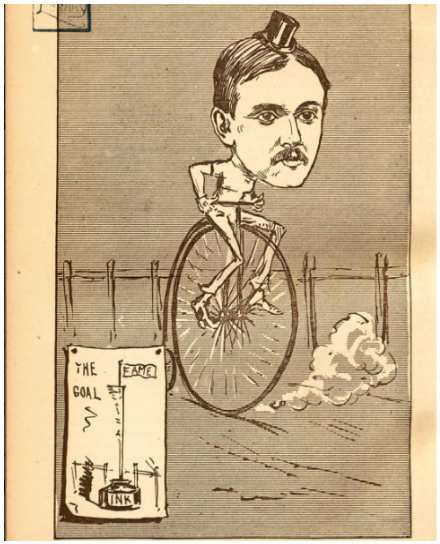
The site is finished: now what?

1. Review
2. Promote
3. Assess
4. Maintain
5. Continue to Connect



Promoting the Exhibit

- Social Media
- TLRs
- Institutional PR
- Link on library's webpage
- Press Releases
- Department newsletters
- Listservs
- Tie-Ins
- Add links in Wikipedia where relevant



transportationlibrary

84 likes 14w

transportationlibrary This caricature of William McCandlish is just one of many from the publication The Wheel World, an illustrated monthly magazine of bicycling and tricycling, published in London in the 1880s. Each issue highlighted a cycling celebrity from the bicycle clubs and included lighthearted stories, inside jokes, and news from the bicycle clubs.
The Wheel World is featured in our new online exhibition Bicycles on Paper (http://bit.ly/NUBikes), which focuses on bicycle culture, design, and transportation at the turn of the 20th century.
#librariesofinstagram #library #specialcollections #magazine #1880s #1883 #cycling #bicycling #cycle #bicycle #thewheelworld #illustration #caricature #cyclist #bicyclist #bicyclesinthelibrary #bikelife

Add a comment...

GrowSmart Maine @growsmartmaine · Jun 28
Bicycles on Paper. What fun - had to pass it along!
sites.northwestern.edu/bicycles/

1 1

Frank Valadez @allisvanityfv · Jun 21
New online exhibit **Bicycles on Paper** from @NU_LIBRARY @LeTour @velonews @BicyclingMag @Cyclingnewsfeed @Gazzetta_it
ow.ly/mugn301vmVh

NUTC and 2 others liked

Transportation Lib @TranLibraryNU · Jun 10
Bicycles on Paper: a mini-exhibit to celebrate the #Bike Commuter Challenge:
sites.northwestern.edu/bicycles/ #cycling

1 4

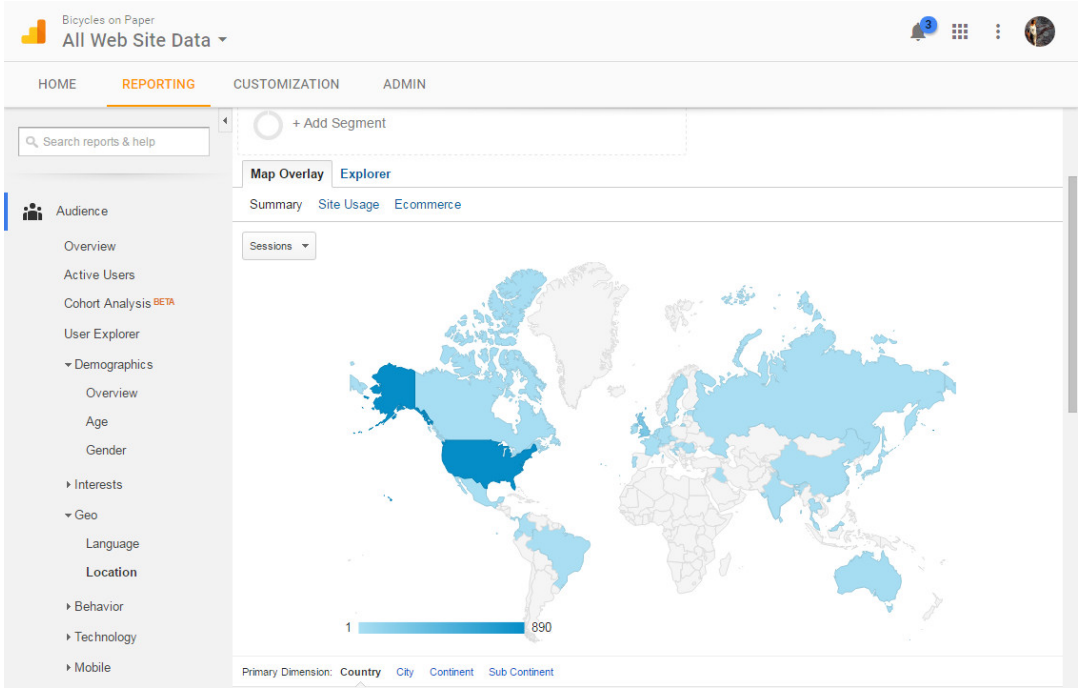
Assessing the Exhibit

Tools include Google Analytics

- Built in to WordPress
- Accessible for any website

User feedback

- Email, phone, in person
- Requests for information
- Build in a contact form
- Contributions of knowledge



Looking Forward

- How can we continue to innovate?
- Crowdsourcing
- Other departments' contributions
- Layers of knowledge
  - GIS
  - Data, multimedia, images, collections.

Additional Resources

- Digital Exhibits at Northwestern: http://www.library.northwestern.edu/libraries-collections/university-archives/digital-exhibits.html
- Columbia University Copyright office: https://copyright.columbia.edu/
- National Association for Museum Exhibition (NAME): http://name-aam.org/
- Creating Online Exhibits – Lourdes Santamaria-Wheeler: http://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/02/27/88/00001/creating_online_exhibits_TBLC.pdf
- Omeka: https://omeka.org/
- WordPress: https://wordpress.com/
- Canva: https://www.canva.com/
- Story Maps: https://storymaps.arcgis.com/en/