

Expense or Essential Investment?

Looking at the value of GIS training

By Suzanne Boden, Esri Training Services

Given what seems like a constant stream of conflicting economic news, it's not surprising that some organizations have a hunkered-down, wait-it-out mentality. Scrutinizing purchase requests and paring budgets to essential spending is the fiscally responsible way to operate these days. However, it begs the question, though: What is "essential spending"?

Howard Community College in Columbia, Maryland, offers customized training for business and work force development. It cites research and benefits to make the case that training is essential spending and posit that by investing in training, organizations will see returns in a variety of areas.

Employee Performance—Improvements in productivity, morale, motivation, and problem-solving skills accrue from training.

Employee Retention—Employees that feel valued and productive are less likely to leave. Hiring and training new employees is expensive and time-consuming.

Cost Savings—Trained employees make fewer mistakes. This results in less duplication of effort. Employees can do more work in less time than untrained employees and require less supervision.

Increased Profits—The less time managers spend answering employee questions about how to complete tasks, the more time managers have to focus on customer management, new revenue opportunities, and more efficient ways to do business—items that increase profits. Increased customer satisfaction resulting from higher-quality work produced by trained employees also helps retain existing customers and win new ones.

In many ways, the benefits of GIS mirror those of training. Improved productivity, operational efficiencies, problem solving, and business decision making are important reasons organizations invest in GIS technology. It's not a stretch, then, to say that investing in training is essential to realize the full benefits of GIS. The staff who create, manage, and use the GIS data, maps, and

apps are contributing to the success of the organization as a whole. To realize the greatest returns from a GIS investment, staff must understand capabilities (and constraints), efficient workflows, and best practices to achieve the desired results.

As the end of the year approaches, most organizations are well into 2012 budget planning. Next year's economic forecast is uncertain, but cost consciousness will remain. There are two Esri training solutions that can help organizations get the most value while maximizing the benefits from training investment: the Virtual Campus Annual User License and the Esri Training Pass.

Virtual Campus Annual User License

A Virtual Campus Annual User License provides one year of organization-wide access to the full catalog of Esri-authored web courses at a reduced price. Web courses are a convenient way to learn a variety of topics related to GIS, ArcGIS, and technologies such as Python scripting. Because courses are available 24/7, employees can take training during downtime or when they need to prepare for new projects.

While valuable to help GIS staff keep their skills up-to-date, web courses can also be a useful training option for knowledge and administrative workers who have no GIS experience. In just a few hours, these workers can expand their skill sets and be empowered to contribute more to the organization's bottom line.

Mark Nowak, GIS manager at the City of Dover, Delaware, is taking advantage of the city's Annual User License to help non-GIS staff develop new skills. "One office assistant was able to pull occupied and vacant mobile home data for a recycling initiative from a program originally created for permitting," Nowak said. "I was surprised with how much she had learned. When I asked her to perform a task, she was able to do it without asking for help."

Esri Training Pass

The Esri Training Pass is the newest way to purchase training from Esri. As with a Virtual Campus Annual User License, it is purchased once and then used to train as many as needed. With a Training Pass, purchase the number of training days needed and redeem them throughout the term for any combination of instructor-led training, client coaching services, and Virtual Campus Annual User Licenses.

For managers, one of the beauties of the Training Pass is that it eliminates the hassle of dealing with individual purchase approvals throughout the year. With training days in place, managers can provide access to training as it is needed—to support staff development plans, prepare key staff for upcoming projects, onboard new employees, and respond agilely to those executive mandates for new GIS products or applications that crop up from time to time.

So there's reason for optimism as the new year approaches. By demonstrating that training bolsters the bottom line, even the most cost-conscious executive can be persuaded that GIS training is an essential investment, one that will reap dividends throughout the fiscal year and beyond.



↑ ArcGIS 10 web courses feature demos, graphic slide shows, and interactive activities designed to reinforce key concepts; are shorter (about three hours); and incorporate adult learning principles that emphasize problem solving and applying the software to complete realistic workflows.