

# The Most Important Part of a GIS

Make sure staff have the right skills with a training plan

People are the key to a complete and successful GIS solution. It is vital to invest in training staff members, especially in this uncertain economy. As a wise manager once said, "One thing worse than training staff members and having them leave is not training them and having them stay."

Most organizations put a lot of time and effort into planning for GIS software and hardware acquisitions. However, the same effort is not always put into building a training plan. The best planned software and hardware solution will not achieve its full potential unless staff receive proper training at the right time. Unfortunately, training is sometimes a last-minute decision when end-of-budget-cycle money becomes available.

Having a training plan in place is a great way to define an organization's training needs and provide a means of reaching the ultimate GIS goals. A training plan is a living document that should be revisited on a regular basis. Its effectiveness should be evaluated by

looking at job performance indicators. The process of building a training plan identifies and documents organizational knowledge and capabilities and the skills required to perform necessary GIS tasks. Comparing current knowledge and skills with required skills will identify any skills that should be acquired through training.

ESRI built an education team focused on helping make software users successful. Because not everyone learns in the same way, a variety of training formats are available.

"The biggest benefit from ESRI training is being able to learn from ESRI professionals. With ESRI training, you have fully qualified instructors who can answer most of your questions on the spot or are in the pipeline to get you answers if they aren't immediately known," said Steve Holmes, GIS manager for the City of Loveland, Colorado.

Once a training plan is complete, it can be included as a formal expenditure in the enterprise implementation. This will help

ensure that money for training is available. After the training is complete, the training plan can be used to validate the investment as well as demonstrate the training effectiveness. Showing that training has improved staff GIS capabilities will help with the approval of future training.

Organizations can develop effective training plans with ESRI's training sales consultants. These consultants are available through regional offices to assist customers with their training needs. Nationwide, there are 11 training sales consultants with regional government and other industry-specific knowledge. Customers are paired with a consultant who focuses on their geography and industry. This assistance can be as simple as suggesting a class or as complex as creating an entire training plan for a large organization.

A powerful tool used by the consultant is the comprehensive training plan. This document outlines 12 GIS job roles common to many organizations and suggests instructor-led and Web-based training for each. This document can be used by organizations to build a training plan, or it can be used by the consultant to build a customized training plan.

When building a customized training plan, the consultant guides the organization through the planning process and helps identify GIS roles filled by staff members and the skills they will require. Once the skills and roles have been identified, the consultant can help perform a gap analysis by comparing staff skills and experience against the tasks that must be performed. Customers will rank tasks according to importance and time sensitivity. This will help ensure that the necessary training is prioritized and timed appropriately.

Once the consultant understands what customers want from GIS and identifies the most effective training solutions, the first iteration of an organization's training plan can be completed. A training plan will document the training necessary for each GIS-related job role or workflow, assist in budgeting and planning for training needs, and provide a long-term plan for growing the GIS skill set of an organization's staff members.

Training sales consultant assistance is offered by ESRI at no charge. More information on this service is available from an organization's ESRI account manager or regional office.

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