

STORIES FROM THE ROAD: Embedding a Librarian with an Immersive Leadership Development Travel Experience

Great Lakes Leadership Academy



The Great Lakes Leadership Academy (GLAA) is a Michigan State University Extension program with a mission to promote positive change, economic vitality, and resource conservation and enhance the quality of life in Michigan by encouraging leadership for the common good.



The GLLA's flagship **Leadership Advancement Program (LAP)** follows a rigorous curriculum over the course of a full calendar year that includes in-person and virtual course work, group research projects, and regional and international immersive learning travel experiences. Each regional experience visited a different part of Michigan and focused on one of three course themes:



- ♦ West Central Michigan, June 24–26:
Agriculture and Food Systems
- ♦ Detroit, August 5–7:
Community Development
- ♦ Upper Peninsula, September 9–11:
Natural Resources

The regional experiences are fully immersive, combining hands-on field experiences with local speakers and expert panel presentations to illuminate the complex and interconnected nature of the issues surrounding agricultural policy and farm practice, poverty and community development, and managing natural resources.



DETROIT

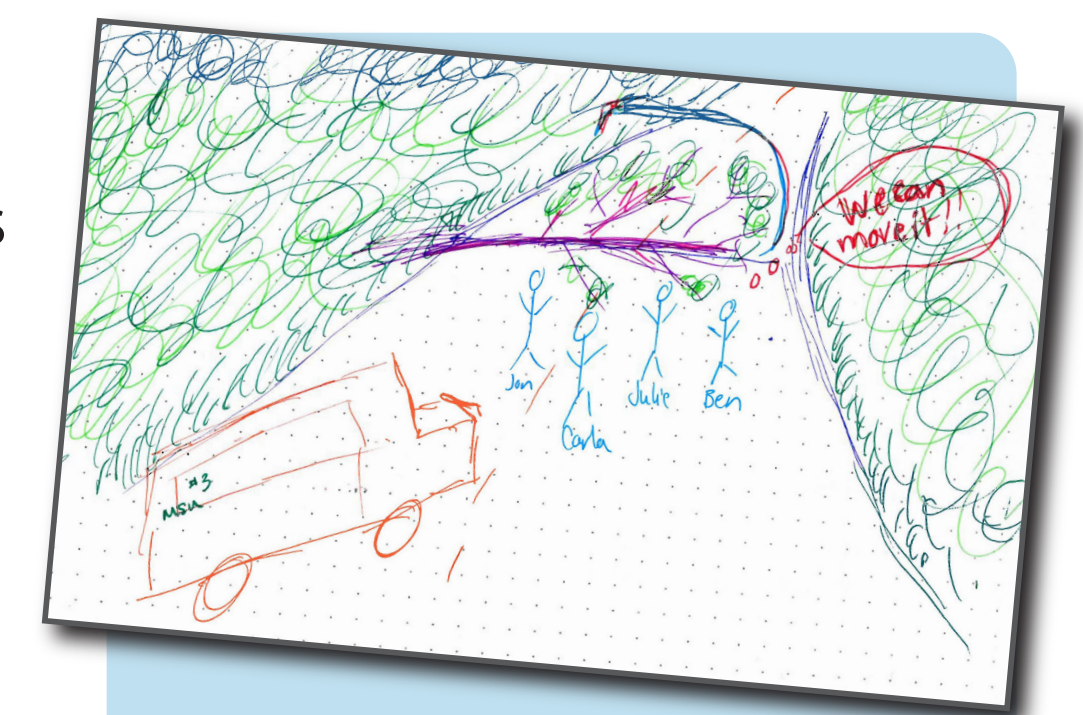


WEST CENTRAL

The challenge is, from a storytelling perspective, how can GLLA effectively communicate the depth and breadth of their programmatic experiences to donors and future cohort applicants?

I embedded with GLLA to support the regional travel experiences by providing technical and audio-visual support for speakers, driving a program van, and most importantly, by serving as a travel documentarian.

I collected materials from each host location, recorded relevant quotes from speakers and participants, and took copious notes describing all each activity.



A collaborative journal entry.

I then used ESRI StoryMaps software to synthesize my materials with photographs and videos provided by GLLA staff and participants into a coherent recollection of each experience.

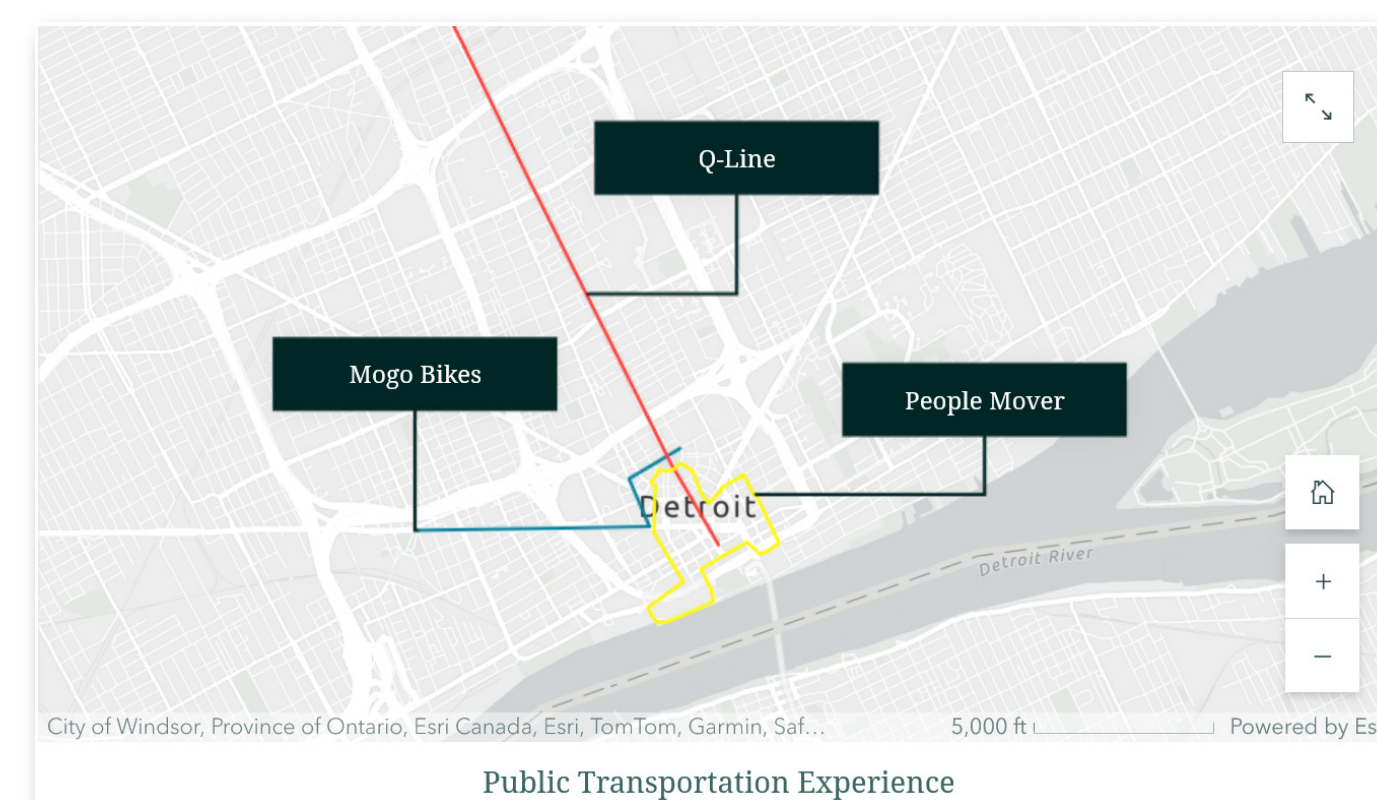
"I asked a couple of questions...essentially asking different versions of 'why do what you do?' Her response was that 'I was born here and our cemetery is here.' Wow – this resonated more with me than anything else I'd heard. Knowing this I understood why a person would stay and fight. In my work I am now motivated to seek out the people with a family cemetery in the area and find out what they think. The power of story telling!!"

Participant quote from collective journal.

Storytelling with StoryMaps

StoryMaps is a powerful digital storytelling tool that is capable of synthesizing multiple forms of information and media into a coherent narrative.

As its name implies, **mapping is fully integrated** into StoryMaps and I was able to highlight the locations of all three regional travel experiences in relation to each other and the rest of the state. The foundation of my narrative is text, with **supplemental material in the form of photographs, scanned document images, and video clips.** The multimedia content was created by LAP staff, including a photography and videography intern, as well as members of the LAP cohort. Cohort members also took turns taking notes and recording their thoughts in a **shared journal**, which was then digitized to allow for excerpts to be included in the StoryMap.



The drawbacks to using StoryMaps stem primarily from its **proprietary nature.** Although a basic free version exists, access to the premium software package requires a yearly subscription fee. I was able to access the program using the MSU institutional site license, but not all institutions will provide

access and free alternatives might be a viable option for some. The StoryMaps are also **hosted on a StoryMaps server**, and I have been unable to find a way to transfer the content to local MSU servers for preservation. Finally, **certain common file types are not compatible**, including HEIF files created by newer mobile phones, and such files had to be converted to JPEG or another compatible type.

Results

The GLLA regional travel experience StoryMap is not yet complete, as the final experience concluded on September 11, 2024. But **StoryMaps has already proven to be well suited for capturing the wide range of activities undertaken by the cohort.** The text, which describes the daily activities in a chronological order, is interwoven with photos, videos, and journal excerpts for a digital facsimile of a field experience. GLLA staff are pleased with the results so far and are looking forward to having the final product to share with donors, future program participants, and with the current cohort as a digital keepsake documenting their experiences together.



Technological innovation has the potential to increase efficiency and automate work, but it requires a large investment in new equipment and systems. Agriculture is "one of the last industries to get the big tech boom."



Great Lakes Leadership Academy Leadership Advancement Program StoryMap

<https://arcg.is/fCSWy1>

MSU Library's Digital Scholarship Lab Project Incubator

I was selected for the documentarian role due to my previous experience with storytelling through StoryMaps. Following an archival research project on the history of the Red Cedar River, which flows through the heart of MSU's campus, I participated in a the MSU Library's Digital Scholarship Lab's Project Incubator to develop the skills create a StoryMap to share my research on the history of the river. I used the same tools and techniques to tell the GLLA regional travel experience stories.