

Why Are You Making Your Map?

What are you trying to say with your map? Who are you saying it to? What do they know? How will they use it? Are they going to see it on a computer, paper, poster, or projected on a screen during a presentation? Careful consideration of these issues will guide the making of your map and will produce a map that more effectively accomplishes what you want it to do.

1

Why are you making your map?

Prior to making a map, clarify your intent: intent shapes design.

2

Who is your map for?

Knowing the intended audience for your map will help you design it.

3

What is the final medium?

The final form of your map - paper, projected, etc. - will affect its design.

4

Evaluating your map

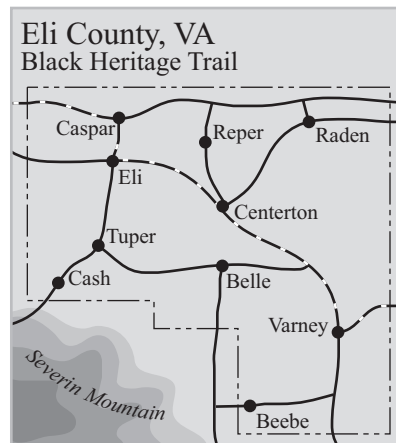
Evaluation plays a useful role in making maps.

1 Why are you making your map?

Prior to making a map, clarify your intent. Simply writing out the purpose of the map prior to making it will clarify goals; help determine relevant data, map design, and symbolization choices; and will lead to a better map.

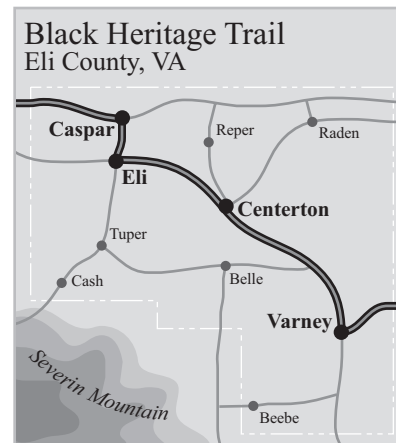
What the map is for: A map showing a proposed Black Heritage Trail in Eli County, VA. The map is the visual centerpiece of a proposal for grants to develop the trail and its associated sites, and must visually tantalize granting agencies.

Poor:



- ✓ title suggests county rather than trail as primary subject of the map.
- ✓ hard to figure out where the trail is.
- ✓ cities and roads along trail not visually different from other cities and roads.
- ✓ little visual depth to the map: trail is not visually prominent.

Good:



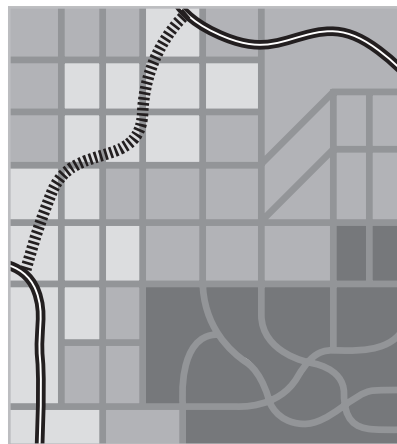
- ✓ title suggests trail as primary subject of the map.
- ✓ easy to see the trail.
- ✓ cities and roads along trail are visually prominent.
- ✓ meaningful visual depth to the map: trail is visually prominent.

Different goals call for different maps! Frequently the quality of a map is a matter of perspective, not design. This is because a map is a statement locating facts, and people tend to select the facts that make their case. That's what the map is for: to make their case.

Consider the examples below. A proposed connector road (dashed black) cuts through a city. Different groups create equally good maps to articulate their different perspectives on the proposed route. Though the maps may seem polemical, isolating the facts each presents is useful in focusing debate.

Goal: The County Chamber of Commerce shows the shortest and least costly route for the connector. They focus on property values:

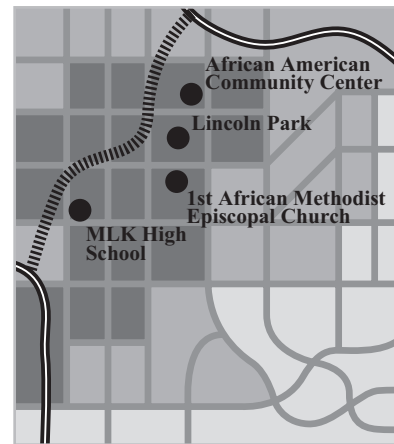
Good:



Property Values: ■ high ■ med. ■ low

Goal: A community group contends the connector will devastate the African American community by cutting it in half:

Good:



% African Amer: ■ high ■ med. ■ low

Goal: A historical preservation group shows that historical properties in a historical district will be adversely affected:

Good:



% Historical Buildings: ■ high ■ med. ■ low

Goal: The Oberlin Business Association argues the proposed road will siphon traffic and thus business away from their members:

Good:



Density of Businesses: ■ high ■ med. ■ low

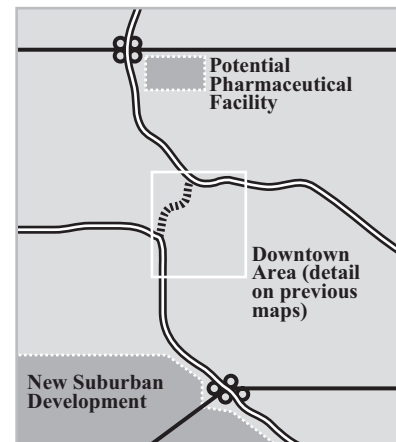
Goal: An environmental group shows how the proposed connector violates the city's long-standing policy of avoiding road construction in floodplains:

Good:



Goal: A newspaper story changes the scale to show that the County Chamber of Commerce wants the connector as part of an incentive package to attract a pharmaceutical firm to a suburban development. Most of the employees for the new facility would come from the suburbs south of the city:

Good:

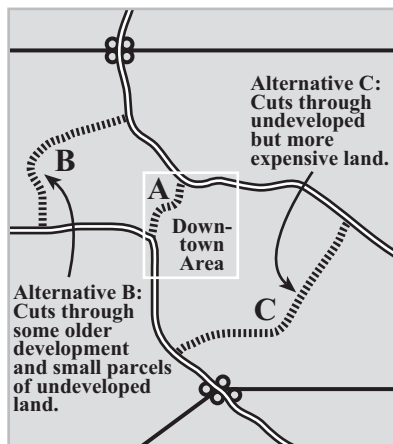


Different goals produce different maps! The eight maps involved in this debate over the location of the connector are all good. Each is clear. Each makes its point with accurate data in a way that is easy to read and understand. What makes the maps different is the different purposes each was designed to serve. It is this purpose that drove the selection of facts, and these facts that dictated the design and scale.

Goal: Due to historical and environmental concerns with the proposed connector, and the embarrassing newspaper article, the planning department is asked to develop two alternative options. When these alternatives are mapped, they raise additional concerns (and maps):

Goal: Alternative B, while more costly than A, is cheaper than C (which passes through property owned by influential developers who don't favor the connector). B also has a lower environmental impact and does not adversely affect any organized social groups or business interests.

Good:



Good:

