

# Creating Thematic Maps

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## **Objective**

The objective of this activity is to create maps that depict information about a topic or theme of interest in an easy to understand and visually appealing manner. Interesting and intuitive thematic maps are an effective visual aid for reinforcing key concepts from the Consolidated Plan narrative and for soliciting directed feedback.

## **Summary**

Thematic maps display data about a topic or theme of interest occurring within the boundaries of selected geographic areas, such as census tracts or counties (for example, the distribution of income within a jurisdiction's boundaries). The data are typically grouped into a number of value categories and symbolized with distinct colors to represent each category.

Thematic maps are an effective visual aid for presenting community data in an intuitive way, particularly for persons who are not subject matter experts. Maps can quickly show the geographic concentration of housing and economic conditions, community resources, and infrastructure important to the Consolidated Plan process. Once created, maps are easily re-usable in a variety of formats.

Maps can be employed in slideshow and printed presentations, within Consolidated Planning publications, and on a website. Maps can also be used as a presentation aid in public meetings. Presenting maps in a public meeting allows residents to visualize existing data, proposed target areas and other community needs.

Note: It is important to select an appropriate geographic unit for mapping data of interest based on the geographic scope of the study area. For example, state grantees and others using CPD Maps who want to display comparative conditions over a broad area will find that displaying data at the "county" level rather than the "tract" level is more appropriate for depicting these conditions. Similarly, local grantees may find that displaying data at the census tract level is more helpful. Grantees can refer to the [CPD Maps Desk Guide](#) for instructions on how to select specific geographic units.

## **Application to Consolidated Plan**

Including themed maps in citizen participation and consultation outreach is an effective way to generate directed feedback and reinforce key concepts from the Consolidated Plan narrative.

Themed maps can also facilitate a discussion of low-income population concentrations as required by the Consolidated Plan.

## **Target Audience/Usage**

The target usage can include community meetings and presentations, community-facing websites and blogs, public and private stakeholder consultation processes and Consolidated Plan document narratives. For example, thematic maps can help focus discussions around specific issues, such as

homelessness, economic development, market analysis, etc. They can also be used to demonstrate strategic decisions and policy options when discussing the needs of different target groups and geographic areas with consultation partners.

### **Logistics and Materials Needed**

Maps can be created in a number of ways, including:

- [CPD Maps](#), a Consolidated Plan mapping tool developed by HUD that includes data on housing and economic conditions, CDBG, HOME, and other HUD funded community assets.
- [Census Data Mapper](#), a web-based mapping application for viewing, saving, and printing 2010 Census demographic data.
- Free offline GIS data products such as [Google Earth](#), which can be used together with any KML source data [including U.S. Census Bureau data](#).
- Partnering with local government planning staff in the use of professional GIS software, such as the ESRI ArcGIS suite of mapping products.

### **Examples of Thematic Maps Used in the Consolidated Plan Process**

Many localities have begun publishing thematic maps on their websites and within their draft Consolidated Plan/Annual Action Plans as a resource for citizens. The maps provide a way to better inform community stakeholders about the market conditions and demographics of the jurisdiction and improve the quality of citizen feedback by providing a situational context to questions and concerns. Examples of jurisdictions successfully using thematic maps include:

- The Austin, TX Office of Neighborhood Housing and Community Development maintains a [Reports and Publications](#) website where it posts thematic maps and other Consolidated Plan materials as resources for citizens and stakeholders, including a map of Race/Ethnicity breakdown for Low-Mod Income Families by Census Tract.
- League City, TX has produced [thematic maps](#) as part of their Annual Action Plan to illustrate the current and proposed block groups targeted for CDBG eligible activities based on projected low- and moderate-income data from the U.S. Census Bureau.
- The city of Medford, OR has created a set of [thematic maps](#) as part of their Consolidated Planning process, including persons in poverty, median income, and housing density maps.
- Washington County, OR has created an online searchable set of [Opportunity Maps](#) that include themes such as Access to Medical Care, Public Transportation, and Low Income Housing as part of their latest Consolidated Plan.