



Norman B. Leventhal
Map & Education Center
at the Boston Public Library

ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021





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As of November 2021

MESSAGE FROM
PRESIDENT & HEAD CURATOR



To the members of our community:

Maps, geography, and history are always important. But in this extraordinary past year, their importance was on display in a particularly striking manner.

The whole world struggled through a full year of pandemic conditions, with endless maps and charts appearing on public health websites, television reports, and above the fold in major newspapers. We peered at circles and symbols representing case counts, transmission rates, and tragic deaths, and tried to make sense of how to respond in the small-scale geographies of our homes and offices as well as the large-scale geographies of travel and the world economy.

Voters in the United States held their breath in November—and then in the weeks that followed—to see what colors would appear on the map as results came in from a momentous election. The decennial census completed its tally, and state legislatures began their work of redrawing election maps across the country. Political scientists and commentators noted that where a citizen is located on a map now tells us a great deal about how they are likely to vote—as well as how much weight their vote may have in a system characterized by enormous geographic imbalances.

And history itself became the site of skirmishes over how both adults and children should engage with complicated, and oftentimes harrowing, stories about the past. Whether thinking about the colonial encounter between Europeans and Native peoples to the legacies of racial inequality in urban environments, this year highlighted important attempts to generate a more inclusive and accurate understanding of our shared past.

In sum, 2020–2021 gave us many reminders that maps are hardly just beautiful objects to look at (though, of course, they are often that too!). Our programs, priorities, and staff at the Leventhal Map & Education Center have shifted in tandem along with that changing world. We’ve completely reimagined our digital programs and tools, while also recommitted to stewarding our historic collections. We’ve opened up new topics when working with K-12 teachers and students, and redoubled our work with researchers and creative people from all walks of life.

We couldn’t do any of this without your ongoing support. From all of us here—new and old—thank you for continuing to mark your spot on our map.

GARRETT DASH NELSON
President and Head Curator

MESSAGE FROM
BOARD CHAIR



Dear friends:

While the physical doors of the Leventhal Map & Education Center were closed for the entirety of the 2021–2022 fiscal year, our staff rose to the challenge of these circumstances, reaching new audiences and reimagining what it means to work with maps and history in the twenty-first century.

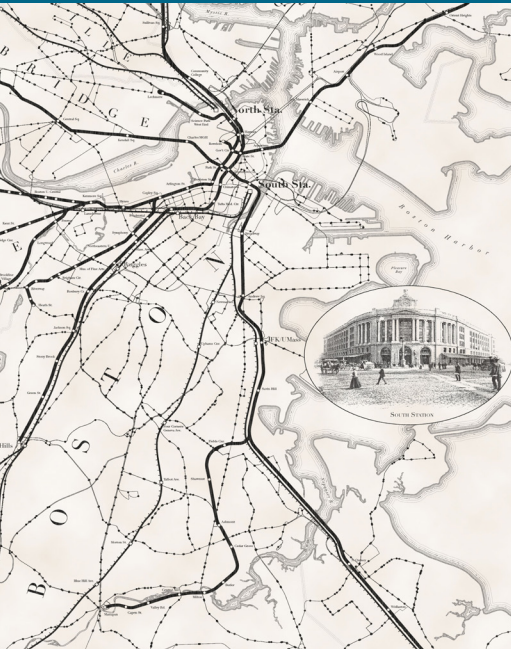
These new forms of engagement came in many different varieties. Our educators, pivoting to online learning like teachers across the country, brought the Maptivist elective to high school students in a remote learning environment. A remarkable visualization allowing you to drop the wedged *Ever Given* ship on top of a map anywhere in the world went viral and reached millions of people in just a few days. Our digital exhibitions became the centerpiece of programs and talks that inspired people to think about data, truth, and storytelling.

Most importantly, we connected with you, our dedicated community of friends and supporters, through new channels, inviting you to click and zoom on maps instead of peering at them under glass in our gallery or craning your necks over them in our classroom.

This year concluded with exciting changes in the organization. We not only wished with many thanks a farewell to outgoing President Connie Chin and welcomed our new President & Head Curator Garrett Nelson, but also brought exciting new members onto our leadership boards. Now, with new staff members and a new vision in place, the Center is better positioned than ever to take advantage of opportunities connecting our community through both physical and digital programs in maps, geography, history, and civics.

I want to thank all of you who have been a part of building the Leventhal Map & Education Center into the kind of institution with the resilience to come through the challenging pandemic year stronger than ever before. I am thrilled about the direction we are headed, and look forward to witnessing the creative potential unlocked by both long-serving and newly-arrived members of the Center’s staff.

ALAN LEVENTHAL
Chair, Board of Directors

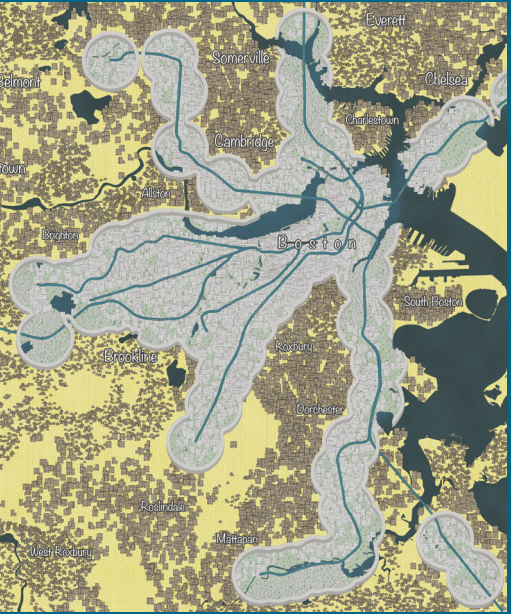


About the maps on the cover

As part of our current exhibition, *Bending Lines*, we commissioned a series of maps from various professional cartographers and designers. The prompt: use a single data set to produce maps with competing interpretations.

We did this to make a point: namely to debunk the idea that data itself can be neutral. We wanted viewers to appreciate the profound role that the analyst, cartographer, or designer plays in shaping the intended message in a map or data visualization. These two maps by Boston-based cartographer Andy Woodruff provide two views of Boston’s mass transportation system. One makes the transit system look comprehensive, while the other argues that Boston has a “great transit desert.”

Andy Woodruff, *Map of public transportation routes in Greater Boston served by the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority comprising 64 miles of subway and light railway, 555 miles of commuter railway, and 6,194 miles of omnibus routes in 175 cities and towns [above, excerpt] and The great transit desert [below, excerpt] (2020).*





This confusing perspective on Boston shows how a mapmaker uses visual language to argue what is important. George H. Walker Co., *Bird's Eye View of Boston* (1902). Library of Congress Geography & Map Division.

EXHIBITIONS & COMMUNITY LEARNING

Bending Lines: A Year of Digital Exhibiting



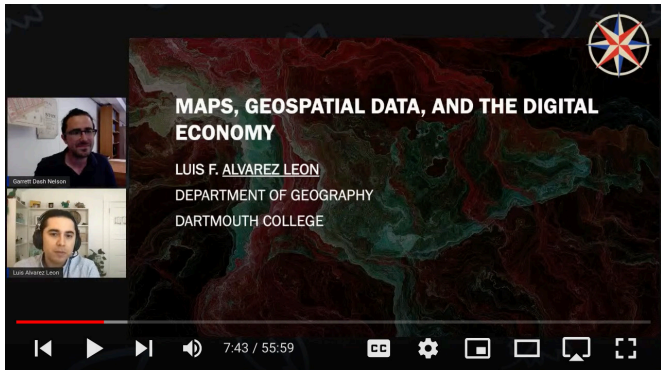
Bending Lines was made possible with support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services

With the prospect of a long closure at the Central Library looming ahead of us, we realized quickly in the summer of 2020 that we would have to make the most of our ability to work with exhibition patrons online. And we did: with tens of thousands of visitors to the *Bending Lines* digital exhibition, coming from all around the world, we broke new ground in working with visual collections in a remote environment. The exhibition earned praise from visitors, from museum and library professionals who saw it as a leading example of a successful digital pivot, and from the International Society for the History of the Map, which named the digital exhibition one of the honorable mentions in the society's inaugural Prize in Map History.

In all, “*Bending Lines*” promises to attract new scholars—young and old—into map history while enlightening even the most experienced scholar about the possibilities of persuasive mapping.

International Society for the History of the Map Prize Committee

We also leaned heavily into remote programming, delivering more than a dozen free events ranging from scholarly forums with historians to informal “map show-and-tell” sessions. To bring the exhibition to life, we hosted a spring series called *More Angles on Bending Lines*, with four experts taking different approaches to the question of why we



Top Luis F. Alvarez León talks about a critical approach to geospatial data and the digital economy in the *More Angles on Bending Lines* series

Above Garrett Dash Nelson presents on election mapping and political geography at a virtual seminar at the Oxford University Bodleian Library

should be critical and careful around “data.” This series brought the historical material from *Bending Lines* into conversation with the very real ways in which modern geospatial information and digital maps can be as persuasive—and distorting—as the propaganda of earlier eras.

Fascinating talk on a necessary topic.

Participant in the More Angles on Bending Lines series

An Ongoing Commitment to Geographic Inquiry

Exhibition-focused events were hardly the only programs we offered in 2020–2021. Partnering with branch libraries in the BPL system, we continued to expand our Neighborhood By Map series, bringing the Atlascope tool into the hands of local historians and community members. Interactive challenges and prompts on social media offered yet another opportunity to engage with geographic themes while safely socially distanced.

I've been reading about Boston history for many years, but it always seemed that something was missing. Your courses have filled that void and provided the missing “dimension” that ties it all together.

Participant in the Neighborhood By Map series

COLLECTIONS

New Acquisitions

Although our ability to bring new physical materials into the collections was slowed by the lack of access to our storage spaces during the BPL's closure, we nevertheless maintained an active acquisition program, bringing in new maps ranging from early depictions of New England through original maps created by underrepresented cartographers in the twentieth century. We continue to develop the strength of our existing collection while identifying opportunities to diversify the voices in our collections, support researchers' interests, and enhance our exhibitions and programs.

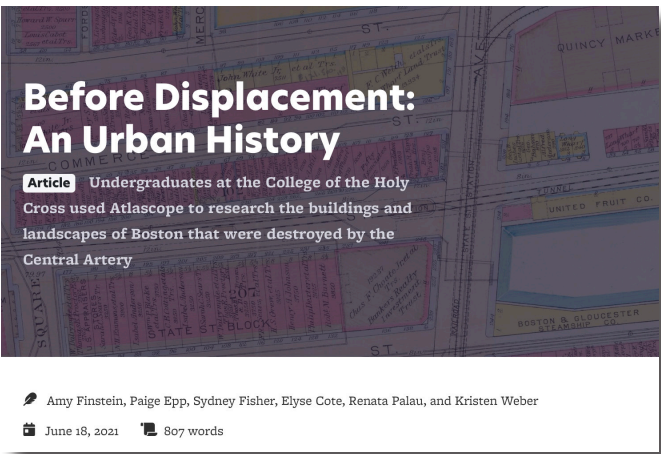
Below This Cold War era propaganda map not only echoes with many of the didactic maps in *Bending Lines* but also prefigures some of the problematic media hyperbole of the present day



Above A previously unrecorded manuscript state of Back Bay Park, circa 1880, showing design plans for the Fenway area

Bringing Collections Alive With New Projects

Collections aren't very interesting when they just stay out of sight in a drawer in storage. Because we didn't offer research visits in the Rare Maps Reading Room this year, we were particularly eager to put our digitized collections in the hands of creative thinkers to see what might happen. For instance, Amy Finstein, Assistant Professor at the College of the Holy Cross, used our Atlascope collection with her students in *Making the Modern City* to create a digital history project examining highway displacement in Boston.



@BPLMaps does such a great job of telling the history of Massachusetts, the US, and our world through their amazing map collection.

Nantucket Atheneum, @nantucketatheneum on Instagram

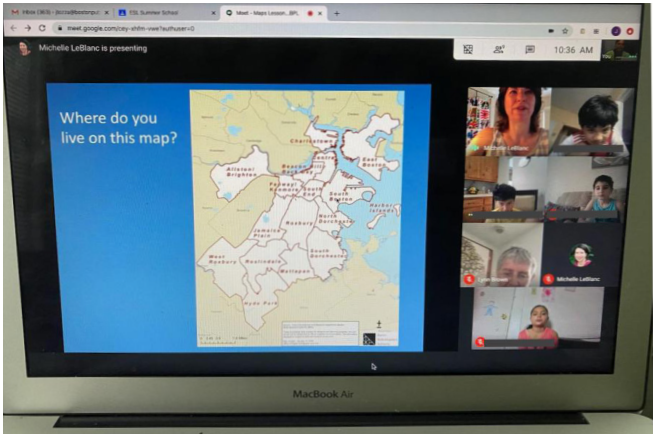
85 Number of new physical collections

1548 Publication year of the oldest map acquired

2020 Publication year of the newest map acquired

K-12 EDUCATION

The 2020-21 school year presented many challenges as well as opportunities for LMEC educators to think on their feet in order to continue working with K-12 students and teachers. While our engagement with students was a small fraction of what it was before school closures, LMEC educators connected with schools by teaching a daily one-semester elective course remotely to a Boston public high school, created and taught virtual versions of our school programs and provided fully scripted lesson plans for our tried-and-true lessons that could be used right away by teachers.



Director of Education Michelle LeBlanc and K-12 Education Manager Lynn Brown work with Boston students virtually to find their homes on a map.

Teaching in New Ways

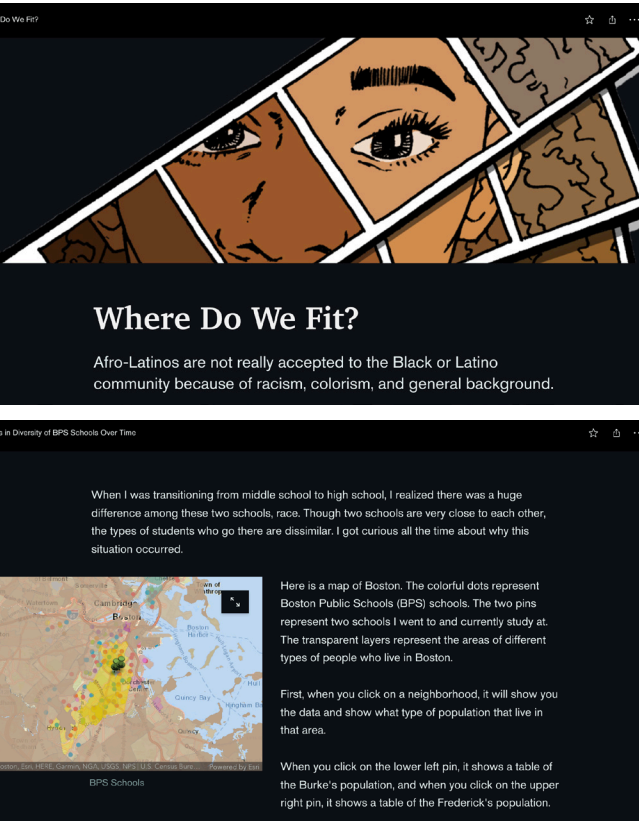
With a majority of students learning remotely during the 2020–2021 school year and the Boston Public Library closed for in-person programming, Map Center educators reached 1100 students with our core education programs online using our robust digital collections and new ways to engage with our collections without being physically in the Map Center. For example, Map Center staff created a special inquiry form that students could use featuring a zoomable digital map on one side and a series of questions in a Google form on the other. This tool can be updated with any map and questions needed and can also be used by classroom teachers for their own lessons outside of our education programs. While everyone missed the in-person benefits of being together in the Center or classrooms, one benefit of teaching in this way was that we could reach many more students in a single day as well as schools far outside of our usual geographic range of greater Boston.

Boston Maptivists Elective Course

During the spring semester of the 2020-21 school year, Map Center educators taught an elective course remotely at the Jermiah E. Burke High School to a small group of juniors and seniors.

The students explored the question of “how do racial ideas become spatial practice?” Students selected 3 topics to explore in-depth: segregation in Boston by economics and choice, protest and police brutality, and how and where people connect across racial lines. Students read articles, created data maps, watched videos, engaged with guest speakers from Boston and beyond, and worked with Teen Central librarians to narrow down their topic of choice to research and create a Storymap in ArcGIS online. One student explored her Afro-Latino heritage and how census data does not reflect her identify fully, making her select either Black or Latino. Another student explored why her middle school had a more diverse student body than the Burke high school and why some families choose to send their students to one school over another. Students presented their projects to one another and LMEC staff as well as part of their junior capstone projects.

Many lessons developed from this elective course are now available on the LMEC website and are part of a larger initiative to model a spatial approach to understanding social issues in our communities to educators.



A FOCUS ON TEACHERS

152 teachers took part in virtual professional development at the Center from one-hour workshops to our multi-week Carolyn A. Lynch Teacher Fellowship program. Sessions included an educators’ tour of the *Bending Lines* exhibition, an introduction to digital mapping in the classroom, sessions exploring Native Lands and Settler

Colonialism with our partners Upstanders Project and Primary Source, a session exploring how to teach civics through maps and mapping, and sessions that introduced graduate-level education students at Boston College to our collections and approaches.

Materials & Resources for Teaching

This year created many opportunities to create new educational materials and find more creative ways to help teachers use our approaches and digital collections. Map Center educators added 10 new teaching resources to our website for teachers across grade levels. Our new Teach it Yourself lessons are fully-scripted versions of our most popular education programs complete with slides and interactive inquiry forms with maps. The Center has also added new Maptivists focused lessons for exploring Boston, from the history of redlining to understanding data maps about wifi access in Boston.

2020 Carolyn A. Lynch Teacher Fellows

Six teachers spent their summer working virtually with LMEC educators and one another to integrate maps in their curriculum, from social justice issues to historical topics. 4 BPS teachers, one Boston charter school teacher and a Cambridge private school teacher met for 3 virtual meetings as well as individual check-ins during July and August 2020. Final resources created ranged from a grade two investigation about pollinators that uses maps to study community gardens and access to fresh food in Boston neighborhoods to using maps about immigration and other data to help adult learners pass a maps requirement and learn about their city.

It was such fun to geek out with other teachers who were equally excited to play with maps! I also got so much out of the push to use maps and map making in a more consistent and meaningful way in my classroom. Planning a unit and putting together resources with the support of the Leventhal staff and other fellows helped me prepare in a way that was both useful and fun.

The interactive lessons and activities are breathtaking. Plus, as a history teacher, I obviously have an affinity for maps, so spending time really diving into the online archives was a lot of fun for me. I enjoyed interacting with my fellow fellows, bouncing ideas off each other, and seeing how they planned to create their lessons with the maps.

Quotes from 2020 Teacher Fellows

Left

Students in the Maptivists elective created digital final projects exploring things such as data classification and race and racial diversity within the school district.

Right

2020 Carolyn A. Lynch Teacher Fellows and the LMEC Education Team connected virtually during the summer to develop curriculum for their classrooms.

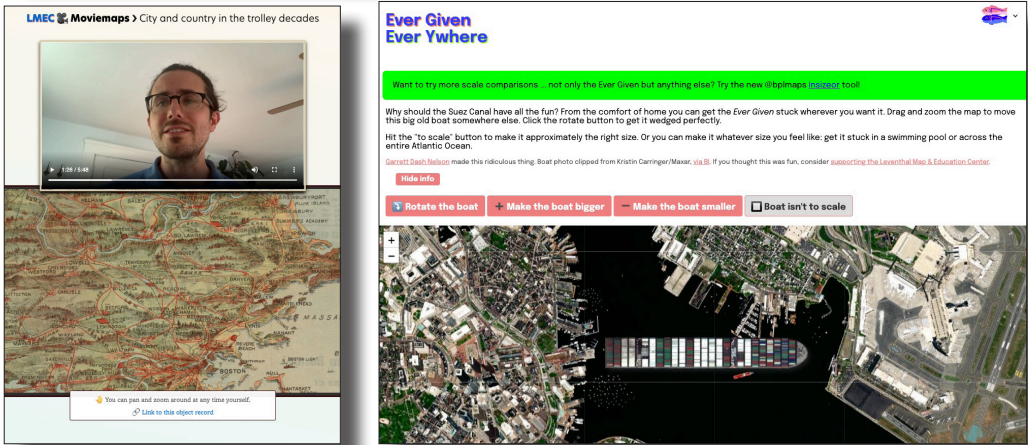
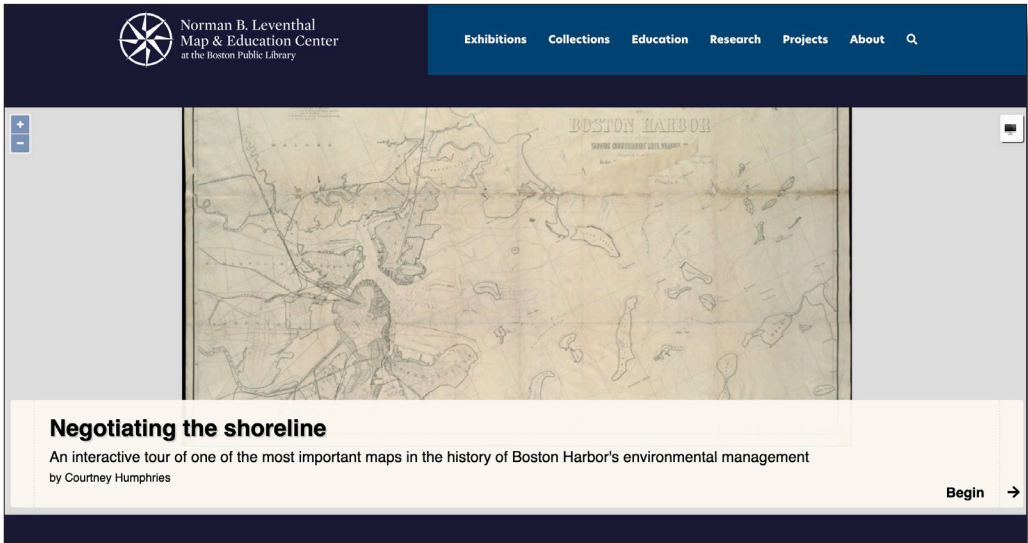


DIGITAL PROJECTS

Top
An interactive map story by Public Research Fellow Courtney Humphries exploring the Harbor Commissioner’s map of Boston Habor

Left
The new Moviemaps interface allows us to present curatorial interpretation while a user simultaenously zooms and pans around a digitized map

Right
The viral *Ever Given Ever Ywhere* app reached millions of users with both a humorous and serious message about global scale



Our many years of investing in digitization and web mapping efforts yielded invaluable returns in 2020–2021 as we found ourselves needing to work exclusively with digital collections. We supercharged our digital efforts with new one-off tools and digital experiments, even reaching worldwide viral fame with an interactive of the stuck ship in the Suez Canal.

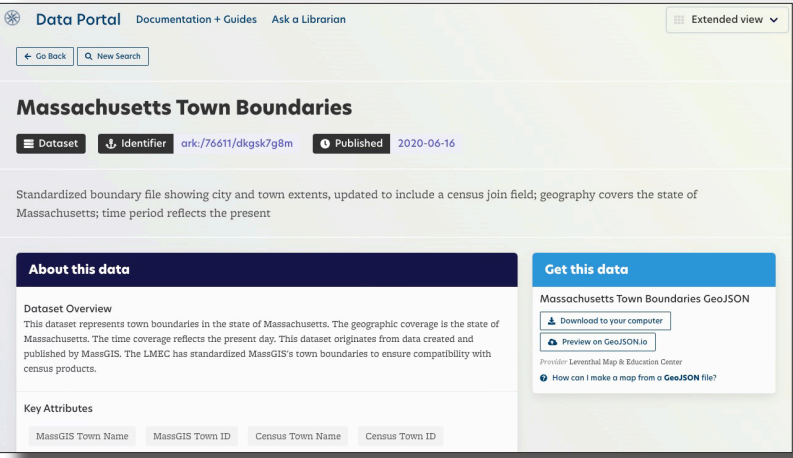
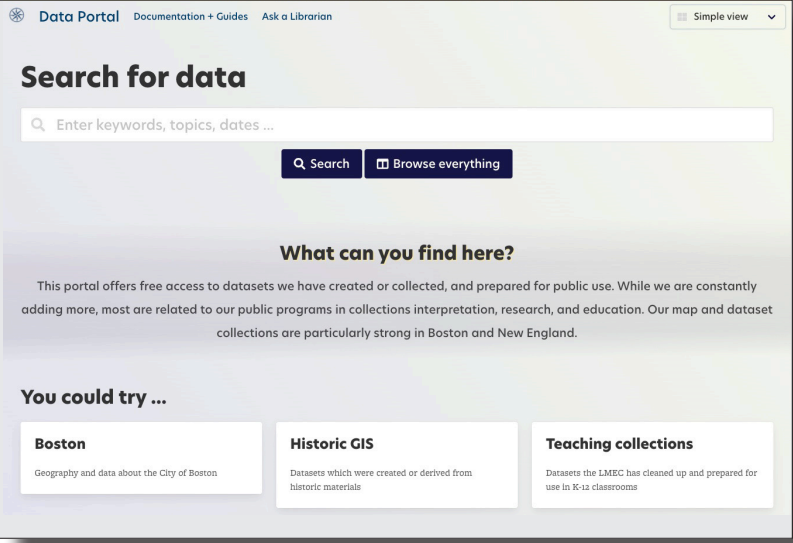
When we lost access to our physical collections, we felt more thankful than ever that years of tireless effort put towards digitization had brought us to the fortunate position of being able to work with 10,000 ultra-high-resolution digital maps. Because our Digital Collections portal, as part of the Digital Commonwealth federation hosted at the BPL, employs best-in-class technologies like the International Image Interoperability Framework (IIIF), we were able to rapidly prototype and develop new techniques for opening up our collections to online audiences, such as immersive slideshows and combinations of movies with maps.

We also experienced a moment of viral fame with a lighthearted map project allowing people to superimpose the Ever Given cargo ship—the one famously wedged in the Suez Canal—onto any place in the world. With more than 10 million views in just a few days and callouts in major media across the globe, this meme map made a serious point about how the geographer’s view can be an important perspective for situating world events.

GEOSPATIAL RESOURCES

I am always humbled to learn new things taught by passionate, knowledgeable people, I now feel empowered to make my own GIS maps.

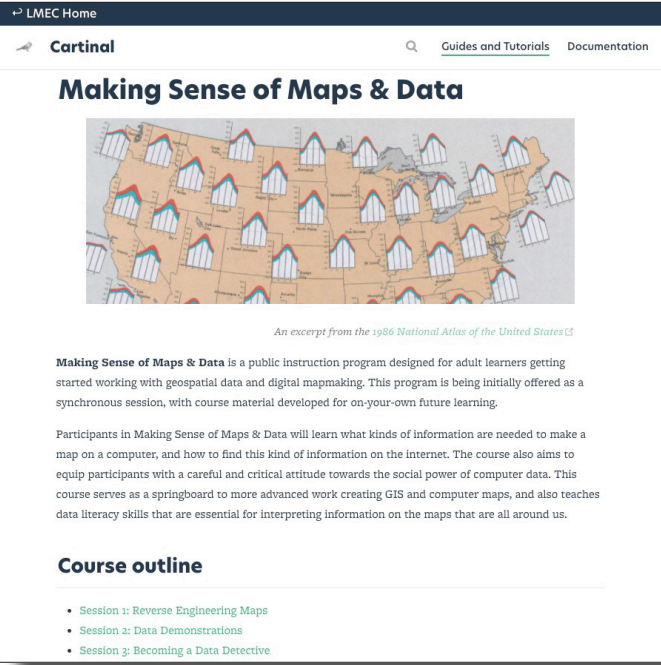
Participant in the pilot *Making Sense of Maps and Data* course



A major effort to augment opportunities for adult education around geospatial data literacy resulted in the pilot offering of our new Making Sense of Maps and Data course, as well as the alpha release of our custom-designed Public Data Portal.

Supported by the NSF-funded Northeast Big Data Innovation Hub, our team worked with student interns and scholarly advisers from MIT DUSP’s Data + Feminism Lab to create our first-ever free online course on critical geospatial data literacy, entitled *Making Sense of Maps and Data*. We designed the course in tandem with the initial version of a web interface for archiving and accessing geospatial data at the Center—an innovative effort that takes the lead in making GIS tools and resources available to nonspecialist users.





Together, the portal and introductory course will form the groundwork for our plans to make GIS and digital mapmaking accessible and empowering for people from all walks of life.



SUPPORTERS

We’re grateful to all those who have made our work possible this past year. We especially thank the Boston Public Library and Boston Public Library Fund for their major support.

Major Funders



Sherry & Alan Leventhal Family Foundation

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Want to help us continue expanding our impact? Consider donating to our end-of-year campaign! Please scan the QR code on the right or visit leventhalmap.org/donate



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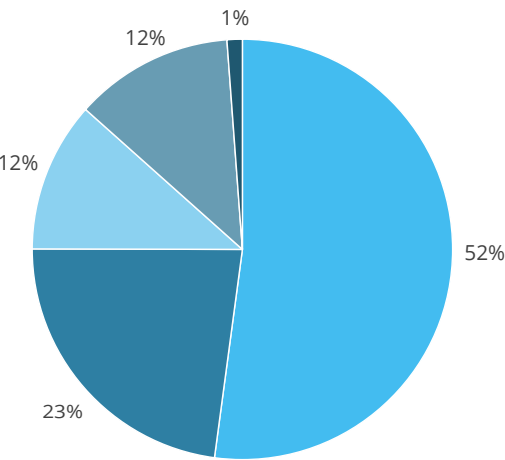
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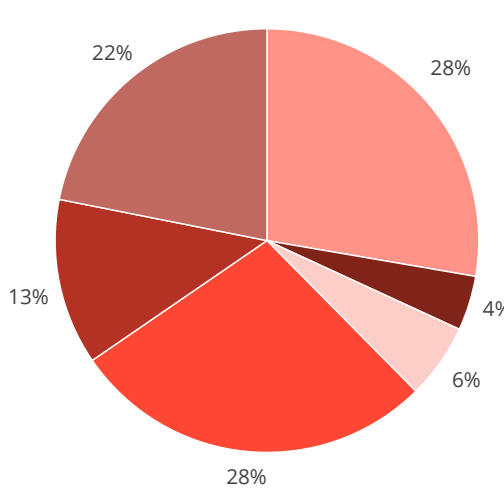
Charitable Gift Fund

Justin Wyner

Fiscal Year 2021 Financial Report
July 1, 2020 – June 30, 2021



Revenues	\$1,725,604
Grants & Contributions	\$899,448
Endowment Income	\$395,411
Acquisition Support, BPL	\$211,046
Donated Services	\$199,422
Program Revenues/Other	\$20,278



Expenses	\$1,386,639
Collections	\$386,071
Education & Outreach	\$384,174
Administrative	\$303,408
Advancement	\$175,915
Acquisitions	\$79,274
Exhibitions	\$57,797



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Image: Greater Boston Business Magazine,
"Panoramic view of Boston showing golden
semicircle." (1959)

