

JULY 2026

NEWS

LETTER



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UC 2026 PLENARY HIGHLIGHTS

The Plenary Session demonstrated how AI is becoming deeply integrated throughout the ArcGIS platform. Esri introduced new AI-powered assistants, enhanced GeoAI capabilities, smarter mapping tools and improved workflows across ArcGIS Pro, ArcGIS Online and ArcGIS Enterprise. Real-world demonstrations highlighted how GIS continues to support governments, utilities, conservation and infrastructure projects worldwide.

ESRI USER CONFERENCE 2026 RECAP



The Esri User Conference 2026 brought together thousands of GIS professionals, developers, decision-makers and innovators in San Diego under the theme "**GIS – Creating a More Intelligent World.**" Throughout the week, Esri showcased how artificial intelligence, authoritative content and the ArcGIS system are helping organizations transform data into actionable insights. The conference featured inspiring keynote presentations, technical sessions, hands-on learning and customer success stories from across the globe.



Esri User Conference 2026:

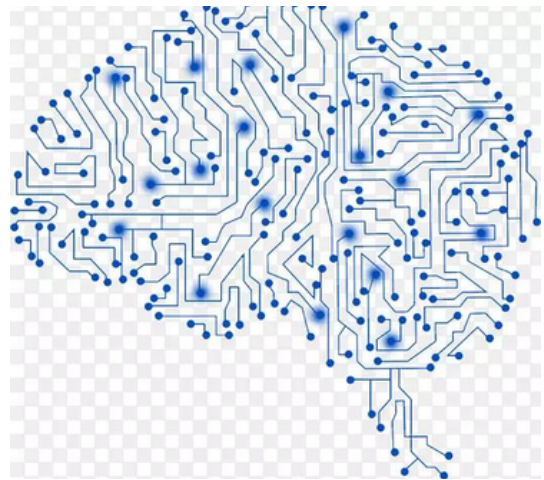
Key Highlights



The 2026 Esri User Conference brought together more than 18,000 geospatial professionals in San Diego under the theme "GIS—Creating a More Intelligent World." Throughout the week, Esri showcased groundbreaking innovations that are redefining how GIS professionals work, with a strong emphasis on Artificial Intelligence, digital transformation and enterprise GIS.

AI Becomes Part of Everyday GIS

One of the biggest announcements was the integration of practical AI capabilities across the ArcGIS platform. New generative AI assistants for ArcGIS Notebooks, Arcade scripting and automated metadata generation are designed to simplify daily workflows, improve productivity and make spatial data science more accessible to GIS users.



Advancing Geospatial Foundation Models

Esri introduced the next generation of Geospatial Foundation Models, including the Geospatial Vision Language Model (GeoVLM). Trained specifically on satellite and Earth observation imagery, these models enable users to perform complex tasks such as object detection, feature extraction, pixel classification, image captioning and object counting using natural language prompts. This represents a significant advancement in applying AI to geospatial analysis.



2026 Esri User Conference



Enabling Living Digital Twins

Another major development was the continued evolution of Digital Twins. With ArcGIS Velocity now available for ArcGIS Enterprise, organizations can securely process high-volume IoT and sensor data within their own infrastructure. This capability supports the creation of dynamic, real-time digital twins for infrastructure management, utilities, transportation and smart city applications.



GIS Driving Conservation

The conference also highlighted the role of GIS in addressing global environmental challenges. A keynote by Kristine Tompkins demonstrated how GIS is being used to support large-scale conservation and rewilding initiatives across South America, reinforcing the importance of geospatial technology in protecting biodiversity and natural ecosystems.

Celebrating GIS Excellence

Esri recognized organizations that have demonstrated outstanding innovation in GIS implementation. The Government of Jamaica received the President's Award, while the City of Austin was honored with the Enterprise GIS Award for its successful cross-departmental collaboration and enterprise GIS strategy.

Looking Ahead

The innovations unveiled at the 2026 Esri User Conference reflect the rapid evolution of GIS. As AI-powered tools, foundation models, and real-time enterprise capabilities become integral to ArcGIS, GIS professionals are increasingly moving beyond traditional mapping and analysis toward strategic decision-making, enterprise integration and intelligent location-based solutions.



Explore the Plenary Sessions



[Plenary Session](#)
[Part 1 of 3](#)

[Plenary Session](#)
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[Plenary Session](#)
[Part 3 of 3](#)

Introducing Geospatial Foundation Models in ArcGIS

By Rohit Singh and Vinay Viswambharan and Priyanka Tuteja



Artificial Intelligence is transforming the way we understand and analyze our world. At the Esri User Conference 2026, Esri introduced a new generation of Geospatial Foundation Models that bring advanced AI capabilities directly into ArcGIS, making spatial analysis faster, smarter, and more accessible.

Unlike traditional AI models designed for a single purpose, geospatial foundation models learn from vast amounts of satellite imagery, maps, demographic information and other geographic datasets.

These models can then be adapted to a wide range of GIS workflows, including feature extraction, similarity search, predictive modeling, change detection and natural language interaction with imagery.

A key innovation behind these models is the use of embeddings—compact numerical representations that capture the characteristics of geographic locations. Similar locations generate similar embeddings, enabling more accurate analysis, clustering, site selection and prediction while integrating seamlessly with existing GIS data.

New AI Capabilities in ArcGIS

Esri introduced three major categories of geospatial foundation models:

Location Encoder Models

Location Encoder Models learn the unique characteristics of places rather than individual images.

- **Global Location Encoder (Sentinel-2):** Generates embeddings from global Sentinel-2 satellite imagery, supporting similarity search, location retrieval, predictive modeling, clustering and change detection. Available through ArcGIS Living Atlas as a Deep Learning Package (DLPK).
- **Geodemographic Foundation Model:** Trained using thousands of demographic, socioeconomic, housing and environmental variables to support market analysis, site selection, spatial interpolation and predictive analytics. USA Geodemographic Embeddings are now available as a beta feature layer in ArcGIS Living Atlas.

Geospatial Vision Language Model (GeoVLM)

GeoVLM combines satellite imagery with natural language, allowing users to interact with imagery using simple prompts instead of building task-specific AI models. It supports object detection, image segmentation, image captioning, object counting, classification and visual question answering. GeoVLM will initially be available through Esri's Early Adopter Community before its release as a Deep Learning Package in ArcGIS Living Atlas.

Remote Sensing Foundation Models

ArcGIS now integrates with leading open-source remote sensing foundation models, including TerraMind, Prithvi EO 2.0, Clay, DOFA, and DINO. These models enable users to generate imagery embeddings and fine-tune AI models for Earth observation workflows using ArcGIS Pro and the `arcgis.learn` API.

Looking Ahead

Geospatial Foundation Models represent a significant advancement in GIS and AI. Instead of developing separate AI models for every application, organizations can now build upon pre-trained models that already understand geographic information, reducing development time while improving analytical accuracy.

With the introduction of Global Location Encoder, Geodemographic Foundation Model, GeoVLM and support for industry-leading remote sensing foundation models, ArcGIS continues to expand its AI capabilities, providing GIS professionals with powerful new tools for location intelligence, Earth observation and predictive analytics.

[Explore further article.](#)

Announcements

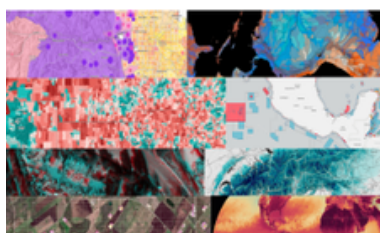


July 21, 2026 | Multiple Authors |

What's New in ArcGIS Urban (July 2026)
By Lisa Staehli and Katie Thompson



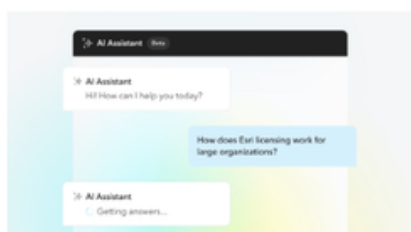
What's New in World Imagery (July 2026)
By Robert Waterman



What's New in Living Atlas - UC 2026
By Lisa Berry



Introducing Review map:
Confidently share scalable maps
By Jillian Rizzo and Lauren Ballantyne



Introducing the AI Assistant (Beta)
on Esri.com
By Esri Digital Experience



Your Complete Guide to Esri's
Developer Resources
By Alison Walker and Raúl Jiménez Ortega

ESRI Training Offerings

➤ Applying Accessibility in ArcGIS App Builders | Esri Training Seminar



➤ Designing GIS Applications with Accessibility | Esri Training Seminar



➤ Introduction to Digital Accessibility in GIS | Esri Training Seminar



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MicroCenter Group

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