



Wikimedia Movement Organizers

—

UNDERSTANDING THE PEOPLE WHO POWER THE MOVEMENT

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Photo by Mario Purisic mariopurismic (CC0)

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PREFACE

Organizers Energize the movement

In the Wikimedia movement, Organizers are fundamental to the healthy functioning of communities; they organize events, build community identity, set movement strategy, develop partnerships, and propel campaigns producing quality content. Through their influence, they advance equity by introducing participants who do not normally engage the projects. These thousands of organizers, many of whom do not directly interact with the Wikimedia Foundation, commit their time, energy, and personal resources to make Wikimedia a stronger, more relevant network of communities. The communities developed by organizers develop varied various means of achieving the movement direction described in Knowledge Equity and Knowledge as a Service.

Organizer impact is broad: between Fall 2015 and the end of 2019, over 6 million content pages were contributed and over 400,000 people were activated over the course of our grant giving.^[1] Beyond raw numbers, Organizers deliver a diversity of non-quantitative impacts; they preserve cultural heritage, build knowledge communities, improve diversity, and integrate Wikimedia into a wider knowledge ecosystem. Meta-Organizers and Affiliates maintain Organizer networks that facilitate connection with allies, grow content, get in-kind donations, bring new technical contributors, and disseminate our content to hard-to-reach audiences, such as internet access-limited children in rural schools.

Committed Organizers align the public goodwill in our brand and platforms with contributions to a healthy and thriving movement.

For example: Wiki Loves Monuments is run by an international organizing team of eight Organizers who activate 56 country teams each with two to three Organizers in 2018. That year, they have solicited 265,395 files by 13,878 uploaders to be judged by volunteer committees in each country.^[2] Another example is the core organizing team of Art+Feminism which mobilized over 280 events each requiring a team of two to three Organizers, who in turn activated more than 4076 editors editing 20k articles in March 2019.^[3]

Other Organizer activities drive quality and diverse content: education programs create high quality content on Wikipedias; GLAM partnerships bring batches of hundreds of thousands of high quality media files directly from cultural institutions; small photo walks provide systematic documentation of rural areas in Ghana or Italy; training programs teach participants how to type on Armenian or Indic keyboards so they can write on Wikimedia projects; and volunteers working with schools and libraries the world over build Wikipedia into education and learning. Though the Wikimedia Foundation has supported this work on a global level through grantmaking and advising, it hasn't successfully instigated this kind of impact through its own direct management of programs and activities. Simply put, well-supported Organizers increase the energy and resources available for pursuing the Wikimedia mission.

1 Digging into those numbers suggests that grant metrics substantially underestimate the total impact of organizers: these are only the activities directly supported by Wikimedia Foundation funding. For example, in 2018 [Alex Stinson found reporting of GLAM impacts](#) exceeded grant reported numbers in the same window.

2 <https://tools.wmflabs.org/wlm-stats/>

3 https://outreachdashboard.wmflabs.org/campaigns/artfeminism_2019/programs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Movement Organizers are a fundamental building block of the healthy functioning of Wikimedia communities. These individuals commit their time, energy and personal resources to develop and empower communities that deliver on the Wikimedia mission.

Most are volunteers - passionate, dedicated people whose donation of time and energy is the lifeblood of the movement. Where there are paid Organizers, many are overstretched, supporting multiple communities

of volunteer Organizers. Paid or unpaid, Organizers' work is often poorly supported, unrecognized, and invisible to the Foundation and other Wikimedia communities. Understanding and addressing the well-being of Movement Organizers is a fundamental aspect to investing in Wikimedia's future.

Organizers must navigate myriad challenges. These challenges range from the simple how-tos of learning to write and manage grants, to the more complicated and draining emotional labor of shielding and supporting community members through online harassment. In developing countries, Organizers also face challenges arising from contextual difficulties, compounded by a lack of equity or understanding within the Wikimedia movement. Collectively, these challenges drain Organizers of energy, lower their engagement, and make them vulnerable to burnout.

“The most valuable resource we have as a movement is volunteer time.”

– **International Wikimedia Campaign Organizer**

$$\text{Engagement} = \frac{\text{Motivations}}{\text{Challenges}}$$

Increasing Organizer motivation to continue volunteering and addressing their challenges to reduce friction is vital to the long-term health of the Organizer network. This report describes the motivations, lifecycles, support networks, and challenges of Organizers, proposes three strategies and guiding principles for Organizer growth and retention.

INTRODUCTION

The Movement Organizers study was designed to create a baseline understanding of the who, what, and how of organizing in the Wikimedia movement. This fills a gap in documented knowledge within the Wikimedia movement on two fronts:

First, it establishes Organizers as a clearly articulated audience in addition to [readers](#) and [editors](#) who have been subject to similar design research studies. This allows more parts of the Wikimedia movement to direct energy to supporting Organizer needs.

Second, the research can feed a larger decision-making framework for growth that clearly articulates how individual community Organizers relate to the community capacities articulated by the [2015 Community Capacity Development Framework Research](#) and the subsequent movement impacts described in [2018 Grant Impact Retrospective](#).



The organic formation of the Wikimedia movement allows for a diversity of motivations, ways of working, and desired impacts that reaching far beyond measurable pageviews and content pages. Within this diversity, previous research by the Wikimedia Foundation's Community Engagement department^[4] showed that individual Organizers encounter a number of similar challenges inflected by local context. As a generative study, like [New Editors](#) or [New Readers](#), this research sought to understand and articulate these shared challenges so that staff at the Wikimedia Foundation as well as community leaders could see and evaluate challenges, and then build local collaborations to design support for existing Organizers and better welcome new Organizers into the community.

4 Such as the [2018 Gender Equity Report](#) or [Commons GLAM Contributor Research](#)

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

OBJECTIVES

Objectives for this research were set in collaboration with a steering committee of Wikimedia Foundation staff from Product, Community Engagement, and teams throughout other Wikimedia Foundation departments who work with community members. In a week-long workshop held in November 2018, the committee agreed on the following research themes:

- **Create a common language and framework around our understanding of the range of Organizers in the movement.** While a number of individuals within the Wikimedia Foundation have an intuitive understanding of the movement, there has not yet been a **shared vocabulary and understanding** of this audience built for effective collaboration. This theme develops definitions and common frameworks for the range of organizing work done within the Wikimedia movement, from unpaid volunteers to staff, from individual Organizers to organizing partners, from long-term Organizers to new members of the community.
- **Understand the pathways to organizing, and the journey of Organizers.** There is a life cycle to organizing work. This theme builds our knowledge of the starting points, motivations, growth, transition points, and exits that movement Organizers experience.
- **Understanding the challenges of organizing in a socio-technical environment.** Wikimedia organizing exists at the junction of social, real-world environments and an online community interacting in virtual environments. This theme explores the challenges faced in both these environments, and by the crossing of these two very different contexts.
- **Understanding the skills that Organizers bring to the work.** Organizers bring a variety of hard (software development, budget keeping, press communications and publishing, etc) and soft (interpersonal traits such as mediation, listening, empathy, etc.) skills to bear on influencing and guiding their communities. This research theme helps us understand and catalogue the many faceted demands of organizing work.
- **Understand the risks and burdens that individual Organizers take on themselves when organizing.** Across the world, Organizers face a variety of emotional and physical risks. This goal helps the movement build empathy and address the issues associated with the cost of organizing.
- **Learn from analogous organizations that inspire thinking about facilitating organization, leadership, and mobilization.** Wikimedia Foundation is not unique in leveraging global volunteer organizing effort to grow its movement. This goal helps the team learn from other organizing bodies' experiences to explore common challenges and best practices.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Respondent selection and recruitment

Participants were selected for this research to crosscut both horizontally across the movement as well as vertically into two specific communities: Ghana and Argentina. In these two countries, we met participants in the capital cities of Accra and Buenos Aires, as well as in the remote satellite communities of Kumasi and Santa Fe. In addition to these interviews with Wikimedia community members, we leveraged existing knowledge by interviewing experts in other analogous organizations who work with volunteers Organizers at a global scale.

Remote participants

- **16** Known Wikimedia and affiliated Organizers in the global context
- **6** Experts from analogous organizations that leveraged volunteer labor on a global scale
- **4** Organizers in multilingual contexts
- **2** Organizers who left their communities

In-person participants

- **13** individual participants in Ghana
- **14** individual participants in Argentina

Total spread: 55 Organizers from **15** different countries

These two communities represent different kinds of support and community growth environments, as well as share socio-cultural similarities to other communities in their geographies.

The Argentinian chapter and network of Organizers formed during the same window as European chapters in 2006-2009, is well connected to the international community, has a strong editing community, and has had several generations of successful Organizers with the latest being well-supported by funded staff. Meanwhile in Ghana: communities are still relatively new, with the local affiliates forming in the last 4-5 years; many of the organizers were not previously involved in the Wikimedia community, as organizers or editors; and the community groups have limited funded structures for supporting their work. These communities were selected as some of the least-known and previously unexplored in Foundation-sponsored research. To reach beyond this known set of Organizers in Ghana and Argentina, we asked the primary contacts within chapters and user groups to help connect us with their local Organizers and partners. This allowed us to connect with respondents who were not previously known to Wikimedia Foundation, and to access communities of Organizers who work together. This approach did not allow us to extend our research to Organizers currently unconnected to existing known networks.

A note on recruiting bias: As participants were either directly known or recruited through known Organizers, we acknowledge there may be a bias towards Organizers that are closer to the movement (i.e those who have contact with the Foundation and affiliates). There is a potential future research opportunity to better understand Organizers further removed or not yet included in our communities.

In addition, given the power relationship between the Wikimedia Foundation and the local organizing work it funds, we recognize that this creates a recruitment and respondent bias towards Organizers who have positive experiences with organizing work, or rely on the Foundation for funding. To address this bias, we have also included two Organizers in this research set who have left their communities for various reasons. This subset could not account for all the reasons that Organizers leave the movement or stop organizing, but the constraints of the project did not allow for further investigation of individuals who leave.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

We used qualitative research methodologies to uncover latent needs, understand multi-stakeholder interactions, and uncover opportunities in complex social systems. The process uses a flexible conversational approach with participants to establish trust, build rapport, and deepen empathy with their needs and motivations. In-context visits in Argentina and Ghana provided additional information on the challenges faced by Movement Organizers in their daily working environment. Working in collaboration with local research agencies (Urika in Ghana, and Insitum in Argentina) brought deep expertise in interpreting the local cultural context surrounding the participants.

We used three types of interview sessions^[5] to learn from participants:



REMOTE INTERVIEWS

We conducted 28 one-hour remote video with Organizers and community experts from a variety of Wikimedia and analogous contexts. These interviews provided a global perspective on the shared and unique experiences of organizing.



IN-CONTEXT IN DEPTH INTERVIEWS

We conducted 27 two-hour interviews with individual Organizers. Where possible, we met participants where they studied or worked in order to better experience their organizing environments.



GROUP INTERVIEWS

In Santa Fe, Argentina and Kumasi, Ghana, the research team met with three different local groups to better understand the interactions between team members and the shared identity, goals, and development of the group.

⁵ Icons by FontAwesome (CC-BY-4.0)

UNDERSTANDING MOVEMENT ORGANIZERS

SECTION 1. WHO ARE MOVEMENT ORGANIZERS?

Movement Organizers are a fundamental building block of the healthy functioning of Wikimedia communities around the world. These individuals commit their time, energy, and personal resources to build a stronger network of communities that support Wikimedia growth. Understanding the experiences, motivations, challenges, and frustration Organizers face is critical for the Foundation as it seeks to grow and expand its impact.

We describe two main types of Organizers: volunteer and paid. Most Organizers are **volunteers** - passionate, dedicated people whose donation of time and energy is the lifeblood of the movement. They provide the bulk of labor and local expertise needed to build the global movement. Paid Organizers provide important expertise and long-term stability to the movement. Many meta-Organizers - Organizers who provide mentorship and support across different organizing communities - are paid on a part-time or full time basis directly by the Wikimedia Foundation or affiliates. There are also local Organizers who were paid to do Wikimedia work by employers other than Wikimedia Foundation, such as universities, government institutions, activist organizations, or other institutions with a public-facing agenda.

Movement Organizers in the Wikimedia movement include thousands of individuals who contribute work beyond the creation of content -- and most of them do it in a volunteer capacity. They organize events, build community identity, set movement strategy, develop partnerships, and propel campaigns that produce high quality content. This diverse group of people has been growing for more than a decade, facilitating thousands of activities each year locally and globally.

Organizers work across a range of different types of communities, defined by different types of boundaries. Organizers work in communities brought together by:

- **Geographic proximity.** From local city groups to country groups, Organizers may base their work, reach, and identity on geography.
- **Campaigns.** Organizers for campaigns like Black Lunch Table, Wiki Loves Monuments, and Art+Feminism cross geographic boundaries and unite global communities on a common goal.
- **Language.** Local language organizing creates impetus for people interested in capturing minority languages such as Twi, Basque, or Minangkabau; some of these Organizers work with urgency to capture languages before they disappear. Some groups are also organized around majority languages with a specific focus; for example, several Organizers in Argentina belong to a group of Spanish Journalists with a Gender Perspective group, who sought to balance the representation of women in media.

While we sought a range of participant types, the volunteer Organizers we met shared two principle commonalities. First, **volunteering is a privilege:** volunteer Organizers tend to be better educated and in higher social-economic strata relative to most people in their countries. Second, while Organizers come from all backgrounds, it more **commonly attracts communicators, journalists, educators, and activists** -- people who are interested in social progress and/or have the skills or experiences useful for impacting larger audiences.

To pay or not to pay? Volunteer and paid Organizers

While editing is largely an unpaid volunteer function, organizing work can fall within gray areas. We found three primary categories of Organizer remuneration:

Unpaid volunteers. These Organizers donate their time to the movement. They frequently have their own full-time jobs, and do organizing work on evenings, weekends, and whenever else activities may fit. Some volunteers may have access to funding for expenses or other resources for events; many also donate their own resources to make organizing activities possible. Although volunteer Organizers from all walks of life make personal sacrifices for this work, having consistent time to volunteer is a challenge and a volunteer Organizer's ability to engage will naturally ebb and flow with the demands of their everyday life. Long-term commitment is difficult for them to guarantee. For communities where organizing responsibilities are assumed by a single individual and are not distributed among an organizing group, the departure of a central Organizer can hurt the community's growth and long-term stability.

Organizers paid by other organizations. Some Organizers integrate their movement work into their professional work paid by institutions outside of Wikimedia Foundation. This type of Organizer tends to have more long-term stability and participation is not contingent on free time. These Organizers help communities build and deepen relationships to institutions and legitimize Wikimedia work in local contexts. However, Wikimedia is secondary to their relationship to their employer, and building this group of Organizers requires flexibility in listening to the needs of institutional partners. Many Organizers paid by other organizations started their experience with the Wikimedia community as volunteers, but

opportunistically sought investment in Wikimedia through their professional responsibilities.

Wikimedia Foundation or affiliate-supported Organizers. These Organizers are compensated by the Wikimedia Foundation or Wikimedia affiliates specifically to support communities. They usually have more experience with organizing and with the other Wikimedia communities. They also can better access grants or other forms of resources, long-term planning abilities, and the capacity to assist other Organizers.



[6]

“Recognize that commitment can be variable. Lives are more and more precarious. The time that you have for interests, they are getting more complicated. We can invite but we can not demand dedication.”

– Argentina volunteer Organizer

6 Photo by Ana Chang, Concept Hatchery (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

The importance of professional allies

Successful organizing is often supported by non-organizing allies. These are people and institutions who do not directly organize and are not paid by the Wikimedia Foundation, but have some relationship to the Wikimedia Organizer and community around them. Examples include university educators, like-minded nonprofit organizations, and local innovation or technology hubs. These allies provide assistance and resources, such as meeting space, internet, research materials, refreshments for attendees, and event volunteers. They also help counsel volunteer Organizers, and help them build local connections.

RECOMMENDATION – Build professional allies. Professional allies build more stability into the Wikimedia community, both by building ties with local institutions as well as by providing localized support for Organizers.



Wikimedia Ghana User Group members and participants in a workshop at a BarCamp. Owula kpakpo CC-BY-SA 4.0 <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?oldid=277572676>

The BarCamp Partnership.

In Ghana, an ongoing relationship with the local organizers of [BarCamp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BarCamp), a recurring technology conference, allows the Wikimedia Ghana User Group to use their events as platforms for Wikimedia education sessions. They provide event volunteers, conference space, publicity, and an interested audience for the user group's events. The key collaborators at BarCamp Ghana also informally mentor the lead organizers of the User Group to help their community grow.

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BarCamp>

SECTION 2. ORGANIZER MOTIVATION

People are driven to do Wikimedia organizing work by three primary motivations. Some have a deep passion for the Wikimedia platform and mission, gaining experience through editing and joining editing communities on the path to becoming an Organizer. Others are drawn to organizing through a commitment to the “open” agenda, through communities like Open Source or Open Education; these Organizers can also be Organizers or activists for Open Street Maps, Linux, Creative Commons, or other open projects.

Social activists who have found Wikimedia as a platform to advance their activist work come from a different, often non-technical background, and sometimes don't have prior Wikimedia experience. These Organizers recognize the power and reach of the Wikimedia platforms in accurately portraying marginalized populations, sharing cultures, documenting minority languages, and pursuing issues around justice and equity.

While people are brought into organizing through these different channels, Organizers are also motivated to continue volunteering by seeing the impact of their work and by the sense of community and identity they share with others in their group. Acutely aware of the challenges of maintaining volunteer energy and as volunteers themselves, Organizers actively build social bonds between their community members to keep them engaged.

As a predominantly volunteer work force, Movement Organizers have a choice to continue or leave their work at any time. **Understanding and addressing their motivations to work** is critical to keeping volunteer Organizers engaged.

“It was not just a personal epiphany but a collective realization of the power we had and that we could do things.”

– Argentina volunteer Organizer



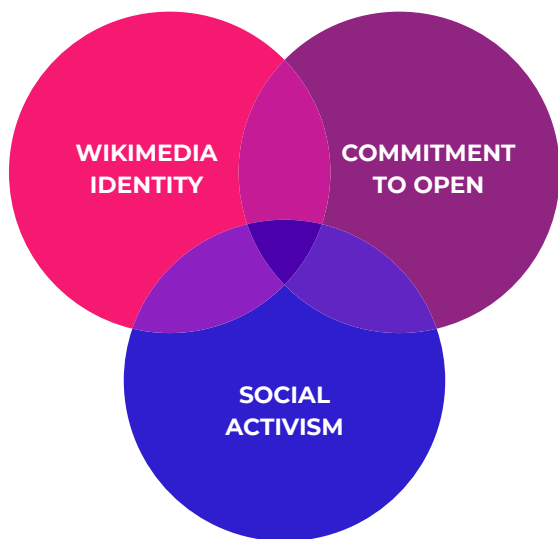
7 Photo by Ana Chang, Concept Hatchery (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

Getting motivated

Organizer motivations were described in terms of both ideological motivations and personal benefit.

Ideological motivation

Many Organizers described their commitment to Wikimedia as fulfilling an ideological or identity-based call-to-action in their lives. These ideological motivations help Organizers develop deeper commitment, and is paired with a desire to support others with similar ideological motivations.



WIKIMEDIA IDENTITY: Some people organize as part of their commitment to and belief in the Wikimedia platforms and projects, the mission, and the communities that have formed around the work. For these Organizers, Wikimedia has provided a source of personal identity and fulfillment. In our sample of Organizers, very few interviewees grounded their entire motivation

in a pure Wikimedia identity.

- **Examples include:** Wikimedia editors who want more people to find the same sense of belonging they have in the Wikimedia community or to create more content like they do; Open Source advocates who found their community in Wikimedia and want to promote that; or people who started with other motivations but found joy in the community and process created by Wikimedia (see also “Staying motivated” below).

COMMITMENT TO “OPEN”: Some Organizers find motivation in an “open” agenda that focuses on meaningfully building a cultural or technical commons. Many long-term Wikimedians eventually drift into an open agenda commitment. The Open Education, Open Access, and Open Source movements can be origin communities for Organizers who eventually turn to Wikimedia because the Wikimedia platforms or community provide meaningful tactics for fulfilling the larger promise of openness.


- **Examples include:** Educators and librarians who believe that their students and the broader public need inexpensive and open educational resources; Open Source enthusiasts who take joy in supporting others adopting open technologies and practices through Wikimedia; and academics who want Open Access research to be shared with a broader public.

SOCIAL ACTIVISM: Some Organizers are motivated by an activist agenda broader than Wikimedia or “open”. These Organizers approach Wikimedia with enthusiasm once they realize how Wikimedia platforms and the knowledge creation processes supported by Wikimedia communities allow them to bring their topics or issues to a broader public. Many of these Organizers learn more about and then develop deeper commitment to

Open or Wikimedia as they continue engagement with the larger Wikimedia community. In Argentina, the chapter has pursued an activism-powered growth strategy, resulting in a strong and healthy community of well-networked and very passionate activist Organizers. Though we hypothesize that other forms of activism, such as environmentalism, could find homes in Wikimedia projects, our sample included activists involved in:

- **Preservation of language:** Wikimedia platforms, because of their multilingual environment, provide ways for people to preserve or promote languages.
- **Preservation and/or sharing of culture:** The global scale and reach of Wikimedia makes it an attractive platform for activists seeking visibility for their local culture. One Organizer in Ghana was inspired to empower fellow students to edit by prominent Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, who described how stories coming out of Africa often depict just one perspective of Africans - that of people living in poverty - and the only way for Africans to create a new perception was to share other stories, from their own perspectives.^[8] For several organizers, creating Wikimedia content with others is a tactic for empowering communities to shape how their cultural identity is seen and preserved in an increasingly globalizing world. Wikimedia represents an opportunity for any culture and tradition to reach an international audience with multiple perspectives created by local sources.
- **Geographic diversity:** Even though a diverse representation of different countries is present on Wikimedia projects, some Organizers, particularly from under-represented regions, described a desire to create content and representation outside of the major metropolitan centers. One Argentinian Organizer described a power dynamic in the country in a

common Spanish phrase: **“God is everywhere, but meets you in Buenos Aires.”** Wikimedia offers an opportunity for local knowledge workers and activists to confront this national-city-bias: creating local content equal to the “national” and “international” conversations. Organizers from these less-noticed local regions expressed great joy when content they helped create reached national and international audiences on big-language wikis.



“For people, Wikipedia is the truth. People don’t question it. So it’s important to participate in these niches.”

– **Argentina Organizer and gender activist**

8 https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

- **Social justice:** Internet and knowledge systems tend to reflect the systems of power and privilege prevalent in larger society. Some activist Organizers see Wikipedia as a platform for building presence in disputed online spaces. This was particularly prevalent in Argentina, where the chapter has adopted a strategy of partnering with activist organizations to build their organizing community. Creating presence for under-represented voices allows for the dual mission work of advancing their larger activism while also contributing to a larger “Open” knowledge aspiration. We observed different subclasses of this kind of Organizer, including, for example:
 - In Argentina, Wikimedia is a public forum to surface the academic and public research about human rights activism. Community organizers partner with activist preserving memory of the disappeared during the U.S.-backed state terrorism of the [Dirty War of the 1970s and 1980s](#) in Argentina.
 - Wikimedia creates a public forum for surfacing knowledge about Gender and LGBTQ issues that are established in scholarly, journalism or academic environments but are not well represented in larger public consciousness. This is leveraged by activists in Argentina as well as in the international community.

RECOMMENDATION – Invite and support the integration of activists.

Recruiting Organizers with social activism identities is a win-win: they are activists in equity issues aligned with Wikimedia’s mission and can bring other organizing or communications skills to the movement. Invite activists and surround them with a community of practice that supports their participation in the Wikimedia movement.

Personal Opportunities

Many people are drawn to participation in Wikimedia communities, at least in part, out of a need to find opportunities that will propel their personal or professional growth. Especially prominent in Ghana, but experienced to some extent from everyone we met, Wikimedia offers an empowering environment for the development of new experiences, skills, capacities and connections that create opportunities for the future. Organizers described several kinds of personal opportunities:

- **Learning and self improvement.** The development of leadership, technology, writing, researching, and organizational skills puts Organizers in a better position to take advantage of other opportunities in their lives. Younger Organizers in particular saw these skills as deepening and strengthening their ability to achieve other goals.
- **Serial entrepreneurship.** Organizing commonly attracts serial entrepreneurs; they frequently have other creative endeavours, businesses, or non-profits, or actively found organizations, invent, or design independently or as part of other collaborative communities. For Organizers that enjoy this kind of activity, Wikimedia offers a number of open-ended opportunities to do entrepreneurial work for good.
- **Networking.** Developing and maintaining social and professional networks is important for finding employment opportunities, building potential future collaborators on entrepreneurial activities, and developing a professional reputation. Wikimedia organizing offers opportunities for building a professional network both locally and globally.

- **Resume building.** Especially for younger Organizers, Wikimedia organizing builds depth and breadth into their resumes. In Ghana where jobs are scarce, Wikimedia organizing can put work experience on their resumes otherwise difficult to get.

Context Note: More Organizers in Africa expressed the need for Wikimedia work to support their individual personal growth than in other contexts. Unlike Argentina and in remote interviews, where Organizers talked about ideological motivations before their personal growth opportunities, economic and professional opportunities are rare and coveted by Ghanaian Organizers. Wikimedia was frequently part of a collection of opportunistic activities that Organizers built into their lives. This creates both opportunities and challenges: volunteering can be very appealing to youth and underemployed professionals looking for experience and skills, but those same volunteers may stop organizing when they find more stable work.

Staying motivated

The motivations listed above attract people to the movement and contribute to continued engagement. However, even when confronted with a wide range of challenges, committed Organizers also described the following factors strengthening their persistence and desire to stay within the Wikimedia community:

- **Seeing impact.** Impact is perceived by Organizers in both measurable and immeasurable ways. Most Organizers described wanting to see a) the broader public impact of the work they are doing in Wikimedia, b) the effects their work had on participant and other Organizers' lives, or c) the progress the Organizer is making towards personal goals. These types of impact are often not clearly reflected in Foundation-supported metrics, and Organizers frequently expressed frustration with spending valuable time on gathering metrics that did not provide the information they desired.
- **Being Acknowledged.** Organizers value moments of acknowledgement both within the Wikimedia community (i.e. when other Organizers thanked them for their work, getting scholarships to movement events, or getting awards from their local Wikimedia groups) or by external communities (i.e. an article or photo getting picked up on social media or the news, or partners or collaborators praising their work in public). At the same time, a number of Organizers described feeling that much of their work goes unnoticed -- especially from established movement organizations like the Wikimedia Foundation but also from editing communities and among their peers in their regional contexts.

- **Belonging.** The Wikimedia community's strong social network encourages people to stay engaged. A number of Organizers described deep social bonds or feelings of belonging and shared identity with the group of people who form their community.

The analogous interviewees described actively building these kinds of “staying” motivations for their community members. They described regular social events, recognition of community member effort, and sharing of successes as investment as important in maintaining the health of the community.

“Having a community will keep their spirits up. We share ideas and come together.”

- Ghana Organizer

Demotivation

Organizers also face demotivating experiences that draw their energy down, reducing their commitment to organizing. When analyzing the findings of the research, we found that most of these experiences were attached with larger more systemic challenges that repeatedly taxed the Organizer's resilience to recover and continue organizing (see the Organizer Burdens and Challenges section).

Singular demotivating events such as article deletion or online harassment occasionally created very large demotivating experiences, but when adequately supported and motivated, many Organizers are able to overcome these demotivating events. The build up of recurring demotivating events without being balanced by positive motivating experiences leads to loss of interest and eventual disengagement from the movement.

SECTION 3. ORGANIZER ROLES

Communities develop organically and uniquely, but we observed common types of roles Organizers assume across communities. With limited volunteers to help, most Organizers assume multiple roles and switch between roles as needed. Roles fall into three categories:

Implementer Roles handle much of the work typically described as organizing; people assuming these roles generally plan and run events, write grants, teach new members, and manage projects.

Connector Roles handle outward-facing needs and help in the **growth of their communities**: cultivating partnerships, making introductions, tapping into ally networks, remaining on alert for potential volunteers to activate, acting as a publicist and ambassador for their community.

Supporter Roles are critical for **building community impact and retention**. These roles are some of the most needed and least recognized, and require the most capacity building and support from movement organizations. People in these roles mediate conflicts, provide emotional labor, identify gaps in knowledge, mentor other Organizers, and translate language and culture to help local communities interact with the global Wikimedia movement.

While Implementer and Connector Roles have been prioritized, people assuming Supporter Roles provide a tremendous amount of value, and typically express more frustration and burnout.

Recognition of the value that all roles bring to the movement, and helping communities identify gaps in the type of people they have to fill roles, can provide a more robust approach to building strong organizing communities.

Organizers can take on many different roles to develop a community, keep it resilient, and increase impact. Communities need a long list of different roles in order to realize their goals. These roles are rarely mutually exclusive, and most Organizers take on multiple roles at the same time out of necessity or out of propensity or capacity.⁹ The terms used below are based on language and concepts Organizers used to describe their work, and generally fall into three broad functional categories: Implementers, Connectors, and Supporters.

⁹ In general, our research reconfirms and adds nuance to the findings of the 2016-17 Leadership Development Dialogue: most Organizers identify and take on functions that diverge from traditional concepts of “leadership”. https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Community_Engagement/Leadership_Development_Dialogue

Implementers

Implementers do the work commonly described as organizing, or the work of program leaders in movement conversations: they write grants, plan events and teach new editors how to contribute.

	IMPLEMENTER ROLES	IMPLEMENTER TASKS
Build contributor skills	Event Organizer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arrange for space, wifi, laptops, food, etc. • Work with event venue • Manage sign-ups
	Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create teaching materials • Teach at edit-a-thons
	Facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep activities moving during an event by making helping participants find resources and people
Keep projects on track	Project manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build plans • Assign tasks • Track progress
	Grant and report writer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find funding for group activities and facilitate reporting
	Treasurer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage money for group

Connectors

A second category of Organizer roles fuel and support the growth of communities for Movement Organizers. Connectors help Organizers communicate with the external world, and find new members and allies for communities.

	CONNECTOR ROLES	CONNECTOR TASKS
Build networks	Professional ally	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make institutional networks available for Organizers and their communities
	Partnership manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build, maintain, and manage existing and new partnerships
Identify new people	Recruiter (contributors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find and recruit people who may be activated as contributors or partners into the Wikimedia movement • Pull experts and contributors in to Wiki projects on an as-needed basis
	Recruiter (organizing)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively seek and target specific people, skills or capacities to support more organizing activities
Communicate and publicize	Ambassador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocate for Wikimedia to the general public
	Publicist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and share communications about Wikimedia activities and events with the general public

Supporters

The final category of Organizer roles are critical to the long-term resilience and impact of Organizer and contributor communities. These Supporter roles identify and address personal needs, mediate conflict, build capacity, and help Organizers adapt to new situations and opportunities.

Particularly for Organizers who do supporting work, the toll of the emotional labor supporting other people can be intense. The paid roles who act in Supporter roles for the global organizing effort report feeling overwhelmed and burned out, because there are not enough Supporters within the movement.

“It’s a lot of emotional labor. You can not put this on the hands of volunteers. You need professionals who can mediate these types of tensions and conflicts.”

- Former Movement Organizer

	SUPPORTER ROLES	SUPPORTER TASKS
Mediate	Emotional supporter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and redress individual struggles of members of the community
	Mediator (in-person)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resolve conflict between people within the community
	Mediator (online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defuse conflict online, especially when inexperienced participants encounter online community rules and processes
Coach	Wikimedia facilitator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help less experienced Wikimedians navigate norms, connect to resources and documentation, and get unstuck on Wikimedia issues
	Mentor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help others identify and connect to their goals, see challenges, and solve problems, sometimes about issues or challenges broader than Wikimedia

	SUPPORTER ROLES	SUPPORTER TASKS
Interpret	Cultural translator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take existing resources from the global Wikimedia community, and make it relevant for local context
	Language translator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help community understand other language resources Help attendees interact with conference events and people
	Technical translator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Translate needs and desires into technical solutions or activities for the technical community
Improve impact	Strategist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help people develop loose goals into specific actions See long-term path, potential challenges, and opportunities
	Innovator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help groups find innovative solutions or make adjustments to old strategies.

RECOMMENDATION – Expand Supporter roles within the movement. Currently, some Supporter roles are fulfilled by paid staff at the Foundation or affiliates, who are overwhelmed by the amount of need from the community, leaving many Supporter functions unprovided. Volunteer Organizers describe not getting enough of this kind of help to advance their work. When these roles are fulfilled by volunteer Organizers, they often need capacity-building help and long-term support to provide reliable and regular support to their communities.

To create fluidity or to formalize roles?

A single Organizer may fulfill several roles at a time or switch between roles as needed. In collaborative communities such as Argentina, several Organizers may fulfill the same role, switching on and off as the situation demands. In others such as Ghana, the assignment of roles is more rigid. In evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches,

we find that flexible roles better accommodate the varying time availability of the volunteer-led organizations and lead to more community resilience. However, the flexible roles may require more community members, so may only be possible for larger or more established communities where there are enough individuals to distribute the functions among.

The fluid role structure allows volunteers to step in and out as needed. Some Organizers intentionally “doubled up” job assignments within groups with the goal of building redundancy into their structure. This served the triple purpose of (1) ensuring that a volunteer’s planned or unexpected exit would not jeopardize ongoing projects and relationships, (2) providing volunteers with a greater sense of assurance that they do not need to guarantee a long-term commitment in order to participate, a significant barrier for some volunteers, and (3) providing opportunities for mentorship, apprenticeship and knowledge exchange.

Editing is not a requirement

Organizers described a diversity of roles required for their communities to be successful, and emphasized the value of non-editing Organizer activity. Most Organizers we interviewed did not see editing experience as a prerequisite to Organizer action, or an important factor in effective organizing. They valued the networking, publicizing, socializing, and communications work they and other Organizers did to keep communities functioning and connected.

Organizing without editing

“The best way to get involved in a community is to acknowledge what other people are doing and incentivize it instead of doing what they are already doing.”^[10]



A gender activist and science communicator in Argentina described rarely editing. While she is a writer and a creator of content for the public, she does not write on Wikimedia platforms. Instead, she understands her value as a public figure with a large social media following who can elevate the organizing and editing work of her allies. She participates and moderates online conversation, shares events and new articles, and finds ways to help publicize the impact of her Wikimedia community.

The culture of the edit-count meritocracy within the Wikimedia movement, particularly within Wikipedia editing, signals to some new Organizers that they shouldn't organize until they have contributed significantly online. Conflict between online communities and Organizers or participants in

¹⁰ Photo by Ana Chang, Concept Hatchery (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

Organizer activities are exacerbated because Organizers don't have the same kinds of signals of credibility within parts of the community that recognize editing numbers as merit. Moreover, even very experienced Organizers expressed feeling a lack of authority or expertise to participate in certain online activities. Despite having broad movement knowledge that could make them good participants in community conversations, these Organizers often felt limited by their online credentials or lack of experience participating in online community governance.

Recognizing organizing talent

“If that edit metric stuck that would have prohibited me from attending and I would not be where I am today. I was given an opportunity I didn't deserve.”

One organizer, who had become prominent in their community and region, was identified by a more established Wikimedian as a potential Organizer who could benefit from regional conference scholarship despite having few edits at the time. The organizer credits attendance at the event as a turning point in their journey: exposure to the larger community helped start their organizing activity, most of which is now internationally focused.

RECOMMENDATION – Identify organizing talent separately from edit contribution. While there is a path from editing into organizing, the Wikimedia Foundation doesn't provide clear tools for recognizing other paths and talents beyond editing as equally valid entry points into the community. Developing ways to signal these talents would help the Wikimedia community bring diversity and equity into the movement.

SECTION 4. COMMUNITIES AND NETWORKS

Most successful Organizers are supported by a group of people around them. These include other Organizers who share roles and responsibilities, meta-Organizers who provide important information about how to work effectively within the Wikimedia movement structure, institutional partners and professional allies who support local organizing work with access to resources and expertise, and funders (in addition to or instead of the Wikimedia Foundation) who can provide financial resources. Particularly in the early stages of community development, organizing groups who can work together and meta-Organizers who can mentor the learning process are particularly critical to long-term success.

There are three primary strategies for building network resilience:

- (1) Investing in the development of meta-Organizers, who provide Wikimedia expertise and mentorship across multiple communities, has broad-reaching impacts on community growth and impact.
- (2) Encouraging the development of Organizer groups that share volunteer load provides more stability for local volunteer communities.
- (3) Building redundant connections to keep Organizers connected in both their local and global communities provides a way to retain talent, even if Organizers should leave their own local communities.

While this study focused on individual Organizers, the communities they activate are a key part of their experience and their success. Among the group we interviewed, these local networks of volunteers and activists often preceded the development of an established Wikimedia community.

Participants described these preceding networks having different shapes in different contexts: prior collaborators, friend groups, members of similar activist networks, etc.

In speaking with a consultancy which specializes in volunteer and nonprofit community building around the world, we are pointed to a consistent misconception: that foundations build new communities.

“When foundations say they want to build a community from scratch, we say you’re not building anything from scratch. It’s already there. You’re consolidating, giving it structure, helping it advance.”

– Analogous interview participant

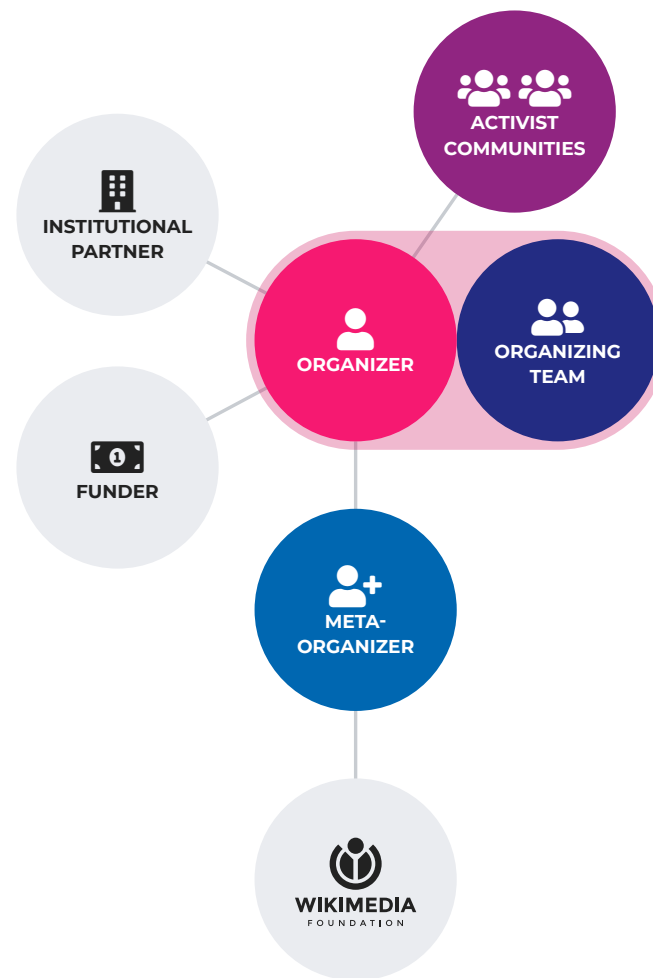
Prominent in our interviews were Organizers from activist groups who successfully tap into and leverage the existing communities they belong to for people, passion, and resources. Their involvement with Wikimedia became not one of building communities, but of structuring and strategizing their existing passions and connections into the Wikimedia model in order to have synergistic impact. Even Organizers who started groups because of a passion for Wikimedia, leverage their existing networks and connections to develop their community. To weave their context with the Wikimedia movement, Organizers constantly navigate and balance the needs and expectations of the Wikimedia movement, and the needs of their own environment and the networks they activate. The Wikimedia movement exists not as a lone driver of community, but as another platform for existing communities to rally, find voice, and represent their own interests.



Community activation^[11]

The founders of the Santa Fe community were friends collaborating on open source for eight years prior to becoming activated as Movement Organizers by the Wikimedia Argentina Chapter. The Chapter helped them integrate Wikimedia into their activities and led the two friends to bring other people they knew into the group. Through this mentoring and support, the “Litoral Intenso” group developed work plans, institutional partnerships, and projects that propelled their contributions to Wikimedia forward.

When we asked Organizers in Ghana and Argentina to create diagrams of their networks, we found consistent references to key partners and supporters within their inner networks, that can be displayed in a simplified “Key Network” diagram:



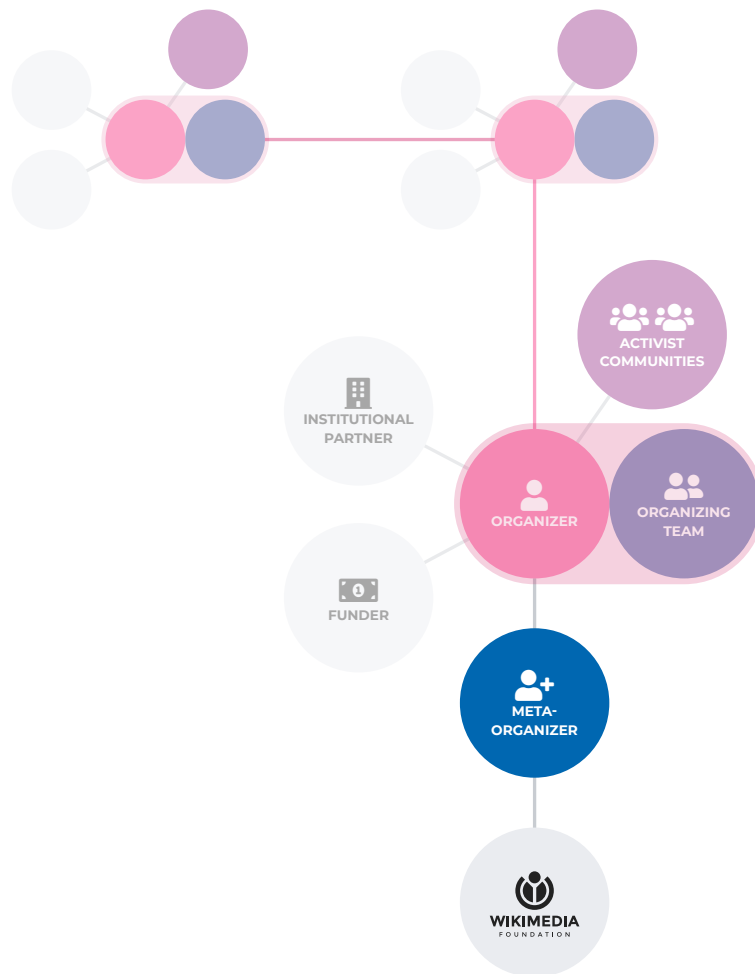
11 Photo by Ana Chang, Concept Hatchery (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

Key stakeholders include people and organizations the Organizer considers most important for success. Relationships may involve frequent interaction, or in some cases may be valuable despite infrequent interactions. Roles in their network included:

- **KEY META-ORGANIZER.** While Organizers are often adept at their local context, they can be stymied by navigating Wikimedia's complex systems. The challenges they face with accessing resources, finding experts to help resolve situations and developing community guidelines or processes all require in-depth knowledge of the Wikimedia movement they may not possess. The key meta-Organizer is a mentor-type person who is deeply rooted and familiar with the Wikimedia universe and can provide information to help Organizers bridge their local context with the international Wikimedia environment. The function of these individuals is crucial to growing new Organizers abilities: they help inspire, answer questions, get Organizers unstuck, help them think through questions, and connect them with other people and resources within the movement. These meta-Organizers are often employed or funded by the Wikimedia Foundation and have the time and deep knowledge to consistently help support local teams.
- **ORGANIZING TEAM.** Volunteer Organizers who have a strong local community group value the support provided by other Organizers in their community. In addition to sharing tasks and responsibilities, the local Organizer team collaborate together to think through problems, find locally relevant solutions, and set goals for their community. These Organizing teams are fluid groups that initially form as **temporary teams** to advance particular activities or events, but if successful or invited to continue organizing may evolve into a **long-term functional team**. Local organizing teams may not need the level of recognition or resource access that Affiliates have, and operate best when meta-Organizers support their learning, development and access to key resources.
- **ACTIVIST COMMUNITIES.** Some Wikimedia Organizers are connected to a larger group of activists who share their passions. This group can provide emotional support, human resources, event resources, or other Organizer needs. Sometimes, an Organizer's work and events are done in collaboration with the activist body, with the Organizer bringing the Wikimedia platform to help achieve the group's goals. When Organizers come into Wikimedia work because of activist agendas, they often also recruit other individuals within their activist network to join in on Wikimedia activity.
- **INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERS AND/OR PROFESSIONAL ALLIES.** The institutional partners and/or allies may not do direct organizing work, but provide resources, space, or other types of support for Organizers. These partners validate the work of organizing teams in their local context, bringing their reputation to a largely volunteer effort, and provide resources for Organizers.
- **FUNDER.** Wikimedia Foundation or other organizations provide funds that keep work moving forward. Nurturing this key relationship ensures the long-term continuation of their work.

Satellite networks

Central communities in a country can spawn satellite networks. In Kumasi as well as Santa Fe, local groups had formed that were supported by the larger groups in the capital cities, which essentially became meta-Organizers for the new satellite community.



Satellite networks face unique challenges. Forming in smaller and less cosmopolitan communities, they often struggle with fewer resources, smaller numbers of active people, a lack of access to transportation and technology infrastructure, and more conservative values that may not support the democratization of information ideals offered by the Wikimedia movement. In addition, they are usually more removed from information about the Wikimedia movement as well as power structures, relying on their centralized partners for information and resources, making it more difficult for them to understand and engage on a global level and represent their own interests. In many countries, English is less prevalent in these satellite communities, making it more difficult for them to access information even online.

15 hour bus ride for an editathon^[12]

An Organizer in Ghana is trying to document the local language used in his hometown of Tamale in the northern region of Ghana. Connecting with the Ghanaian Wikimedia community means a 12-hour bus ride from Tamale to find the small community in Kumasi, and an additional 5 hours to meet with the main Organizers in Accra. The transportation barrier means that for this Organizer, getting enough Organizers to run events in Tamale to document their local language has been impossible. He continues to attend events in Kumasi and Accra with the hope that he could eventually find a path to organizing in his own community.



¹² Photo by lucianf (flickr) via Creative Commons https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trotro_in_Accra_2009_B002.jpg

Network resilience

Dependencies on key nodes in the network of Organizers, i.e. Key Meta Organizers, mean that when Organizers stop organizing, entire branches of dependent volunteers are at risk of disengagement. These Key Meta Organizers are also often a point of failure or choke point for local organizing teams to get support, access to knowledge within the international movement, or find resources or support from partners.

Organizers, including Meta-Organizers, become disconnected from the larger movement for a variety of reasons: they get a new job or have a child, their meta Organizer contact was unavailable, friction forms within their community that builds into disengagement, or divergent strategies with other Organizers leave local Organizers isolated and unsupported. These kinds of disconnection events lead to the loss of motivated people from the Wikimedia movement. Some attrition is avoidable by building resilient networks. **Resiliency can be developed through:**

(1) **Identifying and strengthening key roles that support large branches.**

Meta-Organizers are responsible for the growth and development of many local Organizers across different communities. These in turn activate other Organizers and contributors in their network. Ensuring there are enough meta-Organizers to support growth, and that they are themselves supported to make long-term commitments to Wikimedia, is critical to movement growth and impact.

(2) **Building redundant roles and skills.** Key nodes within the network are intentionally duplicated by more experienced Organizers. People do organizing work or build partnerships with institutions in pairs or teams, meaning that if one Organizer within the group leaves, other people can smoothly carry the work forward.

(3) **Building multiple connections back into the network.** In cases where an Organizer leaves their community because of community friction, their skills and energy can still be brought into the movement through a global or regional connection that's separate from their local community. Increasing the number of access points to this larger network can happen in many ways: participating in campaigns, connecting laterally at movement events, participating in movement-wide collaborative groups (i.e. the Education, Library, GLAM-Wiki or Gender organizing communities) and participating in newsletters or other kinds of exchange forums. These additional connections allow possible paths to reentry for folks who want to continue after disconnection.

RECOMMENDATION – Develop network resilience. Building resilience into the network should be a top priority of the Wikimedia Foundation. Identifying key roles that support large branches, building redundancies, particularly where roles temporary or voluntary, and developing multiple connections for people in key roles into the global Wikimedia community will help support communities and retain Organizers who might otherwise leave the movement.

A note on network federalization and fragmentation

Organizers in growing communities need to decide how to handle local teams and regional groups, and how to manage the division of power and responsibility between central, satellite, and neighboring communities. Volunteers often handle this structuring process without professional organizational expertise, so they have little experience in understanding or exploring different possible structures and strategies for creating these relationships.

In Ghana and Argentina, the centralization of power in the capital cities provides support and structure to fledgling organizing teams in outer regions. Having the support and experience of a larger, older community provides stability and guidance for new teams, who can call on the central organization for ideas, coaching, resources, and other organizing support. However, there were also drawbacks: in Ghana, the centralization of resources and power means that remote Organizers are expected to come to Kumasi or Accra to join community activities.

Centralization also impacts partnership dynamics. Local institutions such as museums, libraries, or government institutions will sometimes prefer building official relationships with the larger and more respected central office rather than the local Wikimedia community. This may have the unintended effect of disempowering the local community, and creating additional work on already taxed meta-Organizers.

Structure impact costs

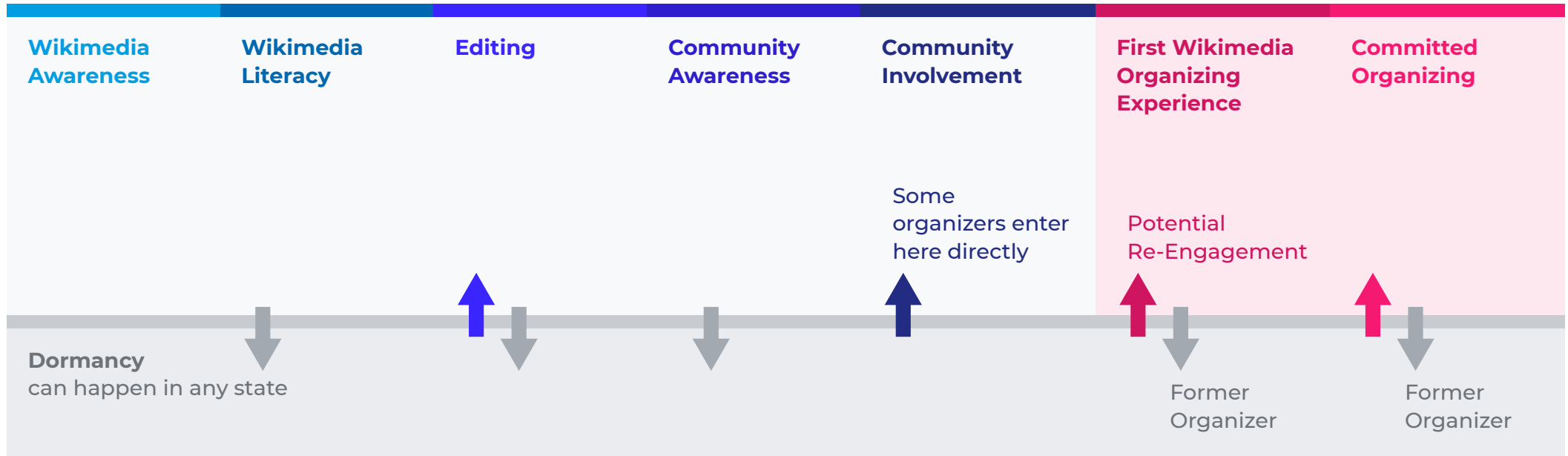
In Indonesia, a high respect for hierarchy and power means that the chapter staff in Jakarta needs to take long flights to remote islands to build relationships with institutions, even when there are local volunteers on the islands. Many costly trips precede relationships, as face-to-face trust building is essential to developing partnerships in Indonesia.

Ghana has the additional challenge of being home to two different officially formed communities: the Ghana User Group and Open Foundation West Africa (OFWA). OFWA works regionally, focusing on both Wikimedia as well as other open source tools, while the Wikimedia Ghana User Group is exclusively dedicated to Wikimedia and hopes to eventually become a Chapter. Both groups today run events in Accra and Kumasi.

This has created some confusion among new members and potential partners, who sometimes interact with one group without realizing it's different from the other.

SECTION 5. ORGANIZER JOURNEYS

PATH TO ORGANIZING



People take a variety of paths into and through the Organizer journey.

This is a journey characterized by starts and stops, periods of dormancy and periods of frenetic activity. Organizers are propelled to higher states of engagement through catalyzing moments both in the course of their everyday lives and in the Wikimedia realm. We identified eight distinct states of Organizer development. The first five take proto-Organizers through understanding the Wikimedia movement: awareness of the platform, understanding of the principles, editing, seeing the community and then joining it. These steps prepare people for future organizing work through the organic path of Wikimedia engagement.

Other Organizers, however, get their start in Wikimedia through an invited path that may skip the first five states. For these Organizers, the essential building blocks are sometimes missing from their experience, and they find themselves doing Organizing work without a working knowledge of the Wikimedia movement or community. Having the mentorship and support of other Organizers or meta-Organizers while they gain familiarity is an important part of organizing success for Organizers entering through the invited path.

The last three stages are true Organizing stages. People often start organizing as an experiment, without understanding what it's about or why they are doing it. Long term, committed organizing often comes after an event or interaction that helps them suddenly realize why organizing matters to them. From either of these two stages, Organizers also disengage or become dormant for a variety of reasons, where they sit on the edges of Wikimedia organizing: aware of the activities but unwilling or unable to rejoin.

There are a variety of paths into movement organizing. Some arrived through the path of editing; others arrived through job responsibilities or activist work, and have very few edits. Many Organizers recognized that the value of their work came not in their own edits, but how they activated and empowered a broader community and network to participate in Wikimedia.

We identified **8 distinct states** that Organizers experience in their Wikimedia journey. Experience with previous states helps an Organizer be more effective, but is not always required. Some Organizers are invited directly into organizing without those other supporting experiences. Organizers pass between different states by **catalytic experiences**, which help them think differently about Wikimedia and give them exposure and access to other parts of the Wikimedia community.

Most Organizers described long periods of **“dormancy”** between the different states where they were doing other things in their lives, but because they didn't have exposure to many catalyzing experiences, Wikimedia did not become part of their focus or habits. This falloff effect in Organizer journeys suggests that there is a wide network of individuals who could be reactivated.

States in the Path to Organizing

Organizing journey

Some people become Organizers out of organic interest in Wikimedia. The first five states help **Organic Wikimedia Organizers** to emerge within existing editing and reading communities:

- (1) **WIKIMEDIA AWARENESS.** Understanding that Wikimedia projects exist and have useful knowledge on them is an important prerequisite to engaging with the projects. Often, people have an early awareness of Wikipedia, but not of the rest of Wikimedia.
- (2) **WIKIMEDIA LITERACY.** Understanding how Wikimedia is collectively built, and that there are practices and principles behind content creation, is another common building block to editing or organizing.

In Argentina, the WikiPuentes program (WikiBridges) was an important part of many of the Organizer journeys: the project educated teachers about how Wikipedia works, but not about how to edit. People who interacted with this program were ready to be activated as Organizers.

- (3) **EDITING.** Even people who don't become long-time editors may attempt their first edits once they discover how Wikimedia works. People with editing experience are frequently better teachers of Wikimedia projects, although many Organizers from the invited path (described below) described this experience as not necessary to Organizing. This opinion that not all organizers need editing experience is not universally held within the movement, and reflects the editing meritocracy described elsewhere in this report.

(4) COMMUNITY AWARENESS. At some point, some people gain awareness that there are communities of people on the Wikimedia platforms, rather than just a collection of individual contributors. They also discover that there are many forms of contribution to the communities. Having this knowledge kept people engaged. Many Organizers had been stuck in solo editing, or had gone dormant before being reactivated because they lacked the support of a community that could support their engagement.

(5) COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT. Not all people who join community groups, events, or discussion forums in Wikimedia do so to Organize; sometimes just belonging in a community is enough. However, being part of a community provides more opportunities for catalytic experiences, through shared information and discussions.

The above five states often happen organically through exposure to the Wikimedia movement. In addition to the organic path through movement experiences, we observed a second pathway to organizing where new Organizers were actively invited, skipping some or all of the organic steps, and enter directly into organizing.

PATH TO ORGANIZING



Invited Organizers don't have as much experience with the Wikimedia movement and require more guidance and support anticipating and overcoming challenging experiences organizing in the movement; however, they often arrive experienced in general organizing skills gained from previous activist organizing.

RECOMMENDATION – Develop on-boarding and support structures. Invited Organizers bring a wealth of skills and capacities to the Wikimedia movement but often have a frustrating and confusing learning process. The Wikimedia movement and movement Organizations could provide more consistent on-boarding and support for invited Organizers so that they have fewer demotivating experiences as they join the community.

Organizing experience

Both **Invited** and **Organic** Organizers described the last three states of engaging in organizing in the movement:

(6) FIRST ORGANIZING EXPERIENCES. Most new Organizers are invited by more experienced Organizers. These first organizing experiences, however, require additional catalytic experiences for the Organizers to become dedicated. Many Organizers describe a dormancy after their first organizing experience, or occasional experiences with periods of dormancy where they help with activities as needed, but don't identify as Organizers.

(7) COMMITTED ORGANIZING. For some Organizers, there is a transition from occasional organizing to committed organizing. This transition from occasional helper to committed Organizer usually comes when Wikimedia fulfills one of their motivations, and they want the Wikimedia

community to give more space and support for fulfilling that motivation. Committed Organizers also described “reengagement” experiences where a new tactic, partnership model or kind of activity propels them into having another “first organizing experience” and then re-engaging in a different way. For example one Organizer described shifting from organizing events, to supporting the local affiliate in a formal role, to being re-inspired by training people in Wikidata.

(8) ORGANIZING DORMANCY. People step away from organizing for both catalytic and gradual reasons. A change in employment or family status can change a person's availability to engage. Some Organizers experience burnout from overwork or a downward spiral in engagement stemming from too many negative experiences. Others are attracted into other movements that occupy their attention. Organizers expressed a desire to provide graceful exit paths, while also creating opportunities for former Organizers to re-engage after dormancy periods if they are still interested.

In **Editing** and **Committed Organizing** we saw habit building as very important. Some Organizers who had created routines of editing or doing organizing activity continued to do the same except when it was severely interrupted by a major life change or negative experience.

RECOMMENDATION – Build habits through repetition. Encourage or design for regular activity: for example by funding multi-event grants that provide activity at regular intervals. Though people get pulled by catalyzing experiences into deeper engagement with Wikimedia, they can easily fall into dormancy if those experiences aren't repeated and reinforced.

Catalyzing Experiences

The organizing journey described by research participants rarely followed linear paths and often included starts and stops, depending on resources, time, and availability of information. Catalyzing experiences catapult Organizers into another state in the organizing journey. These experiences were often sudden, intense, and memorable for Organizers: opening up a new world of possibilities for them in the context of the broader Wikimedia movement. Without catalyzing experiences, Organizers often stay stuck in one of the states, with no impetus to move forward.

Some catalyzing experiences happen in the context of people’s lives, out of Wikimedia control.

“The most common thing people use to join is Wikipedia and they often get stuck there and it can take years for people to realize there are other projects.”

**– Wikimedia Foundation
Meta-Organizer**

CATALYZING EXPERIENCE	WHAT IS IT?	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZERS THAT CREATE CATALYZING EXPERIENCES
Change in personal situation	A life transition moment - job loss, new child, move to a new city - creates an opportunity for change.	Losing a job and having free time. Graduating from college and looking for a community to join. Working on a project in the office that involves Wikimedia.	Stay alert for moments when people are “ready” and be ready to offer organizing invitations.
Epiphany	Previous experiences suddenly come together, bringing new awareness of the personal relevance of or connection to Wikimedia.	Realizing that a job as a librarian or academic could be served by Wikimedia platforms; having a conversation with a family member about how Wikimedia could be a great place for sharing your hobby.	Build spaces and events that allow people to collaborate and share perspectives. These epiphanies more commonly occurred when people were exposed to conversations with others in the Wikimedia community.
News or other event: call to action	Societal events create a call to action on Wikimedia platforms.	Reading a news article where your small region is described incorrectly and realizing that the journalist had referenced Wikipedia for the information ; going to a football game where none of the female players are listed on Wikipedia.	Pay attention to societal changes or events and build responsive communications and outreach strategies connecting the events with sharing knowledge, openness and the Wikimedia movement.

Other catalyzing experiences occur because of specific **actions** or **events** instigated by Wikimedia or because of Wikimedia Organizers reaching people and making them more active or engaged.

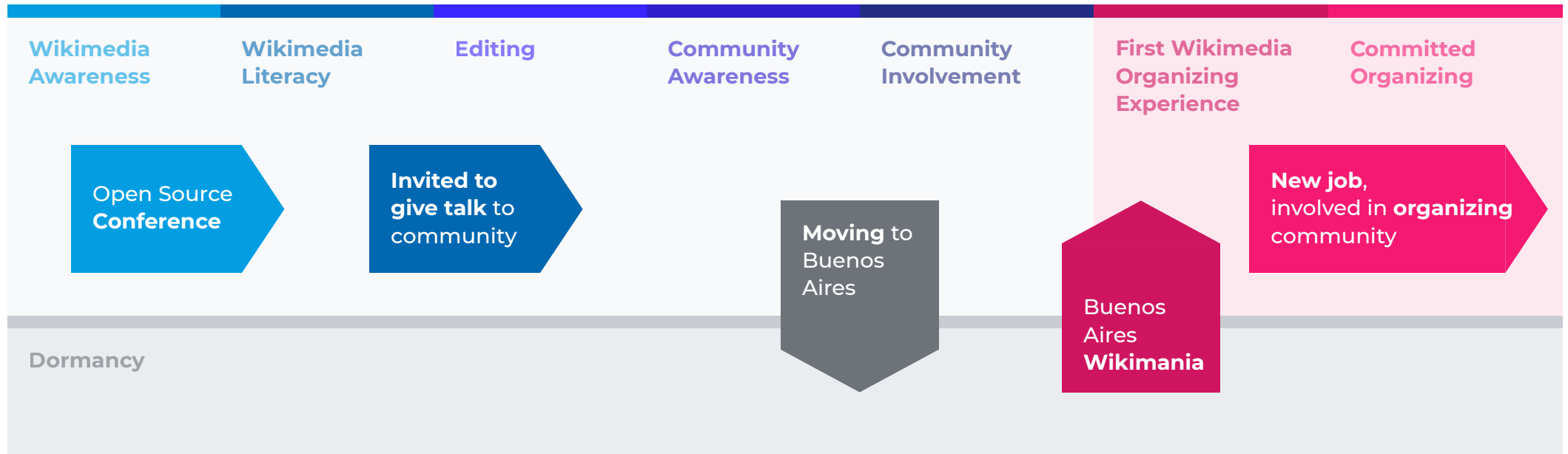
CATALYZING EXPERIENCE	WHAT IS IT?	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLE STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIZERS THAT CREATE CATALYZING EXPERIENCES
Invitation or delegation	An invitation to participate, or an assignment of Organizer responsibilities by another Organizer.	Being invited by a trusted member of your activist community to participate or teach in a workshop. Being invited to start a satellite community after attending an event in the capital city.	Identify and encourage potential Organizers to take on new responsibilities, participate in events or activities. Design roles in campaigns, activities and events for less experienced organizers.
Learning opportunities	Spaces explicitly designed to help potential Organizers to pass states.	Attending the WikiPuentes Open Online Course. Seeing presentation at a professional meeting about Wikimedia projects.	Develop trainings designed for different audiences of potential Organizers, such as professional groups or different kinds of activists.
Movement event	Movement events that create experiences and opportunities that inspire and make more committed participants.	Connecting with local community at editathons and regional trainings. Meeting people at international conferences.	Create targeted experiences to help people transition through different states with different audiences in mind at movement events.
Wikimedia news and information	Inspiration or understanding from broadcast communications by other Organizers	Reading about activities being implemented by others in the global community. Hearing calls to action for campaigns like Wiki Loves Monuments or Art + Feminism.	Circulate targeted story telling or calls to action.

RECOMMENDATION – Design to catalyze. Develop systematic and repeated exposure to catalyzing experiences for Organizers in all states of the journey to build and strengthen the flow of Organizers into the movement.

Example Organizer journey

One of the Argentinian organizers moved from state to state at a relatively stable pace, with catalyzing experiences moving him steadily from understanding the system to dabbling in organizing to making a firm commitment to the movement.

PATH TO ORGANIZING



The engagement equation keeps people committed. Once people reach the Committed Organizing state, they typically stay in regular organizing activities unless a sudden catalytic event brings them out, or their engagement drops slowly over time. We find that their engagement with the movement is built over time, depending on the challenges they are facing as Organizers, balanced by increases in energy brought from increases in motivations.

$$\text{Engagement} = \frac{\text{Motivations}}{\text{Challenges}}$$

Motivations can include the factors listed in the section above, but can also include rewards that are material or monetary in nature. Challenges include organizational and emotional barriers, and are described in detail in the section below.

SECTION 6. TOOLS


Movement Organizers use a variety of tools for complex and varied tasks. They use off-wiki and on-wiki tools depending on need, and sometimes build bespoke solutions. These tools help Organizers build, communicate with, and incentivize their community, connect with the public, organize events, track projects, and build content.

While on-wiki tools such as the Wiki Education Foundation's Programs and Events Dashboard and Wikidata-driven lists (like Listeria which allows query-driven worklists for events) are valuable resources for Organizers working deeply with the movement, community Organizers often turn to more common broadly-available tools such as Google Drive to collaborate with their communities. Similarly, online communication often happens on social media platforms, such as Telegram or WhatsApp, that provide more immediate access and group privacy.

Organizers use a combination of in-person communications, online channels, and collaborative platforms when collaborating with other people. While digital tools are efficient and scalable, they cannot replace the full emotive bandwidth of in-person communications, which is ideal for complex discussions as well as situations requiring the building and reinforcing of mutual trust.

Organizers frequently described a series of **External to Wikimedia** and **Internal to Wikimedia** tools that complement their ability to effectively scale work and create impact. These tools fall into a range of different functions, and when designing support for Organizers we recommend being clear about the function any given tool supports. Organizers frequently and repeatedly build workarounds into existing in-Wikimedia environments or overcome repeat challenges with more familiar and commonly-shared external tools such as social media or Google Docs.

Table of Tools Identified by Participants



	CLASS OF TOOL	TOOLS EXTERNAL TO WIKIMEDIA ECOSYSTEM	TOOLS INTERNAL TO WIKIMEDIA ECOSYSTEM	
External facing tools	Broadcasting communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banners/notices 	
	Professional representation communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Templates for communication • Press passes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business cards • Press kits 	
	Affirmation	From top to bottom, covering a spectrum from encouragement to recognition of community members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merchandise • Competitions & prizes • Certificates • Travel scholarships to attend events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-wiki affirmation
	Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning Management Software and other resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-wiki trainings • Wikimedia community practices and policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events Dashboard learning modules
	Support and collaboration communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media closed groups (Telegram, WhatsApp, Facebook groups, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassMessage 	
	Focusing and recruiting tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Custom tracking tools (i.e. Google Sheets) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-wiki list building • Discovery of community members on-wiki 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categories • Wikidata (e.g. content seeding, list generation, gap demonstrations)
	Content collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Drive • Flickr 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Source tooling (i.e. collection, discovery, creation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drafting spaces
	Monitoring and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreadsheets 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events Dashboard (used as a leaderboard)
	Internal facing tools	Measuring and tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spreadsheets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Programs and Events Dashboard • Grant Metrics and Event Metrics tools

Broadcasting communications. Connector Organizers often recruit participants for Wikimedia activities and connect with larger networks by turning to social media and other push communications tools such as email. For those with large social media networks, this effectively reaches a large, engaged audience. Very few Organizers reported using internal-to-Wikimedia tools for broadcasting communications. One reason is that the audiences they seek to reach are often not looking to Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects for events and other opportunities. Only the most experienced Organizers described using on-wiki Banners, notices and other kinds of notification, suggesting most Organizers don't know that these options exist or how to use them.

Professional representation communications. Many Organizers described either greatly benefiting from or wanting materials that improve the consistency and professionalism of their work with outside communities. Some Organizers provided things like business cards or press passes to increase motivation within their community, giving members a greater sense of importance. Organizers sought easier access to "official" and well-designed slide decks and other communication tools to increase the professional design of their communications-- local production of high quality communications materials can be quite hard or expensive.

Affirmation. Organizers described a number of large and small rewards for providing affirmation to participants and other Organizers. These typically serve different functions that range from encouraging community members to participate, to recognizing or rewarding existing skills, work, or contributions to the movement.

Learning. Organizers develop and deploy a variety of different learning tools to facilitate new contributors and other Organizers. Typically these fall into two broad categories:

- **Off-wiki learning and Learning Management tools.** Some Organizers train, teach, and communicate to others in off-wiki environments. The use of the MOOC environment in Wikimedia Argentina for the WikiBridges program emerged as an influential tool that brought Organizers to experience catalyzing experiences leading them into the community. Meta-Organizers frequently have a need to share and teach across communities.
- **On-wiki Community Resources.** Organizers frequently rely on documentation and training materials found on-wiki. Some also use the community and its policies as learning and teaching tools: using the documented community standards to facilitate other kinds of skills, such as research and learning how to write objectively.

Support and collaboration communications. This class of tools used by Organizers include social media and communication channels that facilitate functional teams to collaborate across other parts of the Wikimedia movement. These are often semi-public or invite-only channels such as email or Telegram groups that provide a better sense of privacy and community. The invite-only channels were very important for maintaining support, especially for those working on underrepresented topics. We did not hear about any use of on-wiki communications for this work.

Topic focusing and recruiting tools. Organizers working on events or coordinating community participation use a number of different tactics for building focus, tracking progress, and maintaining lists of potential participants. Several Organizers build these tools off-wiki using platforms such as Google Sheets, while other Organizers use a mix of complex on-wiki tools such as Wikidata-driven lists, and deep knowledge of how Wikimedia wikis work to achieve goals such as finding editors via contribution histories and categories. Finding the right content to work on and inviting the right existing contributors in the community to participate is a very difficult challenge.

Content collection. Some Organizers encourage new contributors to participate by contributing to offline resources, which have a lower barrier to entry and less likelihood of encountering online hostility. These early experiences of uploading images to Flickr, drafting articles in Google Docs, collecting research materials in spreadsheets ahead of time, provide easier paths to Wikimedia contribution and provide positive, impactful first experiences. Moreover, Organizers use different tools for searching for, accessing, and collecting research materials. In communities such as Ghana that struggle with the lack of reliable sources on local topics to cite for the creation of articles, there is a need to create more sources through digitization effort or collaboration with external partners such as journalists in order to create content on Wikimedia platforms.

Managing and monitoring activities. Organizers manage their activities with both off-wiki tools such as Google Sheets, or on-wiki tracking tools. One creative Organizer introduced the use of the Programs and Events Dashboard to her university club as a way to track their own progress on an edit contest, effectively making the Dashboard a public leaderboard. As with the Topic Focusing and Recruiting tools, Organizers felt this category of tools needed strengthening.

Measuring and tracking. We observed measurement and tracking tools primarily used to obtain metrics to report to the Organizer's affiliate or Foundation funder. For the most part, these metrics were described as not very relevant to their own goals. However, some Organizers see the value of metrics as a way to show their community the impact of their work to increase motivation as described above, or as a way to see whether their efforts to improve practices were effective. There is an opportunity to help make metrics more relevant to motivating participants.

Communications within teams

One of the most important tasks Organizers have is to facilitate communication and collaboration across their groups. In using the tools described to achieve their goals, Organizers use a variety of methods of communication depending on goals.

In-person communications. The ability to meet a person or group is highly valued by Organizers. These face-to-face meetings are vital for building identity, a sense of shared purpose, tackling difficult problems, or creating strategies. Particularly in a volunteer network where many people contribute alone during odd and unpredictable hours, in-person meetings provides a way for building social bonds that are both motivating for the individuals and strengthening for the community. These convenings can also provide the necessary hands on support and motivation to new users, or contributors not likely to contribute outside of in-person meetings. Teams can sustain more focused and consistent collaborations after in-person meetings, and describe feeling inspired and empowered to be effective.

Collaborative online channels. Many Organizers keep in touch with their teams through the use of only chat and voice channels such as Telegram or WhatsApp, video calls, and email to continue communicating and collaborating after in-person meetings. These collaborative and often asynchronous channels help people continue organizing work while navigating busy lives. These channels are convenient and effective, but do not provide the bandwidth to tackle complex challenging problems, or to provide emotional benefits of inspiration, fulfillment, and community provided by in-person conversations.

“Physical presence is very important. You feel like you are a team. It’s a sense of belonging.”

– Ghana volunteer Organizer

Collaborative workspaces. Teams use collaborative workspaces, either on Google Drive or in an on-wiki documentation page, to make progress on projects together. These shared workspaces allow them to pool their contributions into one place that can be accessed and beneficial to the entire group. One Organizer deliberately told new Organizers to think of the Google Docs and Sheets she provided for them as “your office for Wikimedia,” encouraging participants to keep them clean and organized for the group.

The three examples below show how the same two people might need to use a mix of different types of communications for different tasks.



In-person communication

Collaborative online **channels**

Collaborative online **workspaces**

COMPLETE EDIT LIST



MEMBER SUPPORT



STRATEGY MEETING



Almost all groups we met used all three forms of communications described above, and required the full range of channels in order to be effective. Since collaborative online channels and collaborative workspaces are free, and because in-person communications often carried associated costs, in-person communication was the communications channel in most need of financial support. Physical spaces, travel costs, and refreshments for meetings were the most commonly-reported costs that created barriers to meeting in person.

RECOMMENDATION – Support in-person activities. Newer communities rely heavily on in-person convenings to get established, grow, and build focus. Convening establishes trust and a shared identity and purpose within the community. Some cultures require more in-person meetings to establish official relationships; supporting increased travel costs established organizers to build partnerships in these cultures would be a wise investment in long-term stability.

ORGANIZER BURDENS AND CHALLENGES

Taking on the role as a Movement Organizer means taking on an array of challenges. Organizing is a constant practice of consensus-building, volunteer rallying, and problem solving on a limited amount of time. Some of these challenges are faced by Organizers globally, and reflect the organic nature of the movement. Others are specific to context, and particularly hinder Organizers working in developing countries and other regions with social and economic inequality. Almost all Organizers do significant emotional labor, taking on burdens that are difficult to define but critical to the long-term success of their community. This emotional labor is exacerbated by the poorly defined and largely unrecognized job of volunteer organizing, which makes it difficult for Organizers to find clear guidelines or support for their challenges.

Acknowledging these challenges is a critical first step to addressing the friction inherent in the Wikimedia system so we can better engage and retain Organizer talent. Resolving them will take time and effort, and a sustained effort to better listen to and collaborate with Organizers from around the world to find solutions.

SECTION 7. STRUCTURAL/SYSTEM CHALLENGES

Across the many locations where our participant Organizers were active, we heard consistent reports of the following common challenges.

Time

As a volunteer activity upon which other people depend, organizing requires a consistent, long-term donation of time to follow through on projects and goals and be available to help community members. Particularly in the early stages of community building, when the number of volunteer Organizers is low but the number of tasks to be completed are numerous, a steady effort is required to build momentum for a community to grow. We found different ways in which the challenge of having enough time can manifest:

- **Periods of availability, followed by unavailability.** Some Organizers start doing organizing work because they have sudden availability; for example, they have lost a job and have time on their hands. University students find that they have time as students, but not when they graduate. However, when a new job materializes or a student graduates, organizing activity may fall by the wayside as the Organizer needs to prioritize career-building and money-making activities.
- **Partial or erratic availability.** Some Organizers have long-term availability, but in short spurts or only as small amounts of time on weekends, evenings, and other periods when they aren't fulfilling work or personal obligations. Fitting organizing work in under these conditions is challenging, particularly when people have a desire to follow through on their commitments to a group.

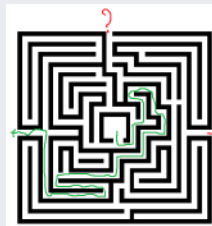
Because of issues with time commitment, potential Organizers with time on their hands may not join an organizing community out of a fear of failure to deliver what's needed. Communities like Argentina compensate for this by building redundant, shared roles that offer more time flexibility for Organizers to step in and out as needed. The knowledge that they are not the sole responsibility holder makes it easier for Organizers to join an organizing team. In addition, the paid chapter staff in Argentina have long-term organizing stability that can help communities with variable availability.

Straddling multiple ecosystems

Organizers are constantly mediating across different systems and contexts to try to achieve their goals. While they are intimately familiar with their own local context and the needs of the community they are trying to build, they also need to align with the expectations of local partners, the requirements of the Wikimedia community, and to communicate the Wikimedia context back to their own community.

Lack of clarity in Wikimedia movement

New and experienced Organizers alike cited a lack of clarity within the movement as part of their frustration.



In our interviews exercises, Organizers commonly chose this picture^[13] to represent the most challenging days they experience while organizing for Wikimedia. They often described a consistent frustration caused by not knowing the way through to their goal.

¹³ Image by Naowen (CC-BY-SA 4.0)

This lack of clarity leads to disengagement, either as they wait for an answer to arrive from a meta-Organizer or someone else within the Wikimedia community, or as they give up after trying and failing with multiple approaches. This challenge can be broken down into several components:

- **Lack of clarity from the Wikimedia Foundation.**

- **Strategy.** Organizers, particularly meta-Organizers, found it difficult to deliver on a strategy from the Foundation that has not been well articulated to the community. “It is difficult to deliver on a strategy when there is none,” said one meta-Organizer. Organizers also try to interpret small signals from the Foundation, such as metrics reporting requirements, to infer the strategy that the Foundation wants in an attempt to better align with the larger movement.
- **Support.** Organizers do not know what kind of help is available from the Foundation, or whom to contact if they need help. Without clear information about support, they make assumptions about the Foundation and what is available. In one example, an Organizer tried to handle harassment and undue attention concerns themselves rather than contacting the Foundation, because they assumed the Foundation was busy. On the other hand, another Organizer who received some support from a team at the Foundation assumed that the team was ready to strategically invest more time in their efforts, and was disappointed when less time than expected was actually available.
- **Lack of clarity in organizing expectations.** When clear organizing guidelines or structures are not defined and understood, individual Organizers find themselves struggling alone to determine what the right next move should be, or what their responsibilities are towards their community. An Activist Organizer in Argentina wrestled with whether to invite everyone she was requested to contact for an editathon or leave

out a presenter, because he was rumored to have assaulted another community member. Without guidelines, training, or understanding of the expectations and norms of the community, the Organizer felt unsupported in acting on this knowledge. This example represents the multitude of micro-decisions that Organizers make while guessing what *should* happen, without knowledge that empowers them to act.

- **Lack of visibility into the movement network.** Even relatively isolated local Organizers were aware that somewhere another Organizer like them might have similar experiences that, if shared, could inspire their work. Organizers are deeply curious about how other communities succeed and desire an ability to connect with and learn from others, but this information is difficult to find and organizers are not aware of the spaces to connect and have meaningful conversations with others.
- **Lack of clear online assistance.** Organizers told us that while online help was available, it was not accessible. Online Wikimedia resources for Organizers are difficult to find, and Organizers rely on other Organizers to direct them to needed resources. Organizers lean heavily on informal off-wiki communications channels, or difficult-to-access busy meta-Organizers, to find assistance. Sometimes, a pointer to an online resource is enough to re-energize and reactivate stalled Organizers; in many cases, detailed step by step instructions and tutorial videos are necessary to truly reengage an Organizer and not cause further overwhelm or disengagement.
- **Lack of clarity in online community policies and processes.** Both organizers with experience editing and who were new to Wikimedia encountered community policies and processes that slowed or increased challenges to their own work, or discouraged participants from participating after editing events. This includes processes like articles for deletion, community policies like Notability, and the process for changing

policies. These challenges were especially visible when working with marginalized knowledge, where community policies and practices don't account for differences in context, i.e. application of verifiability policies to delete Ghanaian content because online publications from Ghana don't look like western source materials.

Insufficient support

Because Organizers receive little structured training and due to the above clarity issues, organizers frequently need informational and emotional support. Organizers who reach out to help channels often fail to find the help they need. Paid Organizers at the Foundation and affiliates feel overwhelmed with the guidance requests from the community. They triage the need they see, leading to unfulfilled help request from unprioritized organizers. As a result, the Wikimedia movement does not fully leverage the volunteer will and time available: Organizers in need of help stall or become discouraged waiting for answers.

“I would have found this knowledge eventually after 200 years, some of the info buried deep somewhere in a 50 page Wiki article.”

– **Movement Organizer**

Insularity of Wikimedia movement

The culture of the Wikimedia movement itself challenges many new Organizers. A strong “meritocracy” and informal hierarchy created by edit counts and persistent entrenched community members is challenging for new editors, Organizers, and communities. Reputation and recognition depend on on-wiki meritocracy and affiliate structures, and Organizers contributions are not always recognized by the established communities. The common phrase “A Wikipedian is born, not made” implies an inherent exclusiveness to the Wikimedia community where many people are not allowed to grow.

Organizers reported that this exclusive participation model can lead to a hostile environment that pushes folks away. Organizers from analogous global communities as well as meta- Organizers described building strategies that intentionally reward other kinds of contributions and reduce situations where enthusiastic and experienced community members impose meritocratic expectations on new contributors. The Open Source software advocate Coraline Ada Ehmke describes this as the “[Dehumanizing Myth of Meritocracy](#)” where Open Source communities reinforce inequitable and exclusive community dynamics that impede growth.

Language

As an international movement, Wikimedia faces challenges in finding common languages for equal participation. These language challenges manifest in many different ways:

- **Wikimedia platforms and tools.** While some of the information and interfaces on Wikimedia are translated into multiple languages, not all of it is translated, meaning that only people who understand English can contribute equally on Wikimedia platforms, like Wikimedia Commons,

Meta, and Wikidata.

- **Wikimedia events.** Since many international Wikimedia events are conducted in English, Organizers who attend international events find that they can fully participate only if they are fluent in English.

Translate or participate? One of the Argentinian organizers is a fluent English-as-a second language speaker. This language skill allowed him to participate and learn from Wikimania and international hackathons. Other Organizers from Latin America, however, relied on him for translation. He was torn between his desire to make the most of his own event experience and supporting other Spanish speakers to gain value from the same event.

- **Choosing a language for reach.** Some Organizers choose to participate in English, even when not their primary language, because as an internet language, English content reaches the most people. This applies to online contributions as well as to project proposals where Organizers are seeking feedback.
- **Availability of online information.** English-centricity is not a challenge unique to Wikimedia. As the largest internet language, English has more than half of the most-visited homepages on the World Wide Web, and about a quarter of the internet population.^[14] Research participants who are proficient in English say they have access to more online resources that help them do their Wikimedia work when they seek information on the English internet.

Access to resources

In addition to managing people, Organizers also constantly look for resource opportunities. These resources provide their community with a place to meet, electricity, food and drink for volunteers, and information. Organizers keep a sharp eye out for potential partners and funders who can provide help for their community to reach their goals.

Managing grants

Interacting with the Wikimedia Foundation on the management of grants creates a significant amount of stress for Organizers. While funding is always needed, the amount of work involved in procuring funding through the Wikimedia grant process sometimes does not feel proportional to the amount of aid received. Grant reporting, an unpaid activity, takes volunteer time that Organizers need for other Wikimedia activities. Metrics and measurements that don't align with Organizer goals also create frustration. The question of why certain measurements are chosen and prioritized remains unanswered for some Organizers.

Several Organizers reported opting to skip Wikimedia Foundation as a funder in favor of working with other funders who are easier to work with, such as their local offices of International Non Governmental Organizations.

“You measure things the Foundation wants to measure, not what’s useful to us”

– US-based volunteer Organizer/grantee

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_used_on_the_Internet

SECTION 8. PERSONAL RISKS AND BURDENS

In addition to overcoming the structural challenges listed above, Organizers also find themselves taking on personal risks and burdens in their volunteer role.

Emotional labor^[15]

Successful organizing work requires constant emotional labor. Organizers need to maintain the emotional well-being of their community in order to keep individuals engaged and productive. Organizers recognize that their most valuable asset is volunteer time, and work hard to build a healthy and functioning group environment.

Not only are Organizers juggling challenging logistical and systemic issues, but they need to be socially adept to pay attention to the needs of their volunteer community, anticipate trouble, and mediate differences. Volunteers within their community may be dejected by personal, professional, or volunteer setbacks, and Organizers step in to help counsel and mediate. New editors may find their articles under attack or deleted, and experienced Organizers need to defend work or support others editors to make changes before the situation becomes heated.

The reliance on volunteer passion is a double-edged sword. While passion will drive people to donate more time and energy, it is also a recipe for eventual burn-out unless volunteers consciously manage their energy. Moreover, passionate and persistent volunteers who disagree with Organizers can create persistent and repeated negative interactions.

“Have done a bunch [sic] activities, I guess I have run my course. Handling a career and this volunteer work, it is not possible to keep up this level of activity. I do what I can. I have to ration the energy I have.”

- Gender activist Organizer

Many paid Organizers build deliberate time and space into their work schedules and interactions with volunteers to allow people to share and reflect on emotional burdens or frustrations. They reach out to volunteer Organizers who are struggling, meet people for an informal chat over coffee, set regular meetings, and employ other methods to monitor and maintain the emotional health of those they support. They often expressed frustration at the lack of recognition of the time required for this aspect of their work, even as they prioritize it because of the impact it can have in retaining and re-energizing other Organizers.

¹⁵ While Organizers in many regions described aspects of emotional labor as a component of their work, the recognition of what qualifies as “emotional labor” - or even its existence - varies from culture to culture. For example, our research partners in Ghana and Argentina said that these concepts were not well understood or discussed in broader public contexts.

Recognition and validation

The ongoing contribution of time and effort, when unrecognized and unvalidated by a larger community, leads to burnout and disengagement. In Wikimedia, as well as in analogous communities we interviewed, the need for volunteer networks to have their efforts noted, their challenges heard, and their existence recognized was an important component of community engagement. In the informal and unstructured Wikimedia environment, volunteers struggle for attention and recognition, feeling like they are “speaking into the silence” of Wikimedia. An unevenness about who gets recognized creates tensions between volunteers and communities. Paid Wikimedia staff told us that over time, volunteers will quit from the frustration of never being acknowledged or heard.

Volunteer acknowledgement in analogous organizations. In learning from analogous volunteer organizations, we found innovative approaches to address the need for recognition. From having regular open “office hours” to transparent systems of receiving feedback to annual acknowledgement ceremonies, successful organizations have developed ways to recognize and validate volunteer experiences.

Navigating hostile environments

Some Organizers take on personal exposure as part of their organizing work. For many activists in Argentina, dealing with hostile people and environments was not limited to the Wikimedia context, but part of their everyday fight for justice and representation. They found comfort through their activist and Wikimedia communities, sharing the burden together to shield and support individual activists. For other Organizers, hostility may

come directly from their Wikimedia work. The public nature of Wikimedia exposes Organizers to those that disagree with their work.^[16]

¹⁶ We have several examples of this in the interviews, that we have not shared out of privacy considerations.

SECTION 9. CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES OUTSIDE OF WIKIMEDIA INFLUENCE

Organizers work in a variety of global and social contexts and must translate the movement needs into strategies effective for their local situation. Organizers working in less stable contexts face even greater challenges. These Organizers have a double effort of managing challenges outside their control while needing to justify their requests for equity-focused accommodation to the Wikimedia community. For example, Organizers in Ghana described frustration at needing to defend travel and other venue expenses, such as internet or routers, when global north community members made comments on meta grant pages.

Political instability

Organizers trying to build communities in unstable political environments may find it more difficult to build long-term relationships and partnerships with government and government-sponsored institutions. Libraries, museums, and ministries may not have the power to make decisions, political whims make partnership paths difficult to navigate, and hard-won decisions may suddenly change when another party comes into power.

Economic need or instability

In economically challenging situations where income is scarce or unreliable, the ability to organize becomes a privilege even more exclusively reserved for people with the financial means to do unpaid work. The need to find consistent a living leads some Organizers to abandon their organizing work, or to organize with the hope of a paid job.

“On any given day they would choose work that makes money because they need to survive.”

– **Wikimedia Meta-Organizer**

Organizers receiving funding from the United States carefully watch the exchange rate between their local currency and the dollar, and warily eye their own currency’s inflation. Grant requests may suddenly need to double because of inflation in the local currency. In Argentina, where the inflation rate reached 48% in 2018^[17], grants approved at the beginning of the year may no longer cover the outgoing expenses by the end of the year.

“**What be your hustle?**”^[18] Ghana has a severe shortage of formal white collar jobs for college graduates. Many people juggle multiple informal or part-time positions to make ends meet - in the Ghanaian English parlance, they have multiple “hustles” to find sources of income. Because of this, many of the volunteer Organizers in Ghana are also motivated by a strong desire to find jobs, and access to networks, international opportunities are highly coveted. For example one local organizer is starting to receive grants for paid work on other open source projects and is now directing their professional and volunteer effort toward that platform and away from Wikimedia.



¹⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-argentina-economy-oecd/argentina-inflation-rate-will-slow-to-about-34-percent-this-year-oecd-idUSKCN1R82IS>

¹⁸ Photo by Abbey Ripstra, Wikimedia Foundation

Weak infrastructure

People organizing in regions of the world with weak infrastructure face basic challenges that those in the developed world do not. These include:

Internet accessibility.

- **Slow and costly internet.** While half of the world's population is now online, much of that access is of low quality, low consistency, and high cost. According to a report by the Alliance for Affordable Internet, regions where people pay the most for mobile broadband internet (relative to monthly salary) also experience the slowest download speeds. While the US and Europe enjoy relatively fast internet at affordable rates, countries across Africa experience the slowest internet connections, at the highest prices. The internet, while it exists, is largely ineffective or unaffordable^[19]. In this environment, it is more difficult for Organizers to do their own online work as well as to encourage their communities to use their expensive internet packages for editing. Additionally, accessing high bandwidth instructional materials or attending remote video sessions can be difficult and expensive.
- **Unreliable internet.** In Argentina as well as in Ghana, Organizers created content offline, sometimes by writing on paper, in order to circumvent internet problems that might cause disruptions to their work.
- **Too many people on a single IP.** When Organizers in Argentina or Ghana set up mobile wifi spots or tried to use institutional IPs to support an editathon, they found that the multiple edits done by new editors attributed to a single IP caused edits to be flagged and removed or even resulted in news users being banned.

Unreliable energy.

In developing regions of the world, the electrical infrastructure cannot keep up with the energy needs of the people. In Ghana, this persistent, unpredictable loss of power is called dumsor^[20]. Power goes out intermittently, bringing down the internet, and bringing additional challenges for Organizers.

Transportation.

Wikimedia organizing takes even more time when transportation infrastructure is weak. Access to central cities such as Buenos Aires and Accra was limited by the weak transportation infrastructure, making it more challenging for remote Organizers to collaborate with central communities and attend the editathons and other events more prevalent in larger communities. In Ghana, public transportation on bus-like vans called “tro tros” were unscheduled, and left only when they were full, resulting in the possibility of waiting hours before departure.

Weak funding environment

The United States and European countries have relatively strong funding environments compared to the rest of the world: familiarity with grant process, professionalization of nonprofit work, accountability procedures that are generally understood and accepted, and philanthropic organizations that are native to the countries they fund. Some developing countries such as Indonesia also have this, fueled by international funding and efforts that have grown a professional nonprofit sector that understands the needs and norms of granting environments. In Ghana and Argentina, local charity is

¹⁹ <https://a4ai.org/mobile-broadband-pricing-data/>, <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/the-worlds-slowest-internet-is-the-least-affordable/>

²⁰ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumsor>

less developed than the United States^[21], and the nonprofit sector is not as well developed, making it more challenging for Organizers in these countries to have the expertise to compete with other communities that have a more innate understanding of how to work with grants and communicate with funders.

Low volunteerism and activism

Different cultures build different norms and expectations around the ideals of volunteerism and activism.^[22] People participate in voluntary activities for altruistic, utilitarian, and social motivations that vary widely from region to region. Organizers working in contexts where volunteerism and activism was not a norm had more difficulty attracting people to their communities. Organizers in Africa, in particular, find low resonance with the concept of volunteering for altruistic or social reasons, and rely instead on utilitarian benefits to attract members to their community: for example offering material rewards, training, or opportunities for career advancement such as letters of reference. Moreover where volunteerism was described in Ghana, for example, it was frequently about meeting basic economic or social needs; volunteering for knowledge production is not very common. Argentina Organizers, however, are able to tap into the altruistic ideals of volunteerism found in the vibrant culture of social activism to build their community.

21 https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/caf_wgi2018_report_webnopw_2379a_261018.pdf

22 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227005716_Cultural_Values_and_Volunteering_A_Cross-cultural_Comparison_of_Students'_Motivation_to_Volunteer_in_13_Countries

SECTION 10. CONTEXTUAL CHALLENGES INFLUENCED BY WIKIMEDIA

Many of the larger contextual challenges described in the previous section are difficult to directly influence or engage with from the movement perspective except through **equitable accommodation**. The Wikimedia community has the capacity and experience for more directly building space for and support for overcoming contextual challenges related to language, technological contexts, and knowledge access environments:

Language equity

In addition to the general language challenges described above, there are additional equity barriers with language. This is particularly evident in two types of language situations:

- Local language Organizers who are trying to preserve native languages struggle to find sources and experts of language that can guide the development of a new Wiki. In many contexts, the fluency of local language resides in an older generation who lacks the technical skills to contribute to Wikimedia. A lack of native keyboards compounds challenges for local language Organizers. However, local context here also makes content creation easier, as the relatively small language Wikis make for more friendly editing environments where differences can be personally negotiated between people who know each other.
- Emerging communities have a different set of language equity challenges when participating in larger Wikis. In Ghana, the official common language is English, and most Wikimedia work is done in English. However, new Ghanaian editors entering the established English Wikipedia often find the online environment to be hostile and not accepting of their perspectives and needs. Almost every participant we met who had created articles described negative experiences caused by

their articles being contested or deleted on their first attempt. A number of these deletions are due to low quality and violations to community standards and therefore exemplify a need for more robust training around Wikimedia policies and editing standards.

Societal context around adopting technology

In rural parts of Argentina, in many parts of Ghana, and in the contexts of some remote Organizers, knowledge needed to effectively use and gain access to technology is frequently lacking. Most Organizers we encountered had strong technical skills, but described having to **“go back to the basics”** when working with new community members. Common barriers are:

- **Basic computer skills.** Wikimedia Organizers in low-technology environments need to be prepared to support some participants at events training in fundamental skills such as using the computer mouse or keyboard, navigating web browsers and WYSIWYG interfaces, and typing.

“In rural areas, teachers don’t want students to touch the laptops from fear of breaking them. They are supposed to learn theory only.”

– Rural Ghana Organizer

- **Internet information culture.** In countries where access to the internet is still fairly new, people lack the assumption that the internet is for accessing information. Unlike European and North American social contexts where internet-based research is a skill and activity that permeates society, many Organizers in internet-emergent countries need to instill the practice of basic online information-seeking behavior: forming effective queries for search engines, evaluating source reliability, and navigating websites for information. This gap was also identified in the [New Readers](#) research and in the [Wikimedia Movement Strategic](#) direction pre-research, and is related to more complex digital literacy priorities described by international bodies such as [UNESCO](#) and the [International Federation of Library Associations](#).
- **Availability of technology.** Organizers described not having access to all the technology they needed to organize (i.e. having to borrow or buy laptops, routers, or wireless hotspots). Organizers described large disparities between the editing and contribution environments on the more common mobile phone with laptops that are relatively more rare and precious. Particularly in Ghana, community members described saving for computers and borrowing laptops from friends or family before they could engage in editing or Organizing activities.

Knowledge Context

Many of Wikimedia's activities and models for collecting and sharing knowledge were developed in North American or European contexts where there are strong public traditions and infrastructure for consuming, creating and sharing knowledge. Organizers in other contexts have to develop strategies for adapting to this foreign model. These differences in knowledge context include:

- **Education model.** Educational cultures that encourage rote book

learning through memorization and unquestioning acceptance of taught narratives do not support a public desire to engage in knowledge creation. Organizers working with teachers in Ghana and certain parts of Argentina described encountering education style barriers where teachers are more dictatorial and do not encourage, and sometimes actively discouraged, independent investigation and learning. This lack of critical thinking skills creates more challenging environments for Organizers who want to build communities of Wikimedia knowledge creation.

- **Information literacy.** Organizers use different strategies for teaching new contributors and members of the public a number of basic information literacy skills, such as evaluating research materials and learning how to interpret the information source quality. Organizers in Ghana described only developing these information literacy skills themselves through Wikipedia contribution, making them more aware of the challenges new participants have in acquiring these skills. In Argentina, there is a greater public awareness of and critique of information sources. Some Organizers in Argentina were actively motivated by questioning information in public forums; they organize in an effort to expose participants to how Wikipedia navigates different opinions about topics.
- **Published and digital source materials.** Many Organizers described frustration with reliable source and verifiability requirements of more established Wikipedias, in part because access to sources published in and about their contexts are limited. For example, in Argentina, a center of publishing for the Latin American world, digitized historical source materials are not readily available, and digitally published sources tend to favor perspectives and knowledge about the capital region. Working with journalists and activists publishing digital sources is important for generating source material for Wikimedia contribution. In Ghana, the publishing industry is relatively weak, and Organizers report more prevalent oral forms of knowledge transmission, such as storytelling and

radio. When published digitally in online sources, the credibility of those sources were frequently questioned by contributors on English Wikipedia, who are used to seeing different patterns of reliable information.

- **Library access.** In Ghana and many parts of Argentina, library access is very limited. For example, [Ghana \(population ~28 million in 2017\) reports having ~280 libraries](#), in the International Federation of Library Association's Library Map of the World. By comparison, Australia has 4 million fewer people in the country in 2017 and [has reported 13,469 libraries](#). Similarly Argentina (population 44 million in 2017) [reported 2425 libraries](#) whereas the 46 million population [Spain reported 25,289 libraries](#). Even if libraries are underreported in Argentina and Ghana, the gaps in access are very different from the context of well-established Wikimedia communities and the disparities also exist at other levels: many libraries in Ghana or rural Argentina do not have technology, internet access or many of the services or staff training that exists in better resourced library environments.

“The offshore documentation (for 1Lib1Ref) says you need to find public libraries and host your event there, but that takes for granted that libraries have internet. Always think about what you have to put on the table for volunteering. Volunteering has to be contextualized and put into reality to what people can access here. The way you tell people how to volunteer has to be translated into a language that is relative to where people are.”

– Côte d'Ivoire Organizer

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND IMPLICATIONS

To build a stronger and more equitable movement, we recommend two strategies for growing the pool of Movement Organizers, and one for building their engagement and retention. First, design catalyzing experiences to move people through the organizing journey, preparing more people to organize from the existing Wikimedia community. Second, reach beyond Wikimedia activism, and develop ways to motivate and attract activists from the open movement as well as social and environmental movements. Last and most importantly, focus on retention of Organizers by paying attention to factors that impact their engagement. By increasing their motivation to organize and reducing the challenges they face, we can better retain and engage active Organizers who may otherwise quit.

To increase the participation of potential Organizers and to improve the effectiveness and engagement of existing Organizers, we recommend taking a 3-pronged strategy.

PATH TO ORGANIZING

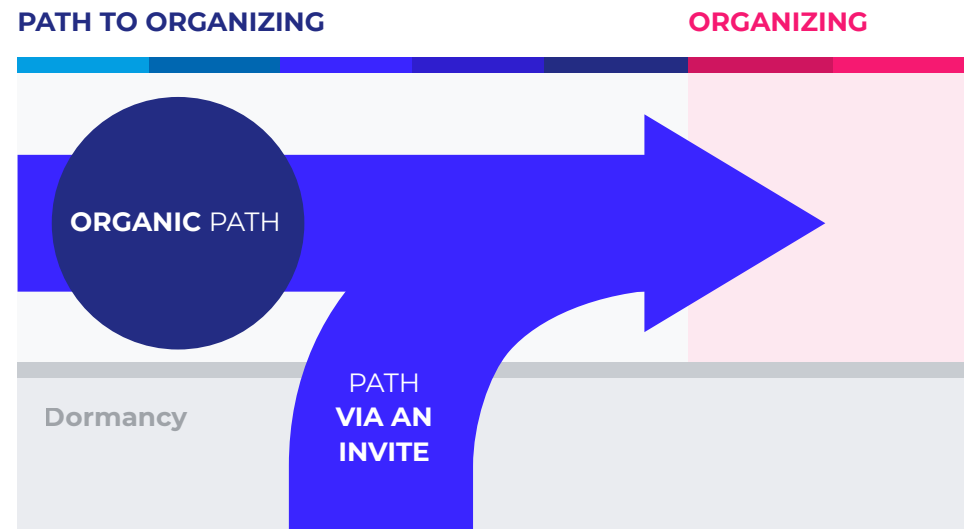


Strategies 1 and 2 focus on increasing the flow of new Organizers into the movement.

Strategy 1: Energize the existing Wikimedia community to organize by designing catalyzing experiences that encourage people towards committed organizing.

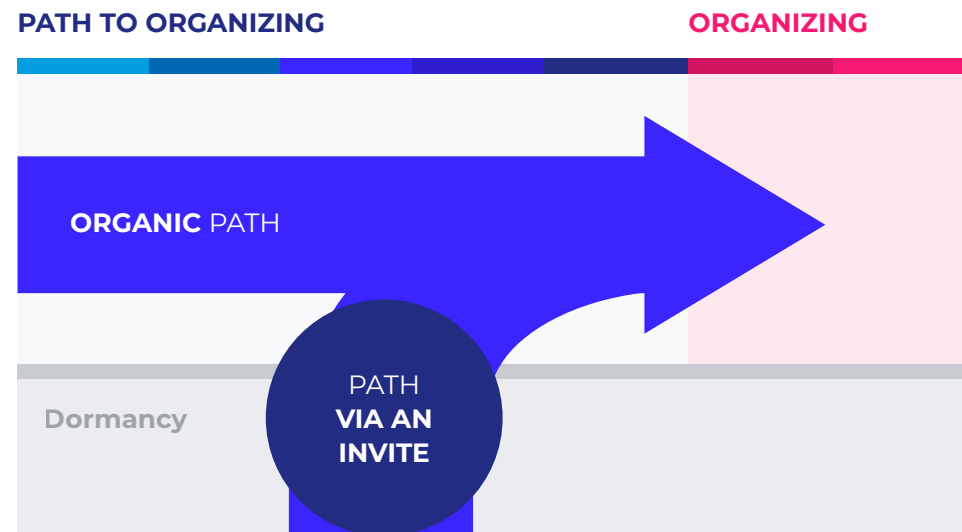
Many of the **Catalyzing experiences** described above can be more intentionally built into programs and activities by individual Organizers, communities, or the Wikimedia Foundation itself. We recommend building practices for:

- Existing community members to invite personal connections into the community.
- Creating opportunities for experienced Organizers to invite new Organizers to participate in organizing activities.
- Events and learning experiences that more purposefully target different audiences at different **states** in the Organizer journey.
- Creating more consistent communications that help readers and editors to pass through the **first 5 states of participating** in the Organizer experience of the Wikimedia community.



Strategy 2: Invest in building alignment with people outside the movement to increase the participation of invited Organizers.

Focusing solely on the organic path of becoming an organizer after contributing online and participating in the community can bring in experienced and passionate Wikimedians but misses a larger opportunity to tap into existing idealistic passions and activist networks that can directly serve the diversity and equity goals of the Foundation. By building alignments with the motivations of activist Organizers outside the movement, and demonstrating the relevance of Wikimedia to advancing their agenda, we can leverage the energy, experience, and networks of people who already have a practice of volunteering.



The guiding principle for Strategy 2 provides people with a **reason to become Organizers**:

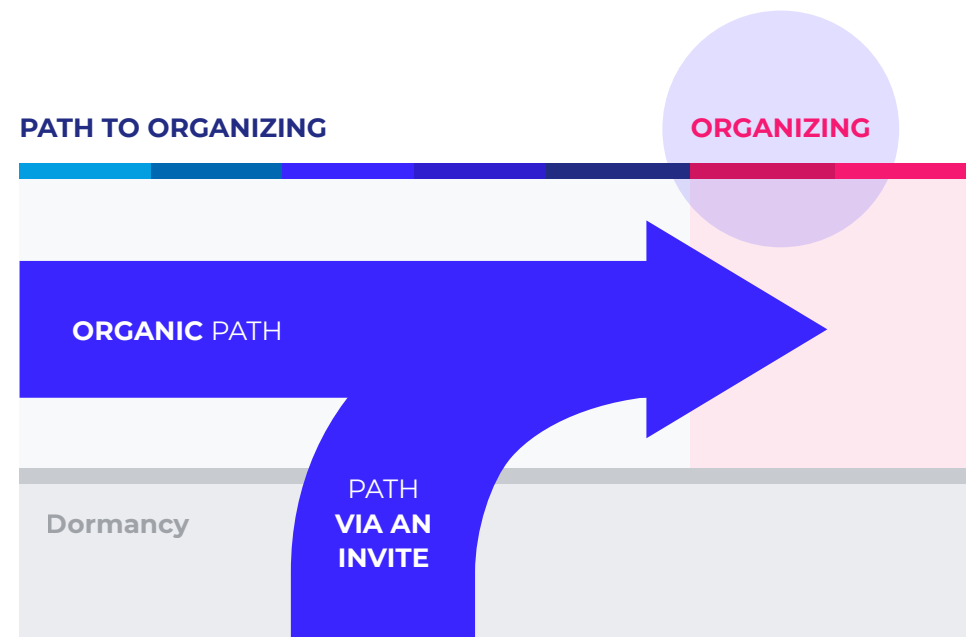
MOTIVATION	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	IMPLICATION
“Open” activism	Make Wikimedia relevant to people by listening to their goals, finding alignment with Wikimedia, and making open invitations to other communities.	Build partnerships with and recruit Organizers from other open source, open culture, and open knowledge communities such as OSM, Linux, Creative Commons, Mozilla, the Open Access and Open Education environments, etc.
Broader societal activism		Collaborate with existing movements with volunteer Organizers, like social activism or environmental activism, to encourage more cross-population of those communities.

Strategy 3. Retain Organizers by increasing motivation and decreasing challenges.

To help Organizers remain engaged with their work and communities, the Wikimedia Foundation needs to appeal more directly to their motivations, and reduce the challenges they face in organizing work. The engagement people feel towards organizing work can be simply expressed as a ratio of cumulative experiences over time:

$$\text{Engagement} = \frac{\text{Motivations}}{\text{Challenges}}$$

It is important to remember that for most Organizers, their work is unpaid and voluntary, so **keeping their engagement high is critical to retaining talent within the movement.**



Guiding principles and implications for **increasing motivation to stay in the movement**:

MOTIVATION	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	IMPLICATION
Seeing impact	Help Organizers see how their organizing work is achieving the goals of their community.	Elevate local success stories that can inspire Organizers to know they are making a difference.
		If there are grant metrics, create them collaboratively with volunteers who are doing the work to make sure the metrics matter and are helpful to volunteers as well as the Foundation.
Belonging	Deepen relationships between people.	Particularly when a group is first forming, invest in building interpersonal bonds that improve communications and trust - for example through regular group activities, face-to-face meetings, and other social events.
		Give official recognition to local teams and organized groups when possible to increase the sense of identity and their feeling that they “belong” in the movement.

Addressing Movement Organizers challenges reduces friction that slows down movement momentum. Where solutions are not possible or while long-term solutions are being developed, the simple recognition of challenges can create a sense of relief for Organizers who want to know their challenges are known and shared. Our analogous interviewees emphasized the importance of acknowledging and explicitly recognizing problems. Even if the central organization in a community cannot address the issues raised by Organizers, providing volunteers with the reassurance of being heard reduces feelings of isolation and dejection.

Guiding principles for **decreasing challenges that increase Organizer engagement:**

CHALLENGE	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	EXAMPLE IMPLICATION
Time	Plan on unplanned volunteer availability: build redundancy into roles and networks for resilience	Support the development of organizing groups that share responsibility and roles by encouraging Organizers to work in teams
	Consider more long-term and stable engagement strategies for key community Organizers	Invest in meta-Organizers and activities that help local communities connect with these Organizers
	Allow for graceful exits and re-entry into the movement	
Straddling ecosystems	Design for information access that may cross multiple communities and contexts	Support communications not just on Wiki platforms, but also on common social networks, such as Telegram and WhatsApp
Seeking resources	Build partnerships with local institutions that can provide long-term support for communities	Develop or help recruit Organizers with partnership skills and practices in new communities
Clarity - Foundation	Provide clear and transparent information about Foundation strategy and processes	Make it easy to find where to direct questions
		Acknowledge that communications have been received
Clarity - Network	Clarify the movement structure	Build tools for visibility into the movement and network, especially for inexperienced Organizers
Clarity - expectations	Clarify guidelines for volunteer roles	
	Help Organizers define their own community rules	Provide better leadership training and capacity building support for Organizers
Clarity - online information	Make online organizing tools and information more accessible	
Access to Wikimedia networks and support	Strengthen the support layer of critical Wikimedia interface roles	
Insularity of Wikimedia culture	Reduce the power of the meritocracy	Increase the visibility and credit given for off-wiki and non-editing contributions to the movement

Address and/or reduce personal risks and burdens taken on by volunteers

CHALLENGE	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	IMPLICATION
Emotional labor	Support Organizers for the massive investment in people within their communities	Accommodate the resource, time, and energy needs of Organizers to fulfill the needs of people in their community
Recognition	Validate, recognize, and legitimize volunteer organizing contributions	
Hostile environments	Build spaces where Organizers feel heard and supported	Build environments where acknowledgement of problems and mediation are available
	Redress core roots of online hostility	Build support for helping communities change online policies and practices to be more equitable and inclusive

When it comes to equity challenges, there is only one guiding principle:

listen to local Organizers and their communities, and collaborate to find appropriate solutions. The global nonprofit sector has seen repeated, expensive failures when trying to quickly scale solutions in developing countries.^[23] This mindset sets global efforts up for failure by refusing to see the nuance and context that determines success.

Instead of scaling solutions, we recommend learning to scale the ability to listen, and improving the process of identifying and testing possible solutions in close collaboration with communities.

“At scale any anchor institution needs to figure out how to do listening at scale.”

– Analogous Interview

“Development projects thrive or tank according to the specific dynamics of the place in which they’re applied. It’s not that you test something in one place, then scale it up to 50. It’s that you test it in one place, then test it in another, then another.”

– Michael Hobbs, New Republic

²³ <https://newrepublic.com/article/120178/problem-international-development-and-plan-fix-it>

Involving the Organizer and their community in finding solutions for local equity challenges improves the likelihood of success, because the people who experience equity issues understand the nuance and interplay of issues at work. Because of this, we strongly recommend that the Wikimedia Foundation **recognize and work collaboratively with Organizers and communities to find appropriate solutions to equity challenges.**

CHALLENGE	GUIDING PRINCIPLE	IMPLICATIONS
Political instability	Practice active listening and collaborative problem-solving when working with Organizers to mitigate equity issues in Wikimedia organizing.	While there are many potential solutions, we strongly warn against the equal application of solutions across all contexts without careful consultation with local Organizers. Equity challenges are complicated and multiple compounding challenges can create unique situations. Localizing responses to these challenges means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing support for Organizers to try and find solutions, rather than providing solutions • Providing examples that have worked in similar situations without expecting them to adopt the same solution • Trusting Organizers by giving Organizers the agency to define ways of working within their environment
Economic need or instability		
Weak infrastructure		
Weak funding environment		
Low volunteerism and activism		
Language equity		
Society context around technology adoption		
Knowledge Context		

DISCUSSION

How do we define success?

In speaking with Organizers from different parts of the movement, we heard many different reasons for engaging, and different definitions of success. For some, a deep love of the open technology behind Wikimedia and a desire to develop that further makes them advocates; for others, the open knowledge it provides the world is the driver, and dissemination of that knowledge is the goal. Some people saw the platform as a place to capture clear-cut facts; others valued it as a platform for knowledge as a complex social production.

Arriving at a single definition for growth is also a challenge. Some people we spoke with cared exclusively about the number of edits and new articles; others disregarded those metrics entirely and valued engaging new people the in-person and online dialogues that the process of creation mandated, to help society advance their understanding of new concepts, for example of evolving gender definitions. Depending on the context of the community, growth goals can vary widely. The Minangkabau minority language Wikipedians, who are trying to document their disappearing local language, are taking on a long-term project. They have expended tremendous amounts of effort in finding sources, defining an oral language so it can be documented, and building relationships with universities, without having many new articles to show for it in the short term. Measuring their growth in number of edits would be meaningless at this point; measuring their growth in gathering support and sources to set up for future success would be more appropriate.

Measuring impact

With these varying challenges described above, and different definitions of growth and success for different communities, measuring impact while promoting equity in the movement is a challenge. Organizers and experts alike shared their frustrations about impact metrics that did not reflect the actual goals or needs of their context. These metrics require costly time to track, and negatively impacted local decision-making and agency. The power dynamics between foundations and grantees -- where questioning a grantmaker's priorities may result in loss of funding -- means that few grantees, especially in impoverished environments, are empowered enough to speak up about the disconnect between what is measured and what actually matters.

“If you want to see progress and see if you are having impact, you have to understand what problem you’re trying to solve. If you don’t know what kind of change you’re trying to make, it’s going to be hard to figure out if you’re making any progress.”

– **Melissa Berman, CEO, Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors^[24]**

²⁴ <https://www.rockpa.org/guide/assessing-impact/>

While we recognize that there is a need for measurement, we encourage the very cautious development of one-size-fits-all solutions and global metrics. For the Wikimedia Foundation to meet its equity goals, there is a need to take a generative learning approach to finding out what success means in the variety of contexts experienced by the movement's most under-represented communities.

“When you need money, people will say what they need to say to get the money. Foundations like to think of themselves as open minded and progressive. Have you been to these grassroots offices where people have no money and are in survival mode? They just need a chair. And you are talking about systemic change. But if that’s what it takes to get your money they can talk about systemic change too.”

– Analogous organizer

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I. CONTEXT COMPARISON

Wikipedia metrics

	Spanish Wikipedia	Similarities	English Wikipedia
Average monthly active editors ^[25]	10.2K	Both wikis are large multicultural and multinational environments: Organizers facilitate participants into large, entrenched communities with their own standards and norms.	66.59K
Articles ^[26]	1,523,357	Content policies, including referencing, notability and the community's approach to newcomers are very entrenched on both language wikis.	5,860,514
Programmatic work	Large scale network engagement which includes online campaigns, education programs, glam outreach, and convenings	Organizers are regularly involved in organizing in-person convenings.	Largely focused on regular convenings to bring together community and “recruit” new participants.
Funding	Annual plan grant	Both communities have access to some funding, particularly for supporting events. However, Wikimedia Argentina has much more paid capacity for attending to and supporting the growth of new Organizers.	Simple APG for OFWA, and Rapid Grants for User Group

²⁵ <https://stats.wikimedia.org/v2/#/en.wikipedia.org/contributing/active-editors/normal|bar|2-year|~total|monthly>

²⁶ https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedias#All_Wikipedias_ordered_by_number_of_articles

Regional Context

Factors	Argentina	Ghana	Notes
Geography			
Location	Buenos Aires, Santa Fe	Accra, Kumasi	
Population			
Total population ^[27]	45,057,167	30,096,970	
Urbanization ^[28] (2015-20 est.)	1.07% annual rate of change	3.34% annual rate of change	
Population distribution ^[29]	One-third of the population lives in Buenos Aires; pockets of agglomeration occur throughout the northern and central parts of the country; Patagonia remains sparsely populated	Population is concentrated in the southern half of the country, with the highest concentrations being on or near the Atlantic coast	In both countries Organizers described a gravity towards the capital cities which are population, economic and cultural hubs.
Age structure	0-14 years: 24.44% 15-24 years: 15.2% 25-54 years: 39.46% 55-64 years: 9.12% 65 years and over: 11.79%	0-14 years: 37.83% 15-24 years: 18.61% 25-54 years: 34.21% 55-64 years: 5.05% 65 years and over: 4.3%	Underemployment is a major problem for Ghana, and Organizers of Wikimedia and other social movements prioritize targeting the youth.

²⁷ <https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/>

²⁸ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

²⁹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

Factors	Argentina	Ghana	Notes
Principal Languages	Spanish (29 total) ^[30]	English and Akan (81 total) ^[31]	English is the official language in Ghana, but minority languages are commonly spoken and are a secondary focus for Wikipedia Organizers.
Technology access			
Internet users^[32]	41,586,960 (Dec, 2017)	10,110,000 (Mar, 2019)	According to these statistics, only 33.6% of Ghanaians are internet users, compared to 92.3% of Argentinians. However, this data may be misleading, as developing world nations generally see more shared internet connections than usage, ^[33] so measured numbers may not reflect reality.
Computer ownership by household^[34]	58%	12%	Ghana has significantly fewer computers in households compared with Argentina, making more of the population reliant on mobile editing or shared computer hardware.
Mobile subscriptions^[35]	61,897,379	36,751,761	
Median download speed^[36]	1.2 Mbps (Latin America)	0.8 Mbps (Africa)	

³⁰ <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/AR>

³¹ <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/GH>

³² <https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm>

³³ <https://www.internetworldstats.com/surfing.htm>

³⁴ <https://www.pewglobal.org/2015/03/19/internet-seen-as-positive-influence-on-education-but-negative-influence-on-morality-in-emerging-and-developing-nations/technology-report-15/>

³⁵ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

³⁶ <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/the-worlds-slowest-internet-is-the-least-affordable/>

Factors	Argentina	Ghana	Notes
Affordability ^[37] (Average Price of 1GB mobile broadband data relative to monthly average income)	3.6%	8.8%	Internet is both slower and more expensive in Ghana, making it a significant barrier for organizing.
Education & Employment			
Literacy Rate ^[38]	99.1%	76.6%	
Education ^[39]	Net Enrollment in Secondary school of 91% 89% Gross enrollment in Tertiary education	Ghana has Net Enrollment ^[40] in Secondary School of 63% 16% Gross Enrollment in Tertiary education ^[41]	Well enforced mandatory education in Argentina and free university education makes the Argentinian population relatively well educated. In Ghana primary education is mandatory but not as consistent, secondary and university access is restricted and expensive.
Unemployment ^[42]	8.4% (2017 est.)	11.9% (2015 est.)	Most jobs in Ghana are in low-productivity self-employment activities that generate limited earnings. ^[43] This means people have a necessity of prioritizing stable, paying jobs. Organizers in both countries described different degrees of underemployment for university educated workers.

37 <https://internethealthreport.org/2019/the-worlds-slowest-internet-is-the-least-affordable/>

38 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

39 See 2019 report at <https://en.unesco.org/gem-report/node/6>

40 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/net-enrolment-rate>

41 <http://uis.unesco.org/en/glossary-term/gross-enrolment-ratio>

42 <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

43 <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/237991477039577804/pdf/109384-PUB-PUBLIC-PUBDATE10-20-16.pdf>

APPENDIX II. PROGRAMMATIC IMPACT EXAMPLES

	Program Name	Participants	Content Created or Improved	Additional Impact
Ghana User Group	Art + Feminism 2019 ^[44]	63 new editors	148 articles	
	Wiki Loves Africa 2017	7 recruits, 124 new uploaders	1,220 images	
Open Foundation West Africa^[45]	Summer Open School	34 participants	89 articles, 15 geolocations	3 new partners, expansion into two new regions
	Wiki Club Ashesi	40 new students	230 articles	
Wikimedia Argentina^[46]	Education Program	498 newly registered	1,093 content pages	80% of girls/women feel comfortable as editors
	Community Building Program	126 newly registered	68,973 content pages	90% feels WMAR is an inclusive organization

44 https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:Project/Rapid/Wikimedia_Ghana_User_Group/Art%2BFeminism_2019/Report

45 https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b8/OFWA_2018_H2_SAPG_Final_Report.pdf

46 https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Grants:APG/Proposals/2017-2018_round_1/Wikimedia_Argentina/Impact_report_form#Global_metrics_overview_-_all_programs

APPENDIX III. STEERING COMMITTEE

Name	Department & Team
Asaf Bartov	Community Engagement, Community Development
Christel Steigenberger	Community Engagement, Trust & Safety
Delphine Ménard	Community Engagement, Community Resources
Dumisani Ndubane	Community Engagement, Learning & Evaluation
Jack Rabah	Advancement, Partnerships & Global Reach
James Hare	Technology, Technical Engagement
Joe Matazzoni	Product, Contributors
Jess Klein	Product, Contributors
María Cruz	Community Engagement, Community Relations
Srishti Sethi	Technology, Technical Engagement
Simona Ramkisson	Community Engagement, Community Development
Winifred Olliff	Community Engagement, Community Resources
Zack McCune	Communications

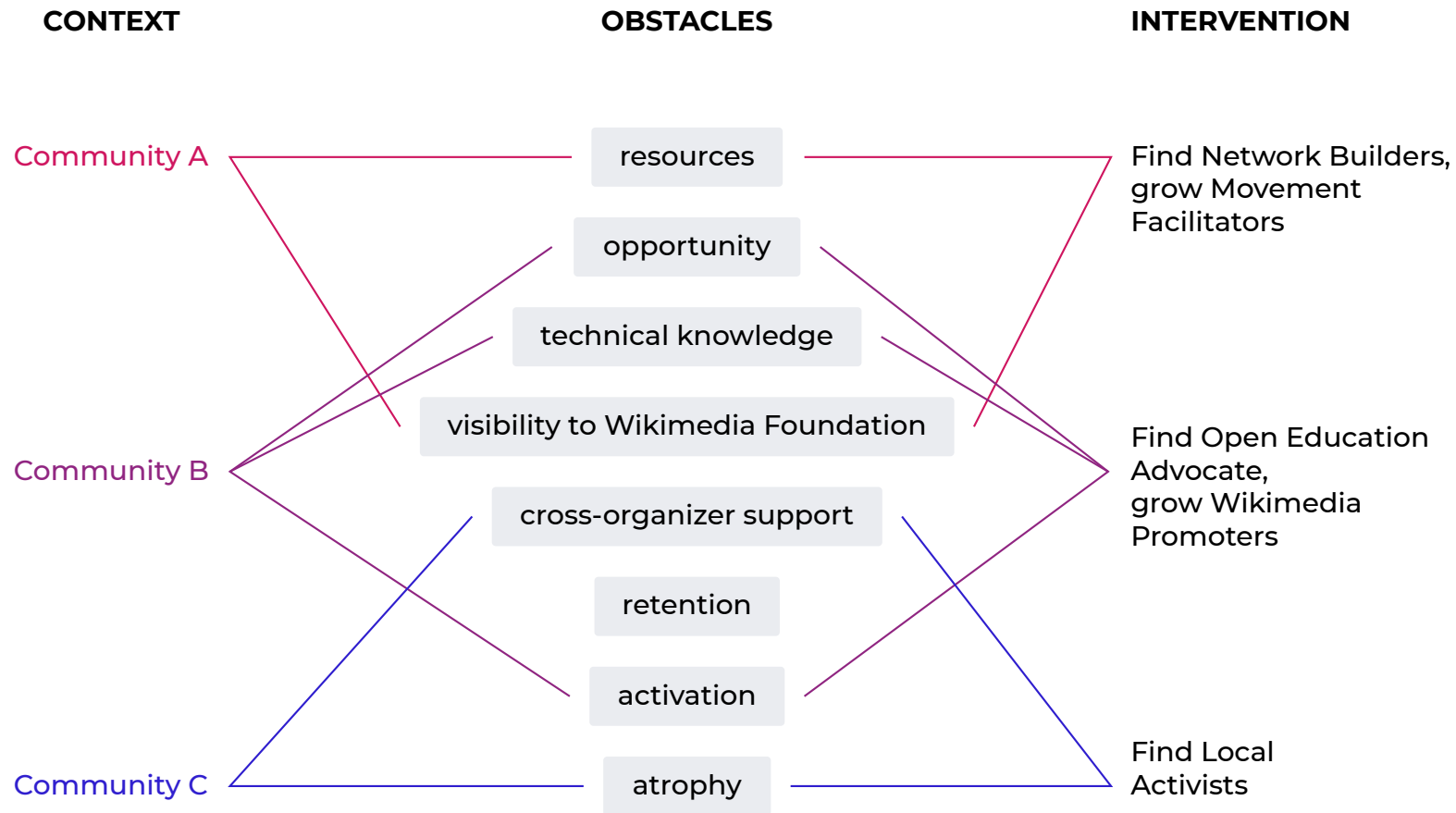
APPENDIX IV. VALUE MATRIX

What are the expected effects of adding more of a particular type of Organizer to a community? These **value chain hypotheses** are based on the limited scope of this research, a starting point to begin to think about who to cultivate or attract in order to achieve particular objectives.

	Organizer Type	Super Powers	Content Created or Improved	Origin	Core Focus
NB	Network Builder	Attracts resources, Amplifies Voices	1 NB = Lowered Affiliate Overhead + Increased Community Resilience + improved Capacity	found	connector, supporter
WP	Wikimedia Promoter	Knowledge & passion about Wikimedia	1 WP = Improved technical capacity + stronger community support structure + improved onramp for newcomers	grown	implementer
OEA	Open Education Advocate	Identifies new opportunities	1 OEA = community morale boost + new/different community members joining + higher likelihood that new members are retained	found, became activist	implementer
OMA	Open Movement Activist	Provides complex support	1 OMA = Improved strategic capacity + better reporting + improved cross-organizer support	found (recruited as activist)	supporter
LA	Local Activist	Activates new participants	1 LA = deeper bench + lowered organizer burnout + improved communications with partners + improved event efficacy	found (recruited as activist)	connector, implementer
MF	Movement Facilitator	Mentor local communities	1 MF = Increased local efficacy + increased capacity + improved connections between related communities + greater awareness of needs at the Wikimedia Foundation	grown	supporter, connector

APPENDIX V. COMMUNITY INTERVENTION MODEL

Different communities face different obstacles, so the intervention (in terms of which types of Organizers to focus on) will be different for each. This is a hypothesis based on limited scope of this research, a starting point for how to think about who to cultivate or attract in order to achieve particular objectives.



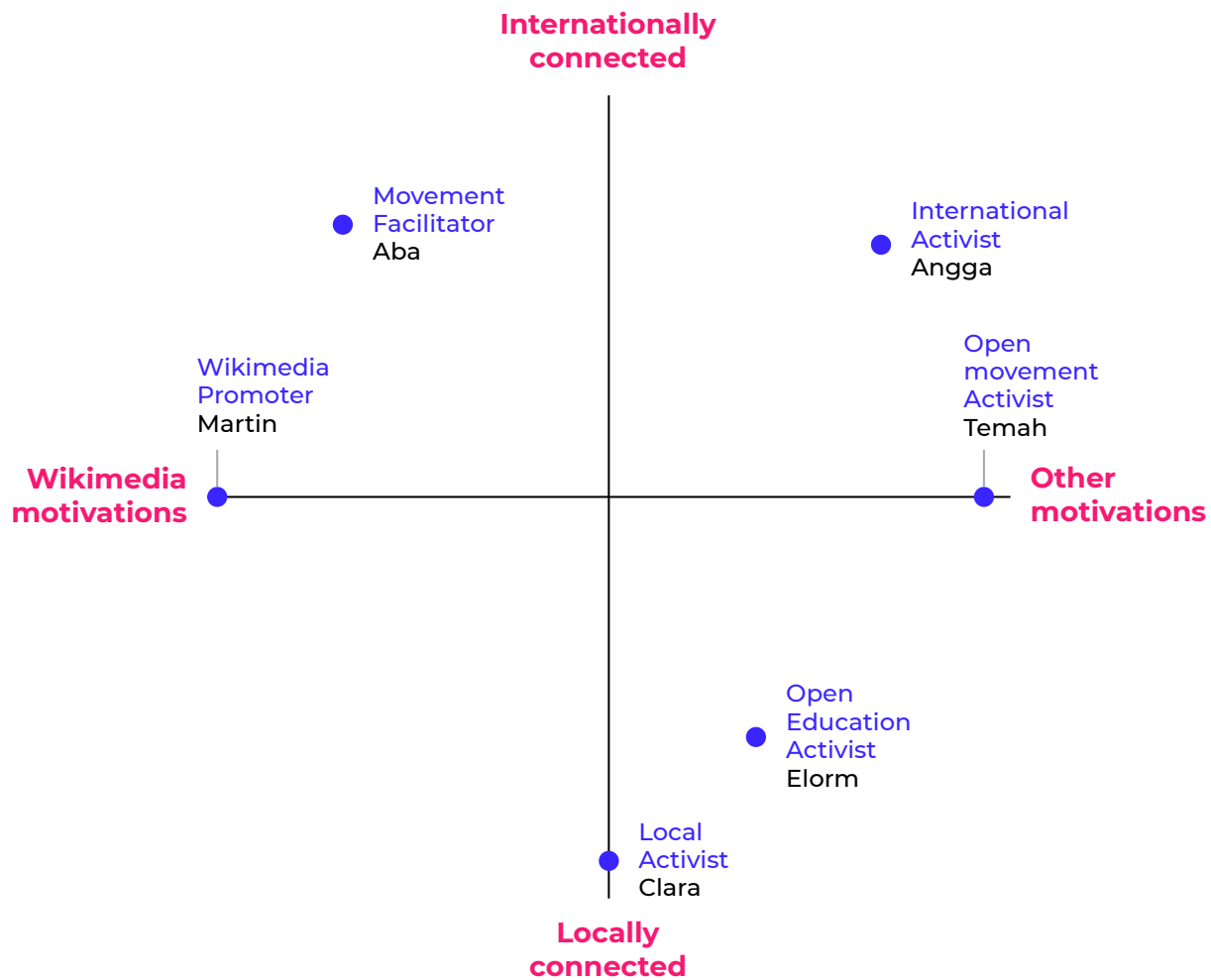
APPENDIX VI. OPEN ACCESS POLICY

The Wikimedia Foundation is dedicated to increasing access to knowledge for everyone, everywhere. Under our [open access policy](#), we strive to make research and supporting data produced with Wikimedia resources or support openly available to the public, and freely reusable on the Wikimedia projects.

However, in some instances, we do not publish all the data we collect, in order to protect and respect the privacy of the participants. This study is such a case. The data gathered include information about users' editing habits, education, hobbies, and day-to-day activities, which could allow the participants to be identified. In addition, in some cases the researchers learned about sensitive topics like users' family relationships, views on controversial social issues, and experiences of harassment which provided context on their involvement with Wikipedia but could cause harm if they were described publicly and the participants later identified.

We take our commitment to protect user privacy seriously, and have obtained consent to release certain limited information about participants. Therefore, the Wikimedia Foundation and Reboot have prepared this report as a summary of our key findings regarding new editor experiences. As of the publication of this report, we do not plan to release any detailed notes from our interviews. If we later choose to do so, we will secure further consent from the participants, so they are fully informed of the data release.

APPENDIX VII. PERSONAS



International Activist:
ANGGA

Supporting local Wikimedia community via mentoring and international connections to resources. Individually supported by funds from a Wikimedia Foundation annual plan grant. Employed as a regranter for a large NGO and balancing family and work responsibilities.

Local Activist:
CLARA

Collaborating with local Wikimedians on events. Receiving mentoring on events planning from affiliate staff. Less motivated to contribute content than to support others. Balancing volunteering for Wikimedia, a full time job as a journalist and responsibilities for a young family.

Movement Facilitator:
ABA

Supporting local Wikimedia community by providing resources and mentoring. Well respected and known content contributor to Wikimedia projects. Wants more accurate representation of Ghana and African countries on English Wikipedia. Balancing freelance work as an events planner (including for Wikimedia Foundation), volunteering and family responsibilities.

Open movement Activist:
TEMAH

Ensuring local facilitators have what they need for successful editathons, and reporting is done well. Not contributing content much, but contributes organizational skills. Balancing volunteer work for both the local Wikimedia affiliate and another NGO with working part time.

Open Education Activist:
ELORM

Volunteering to facilitate editathons with support from affiliate. Wants to access Kiwix for the students he teaches about ICT, thought they have little access to technology. Sees the value in the Wikimedia movement, but it is not easy for him to contribute content. Balancing full time work, volunteering and family responsibilities.

Wikimedia Promoter:
MARTIN

Supporting Argentine affiliate with events planning, grant writing and reporting. Less of a contributor, and supports organizers who teach others to contribute content. Loves the Wikimedia movement and will do whatever he can to see it grow. Balancing volunteering, full time work and a new family.



Photo by Tri Fatono (CCO), <https://www.pexels.com/photo/businessman-984072/>

ANGGA — 43

INTERNATIONAL ACTIVIST

📍 Location

Jakarta, Indonesia

📄 Occupation

Technology access NGO

🗣️ Languages

Bahasa, English, 3 local Indonesian languages

📱 Devices

High end Android smartphone, Acer laptop

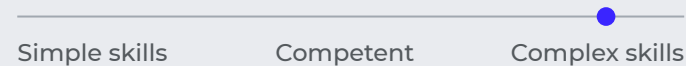
Organizing skills



Organizing career – people impacted



Wikimedia projects fluency



Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▲ Multilingual conferences and international events, so he can focus on content instead of spending his time translating for his colleagues.
- ▲ Easier access to international funding

Long term goals

- ▲ Make it easier for people to use their local languages online.
- ▲ Preserve Indonesian culture and language online.
- ▲ Convince cultural institutions to share more openly with the world via projects designed to free and preserve cultural content.
- ▲ Continue scaling funding for people doing the work of languages and culture preservation in Indonesia.

Challenges

- ▼ Bridging the demands from the western funders for his projects, and the work norms and expectations of the people he works with in Indonesia.
- ▼ The time and effort it takes to translate between English and his communities' languages; he wishes he could pay for translation services.

About Angga

Background

Angga has a business management career and splits his time between a large international NGO focused on information and technology access, and his work as a WMF affiliate lead. Whenever possible, Angga works on preserving local languages and culture in Indonesia. He grew up and went to university in Jakarta, earning a business degree. He primarily works and speaks in Indonesian and English but uses several local Indonesian languages with family and friends. He is married and has 4 children, two of whom are local attending universities. Angga's wife manages their home and supports their children in doing well in school.

Angga is dedicated to his work and family, and having time for both is challenging. He is good at building partnerships, but in Indonesia, developing the trust for a partnership takes many face-to-face meetings, so Angga is often away from home.

Networking and communication habits

Angga uses his phone to connect with family and friends, and to read international news, looking in particular for changes that might impact his relationships with funders and partners. He regularly monitors social media channels and email lists, checking them daily and posting information about projects in his communities.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

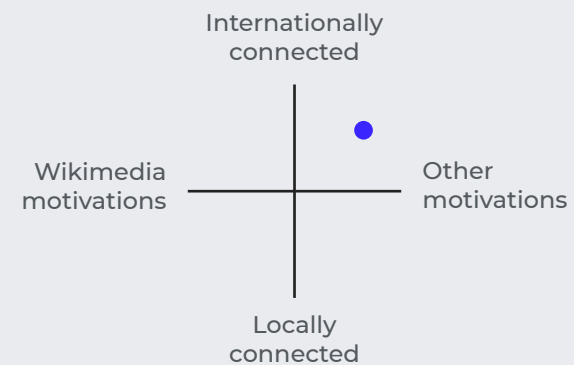
Angga works closely with the Indonesia Wikimedia community to provide professional support as a manager and facilitator. Although it has taken a lot of effort, community processes are slowly becoming more streamlined because of Angga's management skills and ability to find funding for his group. The international NGO funding the majority of his salary focuses on providing internet access to developing communities, and this aligns well with his Wikimedia work. Angga spends most of his day managing the NGO regranting program across Indonesia, strengthening the Wikimedia community's funding opportunities, and creating grant reports for the Wikimedia Foundation.

Organizer type and activities

Angga regularly attends international conferences and events, and speaks about the Wikimedia movement and projects across South Asia. He is connected to an international network of activist organizers. Through his network, Angga can create coalitions that help Indonesians preserve and share their languages and culture. He passionately connects the goals of the Wikimedia movement with clear calls to action, inspiring people to join projects.

In the Indonesian affiliate, he helps his team become more organized by defining roles and creating accountability. He wants to create more paid roles in Wikimedia for preserving Indonesian language and culture. He mentors the people who show promise in organizing. He encourages them to work in other movements where they also find passion, so they can contribute more broadly.

Angga's behavior matrix



Angga's roles

Supporter

- Cultural Interpreter
- Language Translator
- Strategist
- Innovator

Implementer

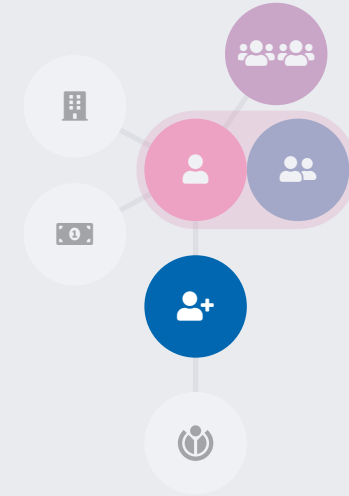
- Grant Writer

Connector

- Publicist
- Promoter
- Ambassador
- Partnership Manager
- Recruiter

In the network

Meta-Organizer



International Activist — Angga's journey

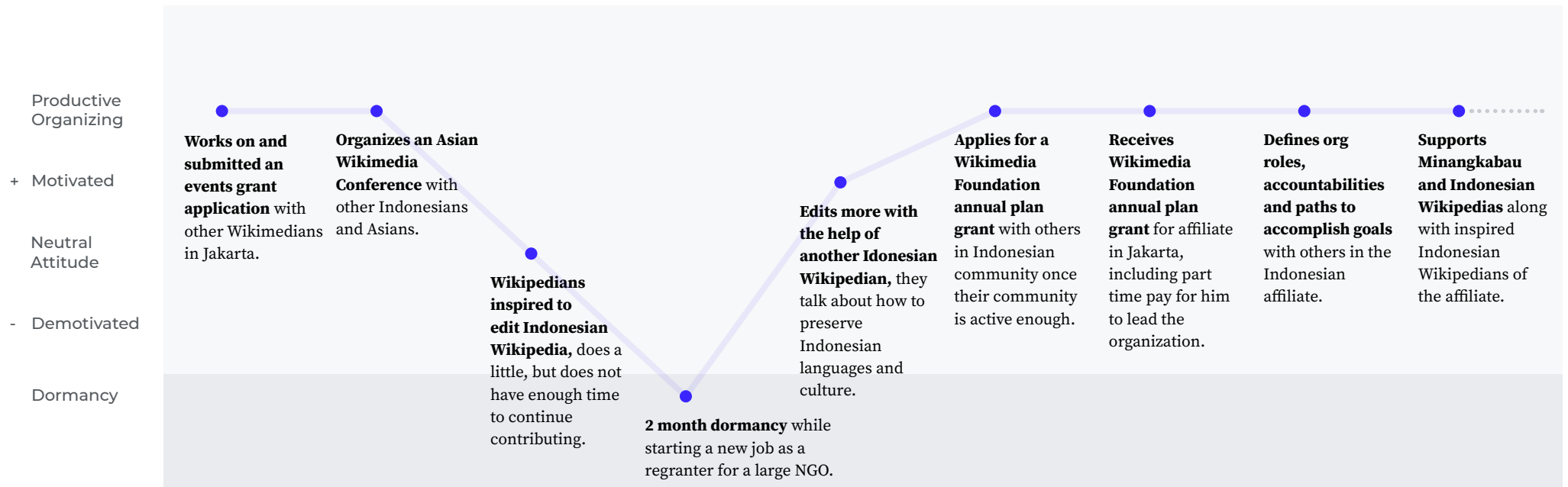


Photo by UN Women (CC-BY-NC-ND), <https://fic.kr/p/BUHFVX>



CLARA — 32

LOCAL ACTIVIST

📍 Location

Cordoba, Argentina

📄 Occupation

Freelance journalist

🗣️ Languages

Spanish, limited English

📱 Devices

Android Smartphone, Dell Laptop

Organizing skills

Basic ————— Proficient ————— Expert

Organizing career – people impacted

1 ————— 100 ————— 1000+

Wikimedia projects fluency

Simple skills ————— Competent ————— Complex skills

Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▲ Mentoring and support to improve at Wikimedia projects within her community.
- ▲ Validation of her volunteer work from the international community.
- ▲ Understanding of how her Wikipedia contributions impact the way other journalists write about her community.

Long term goals

- ▲ Facilitate her community's knowledge creation and sharing.
- ▲ Preserve Cordoba's local history and current events as part of world history.
- ▲ Opportunities for personal development so that she can be better at supporting her community in sharing local knowledge and history.
- ▲ More members of her community reflecting on how knowledge is created.

Challenges

- ▼ Access to economic resources in the overlooked city of Cordoba. Most resources go to Buenos Aires.
- ▼ Event-induced stress - it's a constant concern that people will not show.

- ▼ Access to English web sites and information. She has just enough English to navigate English only categories on Wikimedia Commons, but sometimes has to use an online translation tool.
- ▼ Teaching people how to edit Wikipedia while she is still learning how the community works.

About Clara

Background

Clara wants the people of Argentina to remain engaged in their democracy to ensure that the human rights violations that occurred in her country will not happen again. This passion for democracy inspired her to become a journalist. As a student activist at La Plata University she connected with other activists across Argentina. Clara relies on her deep networks in journalism and activism for Wikimedia community organizing. After working in Buenos Aires for five years, she and her family moved to Cordoba. She currently works as a freelance journalist for local news outlets. Clara works on Wikimedia projects when her children are asleep, and often can't do Wikimedia organizing at all when work gets busy.

Networking and communication habits

She is highly skilled at using online journalism platforms like blogs and WordPress, does research using academic databases and government documents. When Spanish Wikipedia articles don't provide enough information, Clara refers to English Wikipedia, using online translation to assist her limited English. In addition to her activist network, Clara works closely with government officials and other legal professionals working on human rights.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

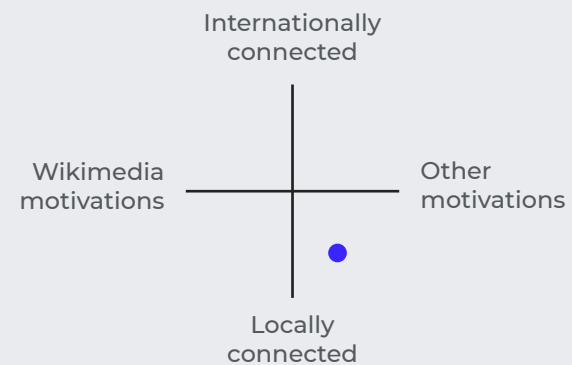
Clara first learned about Wikimedia at a journalist-focused workshop in Buenos Aires. At the event, she learned that anyone can edit Wikipedia, and that there are other Wikimedia projects like Commons and WikiData. Clara had an epiphany; she realized she could leverage the projects as tools for sharing knowledge on human rights issues. Over the past few years, Clara has connected with the

international Spanish-speaking Wikipedia movement, inspiring her to do more to support Wikimedia projects aligned with her cause all across South America.

Organizer type and activities

After moving back to Cordoba Clara met a photojournalist, and introduced him to Wikimedia Commons. Since then, they organized two editathon series in Cordoba. Clara promotes Wikimedia through her network by inviting people to events, and she and the photojournalist organize and facilitate the events. They have actively recruited two more people to help with event planning and facilitation. The Wikimedia affiliate in Buenos Aires provides funding and capacity building for her small group. Since Wikidata and Commons are easier to use, if a newcomer is struggling to edit, Clara and her team guide them towards contributions other than Wikipedia. Through trial and error, Clara realized that the people she wants to engage are motivated more by the topics they care about than the Wikimedia mission. So, for a recent editathon, she proposed current event topics relevant to her network. With interested people, they decided on a topic for the event and they saw greater attendance than before. Clara and her colleagues are focusing on an upcoming photography contest, each working at the capacity they can with full time jobs and families.

Clara's behavior matrix



Clara's roles

Implementer

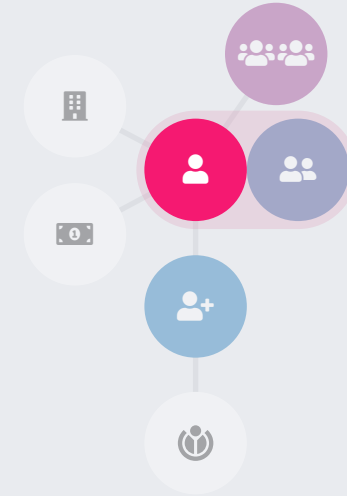
- Event Organizer

Connector

- Publicist

In the network

Organizer



Local Activist — Clara's journey

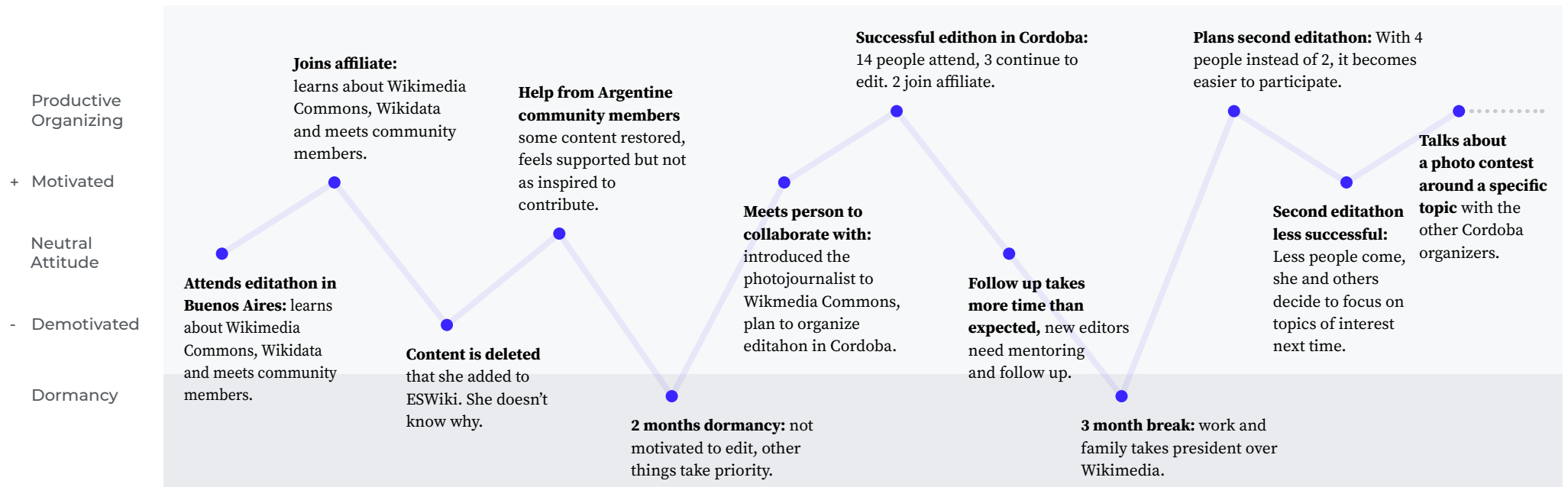




Photo by Eva Owusu (CC BY-SA), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Chanatan_ladies_at_work.jpg

ABA — 45

MOVEMENT FACILITATOR

📍 Location

Accra, Ghana

📄 Occupation

Event organizer

🗣️ Languages

Twi, English

📱 Devices

iPhone, Acer laptop

Organizing skills

Basic Proficient Expert

Organizing career – people impacted

1 100 1000+

Wikimedia projects fluency

Simple skills Competent Complex skills

Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▼ Easier international transfer of money and resources to her community.
- ▼ To learn how other small communities across the movement grow to help her grow the Ghana community.
- ▼ To access more movement learnings, knowledge, skills and resources about community growth from the international community.

Long term goals

- ▼ Ensure the Ghanaian Wikimedia communities thrive and grow.
- ▼ To create a solid succession plan so she knows the community in Ghana can succeed as she moves further into international Wikimedia organizing.
- ▼ To support paths for Ghanaian and other African cultures to be visible in international spaces like the Wikimedia projects.

Challenges

- ▼ Working tactically with the Ghana community while thinking strategically with the international movement. It is hard to move easily between these levels of thinking, communicating and acting.
- ▼ Making sure enough events are happening to keep the Ghana volunteers engaged.

[continue](#) →

- ▼ Balancing family time, her event planning jobs including Wikimedia events, and volunteering with the movement.

About Aba

Background

Aba is married, has three grown children and lives in Accra. She has a business degree from a university in Accra. For several years after school, Aba was a freelance event planner, focusing on weddings, funerals, and other events. Through this work, she built connections and eventually was hired at an international hotel in Accra doing bookings and planning events. After five years, the hotel was sold and she and others lost their jobs. Aba now does freelance event planning, including contract work with the Wikimedia Foundation organizing large international events in Africa.

Networking and communication habits

Aba first used the internet at university. Though interested, she had little access so didn't really learn how to use it then. The skills she learned in university were all on paper and typewriters. She learned to use a computer and smartphone while at the hotel in Accra, getting a shared smartphone with her husband in 2008. Now they each have one and Aba has her own laptop. Aba's husband bought a laptop for their children to share. They believe computer skills will help their children's careers. Aba sees the value of the internet for connecting the people of the world, and wants to make sure Ghana and Africa are visible online. She feels particularly strongly about the Wikimedia movement, becoming a big promoter of the work, as well as a long time contributor to English Wikipedia and Wikidata.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

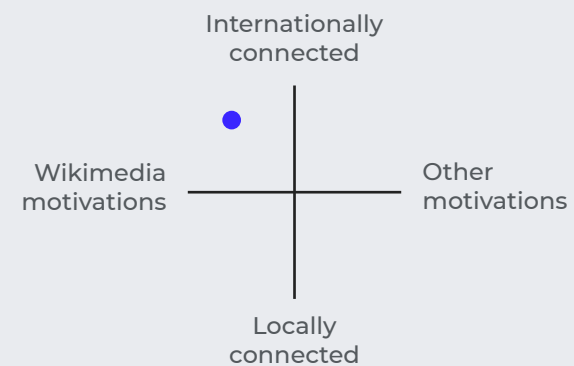
While working at the hotel, Aba spoke with a friend's daughter attending her first Bar Camp in Accra. The youth mentioned she learned how to edit Wikipedia, and wanted to to teach others. Aba hadn't known anyone could edit Wikipedia and noticed that information about Ghana was wrong or non-existent on English Wikipedia. Aba volunteered to help her friend's daughter run an editing event and learned to edit. In the decade since, Aba has joined the Ghana affiliate and contributes about Ghana to English Wikipedia and WikiData. Aba uses her event

management skills to help others run successful Wikimedia events, and promotes Wikimedia across Africa. She wants the communities in Ghana to grow, especially in rural areas where culture and history might easily be lost.

Organizer type and activities

Aba has had many roles in the Accra-area Wikimedia community, and for a period of time led the community. While she was working at the hotel, she applied for rapid grants to support events in Accra and Kumasi. Over time, Aba became a trusted Wikimedia community member. Recently, Aba got a short term contract for international event planning through the Wikimedia Foundation. She still volunteers with the Ghana affiliate and has passed on leadership for the local community to several others. Aba is very excited to see Twi Wictionary and Wikipedia grow, and more Ghanaian content on English Wikipedia. Though she is passionate and driven by the work, she frequently thinks, "It will be hard to continue at this pace."

Aba's behavior matrix



Aba's roles

Supporter

- Strategist
- Innovator
- Cultural Translator
- Mentor

Implementer

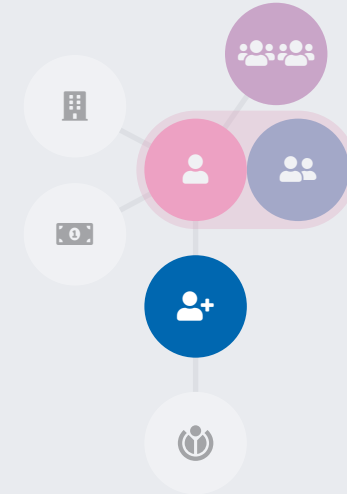
- Event Organizer

Connector

- Publicist
- Recruiter
- Ambassador
- Partnership Manager
- Professional ally

In the network

Meta-Organizer



Movement Facilitator — Aba's journey



Photo by Anthony Chinweuba (CCO), <https://www.pexels.com/photo/photo-of-man-wearing-floral-shirt-2327283/>



ELORM — 24

OPEN EDUCATION ACTIVIST

📍 Location

Kumasi, Ghana

📄 Occupation

Local public school technology teacher

🗣️ Languages

English

📱 Devices

Android smartphone, borrows cousin's laptop when necessary

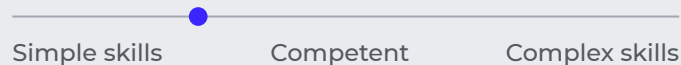
Organizing skills



Organizing career – people impacted



Wikimedia projects fluency



Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▲ Mentoring and support in building partnerships with local schools.
- ▲ Better tools for finding free educational content for his school.
- ▲ To know his work is valuable for students and teachers.
- ▲ Access to a laptop for editing and organizing Wikimedia events.
- ▲ Easier Android Wikimedia editing tools so he can teach students to edit.

Long term goals

- ▲ To create free educational content for Ghanaian primary school students that reflects Ghana's context and culture.
- ▲ To equip his students with tech skills they need to succeed in the world.
- ▲ To find a job within Wikimedia to work on free educational content.
- ▲ To preserve knowledge from communities in Ghana on the internet.

Challenges

- ▼ Accessing the internet: it is expensive and slow in Ghana.
- ▼ Electricity not always being available, and

[continue](#) →

backup generators being expensive.

- ▼ His students have very little access to computers for learning.
- ▼ The school's administrator does not see that Kiwix is of value for his students and the teachers he works with.
- ▼ Getting content on English Wikipedia reverted. He does not understand why this happens, changes are reverted without any warning. He thinks that editors on English Wikipedia don't understand notability for Ghana.

About Elorm

Background

Elorm grew up and went to university in Kumasi, Ghana. He earned an Education degree with a technology focus. He lives with his parents and younger siblings in Kumasi. Elorm joined an interest group about open source software while at University where he first learned about Wikimedia projects. Elorm feels strongly that education should be free and include learning to use technology so that his students can find jobs other than unstable and low-income gigs and hustles.

Networking and communication habits

Elorm teaches his students about technology although they rarely have access to computers. The school has a small computer lab, but it is frequently locked because of lack of electricity in the school. He draws the basic elements of a computer, including a keyboard and mouse, on the chalkboard, and describes them. He draws a word processing interface and teaches his students how to interact with it to get students familiar before they can practice on a computer. Elorm's laptop is permanently broken. He fixed it a few times, but now borrows his cousin's laptop. Usually he uses his Android phone for everything. Once, when a new editor asked how to log into Wikipedia, Elorm made a screen recording of himself logging in on his phone and sent it to them.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

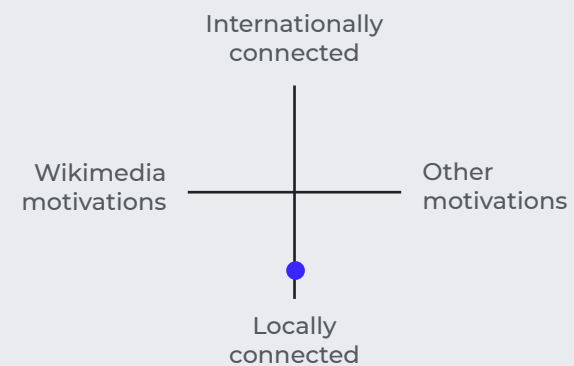
Elorm didn't have much interest in editing Wikipedia when he first learned about it. Six months ago, he was invited to a Wikipedia editathon in Accra and took the

12-hour round trip bus ride to attend. At the event, he learned basic editing on a friend's laptop, using the visual editor. Elorm was excited to learn about Kiwix and talked with an organizer about it for a long time about what it might do for his school. After the editathon, Elorm received an email inviting him to join the Ghana Wikimedia community, and he paid his dues to join. Elorm was soon asked to organize an editathon in Kumasi. He notices gaps in information about Ghana on English Wikipedia, and would like to edit, but it's too hard to edit on his phone. He can't find the visual editor. Elorm decided to edit only when he has access to a laptop, and works to get Kiwix for his school and support others to edit.

Organizer type and activities

Elorm and another new community member who has a laptop held one editathon in Kumasi. They learned from organizers in Accra how to make the event successful, and a professor from Elorm's University gave them free space and internet access. 15 people participated and edited Wikipedia during a six hour session. Two weeks after the event, three people joined the group, and are enthusiastic about hosting the next editathon. So far, Elorm has not been able to convince the administrator of his school, that Kiwix will be of value for to students and teachers; he doesn't have arguments that the administrator finds persuasive.

Elorm's behavior matrix



Elorm's roles

Supporter

- Facilitator
- Emotional Supporter
- Innovator

Implementer

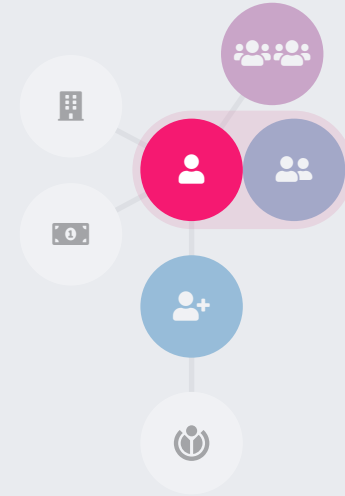
- Event Organizer
- Teacher

Connector

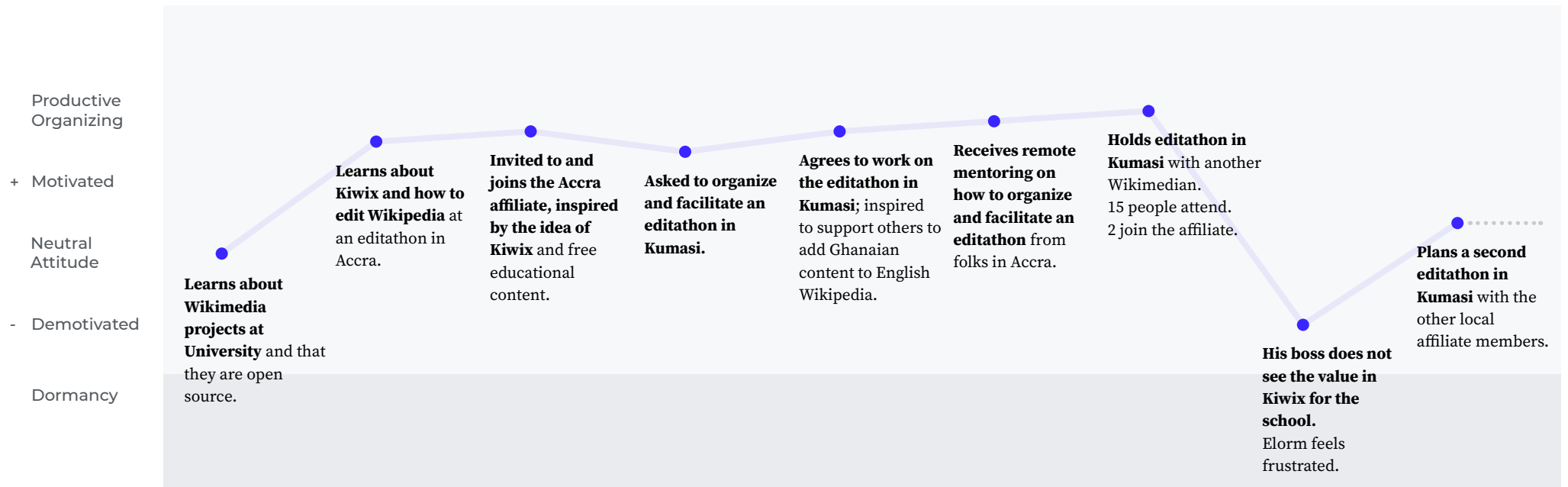
- Recruiter

In the network

Organizer



Open Education Activist — Elorm's journey





TEMAH — 25

OPEN MOVEMENT ACTIVIST

📍 Location

Accra, Ghana

📄 Occupation

Volunteer for open source projects, including Wikimedia and Open Street Maps

🗣️ Languages

English

📱 Devices

Android smartphone, shares a Dell laptop with her sister

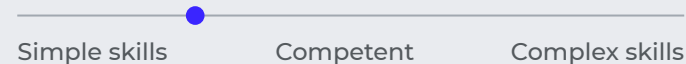
Organizing skills



Organizing career – people impacted



Wikimedia projects fluency



Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▲ Mentoring and support to learn more about project management.
- ▲ Better learning opportunities from other organizers from Wikimedia and other NGO organizations in West Africa, as professional development.
- ▲ Validation that her work is valuable for her community.
- ▲ To find a job that she cares about and is passionate about.

Long term goals

- ▲ Expand the reach and resources for her Wikimedia affiliate, so they have easy access to physical space, internet and computers for events.
- ▲ A dependable income. She hopes that one of her many volunteer projects might provide income in the future.
- ▲ More opportunity to learn additional skills, and deepen the skills she possesses.

Challenges

- ▼ Electricity fluctuations in Accra disrupting her edits to Wikimedia projects.
- ▼ Editing full articles on her phone is challenging, instead, she adds images to Commons and English Wikipedia articles about famous Ghanaian women.

Photo by C.C. Chapman (CC BY-NC-ND), <https://flic.kr/p/bQJ3Wt>

- ▼ Expensive data, and not all her community members having access at home. Although she advocates for active facilitators and contributors in her group to have their internet reimbursed, this still gets challenged.
- ▼ Transferring reimbursement of expenses to facilitators.
- ▼ Grant applications that take a lot of time and effort to write, and become more complicated to track once approved.

About Temah

Background

Temah lives with her parents and younger sister in Accra. She studied business administration at university, where she met people involved in the open software movement, both in Ghana and internationally. From them, Temah learned about Wikidata and Wikimedia Commons, and that Wikipedia is written by many people. While looking for work work, she began to volunteer for the Wikimedia community in Accra and other organizations. She likes contributing and learning valuable skills that add to her CV and further her interest in the open movement.

Networking and communication habits

Temah heavily relies on her Android smartphone's data for social media, messaging, and phone calls, and waits until she has wifi to save data costs. She learned to edit Wikipedia using the visual editor on the laptop she shares with her sister, so she doesn't know how to edit on her phone. Temah is constantly looking for opportunities to advocate for the open movement, and needs to find more work.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

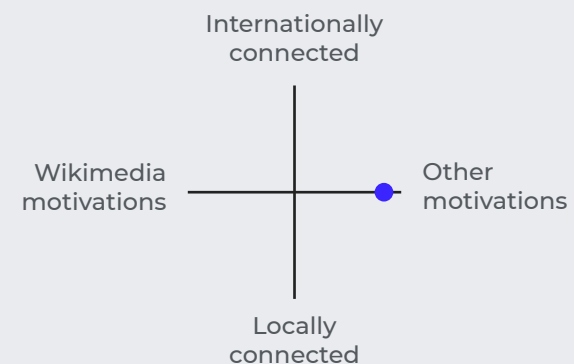
After completing university, Temah met Kwesi at a gathering in Accra. Kwesi facilitates Wikipedia editathons around Accra, and told Temah about the other Wikimedians in Accra. Temah was excited and joined the Wikimedia community right after Kwesi sent the invite. Kwesi taught Temah the basics of editing at a few editathons, and via Telegram and email. When Temah was invited to organize an editathon because Kwesi would be out of town, she said yes, and jumped in. Even though Kwesi helps her when he can, Temah finds it frustrating and difficult to

edit Wikipedia articles. Once she tried creating an article about a famous Ghanaian woman on English Wikipedia, but the article was deleted as non-notable. She was not sure why. She enjoys adding images to Commons and then Wikipedia articles more than writing content. She also contributes to OpenStreetmap when she walks in the city.

Organizer type and activities

Kwesi was out of town when Temah organized her first (and only) editathon. Temah traveled across Accra to pick up a special router and was able to get everything she needed in time for the event. Kwesi gave her slides that helped her deliver the basics of editing to the five people who attended. Though she still had a lot of questions about editing herself, she did the best she could to teach others. She wasn't able to answer all the participants' questions, and ended up talking about other open movement communities. Temah thinks supporting others to organize is an easier way for her to contribute. In the past year, Temah became responsible, in a volunteer capacity, for supporting facilitators who run editathons, and managing the flow of money and other resources (like routers and signs) so editathons will be successful. Temah was just offered a part time contracting job with another organization in the Open movement and may need to reduce her volunteer work for the Accra Wikimedia community.

Temah's behavior matrix



Temah's roles

Supporter

- Emotional Supporter
- Innovator

Implementer

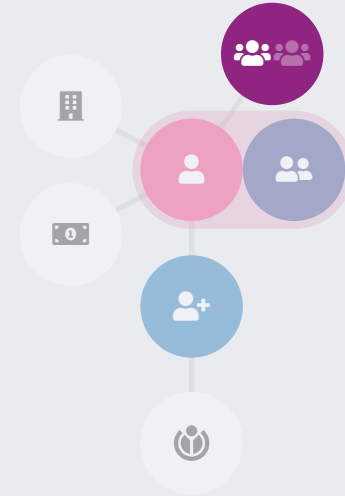
- Event Organizer
- Treasurer
- Project Manager

Connector

- Publicist

In the network

Activist



Open Movement Activist — Temah's journey

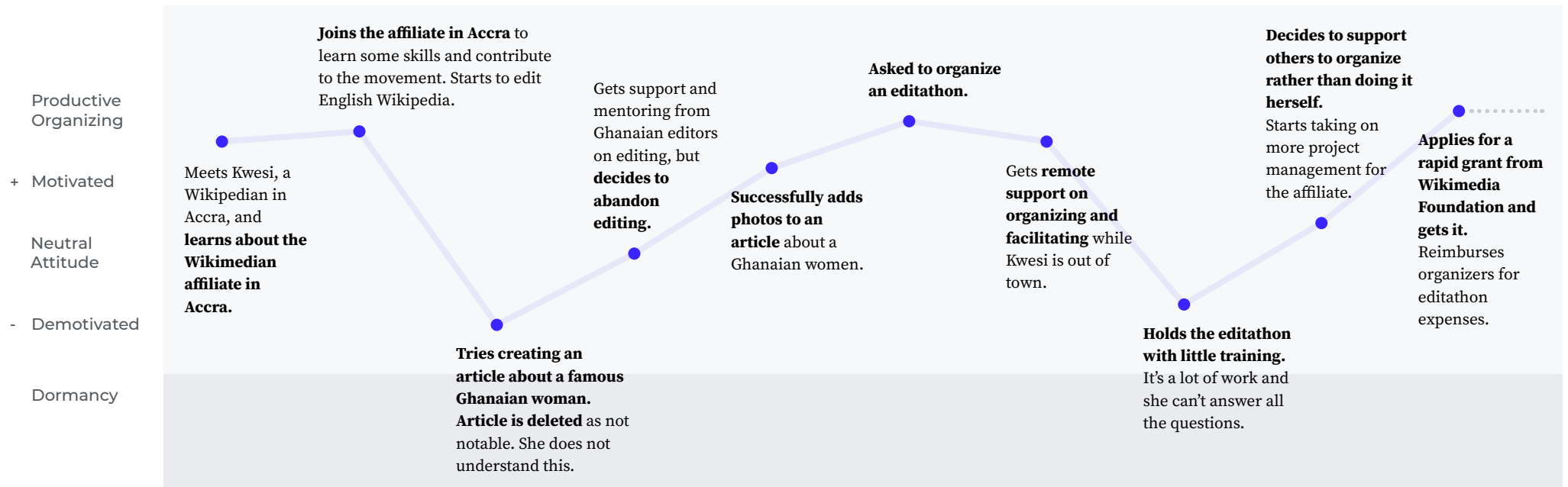


Photo by Pixabay (CCO), <https://www.pexels.com/photo/adult-beard-boy-casual-220453/>



MARTIN — 31

WIKIMEDIA PROMOTER

📍 Location

Buenos Aires, Argentina

📄 Occupation

Ministry of Education

🗣️ Languages

Spanish, English

📱 Devices

Android Smartphone, iPad, personal Dell laptop, work Dell laptop

Organizing skills



Organizing career – people impacted



Wikimedia projects fluency



Goals

Desired organizing experience

- ▲ Reduce the time it takes to apply for and report on annual plan grants.
- ▲ Be visible to and have access to the international Wikimedia movement so he can learn best practices from other communities across the world.
- ▲ An easier process for working with large sets of data and information on Wikimedia projects so that he can teach batch tools to other contributors.

Long term goals

- ▲ To help Wikimedia communities in Argentina grow and to provide the support and resources needed for that growth.
- ▲ Create venues for the Argentinian Wikimedia communities to be seen and recognized by the international Wikimedia communities.
- ▲ Grow the world wide Wikimedia movement, especially in Spanish speaking Latin America.

Challenges

- ▼ Getting connected to international Wikimedians.
- ▼ Navigating how to spend his time between family, work, and Wikimedia volunteer work.

About Martin

Background

Martin lives in Buenos Aires with his wife and their two young children. His wife has a full time job, and they share child care and household duties. Martin went to University in the United Kingdom for his undergraduate and masters degrees in computer science. After returning to Argentina, he lectured at a university, before starting work at the Ministry of Education in an IT role where he implements and manages educational software. Not long after starting at the Ministry of Education, he participated in WikiPuentes, a training program for educators. He learned about the Wikimedia movement and the affiliate in Buenos Aires. Martin joined right away and has since been working with the affiliate, while continuing his work at the University. Martin is passionate about the movement, and wants to see it grow.

Networking and communication habits

Martin works with people at all levels of education supporting them to successfully navigate technology for their work and courses. He is also the “IT guy” for his family and friends, as well as many local Wikimedians. Martin has a computer at work, a personal computer at home, and access to pretty much any kind of technology he needs. He uses his phone to find information, keep up with social media, and for phone calls, and is “on call” frequently via his personal phone. He uses tries to stay on Wifi when using his phone because cellular data is expensive.

Perception of and involvement in the movement

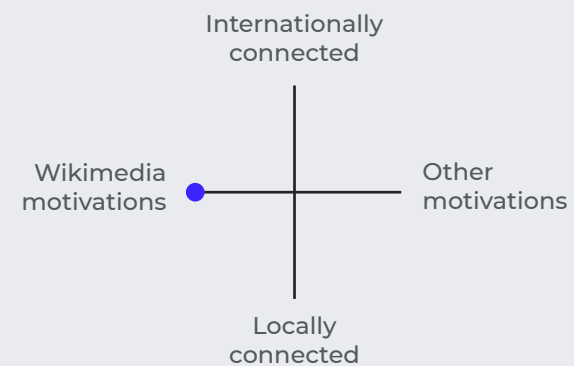
Martin learned about Wikipedia in secondary school. As a user of both Spanish and English Wikipedia, he noticed gaps in content in Spanish Wikipedia as compared to English Wikipedia. While attending college a Wikipedia editor showed Martin how to edit. A few years later, Martin started editing about Argentinian politics on Spanish Wikipedia. He sometimes encountered confrontations on talk pages, and his content was occasionally deleted. These experiences were demotivating, and so he turned his attention to “freeing up images” of political events he attends by adding them to Wikimedia Commons.

More recently, he focuses on supporting others to fill the gaps, and to preserve history online.

Organizer type and activities

Though he continues to contribute content to Wikimedia projects, Martin prefers supporting the Argentine Wikimedia affiliate to grow the movement. He prioritizes supporting organizers who facilitate Wikimedia events, and working with the chapter in whatever capacity they need him. He helps the Wikimedia chapter apply for and report on the annual plan grant and answers questions and provides support for Wikipedia editors. Whenever there is a community event, Martin helps with planning, and spends evenings and weekends lecturing about Wikimedia projects. He can always be called on to promote projects. If there were a job for him in the movement, he would love to take it because it would allow him spend more of his time growing the movement he loves. For now, he balances his work at the Ministry of Education, his family life, and volunteer organizing and editing for Wikimedia projects. It can be challenging, but his passion keeps him volunteering.

Martin’s behavior matrix



Martin's roles

Supporter

- Innovator
- Mentor

Implementer

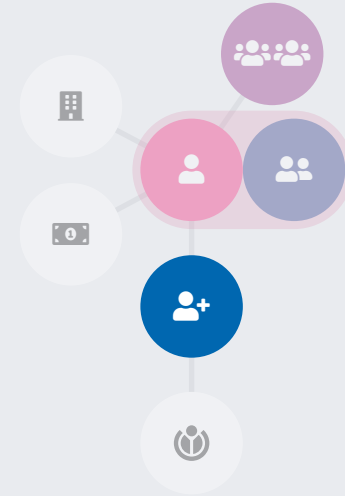
- Treasurer

Connector

- Publicist
- Recruiter
- Ambassador

In the network

Meta-Organizer



Wikimedia Promoter — Martin's journey

