Translatable Pages Research Survey

Product | Design Strategy | Language Team

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Translatable Pages allow people to make content available in multiple languages, enabling anyone to participate regardless of the language they speak. At the same time, translatable pages are more complex to create than standard pages.

The goal of this project is to better understand the challenges of people creating and updating translatable pages in order to improve the user experience.

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Background

(And for as we go along: **Notes doc**)

1. Translatable Pages overview
2. Research questions

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Translatable Pages Overview

Mediawiki Translate Extension

Provides a managed workflow to create and update wiki pages on multilingual wikis. ([more details](#))

Synchronized multilingual content

A contributor can prepare the contents for translation, making it possible for others to translate and keep translations up to date. This in turn enables anyone to participate regardless of the language they speak. For example, translatable pages are often used for product documentation (such as product pages) and announcements.

Before and after the extension

Before this feature was available, wiki page translations were done manually using copy-pasting, and it was not possible to see what parts of translations were outdated.

Translatable Pages allows users to make content available and synchronized in multiple languages.

Nonetheless, creating a translatable page is more complex than creating a standard page. These pages require marking-up the translatable content, and separating it from content that should not be translated. All this adds a lot of additional markup to the wiki text.

Research Questions

The goal of this project is to better understand the experiences and challenges of people creating and updating translatable pages in order to improve the user experience. One metric the team is interested in is **how to increase the number of people who are successful at creating and updating translatable pages, and improving ease for those with less technical knowledge**.

Our approach to investigating and answering these questions is two-fold:

1. **Survey** - feedback from both WMF staff and volunteers who are involved in organizing or preparing multilingual content [*complete*]
2. **Semi-structured contextual inquiry** - moderated research sessions including workflow observation and interview [*ongoing*]

Primary research questions

1. What challenges do people face when *creating* translatable pages?

2. What barriers prevent people from successfully creating translatable pages?

3. What challenges do people face when *updating* translatable pages?

4. What barriers prevent people from successfully updating translatable pages?

5. Who uses translatable pages and what are their goals?

Survey Results

1. Respondents
2. Preparing content for translation with TPs
3. Providing translations with TPs
4. Those who don't use Translatable Pages
5. Translation coordinators

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Survey Results

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Respondents

Overview of participants 👥

- **85** responses remained after data cleaning
  - Data cleaning involved removal of 14 responses <50% complete (all others 98%+ complete)
  - Also, removal of 9 responses from those who responded, "I don't really work with translation for wiki content (I don't usually add content for translation, provide translations, or coordinate work of translators)"
  - **85% of respondents were split roughly 50/50 WMF employees and volunteer editors/translators**
  - 'Other' respondents (~10%) included self-identified: *consultant-translator, translator, employee in an org supported by WMF, WMF documentation translators group member, communications translation team member, WMF contractor, WMF employee and volunteer*

Process

- Survey administered via Qualtrics over the course of ~4 weeks
- Recruitment via Slack channels, talkpages, Telegram channels, and email

Other
10.6%

WMF employee
35.3%

Volunteer editor/translator
48.2%

WMF affiliate employee
5.9%
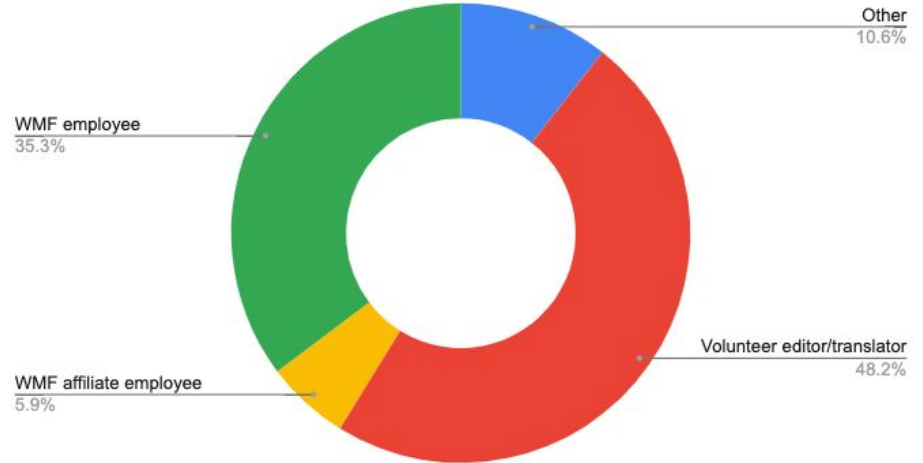
Respondents' involvement in translation

Who did we hear from?

'Which of the following best describe you?'
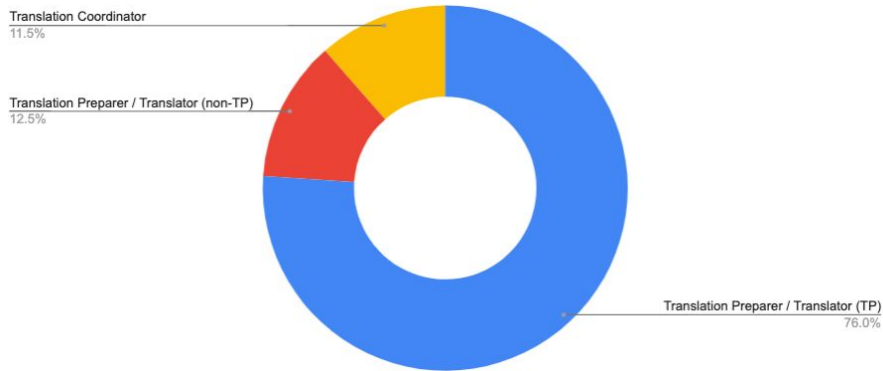
- 76% of respondents use the Translatable Pages (TP) Extension to prepare content for translation, translate content, or do both
- We also heard from wiki page translators who don't use the TP Extension, as well as individuals who coordinate translation work

Translatable Pages users - *frequency of use*

'How often do you use Translatable Pages?'
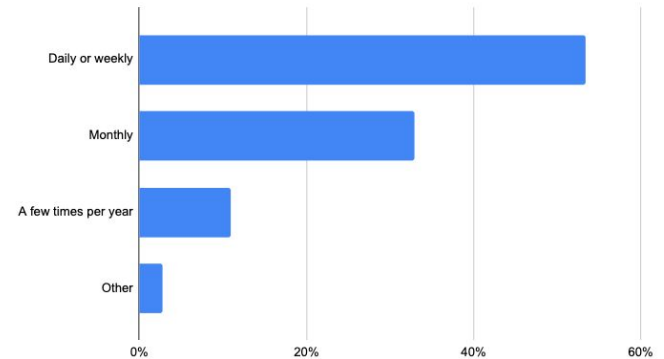
- The majority of respondents who use Translatable Pages report daily or weekly use
- 'Other' responses included "sometimes daily, sometimes monthly" and "daily intermittently, during projects"

Survey Results

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Preparing Content for Translation with Translatable Pages (TP)

On and off wiki content preparation

The majority of respondents (~75%) reported drafting content for translation directly on wiki. But others are primarily transferring content that has been drafted elsewhere. They either prefer to draft with other tools, or receive content from others that they must then transfer to a wiki page. In some cases, content needs to be polished and approved before being published more widely.

Which aspects of creating TPs are most challenging or time-consuming?

Top 3 by frequency:

1. Handling other types of content (e.g., graphs, tables, etc.)
2. Adding translation tags
3. Editing pages after initially adding translation tags

A number of respondents also noted setting the source language and setting priority languages for translation. Only 25% respondents said 'none of the above'.

We also received a wealth of descriptive responses to a follow-up question asking for more information about the challenges users face. **The following 2 slides summarize some themes and opportunities,** and you can [read verbatim responses here](#).

> **On adding translation tags and updating content…**
>
> *"The worst part is tvars. It would be nice if it could auto-detect piped links and add tvars for that automagically"*
>
> *"Adding simple, per-sentence or per-graf translation tags when composing on wiki takes more time than composing content"*
>
> *"The tools add lots of additional content in the wikitext that makes it hard to edit the page afterwards. Making one mistake can break the whole code. The tags not being very compatible with the Visual Editor."*
>
> *"The whole <!-- T:123131 --> is confusing, I have had so many errors in just making a simple change, where to put <translate></translate>. It's really really hard to work with."*
>
> *"Also, I'm never really sure what to do when I add, e.g. a new sentence, to an existing text. Do I manually create a new translation unit (I don't think so)? Do I wrap it in <translate></translate>? Or is a new translation unit generated automatically?"*

Which aspects of *creating* Translatable Pages are most challenging and/or take the most time? (1 of 2)

Initial categorization of verbatim responses

Translation tags, markup, and variables

- Translation variables
- Tvars
- Adding translation tags if there's a lot of other content, code that I want to exclude from translation
- Understanding which types of content changes should trigger certain translate markup changes

Documentation and instructions

- Lack of instructions, ML suggestions not appearing or being incorrect
- Documentation
- Lack of instructions, ML suggestions not appearing or being incorrect

Updating pages

- Handling updates to transcluded pages that are not translated templates
- Managing changes after making available for translation
- Wait for the version difference when updating obsolete content

Cross-page issues

- Handling cases when some pages use the Translate Extension but others don't (either because they're not translatable, or because they use some manual translation method (e.g., templates transcluded in both types of pages, links between them)

Other

- Getting the page translated (connecting with translators)
- http://phabricator.wikimedia.org/T320220

Which aspects of *creating* Translatable Pages are most challenging and/or take the most time? (2 of 2)

Additional summary of themes and opportunities

Difficulty adding translation tags and markup, and dealing with the complex formatting. In particular, adding tags to bulleted lists, tables, and section names can take a lot of time. Adding multiple *tvar* tags is a burden and wikicode is already challenging to understand

Updating pages is challenging and it's difficult to know when to mark something for translation. There's fear of messing up with a very manual process of marking strings for translation.

Lack of documentation and automation makes learning the system difficult. The documentation is lengthy and challenging to read, and there are opportunities to automate manual processes.*

🌱 **OPPORTUNITIES**

To improve the experience of content preparers

1. **More automation of markup** to ease the burden on users performing very detail-oriented and error-prone tasks.

2. **Interface intuitiveness and formatting simplicity** (including visual layout) will make learning the system easier and reduce the burden of updating pages

3. **Focus on ways of improving the experience of updating pages**, a common need, but notable challenge, among users.

*See appendix for more information about documentation.

Content preparer wish list ✨

What do you wish you could change about how Translatable Pages are created?
What would make it easier for you to create Translatable Pages?

Some highlights of wishes in a wide range of requests:

1. Visual editor support
2. Automate more tasks (esp tagging etc)
3. Improved tutorials and guides
4. A simpler visual interface that helps users process the different types of information present on the page (e.g., color coding, separation, etc)
5. Page previews
6. More machine translation options
7. Ways of managing time-sensitive content and translations
8. Ability to prevent sections of content from being marked for translation
9. Display all errors at once
10. Auto fixing of simple typographical errors (e.g., missing tag, whitespace, etc)

(read more wishes here)

On automation, the ease of errors, and signaling importance of content

"When I edit an existing page, I don't want to see translate tags. I want to edit like I would any other page [...] I don't want to have to care about whether the changes are changey enough to merit retranslation"

"It's easy to get it wrong, far too easy"

"The translatable pages I work on are usually quite long, so the wikitext is hard to navigate with all the translation units and translation tags"

"...user-friendly UI and entry-level usage, with some sort of color-coding, rather than manually adding ever tag, tvars, etc."

"In an ideal world I simply tell the system 'this page must be translated' and all the tagging happens automagically"

"There are hundreds of translatable pages on mediawiki.org and meta, and there's no good way to learn what is important"

"The feature I REALLY miss is to automatically discourage translations after a certain period of time" (e.g., if temporarily relevant)

Survey Results

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Translating with Translatable Pages (TP)

73% of respondents reported that they prepare translations directly using the translation extension interface

Others reported using a combination of the extension interface and external tools

such as Google docs, or using only external tools when providing translations.

Why do some prefer to prepare translations outside of the extension interface?

(each of these responses was mentioned multiple times)

- Translate offline (transferring content online later)
- Prefer to complete the entire translation at one time and then transfer to the wiki page later
- Use external machine translation engine interfaces as base of translation (e.g., DeepL)
- The WMF department works with various translators and Google docs are friendlier to work in (another staff then transfers the translations manually)

"

"Someone else prepares them [text for translation] on a Google doc, which I spend hours (sometimes) converting the complex formatting to MediaWiki, which I then markup"

Translatable Pages features for translators

How important are each of the following features of Translatable Pages?

Legend: ■ Not important at all ■ Not too important ■ Somewhat important ■ Very important ■ Unsure what this is
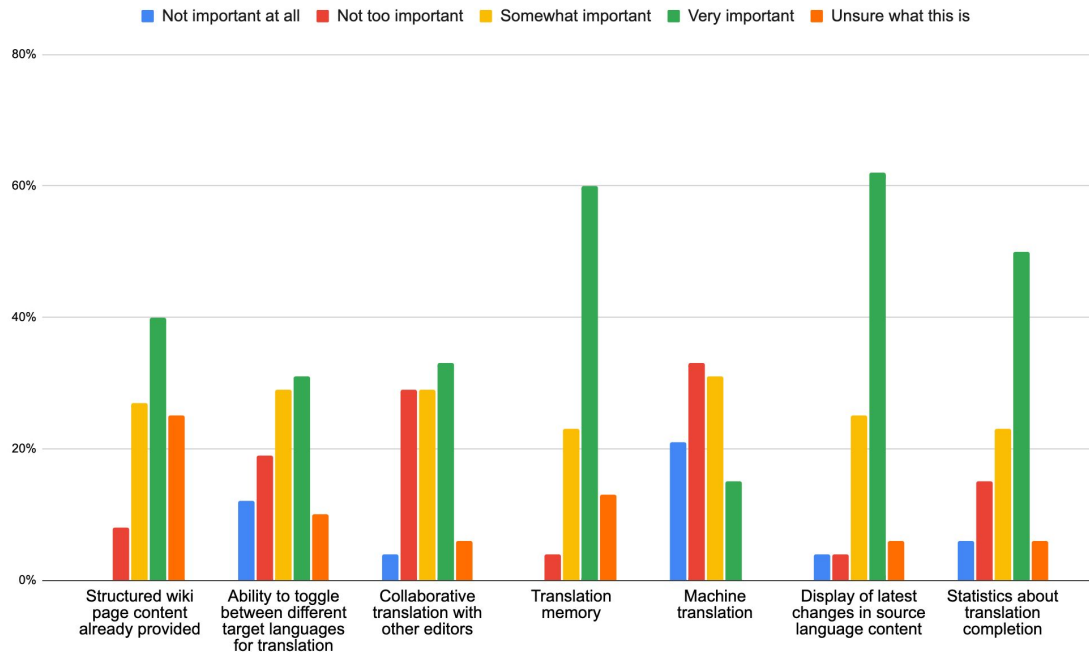
Most important features include *translation memory*, *display of latest changes in source*, and *completion statistics.*

Least important features include *collaborative translation* and *machine translation.*

Most unknown features include *structured wiki page content* and *translation memory.*

Translator wish list ✨

What do you wish you could change about how wiki pages can be translated with the Translatable Pages feature? What would make it easier for you to translate wiki content?

Wishes are diverse, but here are some highlights:

1. The ability to edit visually and fix typos that way

2. Better search functionality

3. An easier way to split translation units and respective translations when they're already created

4. A toolbar for basic formatting and selecting special characters

5. Knowing the content of translation variables is be very important

(read more wishes here)

> **Translating visually and improving translation supports**
>
> *"Translation notes are usually shared between languages. It would be better if this were clarified with translators or there were an option to add notes based on the language."*
>
> *"[I wish I had] the ability to edit visually and fix typos that way. Generally translating more structured and not in this gray, long wall of text that sometimes is like 200-300 units long and doesn't show me how my text is going to look like to the readers."*
>
> *"It would be quite helpful to somehow incorporate this glossary (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Movement_Strategy_and_Go vernance/Termbase/Table/pt-br) so we (professional translators hired by WMF) can quickly check official translations for wiki-terminology."*
>
> *"I hope you can make translation memory better, it's not always working and suggesting translations from previous translations."*
>
> *"'Live translation' would be nice - I mean you can see straight the content of page when you translate."*

Survey Results

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Translators who *don't* use Translatable Pages

Learning from a small number of translators who completed the survey, but don't currently use the extension

Have you heard of the Translatable Pages feature?

A slight majority (~66%) of survey respondents had awareness of the feature

Experience with Translatable Pages

Around half of the respondents who don't regularly use the extension reported they've tried using it once or more, but don't regularly use it

Difficulty is the main reason for lack of adoption

The main reason reported for this lack of use was, "it's too difficult to use / I had trouble using it". Only one reported that it lacks features that are important or essential.

" **What's preventing adoption?**

"Tagging content for translation is often tricky and time-consuming."

"The process to obtain translation admin rights and therefore being able to mark pages for translation is troublesome."

"Too much wiki-markup language. Complicated what belongs to what."

🙇 For regularly active Translatable Page users, 'learning by doing' was the most frequently reported technique for learning to use Translatable Pages (~50%). However, the other half of respondents said that documentation pages and formal/informal mentors played an important role in their process of learning to use the extension.

More on the experiences of those not currently using Translatable Pages

Content preparers

- Prepare content for translation 50/50 on/off wiki
- While ease and familiarity are important for their decision of where to prepare content, the preferences/requests of the translators also play an important role in their decision
- They do not want to learn complex markup to achieve their goals of getting content translated

Translators

- Prepare translations on/off wiki, sometimes opting to draft in spaces with machine translation support (e.g., DeepL)
- For those who draft translations off-wiki, they cite 'simplicity' and 'not being forced/rushed to use the same structure' as reasons
- It's important for them to understand which translations are of higher priority and what's user-facing or technical documentation

Survey Results

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Translation coordinators

Organizing the process of promoting high quality translations

Notifying translators that tasks are available

Email is a common way that coordinators notify translators that tasks are available, but other means include text message, non-wiki messaging apps, Gdocs with task lists, Asana, and a combination of many of the above

Monitoring progress

Most coordinators don't really monitor translator progress, but just wait for the finished translation. Others rely on message group statistics, and fewer via direct contact updates from translators.

Reviewing quality

- The majority of respondents reported that translations aren't really reviewed for quality. Only one respondent reported a thorough review process, including several rounds of independent translation review via an agency as well as staff or volunteers
- Generally when quality is reviewed, coordinators have a variety of methods of checking quality, including: asking a colleague or volunteer for review, and having the localization team organize a translation review in a Google doc
- To ensure proper vocabulary is used, some coordinators provide a glossary to translators, but just as many coordinators are looking for a system to ensure consistent and proper topic-specific vocabulary is used.

How do coordinators find translators?
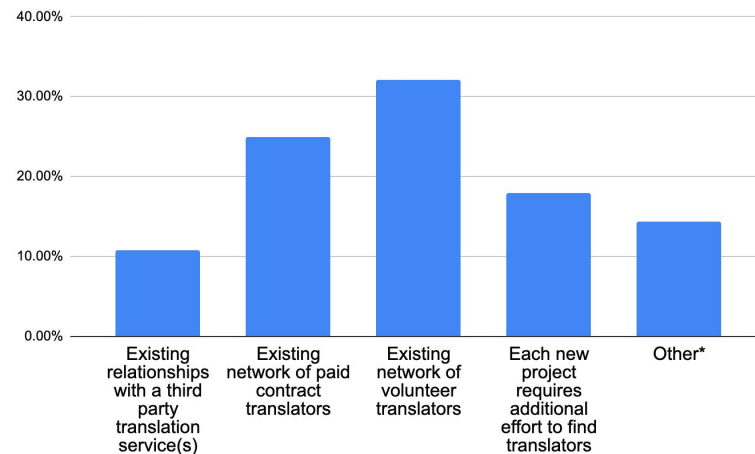
Coordinators report a wide range of knowledge of how wiki pages work among translators. Everything from 'very experienced with wiki pages' to 'limited to no knowledge of wiki pages'. Overall, it's a mix of very different experience levels.

* Other:
"Just mark it for translation and hope for the best, sometimes. There's so much material. We can't be actively asking people to translate everything."
"Special:NotifyTranslators (needs some love)"

Translation coordinators

What's something you wish you could change or improve about your current process of managing and coordinating work?

- Clearer project selector that translators can use to find pages that are more important to translate and group them by topics, priority, etc.
- Ability to connect with more, high quality translators, and communicate situational-specific details (e.g., providing context)
- A more nimble/targeted "notify translators" system/workflow ("Special:NotifyTranslators is too much of a hammer"). The ability to connect with the right people/groups of people without inadvertently over-messaging too large of group (e.g., marking a few translations as 'needing review' and then sharing that with a specific set of individuals)
- Easier way to discover Translatable Pages
- An org-wide termbase and glossary (e.g., [Movement Strategy and Governance](#))
- Way for translators to monitor work (both past and future), such as being notified when a translation unit to which they contributed is updated
- Method or approach for handling translation vandalism
- Gauge of how available different volunteer language communities are, and who may be overly-relied upon at the current time

*This coordinator referenced the following as current attempts to improve this:
- https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Template:SALT
- https://phabricator.wikimedia.org/T288372 or https://phabricator.wikimedia.org/T272102
- https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Meta:Common_messages
- https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Template:Int_string

"

Common questions that coordinators receive from translators

*"Can we automate the standard-every-week strings? I'm tired of spending my time just re-entering (or waiting for the interface to load so I can confirm) the identical content week after week." ***

"When do you need it done by?"

"How do I find important pages to translate?"

"How can I use machine translation?"

Additional questions/topics
- Questions around movement specific terminology
- Assistance with specific glossary terms
- Tvars is a very common question area
- And, questions about how to use Translatable Pages on mobile

Recommendations & Next Steps

1. Summary of opportunities and opportunity areas emerging from feedback
2. Contextual inquiries - *update and plan*

🌱 Emerging opportunities / recommendations

Page preparation and translation experience improvements

- Automate page prep and tagging processes as much as possible.
- Automate tagging for newly added content to existing pages
- Reduce visual complexity of page contents including markup
- More machine translation options
- Support a less complex option to add a complete translation at once (vs unit-by-unit) to support offline translators and those with different workflows and workspaces
- Improve translation memory accuracy
- Communicate errors (especially with markup) and provide the option to fix them all at once (plus, auto correction of simple typographical errors)

- Provide a preview view or live preview of the reader's view
- Review, evaluate, and prioritize work around Phabricator tickets referenced by survey respondents (included in this report)

Ways to support communication and coordination needed among Translatable Page users

- Provide a way to communicate translation importance, category, and timeliness factors
- Enable more targeted messaging to help collaborators reach the right people
- Improve ways of helping coordinators and preparers communicate contextual information and glossary details

Efforts to help increase participation and support learning

- Overhaul and refresh documentation; explore possible mechanisms for promoting mentorship
- Generally simplify the discovery and participation process (acquiring the ability to prepare pages, translate, etc)
- Getting more coordinators and content preparers adoption of TPs may require further simplification of the translator experience because translator preferences in part drive coordinator choices

Appendix

- On the problem of documentation

Documentation

Given existing documentation (e.g., 1, 2), why did the topic of documentation come up fairly frequently in survey responses?

Improvement and consolidation of documentation

Survey respondents reported a general need for improved documentation. Open-ended comments also pointed to other resources that people have created for Translatable Pages [1, 2]. Thus, there may be an opportunity to consolidate and/or improve documentation based on what we observe others perceiving the need to document on their own.

Findability of documentation

A second theme that arose in open-ended comments related to users being able to find the relevant help and documentation. This is particularly important for new(er) Translatable Page users.

More hands-on, "how-to" documentation with gold-standard examples

As illustrated in the first quote to the right, there's a desire for more *"how to"* documentation, focused on the essential, practical tasks users are encountering. Related is the request for more gold-standard examples to learn from.

"

Feedback from daily/weekly Translatable Page users

"It [the documentation] *is able to tell you about the extension, but when it comes to teaching you how to use the extension, it falls short"*

"[We need] *more/clearer documentation, including "best in class" example pages to examine and learn from"*

Feedback from non-Translatable Page users

"[We need] *a documentation refresh: there's a lot of good information out there that has been created over time, but […] make sure everything is findable, covered, and up to date. After 3 years at WMF, I still have trouble figuring how to do translated links and use tvars"*

"The most important improvement is better organized, more complete documentation"

Thank you

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Please direct questions & comments to:
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