

The Grand Tour of Wikimedia

– Developing an inter-affiliate knowledge exchange program

TL;DR: Through a fairly low cost exchange program staff and volunteers from the Wikimedia movement will visit a number of affiliates to share learnings, build capacity faster, initiate more collaborations and keep staff and volunteers interested and engaged. Initial development costs during the pilot is expected to be significantly higher than in the coming years.

Concept summary

- 2-4 participants from the Wikimedia Movement (staff as well as volunteers) travel in each international tour to exchange knowledge, experience and best practices.
- They visit a few affiliates' offices or bases, and stay 3-5 days at each participating location.
- They meet communities, staff (where applicable) and partners to share their own knowledge with the receiving parts, and to bring back their learning points to the communities/affiliates they came from: communication or learning materials, skills, best practices.
- Different tours have different themes, and all of the travellers create an individual plan for their personal development.
- The costs are shared among the participating affiliates and Wikimedia Sverige.

Background

A [Grand tour](#) was a historical occurrence where youth in Europe traveled across the continent to deepen their knowledge about art, culture and language. It served as an educational rite of passage.

The grand tour historically lasted for months or even years, with huge costs associated with the activity. The tradition declined when technological advances made mass tourism accessible for many more people. We will modernize this idea of cultural exchange and excitement to serve the needs of the Wikimedia movement.

Connection to the strategic recommendations

This initiative is aimed to contribute directly to the fulfillment of the following strategic recommendations:

- [6. Invest in Skills and Leadership Development](#), especially achieving the envisioned change and action "Create a systematic, global approach to skill development for local communities, their people, and their organizations", as this will form the first formalized exchange initiative between multiple Wikimedia movement affiliates (and later also other free knowledge organizations).
- [7. Manage Internal Knowledge](#), especially with "Facilitate a culture of documentation to become integral to Wikimedia's work and evaluation and as an outcome in itself" and to "Adapt content, training, and learning to local contexts and involve diverse communities to ensure knowledge is accessible and available in multiple forms" and to "Provide dedicated staff to assist with content curation, discoverability, quality assurance, user support, and to facilitate peer-to-peer matchmaking" as the travelers will be identifying existing resources and connecting them and developing missing content based on the knowledge they gain during their travels.
- [5. Coordinate Across Stakeholders](#), especially achieving the envisioned change and action "Create and keep updated shared documents defining clear responsibilities and expected capabilities for specific activities ...", as this will be a key focus for the travelers to work on.
- [4. Ensure Equity in Decision-making](#), especially achieving the envisioned change and action "Coordinating capacity building", as well as "Supporting organizational growth through tailored advice and peer support", as this type of exchange program could become an integrated part of regional and thematic hubs in the future as hubs could "if appropriately resourced, [...] empower groups of affiliates to collaborate on capacity building, knowledge transfer, and coordination."
- The initiative will also indirectly serve all the recommendations as new leaders and networks will emerge that support the long term fulfillment of them. This is why these types of actions that ensure exchange and capacity building are key to establish early in the process of implementation.

The knowledge exchange program is intended to be an integrated part, e.g. one piece of the puzzle, of a larger effort to improve documentation and build capacity.

Other exchanges in the Wikimedia movement

Wikimedia affiliates across the world have experimented with smaller staff and volunteer exchanges.

Some interesting examples include regional exchanges in different forms organized by Wikimedia Argentina. Others include the Visiting Weasel¹ at the office in Brussels to learn about the work with EU policies; the Visiting Wikimedian² at the Wikimedia Summit in Berlin to learn about event organization; multiple staff exchanges between Wikimedia Netherlands and North Macedonia to learn more about the work. Wikimedia Sverige's staff visited Wikimedia Finland through an exchange grant to learn about the GLAM activities in the country.³ A number of community members or affiliate staff members have visited the Wikimedia Foundation offices in San Francisco.

Site visits performed by Wikimedia Foundation Program Officers are also a form of exchanges, even if they are more focused on grantees and reviewing their impact.

Outline

What is the Grand Tour of Wikimedia concept?

What opportunities does it bring?

1. A structured and coordinated exchange program between Wikimedia organizations.
2. An opportunity for key staff members and volunteers from free knowledge organizations to learn from each other.
3. An initiative that fosters new information exchange between Wikimedia organizations. The travelers focus on connecting and translating and expanding on materials and methods which are currently dispersed and unknown by the wider community.
4. A way to increase interest from people to join our ranks as volunteers and staff as this is a unique opportunity and [Unique Selling Point](#) not offered anywhere else.
5. A way to keep great people engaged longer and re-energize them with new ideas and knowledge.
6. A way for participants to receive an experience and edge for their CV for their careers.
7. A way for travelers to not only share the knowledge they had before, but to act as carriers of knowledge between the participating affiliates that they visit. The travellers will have to plan for ways of passing their knowledge on between the receiving parties

¹ https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/EU_policy/Engage/Visiting_WEASELS

² https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Visiting_Wikimedian

³

https://se.wikimedia.org/wiki/Projekt:Wikimaps_2015/Ansökan_till_Kulturfonden_för_Sverige_och_Finland

during the tour. They will also add more content to e.g. Meta or chapter wikis continuously during the Grand Tour.

8. A good way for staff of participating organizations to be introduced to the Wikimedia movement at large and understand the diversity of programs, contexts and ways of working across the movement
9. A good way for community members to be introduced to the work of (other) affiliate organizations and understand the diversity of programs, contexts and ways of working across the movement

What is the Grand Tour of Wikimedia concept **not**?

- The Grand Tour should not be mistaken for a free holiday but is rather a very intense and exciting educational experience. Travelers should however ideally have holiday days scheduled *after* the Grand Tour to recover.
- Despite the name the travel will be with low costs options and accommodations will be of an acceptable standard, but no more.
- The Grand Tour is an opportunity for the receiving affiliate to learn from the travelers, for them to learn from each other, and for all of them to actively share their knowledge, experience and insights.
- The travelers are not only learning but teaching and need to prepare presentations and materials on relevant subject matters.

How will the Grand Tours be organized?

- Wikimedia Sverige's staff will coordinate the practical parts of the exchange program, at least during the first year (2021-2022).
- Wikimedia Sverige's staff will develop an educational and documentation plan for the exchange program.
- The focus for the first year is GLAMwiki and content partnerships.
- Wikimedia Sverige will look into developing a fundraising model which includes both shared payments from affiliates and external grants.
- A *Program Committee* will be formed. The Program Committee will initially consist of selected interested representatives. The exact size and shape of the board and what its scope should be will be developed as part of the work the first year.
- The travelers will travel in constellations of two to four people. They should be from different countries and initiate their travel from their homeland, but take the tour together as a newly formed team. As such they will share an experience, share the workload, develop things together and support each other. This will help increase security for the travelers as they are not alone during their travels and can support each other in case of an emergency. This will also build friendships across affiliates.

- Each receiving affiliate will provide 3-5 days of program for the visiting travelers. After that, the participants will continue to a new country where a new receiving affiliate will take over.
- Wikimedia organizations share parts of the costs. The receiving affiliate will cover the cost of the travel expenses within the country, the accommodation and the travel FROM the country to the next destination. The first journey (from where the travelers reside) is paid for by the local affiliate or possibly through a dedicated grant.
- Efforts will be made to provide part of the accommodation through couch-surfing with other Wikimedians or renting of apartments through services such as Airbnb to let the traveler experience the uniqueness of each of the countries and keep costs down.
- A dedicated office space is not a must to be a host. If affiliates without an office would like to be hosts, venues could be rented as needed to allow local staff and volunteers to meet the travelers.
- There will be at least two Tours each year: they could consist either of staff members in their professional capacity or for volunteers or other people that would like to understand the free knowledge movement better, or a combination of the two.
- In each of the countries a number of partner organizations should be engaged to provide interesting activities to deepen the learning and understanding of each of the contexts. E.g. visit GLAMs to see how they work with digitization or to universities to see how they work with Open Access for scientific research.
- The travelers can support local communities with specific tasks, e.g. to organize or participate in events to create interest to attend.
- Other projects can be used to enhance the effect of the programme, and vice versa. For example, the Capacity Exchange platform can help identify areas where exchange is needed, and reports and findings from the grand tour can be used to contribute to the platform in return.
- The travellers are highly active in the planning of their own journey. This includes having an idea of what they want to explore during the tour, as well as taking part in creating the journey.
- When going on the journey the participants are dedicated to the tour, understanding there will be no time in the schedule to work on ordinary work tasks.
- An alumni network will be established for the people that have participated in the Tour to continue developing their roles in the Wikimedia movement and for them to share experience with new people taking the Tour.

Staff and volunteers and how the circumstances differ for them

Staff:

- Are chosen from existing Wikimedia organizations.
- Are nominated by their organization.

- Keep the legal status they have with their organization of origin (e.g. if they're employed, will continue to receive their salary as usual) .
- Are experts who bring knowledge with them to the hosting Wikimedia affiliates when they visit.
- Enhance their skills and knowledge for their existing job positions and become experts at the movement.
- Are chosen by the Program Committee, which reviews their application if there is a significant interest to participate in the Grand Tour.

Volunteers:

- Can be Wikimedia movement volunteers, staff members of another free knowledge organization, staff members of a partner organization or studying in a relevant field.
- Are picked through a global application process.
- Receive a stipend to cover some, or possibly all, expected expenses. This is to allow a more diverse group of travelers. They do *not* receive a salary from the Grand Tour Program.
- Do not necessarily have extensive knowledge of the work done by Wikimedia affiliates, but bring some other valuable key competence and energy.

Core values of the Grand Tour

Sustainability

Environmental sustainability: The Grand Tour must strive to make the smallest possible environmental impact. Therefore, mind investigating the different aspects of the tour considering this. Things to consider:

- Using public transports such as trains or buses, rather than flying, travelling by boat or individual cars.
- Planning the route to avoid unnecessary traveling.
- Holding online planning meetings, only travelling during the tour itself.
- Thinking about possible environmentally friendly activities to fill the tour with.

Economic sustainability: To get as much value as possible from the funds we hold within the movement, we must always consider how we use the money. Of course, this may lead to difficult decisions when prioritizing, and the aim is to try to create a model to ensure transparency and predictability in the decision making process. Things to consider include:

- Booking travels and accommodation as far as possible in advance, to ensure lower fees.
- Being aware of food budgets and other living costs for different countries and places, applying adequacy rather than extravagance in accommodation and food.
- Evaluate the different possibilities with refundable or non-refundable tickets.
- Actively apply for external funding to cover costs.

Social sustainability: This means taking care of the human beings involved in all aspects of the tour. Being engaged in the Grand Tour should contribute to more energy and inspiration, and be something to think about with joy rather than anxiety. Consider these aspects:

- The tour will be intense. Plan for resting, especially after traveling but also during the work days. Every impression will be new and after a few weeks the brain will be working hard to sort them all out.
- Make sure the schedule for the tour involves different kinds of activities, including for example both big and small groups of people, external events as well as office hours etc.
- Make sure the schedule is as set as possible in advance. This reduces stress levels for both travellers and receivers.
- Accommodation should be organized in a way that gives the travelers a good chance of resting.
- Keep meals as regular as possible. Make sure there are food breaks throughout the day.

Equity

The Grand Tour is focusing on sharing knowledge. The assumption is that everyone has something to learn. Neither the travelers nor the receivers know everything, but are willing to learn as well as to share their perspectives and experiences. Therefore, we must constantly strive to have different perspectives and backgrounds during the tour.

The participants must get the support they see fit, rather than everyone receiving the same support regardless of different needs. The concept of the tour must provide that support. This might mean different fees for different partners in the project, different kinds of activities during different tours, different kinds of knowledge sharing and so on.

The receiving parties will differ in size, structure, context and skills. It is important to lift the skills of small as well as big communities, from new and emerging affiliates as well as established ones. This, too, will help build a more equal Movement.

Openness and transparency

Transparency and openness are part of the ethos of the Wikimedia movement and will be applied for when organizing the Grand Tour. Planning concepts, as well as travelling plans and programs at different locations will be shared openly. As the overall aim of the Grand Tour is capacity building, we must share what can be of value to all.

Transparency in the decision-making is crucial to keep support and understanding for the decisions taken. It also allows the initiative to be more easily replicated.

Personal development

This is a key element during the planning process, as well as during the actual trip. A participant needs to identify why they want to partake in this project, and plan for their own inner journey as well as the travelling experience.

The program must have guidance around how a person can build their personal development from the beginning, already in the application process. Time must also be set aside for reflections during and after the journey to ensure the participant can make use of their planning.

The personal development will look very different to the different participants. One might focus on communicating with other participants in another language than their mother tongue, while another will evolve their understanding of different kinds of organisations and thereby widen their horizons. A third will develop leadership skills. All these are equally important, as they derive from the participants' own needs.

Organizational development

When staff and volunteers, alike, exchange ideas and know-how with community members around the world, great things are bound to happen. New practices can evolve, and skill sharing is at the heart of the Wikimedia tour.

As the participants are supposed to have a clear idea of what they want to focus on and achieve during their Tour, it will be easy to understand how this will connect to the work of the organization where they are active.

This is also true for the receiving organizations. As the different tours will have different focuses, it will be easy to sign up for receiving participants when the theme for the tour is one where the organizations can benefit.

SMART Goals

- 3+ participating countries with affiliates receiving the staff/trainees 2022.
- 3+ Wikimedia affiliates agreeing to co-finance the costs for trainees from other parts of the world for 2022 forward.
- 3 staff members and/or trainees taking the tour in late 2022 (depending on the COVID-19 situation).
- 1 external funding opportunity identified and an application process initiated.

Outstanding questions to solve

- How would the travelers be chosen?
- How many travelers would get to experience the Grand Tour each year?
- How do we ensure diversity amongst the travelers (e.g. that small affiliates and minorities are represented)?
- How do we prioritize between volunteers and staff when selecting participants?
- How do we ensure as low environmental impact as possible?
- How large should a stipend be to make the Grand Tour attractive for a diverse group of participants?
- How do we finance the initiative long term?
- How do we ensure that there are interesting and valuable tasks available to the travelers in each country during a rather short stay?
- What should we evaluate it based on? We need to define what success looks like.
- What will the actual themes for each of the tours be, and who decides on the themes?
- How can the community or the staff contribute in wishing for different themes?

Mini dictionary

- ED
 - Abbreviation for Executive Director, the senior operating officer or manager of a Wikimedia affiliate or the Wikimedia Foundation.
- Grand Tour
 - A historical activity consisting of an organized tour across Europe where the traveler learned about the culture and heritage of the countries visited. The grand tour served as an educational rite of passage.
- GLAM
 - An acronym for **g**alleries, **l**ibraries, **a**rchives, and **m**useums, the cultural heritage institutions.
- GLAMwiki
 - An acronym for volunteer and staff working to enhance partnerships between **g**alleries, **l**ibraries, **a**rchives, and **m**useums (GLAM) and the **W**ikimedia (wiki) communities.
- Receiving affiliate
 - The Wikimedia organization that the visiting staff or trainee from another Wikimedia organization visits to learn more about the work they do.
- Staff
 - A person who is in employment within a Wikimedia organization and represents that organization in the exchange program.

- Trainee
 - A trainee is a person that can take part in the exchange program. The trainee is either a Wikimedia movement volunteer, working at another free knowledge organization, working at a partner organization or studying in a relevant field. They do not receive a salary but a stipend.
- Travelers
 - The Staff and Trainees that are conducting the Grand Tour of Wikimedia.
- Volunteer
 - A person who, in their free time, contributes to the Wikimedia projects or free knowledge. A volunteer can become one of the *trainees* in the exchange program.