Sustainability Community Roundtable - September 2020

Topic: "*What is our position on emission certificates?*"

Youtube live stream from the zoom meeting: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=81pIvZZTpKU

Meeting information:
- We will meet for 45 minutes starting at 0800PT / 1500 UTC on September 18, 2020
- Notes will be taken in this etherpad (please add your name in the right hand top corner)
- Please introduce yourself when speaking and if you represent an organization, eg. name, affiliation, and position

Background:
- The Wikimedia Foundation does not operate its own data centers to run Wikipedia and her sister projects, but relies on third-party colocation providers that have global interconnection.
- At this time, the Wikimedia Foundation is not pursuing switching to data center providers that could be using more renewable energy for their operations.
- Air travel is the biggest part of the Wikimedia Foundation's carbon footprint.
- Carbon credits, also called emission certificates, is a generic term for any tradable certificate or permit representing the right to emit one tonne of carbon dioxide or the equivalent amount of a different greenhouse gas (tCO2e).

Questions that we'll discuss:
- Should the Wikimedia Foundation's annual carbon footprint calculations disregard emissions that are 'compensated' by its vendors through carbon credits (or emission certificates)?
- Should the Wikimedia Foundation commit to 'offsetting' its carbon footprint by buying emission certificates? If yes, should this option be viewed and clearly communicated as an 'intermediary solution' toward reducing its carbon footprint?

attendees
1. deb tankersley - WMF
2. Lydia Hamilton - WMF
3. Gregory Varnum - WMF - communications department
4. Alex Stinson - WMF
5. Tom VanEtten - WMF
6. Danielle Alexander - WMF
7. Matt Cleinman - WMF
8. (Wikimedia Foundation Zoom account - IT Support)
9. Cassie caseras - WMF
10. Lane Rasberry - volunteer
11. Lukas Mezger - volunteer

12. 5 to 6 folks watching on youtube stream

Discussion:
- Lydia: background on consortium provided. Formed last year. Published 2 carbon footprints for Foundation. Wanted to establish consortium to allow passionate staff to help move the needle. Full year of programming scheduled. Schedule released on Commons and Meta. Roadmap for upcoming committments:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wikimedia_Foundation_FY20-21_Sustainability_Programmatic_Roadmap.pdf. Engagement and membership is open. Community participation can happen a number of ways: Editathons (quarterly), roundtable discussions (quarterly), and more events to come following shift in pandemic. Today's intent: open door for conversation. Learn through experience together. Any suggestions that are shared are not 'set in stone'; they will be investigated as options and reviewed. Meta page to be updated once per quarter (tentative).
- Deb: Excited to have this conversation. https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Sustainability
- Gregory: quick reminders from email. Friendly space policy being followed. Will go over 2 questions today. If things cannot be talked about today, Gregory will let us know. All chats are being monitored. Intentional pauses will be interjected to allow people time to talk.
- Gregory: First question: Should the Wikimedia Foundation's annual carbon footprint calculations disregard emissions that are 'compensated' by its vendors through carbon credits (or emission certificates)?
- Cassie: Environmental Science major. Read an article about incentivizing. Says 'no' because it incentives the public to continue producing carbon - even though we continue to produce carbon (laptops, travel). Should let the public know that we are trying to give something back to the community. How do we take back the carbon that we have used? In terms of doing something that gives back to the Earth by offsetting carbon emissions.
- Alex: We should be thinking about increasing our standard for carbon credits. Lot of Carbon credits from corp strategies may / may not meet our standards. Our approach to offset travel for All Hands 2020 was not my standard for one. We should create a standard and possibly purchase a second set of offsets for example-carbon capture programs. Industries we want to move away from. Green energy installation, microgrit work, focus need to happen. West India and Africa being served by credits and direct work. Even if our vendor is buying credits, it might not be our standard.
- Lydia: What does improving our standards mean?
- Alex: The Carbon credit industry has different philosophies. Capture carbon activities and farmers transfer away from carbon intensive industry. Ask the vendor if they are just working with 'carbon capture' or if they are capturing from air. Does not shift the economy. We would want to decide our philosophy.
- Lydia: That translated to me that we should explore the approaches that our vendors take to ensure that we agree with the approach.

- Alex: Different ways of accounting this.
- Gregory: acknowledge what vendors are doing, but be transparent in our actions. Documenting how they are doing it so community and foundation can decide if they want to move further.
- Lukas: Blog post (https://diff.wikimedia.org/2020/08/13/how-the-wikimedia-foundation-is-continuing-efforts-to-reduce-its-carbon-impact/)we published in Aug says from 2018 - 2019, our carbon footprint decreased by 7.66% from data center conversion and less travel. The person that reads this will think they are more efficient. But when you look at the actual data, we flew more and improved some efficiency at data center. We did not switch to solar power. We went online and bought emission certificates that got fed into our vendor that created our reports. Certificates do show up on the balance sheet for our vendors. They make the service more expensive for them. Might help finance the sustainability efforts by planting trees. We need to be transparent and honest - if we flew more, say we flew more. Microsoft is saying they are carbon negative, but they are still flying and using coal power. How can they say that they are carbon negative? Should say they are trying and financing mitigating efforts. THat is how we should talk. Publish 2 figures. Carbon offsets and no carbon offsets. How do we reduce our footprints? Do what Facebook has been doing. But do not 'drink the carbon offset kool-aid' or at least if we are buying that from our vendors, we need to disclose it in our numbers that we purchased offsets. The Obama administration signed policy for wind power; the Trump administration has not followed through. Should raise our standards for what kind of emissions certificates we would support / accept. If we accept - we need to provide 2 numbers. With and without.
- Lydia: Thanks for transparency. We are earnestly striving towards transparency. Had to make changes after the report. Way travel was being reflected. Not easy to understand. Travel team partnered with Lydia and Deb to clear up the travel. Small win for us. Regarding 'don't buy the lie from the vendors'. We are being transparent - we rely on their narrative and carry it forward. If we find something different, 'if we know better, we do better.' We share what we learn. Not a hidden fact - we are trying to have better conversations with the data centers. Geographically decided. Request for transparency - we will continue to share.
- Lukas: example to look at: Singapore cashing center - 100.0% of all electrical energy is from burning gas. YoY 2018 - 2019 represent 6.82% decrease in cashing center. How is this possible if 100% of energy comes from gas? Cannot be true. We should disclose and not accept.
- Deb: Singapore data center is fairly new. First report - we used what was available. Second report, we used concrete data.
- Lukas: we need another example.
- Gregory: For sake of time, there is general consensus that we need to be transparent. and that the sentiment is that we make people aware if credits are being used and how they are being factored in. Not so simple as 'do we use the credit' but rather 'how we use them'

- Lukas: can we ask for emissions with and without creditS?
- Lydia: we have not asked for both.
- Lukas: but we could?
- Lydia: willing to explore.
- Lane: want to work with someone willing to be transparent.
- Gregory: when the foundation is compiling reports. We are working with an outside company to write the reports. Moving forward, we should ask these questions. Why have we not asked these in the past? We are not sure, other than that we were not asked to until now. Vendors have answered all questions we have asked. How we ask should be reviewed. They have not provided these answers because we have not asked them to.
- Lydia: exact difference of questions: Lukas is asking 'when we get the emissions reports, bring the numbers with and without credits'
- Lane: bring the information to the community and let the community ask the questions they ask
- Lydia: The reason we do not come to the community for Foundation footprint, is that it is just a footprint. In trying to improve transparency - it is helpful to know what questions would be of interest to you. Those 2 questions are easy to take action on. Thanks to these roundtables we can get input like this.
- Gregory: for sake of time, we will continue this conversation in the future roundtables
- Question 2: Should the Wikimedia Foundation commit to 'offsetting' its carbon footprint by buying emission certificates? If yes, should this option be viewed and clearly communicated as an 'intermediary solution' toward reducing its carbon footprint?
- Lukas: super open if we should do this. But 'if' then it MUST be an intermediate step and communicated as such. If we are flying less, it will be more expensive for the departments to have our people fly. This should be the communication. If the Wikimedia foundation decides to buy carbon emissions to offset flying, it makes the departmental cost to fly increase. It will make people less likely to fly as an additional cost; dis-incentivizing travel.
- Matt: yes we should be offsetting until we get better. Better not to have the emissions, but offsetting is better in absence of how to better compensate as we move towards less.
- Lane: No. Alternatives to offsetting. Find communities in parts of the world to drive articles in each language. Why as a non-profit give our non-profit money to a group to offset our footprint? Corporate culture created this offsetting strategy.
- Lydia: partnerships have been created to explore relationships 'increased education and reduced emissions'. Some think this is enough, while others do not. Competing thoughts. We want to explore this to keep in line wiht our mission.
- Lane: We should sell carbon offsets, instead of us buying from them.
- Alex: If we were a partner in the community, we could do both. WE have resources in a moderately good way. Opportunities to invest in specific regions to create more education. The movement could help the Foundation to make the decisions - show up. Good efforts (editathon), but new practice. Need movement to say it is a priority,

- and need examples. Personally support. Exploring partnerships. Opportunity but need a 'both / and' approach. Need the push from the movement.
- Gregory: at time, will hold more time to continue this conversation. Please share more.
- Lane: request of Alex and everyone else. More transparency about initiatives. Difficult for the community to know how much is allocated for initiatives, countries, or regions. Community can organize, but are unaware of spend available. Example - internal staff hours available should be shared to help volunteers. Not put burden onto the community.
- Lydia: Funding piece - variety of grants to apply for. Rapid, annual, conference. None are specifically focused on any topic. Welcomed to ask for spend for any topic. Conference grants fall into Lydia's overview. If you wanted to pull a group together to talk, please apply for a conference grant. 75-80% of requests are approved, with the few that are declined receiving a reason why. Extra hours are not wide-spread. Goal around sustainability and carbon -neutrality is an organization-wide effort (multiple departments). Some staff have this as a part of their job. Nobody's full-time job, but a part of some people's job. Not enough work going on to have a full-time person allocated. Will continue to move the needle.
- Lane: Total investment in environmental issues is zero. I just want a number. how much do you spend?
- Gregory: almost published gender gap number. asked not to because YoY does not indicate focus areas. Gender gap community asked that we not share because it would look like the Foundation sets the ceiling for spend, as opposed to the community driving by requesting events / spend. Topic goes well beyond this meeting. Topic continuity - thought sharing numbers would be helpful, but the community asked not to.
- Alex: What capacities belong and what should be here? Operational piece has seen movement. Try to integrate ideas. Lane, give me specific ideas so I can push. I agree with you.
- Gregory: for sake of time, thank you for joining us. Many spoke passionately, and hope this is an example of future conversation. Should make decisions with community involvement. Thank you for being a part of this conversation. Topic not going away soon, will talk about this for years to come. Hope to see this group continue to grow; please tell your friends. Look forward to the next one.

Open questions:
1. Can we ask our vendors to provide emission statistics <u>with and without</u> emission certificates taken into account?