

# UNLOCK

## Accelerator

# LESSONS LEARNED 2020

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*UNLOCK your ideas.  
UNLOCK the potential of collaboration.  
UNLOCK the world's knowledge.*

With this call for action we started this year's search for projects that contribute to an open, informed and fairer knowledge society: We were looking for project teams that want to work with us - the Wikimedia movement - for equal opportunities in the access to knowledge and education. UNLOCK is the first accelerator program launched by Wikimedia Deutschland to support people in the (further) development of their project ideas for free knowledge - by means of coachings, knowledge exchange and collaboration among the teams, and networking with Wikimedia Deutschland and other experts.

A side note: The UNLOCK team has learned an incredible amount during the conception and implementation of the program - and all of this throughout the pandemic. Therefore we want to make our "Lessons Learned" freely available and highlight the things that went really well or rather badly in the planning and implementation over the past weeks and months. Of course it was our goal to set up a good program to support the projects in the best possible way. But we also know that such a program will never be perfect. Experiments, mistakes and learning curves are part of the process.



The lessons learned are listed in two categories:  
"This went well" (left column) and  
"That was challenging" (right column).



## NUMBERS & FACTS

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Here are some facts and figures to get started before we head into the "deep dive":

- In the first round of the accelerator we received **56 applications** (which was twice the amount expected).
- The projects can be classified into our central fields of action as follows:
  - 42,4% Knowledge competence
  - 13,6% Knowledge networks
  - 11,9% Knowledge horizons
  - 5,1% Knowledge society
  - 27% not specifiedThe topic "knowledge production" had not been selected.
- The jury consisted of **9 members**, our jury session lasted **3 hours** (preparation time is not included here) and the online calls with the "Top 11" teams lasted **11 hours**.
- All **5 teams** (**18 participants** in total) that were selected completed the program.
- During the 3-month program, we spent a total of **67 hours** together with the project teams and coaches, including virtual events and informal meetings. Together we did **26 check-ins/outs** plus **11 further energizer activities** and games.
- Over the last few months, we have created **17 [blog posts](#)** and made our findings and updates freely available.

## CONTENT

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We clustered our lessons learned as follows:



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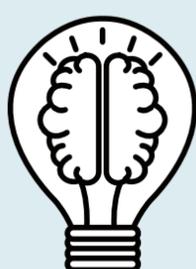
## I.

# DEFINITION OF THE CENTRAL FIELDS OF ACTION

*What are the present and future topics of free knowledge?* In order to create the content of the accelerator program an overview of current societal challenges and needs for Free Knowledge were needed as well as an assessment of current and future trends and developments. Together with the [Hybrid City Lab](#), a Berlin-based design studio for public innovation, we conducted a three-month research project which included interviews with experts, conceptual deep dives and explorative research (find out more in our [blog post](#)). Finally we identified five central fields of action to be targeted in order to support a free and digital knowledge society:

1. Knowledge networks: How to connect existing knowledge with each other.
2. Knowledge competences: How to understand knowledge and learn how to deal with it competently.
3. Knowledge horizons: How to overcome filter bubbles.
4. Knowledge production: How to make Free Knowledge fair for everyone.
5. Knowledge society: How to create a big movement for Free Knowledge.

Here you can find the [full research report](#).



The research helped us to categorize the topic Free Knowledge into tangible fields of action. This had two benefits for us:

(1) The central fields of action helped us to better communicate with our target group. We were able to address people who would otherwise not identify with “Free Knowledge” or who associate Wikimedia solely with Wikipedia.

(2) Defining the central fields of action also helped us to identify relevant multipliers more specifically who acted as communicators and that supported us by directly addressing our target group.



The classification of the applications into our fields of action gave us an initial overview of what topics are being perceived as particularly urgent and that clearly need to be addressed.



Especially for the first round of the program it was a good decision to start with the five central fields of action defined. Thanks to the variety of topics, we were able to address a broad target group as well as focus on the individual topic-specific fields.



When applying, the teams were asked to assign their submitted ideas to one or more of the defined fields of action. It was found that the assignment and thus the understanding of the subject areas did not always correspond with our definition of the topic, instead the subject areas were often interpreted differently. Even though we tried to make the topic “Free Knowledge” more tangible it seems the topics were not sufficiently clear, descriptive and precise in their formulation.



The five subject areas were not further relevant throughout the program following the application process. We worked together with the coaches and the teams on their project visions and how they could contribute to Wikimedia's vision of Free Knowledge. While we first tried to break down the big topic “Free Knowledge” to smaller subfields, throughout the program we concentrated more on the overarching vision.



“Lucky number...5”? Or would have less been enough as well? To target five different topics at the same time led to the fact that they could not be dealt with in detail and that the target groups could not be addressed more specifically.

## II.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The focus of our communicative work was to reach potential applicants for the accelerator program in the best possible way - outside of the usual Wikimedia target groups as well: The UNLOCK program is open to volunteers from the existing Wikimedia projects, but also to those who are not yet part of the Wikimedia movement, such as people with an entrepreneurial spirit.

Thus, a central component of our communication work was the [UNLOCK Website](#) through which project teams had the possibility to apply for the program and interested people could read our regular updates throughout the program. Additionally we established our own [UNLOCK channel on Twitter](#) and also used the social media channels of Wikimedia on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) to extend our reach. We also did press work (addressing high-reach media as well as startup media and industry media) and addressed various newsletter services and multipliers (direct contacts) with their own networks to the addressed target group, including tbd\*, Impact Hub, maker & coworking spaces, entrepreneurship centers at universities and various associations.



Our broad target group definition made it possible to address a variety of people that were not familiar with Wikimedia to date (about 86% of the submitted applications were solution ideas that go beyond the existing Wikimedia projects).



Our website was perceived positively: In the baseline survey with the 18 participants of the program, 94% found the application process to be not only understandable, but inviting.



Despite the fact that UNLOCK is a new program, we were able to generate noticeable visitor numbers on our website. In a direct comparison to more well-known and far-reaching Wikimedia campaigns that ran at the same time, such as [#ÖGÖG](#) and the [#Wikipedia-Challenge](#), UNLOCK was the third most visited Wikimedia site in 2020.



Addressing the startup media in addition to traditional press work turned out to be useful and effective. Startup media like [Deutsche Startups](#), [Gründerküche](#), [Gründerszene](#), [She works](#) or [Startupmag](#) reported about UNLOCK. The program was also featured in newsletter articles on platforms in the social impact sector like tbd\* (which has a reach of over half a million people) and Social Impact Lab.



We also received positive and helpful feedback from personal contacts, our multipliers in the innovation context (e.g. d.school or Impact Hub) or from civil society networks, etc. by re-tweeting on Twitter, which helped extend the reach of the accelerator.



In the last 10 days of the application deadline we generated a Facebook campaign that increased the number of visitors to the website and resulted in further submissions (as can be seen from the application documents).



The response from the classic media was low. The press work was severely restricted by the current Covid-19 measures. Many editorial offices were reduced to short-time work and had set other priorities.



The challenge in addressing personal contacts often lied with tracing back whether or not the information had been forwarded in the first place. Except for obvious indicators (e.g. a re-tweet on Twitter), we were not able to confirm all traces and thus evaluate them effectively.



Directly addressing potential project teams was not very actively pursued (#scouting). This would have been possible and easier to do at meetups and other physical events.



How can we differentiate ourselves better / more from other accelerator programs and stand out in terms of communication? Other accelerators, hackathons etc. are often either embedded in large corporate structures or media corporations or receive a lot of attention through partnerships with federal ministries and other publicly known multipliers.

## III.

## APPLICATION PROCESS

Troughout the six-week application phase we received 56 applications. In order to review the submissions, we established an evaluation framework and nominated a 9-member jury with diverse knowledge, experiences and perspectives to evaluate the project submissions and help us to make a selection of the five project teams that would participate in the UNLOCK Accelerator program.

Each application was viewed and evaluated by two jury members. The evaluation framework consisted of three criteria: idea fit, program fit and team fit. Details on what the criteria contained can be read in the corresponding [blog post](#). The evaluations were then taken to the jury meeting, justified and put up for discussion. Afterwards we invited the top eleven project teams to participate in online calls in order to better get to know them before a final decision was made by the UNLOCK team.

The jury consisted of the UNLOCK project management, three employees of Wikimedia Deutschland e.V. and the five coaches who supported the teams later in the program.



The jury screening was the unofficial start of the program and created an enthusiastic atmosphere full of anticipation and excitement. The screening of the documents and getting to know the teams gave life to the program and the jury got a first impression of who we had addressed with our call for projects in the first place.



All jury members were provided with a document on the procedure, evaluation scheme and timetable of the application process as well as information on the jury composition. In addition we provided a consultation session prior to the jury session to clarify any questions about our requirements. All jury members stated that they felt comfortable during the jury session and were sufficiently informed. The evaluation scheme was understandable and easy to implement.



Our preparation of the application documents and the conceptual preparation of the jury session in a digital whiteboard was evaluated as positive and easy to understand. The approach of the jury session, including discussion rounds and a scoring system, were beneficial in the decision-making process and helped to capture as many jury voices as possible.



Each application submitted was examined in detail by at least two jury members. Possible biases were addressed openly, so that it was also possible to swap the assigned documents or to consult additional jury members.



The nominated jury members had strong competences and complemented each other nicely. The Wikimedia staff's strong knowledge of Free Knowledge and the coaches' qualified methodological views were striking. However, diversity in terms of individual characteristics such as age, culture or working style was low and could be elaborated to make the engagement with the applications even more inclusive.



The evaluation criteria "program fit" and "idea fit" were strongly emphasised in the application process. There was not enough time spent on analysing the composition and the roles and expectations of the individual team members. During the program, the team dynamics turned out to be more significant for the successful completion of the program than the maturity of the concept with which the team applied for the accelerator.



In the course of the program, it became apparent that a few participants perceived the accelerator more as a support program than as a working program. These expectations and understandings of the program were not addressed in the application process, but should play a greater role.



We did not define hard criteria in the application process for the participation in this program. Instead, individual desired expectations and outcomes on the part of the UNLOCK team were formulated. However, this made it difficult to directly question or even demand the commitment of some participants.



Although the participants could devote different amounts of time to the program, it was often considered to be useful to specify a guideline for how much working time the program would take up.



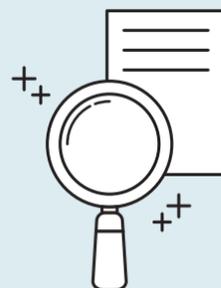
For transparency purposes all project documents and their evaluations were available to all jury members. The screening process was also made public in a [blog post](#). Therefore questions from applicants could be answered quickly. The entry may also serve as a point of reference for future applicants.



Online calls were an important part of the decision-making process and helped to clarify open questions from the application documents and to get a first feeling for the team dynamics. Further, it helped to do the online calls in tandem with a coach to get a second opinion.



The matching of the coach with a project team was done in an open dialogue. The competences and interests of the coaches were thus taken into account in the decision-making process, which created a positive atmosphere and trust in our teamwork.



## IV.

## PROGRAM CONTENT

We wanted to set up a three-month program that would provide the teams with the skills and knowledge necessary to validate and develop their ideas and to find their individual path going forward. Overall, the content was helpful and the participants' self-assessment show a steep learning curve in terms of the skills and knowledge acquired.

The program included

- individual and needs-oriented coaching
- events for exchange, collaboration and expert input
- a community of "like-minded people", and
- a scholarship.

## COACHING

The coaching of the participating teams is one of the most important parts of the UNLOCK Accelerator: Within the program, we wanted to offer intensive and demand-oriented coaching (instead of a "curriculum-based" coaching) in order to support the teams in the best possible way. The participating teams were supported by experienced coaches who accompanied them from the product vision to a concrete implementation plan to the construction of a Minimal Viable Product (MVP) and in some cases an initial concept of their business model. The goal was to help the initiatives to mature and become utilizable, and thereby encouraging more projects in the context of Free Knowledge. We identified a pool of coaches who brought an array of experience and expertise to support the teams: there were "core coaches" who accompanied the teams throughout the entire program (as [portrayed on our website](#)) and a number of "domain coaches" who were brought in during the course of the program to help the teams with their domain expertise (e.g. expertise on game design or product development in the Global South).



All the participating teams evaluated the coaching as helpful. The coaches were particularly valued for creating structure, pushing the teams forward and providing methodological support, and for providing a "fresh, external perspective". In particular, the "Design Sprint" format with the coaches was perceived as useful.



The coaches were also part of the jury during the selection process of the teams. This not only allowed them to bring a "non-Wikimedia" perspective to the screening (thus diversifying the jury), but also to get to know the teams (and thus their needs) from the beginning.



The UNLOCK organizational team worked with the coaches to define and set the goals and focus for the mentoring phases. In doing so, we gave the coaches enough freedom for individual adjustments, which were not only appreciated by the teams, but also by the coaches themselves, who assessed this approach as meaningful (and trustworthy).



Needs-based support often means pushing the boundaries of the role: Is the coach "only" there to provide support at the product and project development level, or is he/she also responsible for team dynamics? Is he/she a "team member" for this short, yet very intensive time? There is probably no "perfect coach", but we need to elaborate the role more concretely and sharpen the boundaries of the role to manage expectations better.



Some coaching opportunities were not perceived or seized. In the last sprint, almost all of the teams did not use up the coaching contingent available to them. The last sprint also meant the final sprint for the teams, possibly they were so focused that they did not see where they could still use help.



What is better: curriculum/schedule-based or needs-based coaching? Do we perhaps need to be more prescriptive because teams may not be aware of what else they might need? It's a balancing act between clearly prescribing and "nudging" teams in a certain direction while also understanding and anticipating their needs.

## EVENTS

The accelerator offered support in the implementation of project ideas and was divided into three sprints. Various event formats acted as milestones and created a formal framework that enabled us to actively follow and shape the teams' processes. The events were organized and conducted by the UNLOCK team and were mandatory for all participants. Aside from the events the teams were able to determine for themselves how much time they (could) spend on their project.

Insights into our events can be found in the blog posts on our [kick-off event](#), our joint [retrospective](#), and the so-called [Collab Days](#), among others.



At the beginning of each event the participants were given the objective of the working day. For this purpose we defined the "desired outcomes" in advance and prepared an agenda for the day. The focus laid primarily on the roles and expectations of the specific day rather than the overall program. We did not share the detailed schedule in order to allow the events the greatest possible flexibility and to avoid imposing performance pressure on the participants. This allowed them to trust our guidance and engage with what was happening in the here and now.



It was important to us to create a safe space in which the participants felt comfortable to exchange ideas among themselves as well as with their coaches and, if necessary, external experts, to make mistakes and to take a critical look at their work: Through energizer activities we created space for team building. During the kick-off event the teams had a whole day for getting to know each other, which created an extraordinarily positive atmosphere and a great start to the program. We also implemented a working session to develop a playbook together in which we agreed on common values and communication rules that we would like to follow during the program. This was perceived in a most positive way. We were also able to observe how participants reminded each other of the agreed principles.



Among other things, the events lived greatly from the variety they provided, which kept the participants active and interested. This also made us comfortable in experimenting more and bringing new formats into the program.



The UNLOCK team acted as a bridge between the teams and made it possible for participants to get an insight into what others were working on, how they were progressing and what their biggest learnings and current challenges were.



Maintaining the positive mood and excitement of the first working week for the duration of a three-month program was challenging. Participants were also strongly guided by the mood of the UNLOCK team. The moderation played a key role here. However, it was equally crucial that participants had the appropriate attitude and drive - a factor that was out of our control.



The participants rarely assumed their role as active co-creators of the joint events. They actively participated in the formats, but left the structure and process to the UNLOCK team. We assume that a clearer communication of their active, co-determining position could help to make the events even more demand-oriented.



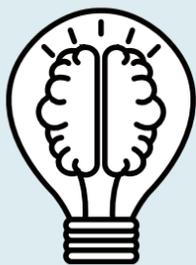
The reactions and feedback of the participants showed that some of them were more familiar with the methods we used than others. Similarly, some found it easier to adapt to new formats than others. This showed us that it is hard to find the right balance in order to guide all participants throughout the process.



Some participants told us that some events were too long with too many sessions. This particularly refers to the first intensive sprint week.



The external experts who led the working sessions took on different roles: at times as keynote speaker, at others as workshop leaders or coaches. The respective role was not always clear to some participants and partly led to false expectations of individual sessions. These should be clarified and clearly communicated in advance.



Further, by means of the events we facilitated exchanges with Wikimedia projects on a small scale. Certain activities enabled insights into the bigger Wikimedia movement.



The input sessions by experts were particularly appreciated, as they made a noticeable contribution to the projects and also offered a view from outside the project team. Particularly the sessions with Wikimedia employees were highly appreciated.



Formats that enable active learning from other teams were particularly well received as well. These included, for example, testing the products of other teams or the exemplary application of a method to one of the projects.



While planning the events, we always asked for the needs and feedback of the participants, took them into account and put them into practice. We were provided in-depth insights through 1:1 conversations with the individual project teams as well as with individual team members. This way, we were able to supplement the needs we saw ourselves with the needs of the project teams.



The start of the program with an intensive so-called "Design Sprint" was particularly well received. It enabled focused work and was described as highly productive. The "Collab Days" were also highly praised and considered particularly useful. The focus of the "Collab Days" laid on collaboration and concentrated methodological and content-related input.



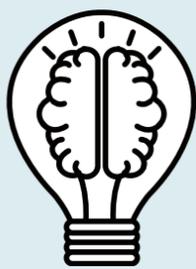
For the implementation of the events, we defined three tools of which each pursued its own function. The *Zoom* video conferencing tool served as a familiar and stable tool for personal exchange in a virtual format. Our digital whiteboard *Conceptboard* enabled (simultaneous) collaboration. *Mattermost* acted as a chat tool to stay in touch outside of the set formats.



# COMMUNITY

What the participants had in common at the start of the program, and what played a decisive role in the selection process in particular, was not only their participation in the same program, but also their belief in the power of teamwork and their drive to actively shape and change our society.

Therefore, our goal was to create a sense of community among the teams, recognizing these commonalities, driving exchange and support among each other, and to create a community of doers pulling together, namely, pursuing the vision of an open and informed society according to the Wikimedia's vision.



We saw our main role here in creating the space and providing the tools that the teams needed and could use to strengthen their competencies and networks. We offered various formats that allowed the teams to exchange ideas with each other and to stimulate and support each other. The formats were used and valued.



We were perceived as the "face of the program" and especially recognized for always being available and ready to help. For this, we established Mattermost as our preferred and clearly communicated communication channel.



It was important to us to moderate the various events and formats ourselves in order to create trust and closeness with the participants.



Our demeanor and positive mood quickly transferred to the participants. We were repeatedly praised for our high energy levels and good "vibes".



Especially the check-ins to jointly kick-start the working day and icebreaker games to get to know each other were embraced and praised.



In addition, informal meetings ensured a pleasant atmosphere. Here, participants had the opportunity to get to know each other better on a personal level and appeared relaxed and cheerful.



In the course of the program, participants also felt comfortable sharing personal facts and anecdotes about themselves and getting to know each other beyond the work level.



The voluntary offers made, such as brown bag lunches, virtual consultation hours and informal gatherings, were only taken up by a few participants.



The exchange among each other outside of the events organized by us remained low. A bottom-up approach within the community did not emerge. Tools to get in touch with each other were also hardly used. In fact, during the course of the program, contact became less and less and exchanges with us mainly took place in private messages rather than in group chats that could be viewed by all.



Formats that provided insights into the other teams' projects were particularly praised. However, the independent exchange was low, therefore the overall awareness of other participants' projects was not great.



The remote setting was partly commented as exhausting for the teams. It was difficult for many to build a sense of community, as the online meetings demand a lot of mental and physical effort in the long term and cannot replace analog meetings.

## SCHOLARSHIP

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Participation in the UNLOCK Accelerator requires a great time commitment from the participants. Generally the time invested in their project comes on top of the participants' regular working hours. In order to enable all interested parties to participate in the accelerator, we offer a scholarship to all participants for the duration of the program, which is intended to contribute to their costs of living.



16 out of 18 participants asked for and received a scholarship. All of them stated that they perceived the scholarship as helpful and appropriate in terms of the amount (1,000€ per month for the duration of the program). No participant mentioned a further need for financial support beyond the scholarship. The payment of the scholarship went smoothly.



The participants stated that the support not only provided financial security but was also perceived as an appreciation of the work they had done and were doing.



The program evaluation showed that the scholarship, in combination with the overall program framework that we created, increased the time the teams could invest in their projects. The participants had therefore been able to devote more time to the (further) development of their idea.



Since a scholarship is not equivalent to a remuneration, we are not allowed to demand any specific performance or service in exchange for the received financial support.



Some participants had uncertainties and questions about taxation, which had to be clarified in individual conversations.



## OUTLOOK

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*What next?* We are very excited that the UNLOCK Accelerator will enter a second round in 2021 and that we will be able to support even more people and their projects contributing to an open, informed and fairer knowledge society.

We can hardly wait to incorporate our lessons learned from the first round into the concept and to experiment even more with everything we did not (yet) dare to do in the first round. We are also already looking forward to making mistakes again, because they are simply part of the process. One thing is clear: we don't want to create the perfect program, but one that constantly grows and develops along with us. We will put our heads together in the coming weeks and months, exchange ideas with people (preferably outside of our bubble) and go "idea shopping" to develop the next iteration of the UNLOCK Accelerator.

In addition, we also want to build and expand the UNLOCK community and find formats for the continued support of the projects from the first round of the accelerator. That way, we want to ensure that not only short-term impulses are created, but greater impacts. We want to ensure that the projects can develop sustainably (financially and in terms of personnel) so that the products and services created within the framework of the program create even more access to and participation in Free Knowledge thus guaranteeing greater benefits for our society.