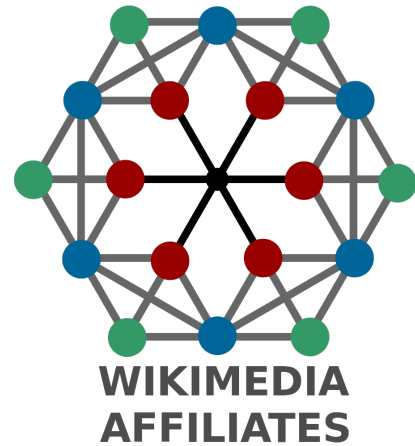


Report on the 2015 Wikimedia Conference for the Committee and Members of Wikimedia Australia

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It was a privilege to attend the 2015 Wikimedia Conference (WMCON) in Berlin [1] as a representative of Wikimedia Australia. The conference was intense but very positive, providing many opportunities for learning and for making contact with groups and individuals who could help us or with whom we could collaborate.



Report purpose

This report aims to give an overview of the context, scope and purpose of the conference; offer some reflections and their relevance to WM-Au; and provide reference links to make it easier for members to follow up should they wish to.

The Conference (WMCON)

This conference was formerly the Chapters meeting but since 2014 other affiliates have been invited to attend [2]. (*Note: All affiliates are allowed to incorporate. However, unlike chapters and thematic organizations, user groups are not required to do so.*) Representatives from user groups and thematic groups now join Chapters and the WMF at this gathering to focus on organisational and strategic issues and work together to identify and resolve them. [3] One relatively simple and to some extent surprising piece of feedback was the difficulty of finding anything on Meta. This familiar frustration was one of many problems raised. Broader questions such as the following, were considered in structured sessions and carried over in unstructured meetings.

- How can we develop our Chapter?
- What is the most suitable kind of structure?
- What are appropriate metrics?
- What is appropriate risk management?
- What do our members want?
- How can we avoid volunteer burnout?
- What is the appropriate employee for our Chapter at its stage of development?
- How do we evaluate our efforts?
- What impact are we having?
- What can we learn from other groups' successes and failures?
- What resources and support is available?

An editathon and explanations of Wikidata [4], led by Wikimedia Deutschland's Wikidata Product Manager, Lydia Pintscher [5] was also offered at the conference at one of the preliminary sessions.

WMF

There has been a restructuring in the Foundation and considerable attention is evidently being given to community relations and support both through the new structures, new employees and roles, and better alignment of effort against goals. Resources are available to communities, including Chapters, through the teams involved in Grant-making, Learning and Evaluation, Wikipedia Education and the Wikipedia Library all of which were placed under the Community Engagement department early this year. [6] The new Senior Director of Community Engagement team, Luis Villa [7], was at the conference listening to all the affiliates' perspectives. Community relations and support was also the theme of the Executive Director's presentation at WMCON. The President of the Italian Chapter, Andrea Zanni, [8] said what many attendees felt when he wrote:

"I learned a lot about the ongoing transformation of the Wikimedia Foundation: many things are changing, they are working a lot, and very often we as affiliates do not notice these things. I saw many changes towards a better, more open and more collaborative Foundation, and I don't know many times I heard WMF employees asking for feedback and help."

Asaf Bartov's job, is now "Emerging Communities" rather than the former "Global South". [9] This is relevant to us (and many others) as it better reflects the level of organisational development in the Wikimedia movement rather than the level of national development of the country in which the affiliate is situated. For example, Mexico is in the geographical north and global south; we are in the geographical south and global north. Both of us are emerging wiki communities in terms of organisational development and capacity.

The Funds Dissemination Committee (FDC) [10] election results were announced during the conference and one of our Australian chapter members, Liam Wyatt (User: Wittylama) was elected to that Committee. [11]

Learning and Evaluation

The Learning and Evaluation team gave many presentations and ran workshops at the conference, such as about setting goals. [12] They are developing resources to help affiliated groups assess their effectiveness and impact. [13] There are more resources now available such as the growing list of Learning Patterns (shared solutions)[14] and assistance with survey design. [15] At the conference the debate continued about difficult matters such as the appropriateness of metrics, especially global metrics [16], and how to measure impact, both of which are important for evaluating the effectiveness of money expended and also for learning how to do things better. Two important concerns were that any effort be evaluated against a clear purpose and that the context be included in any story telling about activities.

Relevance to WM-Au: For both evaluation and learning purposes our Chapter needs to be clear on the purpose of each activity as well as evaluate and report on it against that purpose and in its context.

Chapters and User groups

Chapters, user groups and other affiliates of all levels of development were represented and their experience is useful to us in a range of ways. A logo has been designed for Wikimedia affiliates [17] and Wikimedia Deutschland documented the Insights of the Chapters Dialogue in a comprehensive report. [18]

- The UK Chapter [19], one of only a couple to have had a thorough organisational review, is currently seeking a new Chief Executive to lead them to the next level, following the retirement of the previous one. They are also planning to establish an expert advisory panel for GLAM projects.

Relevance to WM-Au: The UK's is experienced and successful in GLAM collaboration. Our shared history, values and attitudes towards GLAM, makes their experience very relevant to our own efforts.

- The Austrian [20] and French Chapters [21] have organised themselves on Quality Management principles, which means that their processes and projects are integrated, capable of continuous improvement, and can be audited for accreditation by an external body such as the International Standards Organisation. This is a rigorous assessment for which WM-Fr is almost ready. Their Quality Management System is shared on Meta as is France's Board Handbook [22] and Austria's Good Governance Kodex. [23] The French Chapter also reported on their process for committee self-evaluation and role fitness.

Relevance to WM-Au: The extensive work of the French and Austrian Chapters on organisational development and governance is available to us to learn from.

- The Netherlands Chapter, whose office I visited [24] has been involved in Wiki Loves Earth Netherlands [25] and ran a successful GLAM-wiki conference in The Hague earlier this year. [26] The PEG grant application shows that Mylee Joseph, an Australian from the State Library of New South Wales, was on the program committee. She was also a presenter. [27]

Relevance to WM-Au: Wiki loves Earth is something we could participate in perhaps by partnering with the National Parks Association, which has six groups that are members of the National Parks Australia Council.

- The United States, which does not have a national Chapter, has several affiliates: the Washington DC Chapter [28], the New York Chapter [29]; a New England user group [30]; and a regional user group called Cascadia [31], which covers Washington and Oregon states in the U.S. as well as the neighbouring British Columbia in Canada.

Relevance to WM-Au: Given our comparably spread out population, Cascadia may be an organisational model for parts of our community. Their contributions are also to the English Wikipedia.

- The Ukraine Chapter [32] is both distracted and motivated by war. In spite of that they initiated Wiki Loves Earth in 2013 [33] and it went global in 2014. They also won first place in the 2014 Wiki Loves Monuments competition with an image of the Holy Mountains Monastery, [34] which is now inaccessible because of the war. I learned from discussions with their Executive Director that the Ukrainian community wants more articles on Australia.

Relevance to WM-Au: The Australian Ukrainian community is one of many with which we could work to build interest, produce articles and collaborate across Chapters. There is considerable good will from other Chapters that could flow into such efforts.

Thematic organisations

- Wikiproject Medicine [35] has been very successful as a thematic group in producing clear and reliable articles that are particularly valuable for communities without access to information on health. They have been able to establish productive partnerships and collaborations with other organisations such as the World Health Organisation and Translators without Borders. [36]

Relevance to WM-Au: Some of our members might be interested in joining this affiliated global group, especially since research, published in English is more easily available to us than many Chapters.

- Amical Wikimedia is focused on Catalan culture and language. It has a strong, well-led community that overlaps other chapters and national boundaries. [37]

Relevance to WM-Au: The attention to member motivation and support evident in this Chapter's management is something from which we might learn.

WM-Australia

After listening to the reports and discussions, I formed the opinion that our Chapter needs to focus on capacity building and organisation development so that we can better support the movement and our members and respond reliably to opportunities that are presented to us. There are many options. Many levels of affiliate development were represented at the conference and there is also much help available. The question of the best approach to employment in a Chapter was another issue considered at the conference. One view expressed was that payment should only be made for necessary tasks for which skills are unavailable among volunteers. There were other views. At the session for

conference newcomers, affiliates were strongly advised to secure the skills of a professional accountant for their organisation.

We need to understand: a) what our members want; and b) what are the gaps in our systems and processes. One example is our system for responding to requests from the media, which is a predictable occurrence and for which we ought to prepare so that we can respond easily and reliably. Such gaps should be filled *before* engaging in any of the things we want to do such as:

- building partnerships and collaborations, for example, with GLAMs;
- participating in global events and activities such as Wiki Loves Earth;
- supporting member events, such as editathons and outreach;
- communicating with the media and members about our goals and activities;
- building membership and brand awareness.

The proposed WM-Au conference

The proposed Australia Wikimedia conference offers a good opportunity to focus on capacity development and also use the presence of members to gain input into priorities and planning decisions via workshops. After clarifying the purpose and scope of the conference, a major track and theme could be to harness the skills of members in order to examine chapter needs and gaps in systems, and begin planning to fill them. An Australian conference where people have the rare chance to meet and work together, is likely to enhance a sense of shared purpose, greater confidence and motivation, as WMCON did, so this ought to be a stated goal.

References/links

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[24] At own expense

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