

# Collective software development and decision-making

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**

Szymon Grabarczuk  
Johan Jönsson  
Olga Vasileva



# Speakers



**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



**Szymon  
Grabarczuk**

Senior  
**Community  
Relations  
Specialist,**  
Wikimedia  
Foundation



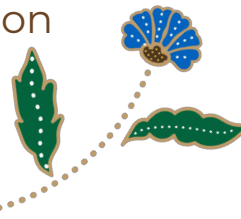
**Johan  
Jönsson**

**Product  
Ambassadors  
Manager,**  
Wikimedia  
Foundation



**Olga  
Vasileva**

Principal  
**Product Manager,**  
Wikimedia  
Foundation



# Introduction: what is this about?

The Foundation makes large software changes **based on the needs of readers, editors and communities** (Vector 2022, IP Masking, dark mode, and more.)

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



# Introduction: what is this about?

The way the communities and the Foundation talk about those changes is **rooted in the values and principles of the free-culture movement**. We would like to continue this tradition sustainably as our movement grows.

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



# Introduction: what is this about?

We would like to **talk about current issues in our discussion and decision-making processes** and brainstorm ways of solving them that do not compromise our principles.

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



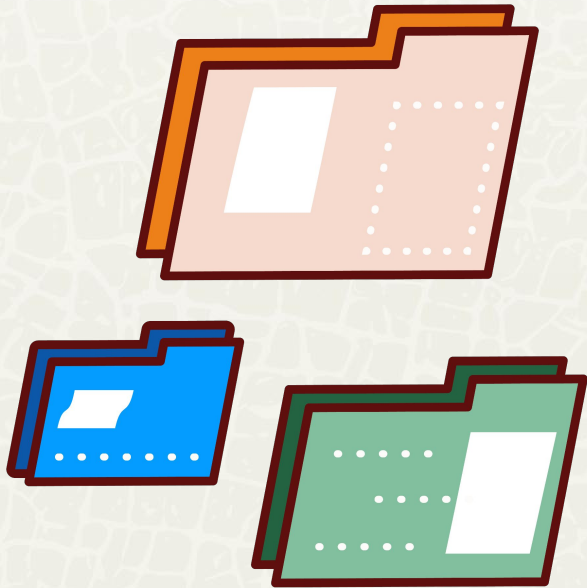
# Session Goals

1. Talk about current issues with discussion and decision-making processes
2. Discuss potential solutions – collect ideas on other decision-making processes

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



# Agenda



**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**

1. Overview of our current process
2. Presentation on some of the issues with this process
3. Brainstorm on issues communities struggle with
4. Brainstorm and discuss potential ways to improve for the future

# Current issues with our decision-making processes

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**





# How do we make decisions together?



## PLANNING

The Wikimedia Foundation, with feedback from communities, makes annual plans with project goals



## ANNOUNCING

Teams begin communication around the projects, goals, and metrics with communities.

## EARLY ADOPTION

Some communities choose to be early adopters for the projects

## DEVELOPMENT

Feedback from communities is collected and used to iterate throughout the development process

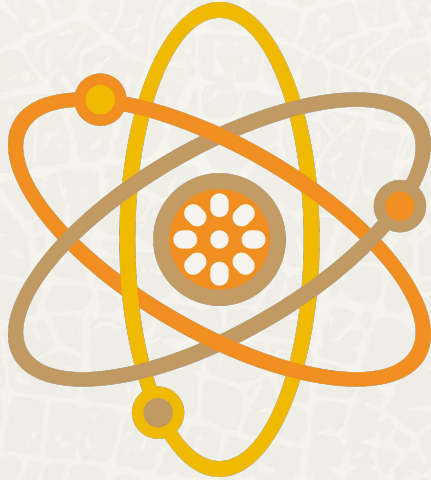
## DECISION

Communities discuss and decide and/or vote on adoption

## RELEASE

Tools are deployed on all wikis

# The benefits of our current processes

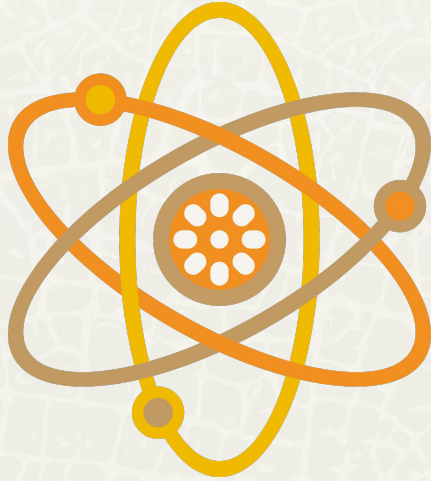


**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**

## Our current process

- Includes communities in decision-making
- Allows for feedback from a large number of active and veteran volunteers
- Is iterative based on the needs and feedback of communities

# The benefits of our current processes



**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**

## Our current process

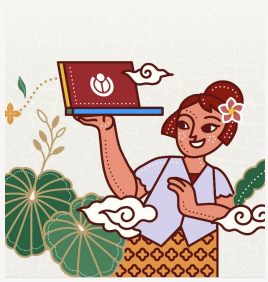
- Builds trust between the communities and the Wikimedia Foundation
- Can gather approval and support for moving forward
- See [\[\[mw:Product Principles\]\]](#) (2018)

# Yet there are a lot of issues...

1. Process is **not representative** of the audiences
2. Not relying on real-world **data and usage** in decision-making
3. Early involvement is valuable but **rare**
4. Consensus building is built on a per-wiki basis, requiring **multiplication of effort**
5. The model of decision-making predates and does not connect to the **Movement Strategy**

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**





# Our decision-making process is not representative

Participating (less than 0.1% of the audience):

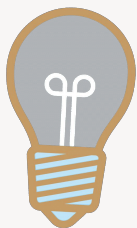
- Editors regularly reading Village Pumps, watchlist notices, etc.
- Experienced editors
- Policy-focused editors
- Technical editors

Not participating (more 99.9% of the audience):

- The majority of everyday users: occasional editors, anonymous editors, newcomers
- Readers
- Affiliate members, partners, donors, allies

Example from the pre-deployment Vector 2022 RfC on English WP

- 809,352,576 unique devices
- 32,805 active editors
- 320 RfC participants

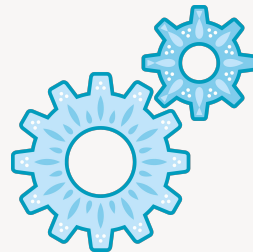


# Using data in making decisions

Current processes do not always clearly account for the data and current usage of a feature or tool:

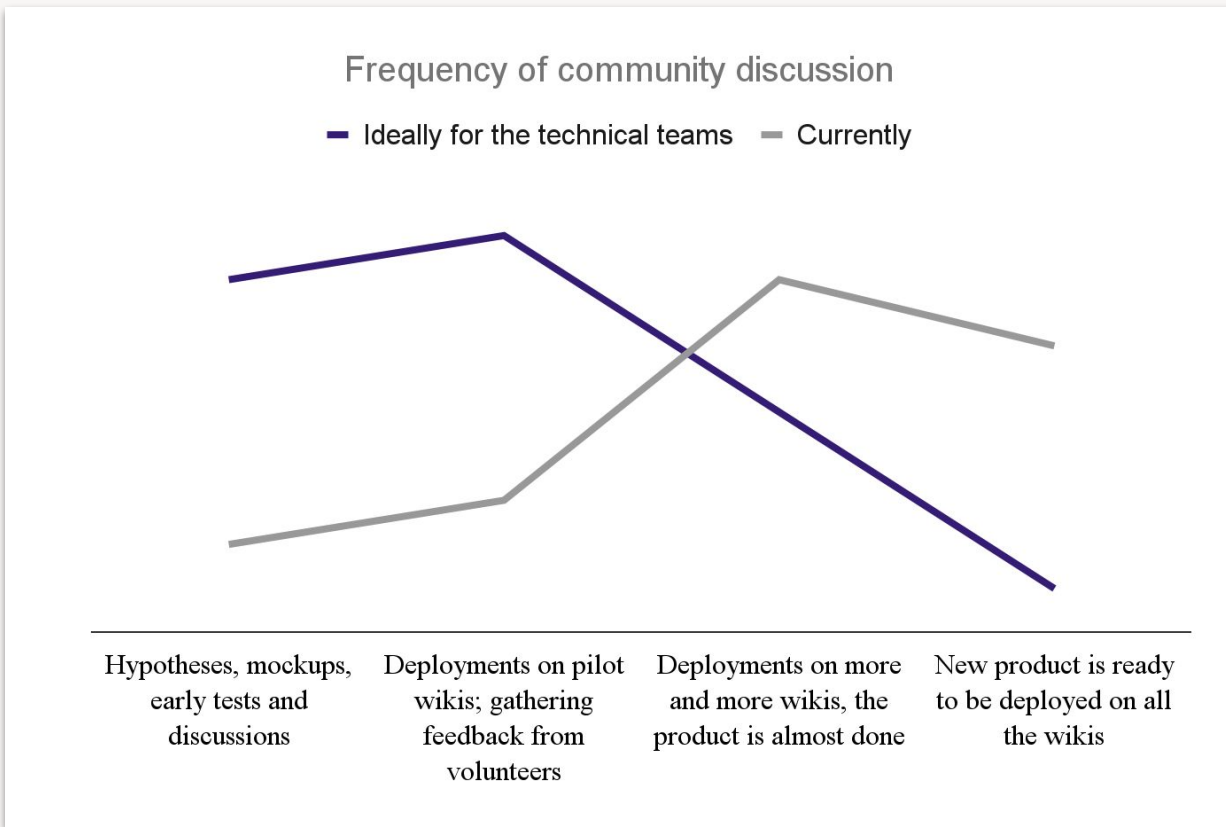
- Focusing away from data can introduce personal sentiment and bias when making decisions
- Current processes can encourage participation without presenting the full context of a proposal to communities

**How can we make it easier for communities to access and understand our metrics and measurements?**





# Early involvement is valuable but rare





# Early involvement is valuable but rare

1. We would like to make our process more transparent and interesting to communities at early stages
2. Building towards agreement on project **goals and metrics**
3. Testing and iteration on early **ideas and mockups**

This allows communities to help shape the goals of the project and the ways these goals will be measured to be successful. It allows involvement in agreeing on the issue.







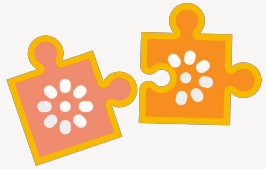
# Early involvement is valuable but rare

We are already inviting people to get involved early:

- Including our communities in annual planning
- Working with pilot communities
- Involving communities through Product Ambassadors
- Hosting meetings and being hosted by affiliates

**How can we make it easier for volunteers to engage with this process early on?**

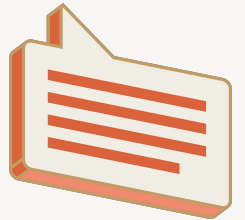


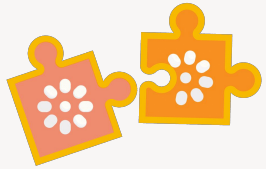


# Consensus-building across communities

- Individual communities have their own local decision-making processes.
- Large Wikimedia Foundation resources are spent on multiplying processes across communities.

**How can we make it easier for different communities to make decisions together?**

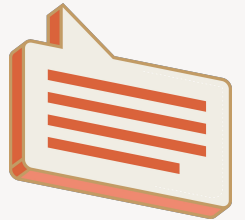




# Consensus-building across communities

- These processes leads to different approaches and requests from individual communities. That may be difficult for teams to accommodate.
- Introducing variation across wikis makes tools slower to build, more difficult to maintain, and more prone to breaking.

**How can we make it easier for different communities to adopt similar tools?**





# Decision-making predates and doesn't connect to Movement Strategy

- Movement Strategy is there to inform our decisions, determine our choices.
- Current model doesn't prioritize it, though. It is not impossible to make decisions that act against Movement Strategy.

**How can we tie decisions closer to our Movement Strategy?**



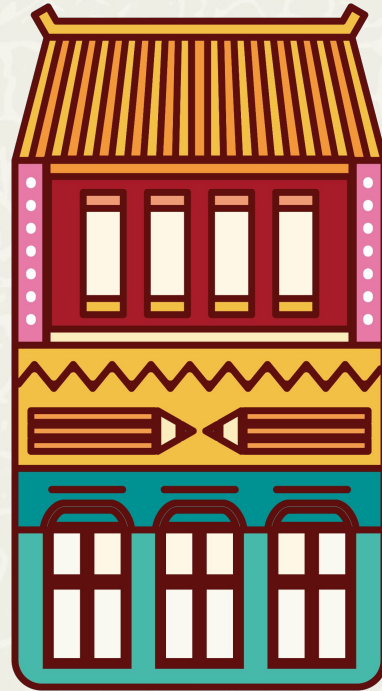
**We need a more  
inclusive and  
data-driven  
development  
process across  
wikis that  
continues to align  
with our principles**

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



**This process can  
focus on getting  
feedback early  
and often from a  
more diverse set  
of participants**

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



# We can use this conversation to inspire change in the future

By having this conversation now, we can begin planning and working towards improving our processes in the future

**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**



## Discussion

**What other issues with our current collaboration processes have you noticed?**

<https://etherpad.wikimedia.org/p/M3VLDX>



Examples:

- “I don’t know how to use Phabricator”
- “I don’t know who to talk to about a project”
- “Participating in RfCs is frustrating”
- “It’s difficult to understand the language the WMF uses”
- ...



## Discussion

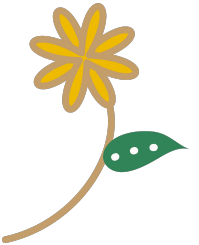
**What are ways we can engage communities at the early phases of projects?**

<https://etherpad.wikimedia.org/p/M3VLDX>



Examples:

- “Run surveys to all editors”
- “Build out more prototypes of upcoming work”
- ...
- ...





**WIKIMANIA  
SINGAPORE**