Wikimedians in Residence programme review

Daria Cybulska, Wikimedia UK

The Wikimedian in Residence (WIR) programme is seen as one of Wikimedia UK’s (WMUK) strongest, most impactful programmes, but is it really so?

Over the first half of 2014 we have evaluated to find out.

What’s a Wikimedian in Residence?

Usually a Wikipedia contributor who accepts a placement within an institution to:

» facilitate close working relationship between the Wikimedia movement and the host organisation.
» facilitate content improvements on Wikimedia projects, e.g. via exploring sharing institution’s digital resources on Wikimedia Commons.
» serve as an ambassador for open knowledge and its benefits. Assist change within the host organisation.
» deliver the above via a range of activities, both internal (e.g. staff training and talks) and public-facing.

WMUK has been involved with WIR, with varying degrees of support and supervision, since the creation of the WIR programme in 2010. We evaluated seven WIR projects that were delivered through a systematic process of applications, agreements and reporting.

What did we evaluate and why?

The aim of the review was to assess the programme delivered to date and identify next steps in its development.

We looked at:

Model
» Length, costs and funding
» Assessment of the WMUK’s choices of partner institutions
Hosts
» Assessment of WMUK support
» Perception of effectiveness of the residences
Residents
» Assessment of skills
» Experience of the project
» Assessment of WMUK support
» Documentation & reporting
Benefits and measurement
» Analysis of the delivery on objectives
» Assessment of the benefits as seen by the residents/hosts/community
» Analysis of impact so far and the potential

Who did we involve and how?

» Residents
» Residency hosts - exp. line managers
» Wikimedia community
» Assistance from Programme Evaluation & Design – exp. survey creation
» Volunteer reviewer

Methods and aims:

» Online questionnaire for residents – to explore initial opinions on the issues above
» Online questionnaire for residents’ line managers – to explore initial opinions
» Follow up meetings with the host institutions – in-depth discussions about challenges and solutions
» Online questionnaire for the Wikimedia community (mostly UK) – to explore their opinions
» In-person meeting of the residents – to develop SWIFT analysis and open to wider dialogue
» Existing data: residents’ monthly reports and final case studies – to assess impact so far
» Producing final review report – for wider dissemination

What did we find out?

From the surveys and meetings we learnt that:

» The programme strengthens lay in the good reputation of past projects and the Wikipedia ‘brand’.
» It leverages the prestige of host organisations, their commitment to the open agenda, working with the web projects.
» The programme is faced with challenges:
  • Obstacles to change within the host institution.
  • Insufficient tools for demonstrating metrics.
  • Community can only support a limited number of projects.
  • Small pool of potential residents.
  • Limited capacity from WMUK to support and help resolve the issues above.

Along the way, we had some surprising discoveries:

» It can take a couple of months for the resident to understand fully what their role is and how to deliver it.
» The residents don’t necessarily network with each other – this needs support.
» It is important to the success of the project to have a ‘team’ within the institution working with the resident.

...What will we do now?

To build on the potential of the programme, we have a series of recommendations:

» WIR programme should continue.
» Duration of residences – should be longer to ensure impact (e.g. 9-12 months for larger organisations).
» Supporting the programme – additional capacity is needed for this. It will be considered in the future.
» Gathering of information – set up a forum for the sharing of advice, information and best practices between institutions and between residents.
» Project format – should be clearer for each residency to improve assessing impact. They should be reflected on the job description. Better reporting should follow.
» Resident skills – training, teaching, working independently, tact, advocacy – should be reinforced in the job description.
» Project format – consider alternative residency formats to increase the potential resident pool.

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Further information

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