Motivating and Retaining Volunteers

WikiConference Ukraine 2020

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Wikimedia depends on volunteers

Wikimedia depends on an influx of volunteers

How can we attract (more) volunteers?

Where do volunteers come from?

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Where did <u>you</u> come from? What motivates you?

Some volunteer motivations

- Help my language community access information
- Using my knowledge to benefit others
- Practicing my knowledge/skills through writing
- SAVING THE WORLD: providing information about topics important for future of mankind (wars, inter-human relations, preservation of nature, energy consumption etc.)
- Being invited to contribute

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Some volunteer motivations

- Language pride
  - "How could it be that we don't have this in our language?!"
  - "How come we have fewer articles than X language?"
- Language preservation
- Inspired by others' work
- Campaigns

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Some volunteer motivations

- Obsession: "I CAN'T STAND THE RED LINKS!"
- "[someone is wrong on the Internet!](#)"
- Sense of responsibility/ownership
- Encouraged by others' building on my own work
- Joy in working competently
- Force of habit
- Sense of pioneering, groundbreaking work

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Okay, but how do we find these people?

Accumulating volunteers

1. Volunteers are **coming to us all the time**! We just need to **not drive them away**. (the good-faith ones)
2. **Outreach**: proactively proposing volunteering (ideally, multi-session and/or specific-audience)
3. Defend against **burnout**: *lose fewer* volunteers.

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1. Retaining new volunteers

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Getting newbies to stay

- **Distinguish** between good-faith and bad-faith newbies. Usually, we do OK rejecting bad-faith newbies, but can **improve reception** of good-faith ones.
  - Remember: not **every** person can be motivated to Wikimedia work. The model *doesn't* work for everyone.
- Different motivations require **different onboarding** (see also [[m:101]])
- Help promising newbies **deal with setbacks**

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Getting newbies to stay

- **appreciation ==> motivation**
  - Identify promising newbies and appreciate them! (e.g. using Quarry queries)
  - Also appreciate "oldies", "techies", ...
  - Off-wiki appreciation (treats, merchandise, ...)

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On-wiki appreciation [1/2]

- The **thank** button
  - Statistics show thanked people are more active
  - Thank someone everyday!

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Who are the **top 10 thankers** on Ukrainian Wikipedia in 2020?

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User	Actions
Nickispeaki	1771
Jphwra	1685
Леонід Панасюк	1307
Андрій Гриценко	1167
Ата	575
Юрко Градовський	552
LRBot	440
Perohanych	436
Lxlalexlxl	380
Goo3	373

Quarry query:
https://quarry.wmflabs.org/query/50257

Pop quiz:

Who are the **top 10 most thanked** on Ukrainian Wikipedia in 2020?

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User	Actions
Леонід_Панасюк	783
Mcoffsky	554
Yukh68	548
Молоде_вино	514
Юрко_Градовський	396
AlexKozur	383
Jphwra	346
Andriy.v	317
Mediafond	315
NickK	308

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Quarry query:
https://quarry.wmflabs.org/query/50260

19
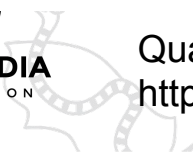
On-wiki appreciation [2/2]

- **Barnstars, medals, etc.**
  - Their value is proportional to your respect for the person who awarded you the barnstar
- **Appreciation projects**
  - Wiki-zhushchyvky!
  - Other examples?
- **On-wiki appreciation is a <u>zero-cost high-value</u> way to motivate volunteers!**

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Engaging newbies off-wiki

- Try to have **low-barrier, recurring activities**
  - e.g. a photo walk, taking pictures and uploading them to Commons, while discussing Freedom of Panorama
  - Recurring/regular -- meetups, WikiThursday
- Lets you engage immediately at the moment when interest is generated (e.g. "our next photowalk is in seven days!" (rather than in seven months)

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Off-wiki volunteers and allies

- Given diverse volunteer profiles (interests, capacities, motivations), not everyone can or wants to write articles (or patrol, or proofread…)
- Keep an open mind on how to harness good-will
  - But don't compromise on principles
- **Non-editors can help** a lot in organizing off-wiki activities; it's desirable as long as **active editors** are **also** involved; negative results likely otherwise.
- Local professionals (lawyers, accountants, media experts) can help without editing

But I need volunteers for X!

- Describe on-wiki what you need; describe why X is the thing to do. But:
- Accept that not everyone may share the interest in X
- If you can't find enough volunteers, you may need to change your plan. Go with the energy!
- In time, build more volunteer interest with your original plan.

Key principles for retaining newbies

- We're open to everyone, but *not* everyone will be interested; not everyone interested will manage to adapt to our norms; **and that's okay**.
  - Spend time cultivating promising people, not fighting to keep people who are a bad fit
- Try to match skills and motivation to roles and tasks.
- **Keeping** the newbies who come anyway **is easier** than **actively attracting** people who weren't already interested.

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2. Recruiting Volunteers through Outreach

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Outreach

- Outreach is better understood, and better documented, so not the subject of this session
- But quick tips:
  - Single-session general-audience **doesn't work**.
  - **Sparking interest** is <u>easy</u>. **Supporting** the newbie through the full **integration** process is <u>hard</u>.
  - **Experiment**! Innovate. Adapt.
  - Outreach-recruited newbies benefit from the same things as "organic" newbies (appreciation etc.)

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3. Reducing burnout

What demotivates volunteers? What burns them out?

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What demotivates you? What burned you out?

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These things demotivate 1

- Endless, circular discussions.
- Indifference and lack of collaboration, e.g. board proposes X and are the only people doing it.
- Feeling unappreciated, taken for granted. Lack of feedback.
- Being criticized by people who aren't helping / working themselves.
- Feeling unheard, lacking a voice, lacking influence.

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These things demotivate 2

- Bureaucracy in "real life", paperwork, accounting...
- Lack of consensus on core policies (e.g. copyright)
- Admin work on controversial topics or high-conflict users
- Having to work with unmotivated people, e.g. students just wanting a grade

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These things demotivate 3

- Repetitive labor
- Not daring to delegate
- Patrolling burnout: using more time to patrol than to create new articles; spam overload.

Reducing burnout

Each of the <u>de</u>motivating factors can be taken as a problem to work on, as a community. You can do something about each of them! <u>Identify</u> the ones most common among your community, and act.

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Reducing burnout - tips 1

- Have we mentioned **appreciation**?
  - Not just on-wiki; not just in-person; e.g. tweets, press releases, interviews
- the **delegation trap** leads to burnout. Ask for help.
- **Face** issues, don't repress them. Ask if help is needed.

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Reducing burnout - tips 2

- Try to match skills to roles; but *also* be flexible and let people switch and experiment.
- What if we just don't *have* some skills so we can't delegate?

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Building team skills

- not everyone is a born speaker, teacher, report-writer, etc., BUT **anyone can be taught** at least <u>some</u> competence in e.g. public speaking, conflict resolution
- providing **training for volunteers** is important and valuable; **WMF supports** such activities; external training can be invited or even purchased.
- **Mentorship**: Bring a volunteer colleague with you to observe you (and learn from you); learn from others.

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Easier said than done…

- I know… :)
- These aren't guaranteed recipes. Avoiding burnout takes attention, empathy, and patience.
- If a challenge seems impossible, cut it up into more manageable goals.
  - E.g. we don't have enough volunteers to run an education program! But can we get a regular meetup going? Can we gradually train volunteers?

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Mismatched volunteers

- Sometimes the person and the role are not a good fit
- **Discuss it**. Gently look for ways to improve it. **And if you can't**, find a way to re-assign roles.
  - "Founder Syndrome" is an extreme case of this
  - The fact X is the only person who volunteered to do Y still doesn't mean X will do a good job.
- **Staff/volunteer** roles and tension

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In conclusion...

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Outreach is the standard approach to gaining volunteers...

But much improvement is possible in <u>retaining</u> "organic" newbies,

And in <u>reducing</u> the number and frequency of people <u>burning out.</u>

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The Volunteer Supporters Network

- A group of people specifically focused on **supporting** (other) volunteers.
- https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Volunteer_Supporters_Network/Resources

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Discussion & Questions

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THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

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