

Notes from the Wikimedia Summit 2024 online engagement sessions (Etherpads & chat)

== Part 2: What is the history and present situation of Movement governance? ==

What works well in the present approach:

- maintaining the hardware infrastructure and some of the core software developments by the Wikimedia Foundation
- affiliates are responsible for their geographic or thematic areas and help their related community
- hubs can help the cooperation and resource sharing between affiliates (between each other, and jointly to outside, like advocacy or applying for external funding) -- this is how they are planned to work already now
- Hindi community: no issues to discuss, just listening
- Having technology centralized - it could be centralized outside of the WMF, open to other models, but keeping it centralized seems to work
- The way affiliate reporting has been standardized
- Creating a UG is very accessible compared to other organization, low barrier to entry (the issue is that we can't keep up to date with everything happening in the movement because so much is going on)
- The board is working rather well, but there are more board members required. In the last 5 years there were 2 staff members. Taking personal risk is something that potential board members are afraid of. Also e.g. a Wikipedia administrator does not want to become board members because of conflict of interest.
- The current structure is SIMPLE. It can be improved, yes, but it is easy to navigate.
- People can voice their ideas and recommendations which is very important
- Beyond one or two significant improvements, there really isn't something that is working ideally in the movement.
- maybe the flexibility for different types of ground-level groups to form? The current model of various types of groups/affiliates, such as user groups, projects, etc. based on geography, themes, and/or other organizing principles allows a variety of entry points for folks to get involved
- Grant process if you can follow it and it is accessible to your group
- Being able to be an affiliate provides a purpose, structure; provides a lot of independent agency to make decisions and adapt decisions to a local context.
- Movement can allow participation from people who do not know about the structures.

- User group with informal activities, works well, wouldn't need a more formal structure. In terms of governance: Have none. Don't feel the need of being part of a governance structure, since all of members are also in different structures.
- good faith - we try to involve more voices than the ones already striving (even if we don't succeed fully yet)
- independence of the affiliates - one size fits all would not work in our Movement
- Wikimedia movement should benefit people even if they don't formally participate. You don't have to "join" Wikimedia to be part of it.
- Regional committees bring Wikimedia users together for discussion to allow them to independently discuss issues of importance to that region.
- The Central and Eastern European hub is discussed as a success story for hubs
- Hubs seems like a way to join forces and help each other, but currently the Movement Charter has not clearly defined what a hub should or could be
- Decision-making about individual project content and content policies provides good practices/learning context for how governance can be done for people/affiliates still learning about this
- In Wikimedia Tunisia, small group, 39 members, easy to connect,
- The creation global council is a good thing
- what is working: The wiki spirit -- you don't need structure to start doing good work. Sometimes it feels like we're trying to create structures and processes for the purpose of structures and processes themselves. Structure should not lead solutions
- Sometimes not having a heavy top down governance also work - most wikimedians do not want to "govern" they want to edit.
- Online pre-conference initiatives and discussion
- A lot of energy around Hubs
- The existing structures (or lack of structure) produced an incredibly successful Wikipedia.
- Serious effort to engage people in the movement
- Democratic style with community participation and accountability
- Collaboration, open, and flexible approach
- Wikimedia Summit, and other community consultations.

What could be improved by introducing a new structure?

- UG Uganda: Representation of many underrepresented communities (many of them in Africa); handling many (participation and content) gaps
- more decentralized decision making
- flexible structure can react on future challenges
- global council could be responsible some of the global, strategic decisions (overtaking from Wikimedia Foundation and/or the community)

- we need to have a voice in decision-making, beyond having board members. It's increasingly important as we grow bigger.
- Nitesh: how to get people interested in high level topics? A group is active, but onwiki, some events. Governance is different (?), a challenge for Indian community, while organising Open call(s), and strategy/governance topics are not engaging the community members (maybe too high level), not much involved. Need some other approaches to get people interested
- The hub decided to not give money anymore to a person who is hub's member anymore, because he is not justifying the results. But the Foundation keeps giving him money!
- really appreciate the idea of federating communities into hubs. However, hubs are not clearly defined. How can the WMF really define their role? What the hub must do for the well-being of the community?
- Affiliates need to know what are their peers in their hub. Maybe we could have an online meeting among them?
- Regional decision making is useful in many cases: locally is better known what are the needs and problems of the communities (Africa and Asia have often dozens or hundreds of languages even in one country, many small, unheard, unrepresented communities) -- hubs, regional funding committees
- English language works well for one part of the world, but it is a big entry threshold for many communities and also for individuals, who have ideas but cannot participate or express themselves
- Generally, big (especially "western") communities are always overrepresented in all types of decision-making
- A few keywords come to mind when talking about what should be improved :
 - Transparency
 - Equity (not only in knowledge but also in decision making)
 - Representativity + diversity
 - Openness to other ideas...
- Content contributors are currently not well represented. Example: WMDE doesn't represent the community of the German-language Wikipedia. So, there's not representation for the German language community anywhere in our current government structure. I hope a General Assembly would change that
- A new structure should be able to bridge or bring distant communities in. The problem with this current one is lack of interest or participation. If a new system can't really solve this, we will arrive back where we started. The structures will exist, but trust, or reliance on them will not happen. We will have to start rethinking governance all over again, as we are now.
- Less power of the chapters in the affiliates scenario.
- Make emerging groups become recognized user groups
- Power imbalance. Things the Wikimedia Foundation is holding that should be done by the communities
- Currently the English Wikipedia community is the one getting the attention. This does not properly represent the other language communities. Similarly, all Wikipedia version communities receive attention from the two major players in

the movement (Wikimedia affiliates and the Wikimedia Foundation). This can be gradually improved in this process.

- It is not normal that only 12 people are taking decisions that impact the whole movement and billions of readers. This should be improved by the charter
- one of the strengths of the movement is the individuals (outside of affiliates), that are so active, but not sure they are involved in the charter feedback process
- HUBS can be geographic, by language, or thematic. One chapter can be member of 3, 4, or more hubs. That can make it difficult to manage. This might be one important aspect of the Movement Charter.
- I think one of the important points that this process needs to improve is the respect of the three main actors of the movement (Wikimedia Affiliates, Wikimedia Foundation, and Wikimedia project communities). Some chapters feel that they can make decisions over the communities (something that should never happen).
- Regarding transparency, I totally agree that this should be prioritized. But from a practical perspective, transparency creates the challenge for users/prospective participants of an overwhelming amount of information. So to support the objectives of transparency, it will be essential to create highly visible/discoverable entry points that are navigable by new participants - to present high-level summaries so that participants can understand the key governance points, how it affects them and their interests, and where they can find out more details.
- Curiosity how this will be implemented in the future
- How can we open the conversation in native languages
- ...it is difficult to know who is accountable for what. It seems like there are silos.
- ...example: four teams at WMF doing capacity building and not coordinating
- chapter perspective: governance system has not seen enough inclusion of members, even board and executive has taken on much of the strategic work. We are trying to change that. Community members do not care about global governance, as long as the platforms exist. A new governance structure hopefully would make it easier to communicate
- it needs to be inclusive but also accessible to those who are not involved day to day
- Need to elevate perspective from broader community who are not involved in governance discussions and won't get involved in detailed on-wiki conversations, conferences / online conversations.
- A new structure wouldn't improve anything for us (we're an informal group). Need to keep the freedom to just be what we are today - be a network of people who do things together.
- Doesn't impact us on the ground - our group is focusing on tech work, workshops, improvements. broader discussions don't play a role for that.
- Not clear what problem we're trying to solve - feels focused on process, not on what we need to do.
- Communities, groups see WMF as funding agency only. They are away from, might don't need any governance structure or process!
- challenge:
 - * strategy discussions led to power struggles in our region - i.e. hubs etc.

- * now a lot of user groups are thinking they should have a hub and active power - sees that as a problem in their region.
- * multiplication of user groups. Governance structure would need to clarify relation between all of them
- Hoping to see in the future governance structure a stronger link between the communities and the decision making.
- When a Wikimedia affiliate has money there can be confusion for how to share this in a way that everyone finds fair.
- When there are regional committee discussions, there come to be some people who have better or more access to Wikimedia Foundation funds, and who come to assert some power over decisions. There is a desire for more community decision making or consensus in decisions everywhere.
- There is significant conflict in the Wikimedia Movement. It would be nice if there were no conflict, but how could that happen?
- There is no certain path to giving small grants to Wikimedia community affiliates. Too often, the first funding to come to an affiliate is a large grant which leads to confusion and chaos. It would be ideal to have small steps to leadership before climatic interventions with higher money amounts.
- Integrating movement strategy recommendations into organization's strategy
- our structure reproduces power dynamics that exists in the world. The BoT does not represent the global diversity in the movement.
- We still are missing the mark on connecting the organized part of the movement to the average contributor. This is a problem because organizers can agree, but then volunteers who edit the wikis but who does participate in organized structures do not agree.
- Some users have very strong opinions about technical development or what they want "Wikimedia governance" to do, and yet they avoid all invitations to participate in user governance
- Building internal organizational governance structures
- More decentralized governance (flat structure, hubs, centers of excellence), not hierarchical decision making by WMF (pyramid structure, with them at the top) -- some things still need to be centralized (like UCOC/overall strategy) but not everything.
- There are conflicts now in English Wikipedia about Wikimedia Foundation fundraising and money distribution. These could create a user revolt or crisis with the Movement Charter. This is comparable to a constitutional crisis.
- Representing individual contributors to the projects who aren't interested in joining a national chapter or local user group
- Improving diversity
- We lack channels for conversation in case of protest or ethical differences.
- Small decision making bodies can be corruptible more easily; larger bodies are better and can also better represent the wide diversity of our movement -- more representative and more accountable, find consensus
- capacities of movement bodies (e.g. some educational program / committee for affiliations and WMF parts)

- Global decision-making that is inclusive of all communities in the movement. Current tools and processes (primarily talk pages on Meta) are not great for this.
- The election process
- An advisory group like WISCOM can also be successful - they were not a recognised affiliate or structure but did good work and now are a recognised, integral part of the region.
- work delegation
- We need more voice from our community
- more approach with global thoughts
- some presence with large power
- Additional question: WMF raises a lot of money and what are we doing to ensure that enough of the money goes to decentralized governance for affiliates. Funding for affiliates was cut off for a few years (WMDC example). Recently got another grant to operate. Decision making wasn't entirely transparent. It's not clear how the new structure will improve the situation, but having more voice coming up from the Affiliates to have input or oversight of those decisions may be good. It may allow new avenues for communication.
- "tyranny of structurelessness" -- when things rely on relationships rather than a clear and explicit structure, we struggle.
- Volunteers should have more powers in governance and not less.
- Would like to see us improve with the broader free and open knowledge movements and other social movements. Especially relationships with stakeholder institutions for thinking about the future of the movement or future audiences. WM universe/movement feels narrow. "We are here for working on the projects". Now that we have the movement strategy and we want to be a diverse and distributed movement, we should see beyond the projects as the center and how we collaborate with other movements.
- Simultaneous synchronization in between volunteers and affiliates within the communities and globally
- In a small community, we have a small structure and community. Moving to manage larger grants (annual meeting -- wiki kickoff). Challenge currently - we received demands from private sector requests on how to get articles on Wikipedia, and we need to develop structure to respond to these requests.
- Hubs can potentially be a big help for regions with loosely connected affiliates. For example, in the US, we don't have a national chapter; instead, we have many affiliates for different cities, states, and regions. A North American hub can help connect and support all these groups.
- clarification about the structure and authority of the new Global Council? How many individuals will it include, and how will they be selected? Additionally, does the Council have decision-making powers, or does the final say still lie with the Board of Trustees?
- Solve existing gaps in governance before new models
- synchronization between governance authorities and volunteers' input
- Implementation rather than strategy discussion

- Important opportunity to create ways for direct involvement from the online communities in the decision making. How can direct democracy aspects be included in the process?
- Important that the new structure ensures that technology decisions can be influenced by the wider movement and that operationalization is NOT limited to WMF (and to a more limited degree WMDE), but that the new structure creates opportunities for more affiliates and hubs. We are an online-based movement after all and the tools/software are crucial and the needs diverse and often specialized.
- Hubs has the potential to provide a more equitable movement, but they need to be funded enough to be able to make a change, they need to be able to have multiple functions (not just capacity building and networking) and they should not be over-regulated from the beginning. The new structure should help to protect the hubs independence from WMF, but also encourage a close partnership.
- My group talks about sharing governance experiences around World and the need of empower non-english communities
- representation - WMF is still an American NGO governed by the US law, this is limiting for the global movement
- "structural grants" idea to support development of the affiliate
- there is bad governance going on in communities
- Distribution of power and money in the movement
- Reducing binary discrepancy and identification of (communal) volunteers vs. (WMF-affiliate) professionals and related mistrust, power relations and resource distribution