

Successful diversity initiatives in open tech/culture

Valerie Aurora
Executive Director
The Ada Initiative

<http://adainitiative.org>
contact@adainitiative.org

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About the Ada Initiative

- Non-profit dedicated to supporting women in open tech/culture
- Co-founded January 2011
- Two employees
- Supported by individual donations and conference sponsorships



Our Wikimedia project experience



Mary Gardiner

CC BY-SA Alejandro Linares Garcia

- Wikipedia editor since 2004
- Thousands of edits on Wikipedia, Wikitravel, Commons
- Keynoted Wikimania 2012



Valerie Aurora

CC BY-SA Steven Walling

- Hundred-ish edits on Wikipedia and Commons
- Member WikiProject Feminism
- Created several pages, one featured on "Did You Know?"

Ada Initiative advisors with Wikimedia experience

- Sarah Stierch
- Joseph Reagle
- Sumana Harihareswara
- Gayle Karen Young
- Sue Gardner
- Noopur Raval
(Not implying endorsement of this talk)



Today's question:



What can Wikimedia communities learn/adapt/steal from successful diversity initiatives in other open tech/culture communities?

Open source software

- Open source software is computer program code that can be reused, modified, and redistributed freely (like CC BY-SA)
- Open source software includes MediaWiki, Linux, Firefox, Android
- I was a professional open source developer for 10+ years (Linux)

Progress in gender diversity in open source

- Measurements: hard, expensive
- 2006: 1.5% women
- 2013: Many conferences in 15% - 30% women attendees range
- Hundreds of paid internships for women through OPW, GSoC
- E.g. 2013 OPW applicants submitted 374 patches to Linux, 137 accepted

How is open source similar to Wikimedia projects?

- Shareable, modifiable, reusable product
- Used by billions of people
- Worldwide community of producers often motivated by social justice goals
- But still created by mostly privileged English-speaking white dudes
- Theoretically open to all but in reality, many barriers to participation

How is open source different from Wikimedia projects?

- Far more work is paid - production fully integrated into corporate capitalism
- Even less diverse than Wikimedia folks
- Pervasive & influential conference culture
- Many different non-profits support work
- Reverse contribution style - default “no”
- Still growing, no “Death of open source” stories

What worked in open source?

- Building affinity groups
- Leveraging conferences
- Community leadership
- Paying people

What worked in open source: building affinity groups

- Community members formed affinity subgroups (e.g. LinuxChix)
- Subgroups created safe, private, invite-only online spaces
- Subgroups met repeatedly in person over multiple years (10+)

What worked in open source: public discussion of problems

- Community members documented many harassment incidents in one place (Geek Feminism Timeline of Incidents)
- Community & press publicly discussed diversity gap and incidents

What worked in open source: leveraging conferences

- Many people gave keynotes and talks about diversity
- Conference organizers adopted anti-harassment policies
- Conference organizers made intense effort to increase diversity
- Conference sponsors required anti-harassment policies

What worked in open source: community leadership

- **Existing** community leaders wrote blog posts, made pledges, participated in boycotts, gave talks, spoke up
- Pro-diversity community leaders competed for leadership positions with anti-diversity leaders and won
- Community members became leaders as part of diversity work

What worked in open source: paying people

- Companies and non-profits funded hundreds of paid internships for specific underrepresented groups
- Paid experienced diversity advocates worked full time on improving diversity
 - Ada Initiative
 - Outreach Program for Women
 - Google Open Source Program Office

What didn't work in open source

- Only volunteers working on diversity
- Organizing one-off workshops or events
- Keeping problems secret/being nice to power
- Preventing safe private spaces
- Adopting vague and/or unenforceable codes of conduct
- Flame-style discussion

Patterns of success

- **Existing** community leaders took responsibility based on personal values of social justice and self-image
- New community leaders grew through diversity work as well

Patterns of success

- Community publicly and transparently held ill-behaving people/organizations accountable for their actions
- Community members acted together in coordinated, public fashion
- Community members publicly express anger with status quo

Patterns of success

- Affinity groups formed safe online private spaces for collaboration and support
- Affinity groups met repeatedly and frequently in person in safe spaces
- Affinity groups used humor and sarcasm to support each other

Patterns of success

- Organizations paid people to do diversity work full time
- Organizations created competitive paid internships for new contributors

Patterns of failure

- Only volunteers working on diversity
- Organizing one-off workshops or events
- Keeping problems secret/being nice to power
- Preventing safe private spaces
- Adopting vague and/or unenforceable codes of conduct
- Flame-style discussion

How can we apply these lessons to diversity in Wikimedia?

For each “what worked”, list what we have tried and what new things we could try (list of new things are suggested by the WMF Diversity Conference attendees)

- Building affinity groups
- Leveraging conferences
- Community leadership
- Paying people

Building affinity groups

- What we've tried so far: WikiProjects, edit-a-thons, WikiWomen's Collaborative, annual Wikimania, Wikimedia chapters, one-off workshops & events, personalized on-wiki communication
- What we could try: invite-only gender gap mailing list, co-locating events with Wikimania, more lunches at Wikimania, look at/consider different languages & Wikidata

Leveraging conferences

- What we've tried: Diversity keynote at Wikimania, Friendly Space policy, travel scholarships
- What we could try: more female speakers (orgs have to work on this hard), share efforts across languages/nationalities more, partner with OPW/GSoC & invite to Wikimedia confs, smaller regular themed meetups, invite people from "outside", more outreach about conferences

Community leadership

- What we've tried: WMF-led initiatives, WMF-encouraged initiatives, Jimmy makes decisions, ArbCom, admins working together on-wiki, suggested but not enforced on-wiki behavior policies, pay attention to diversity in board/etc.
- What we could try: suggested training for new people in leadership positions, admit leaders exist, set goals for confs to level people up to leadership, level up influence of non-English projects, create more structure/change culture regarding leadership

Paying people for diversity work

- What we've tried: Partial or volunteer duty of WMF employees, WMF fellowships, WMF grants for one-off conferences, academic research
- What we could try: funding decisions take into account diversity plan, do anything regardless of diversity and then later take into account, fund research on cost of lack of diversity, start new projects with culture of diversity, expand Engineering community team, publicity efforts

Some of my ideas

- No endorsement implied!

Create invite-only, private, safe spaces for affinity groups

- “Open” is good for some things, not for creating safe spaces
- Must have a safe space to rest, collaborate, support, plan
- Use social networking tools that the community already uses and support invite-only and private communication
- Adopt and enforce behavior policies

Financially support some WikiProjects

- Fund food for monthly meetup in high-membership geographic areas
- Fund 4 conferences in 24 months (not necessarily co-located w/ Wikimania)
- Create paid WikiProject coordinator fellowships (NOT paying to edit)
- Evaluate against unsupported similar WikiProjects after 2 years

Document discrimination in permanent, less “neutral” area

- NOT OPTIONAL! CRITICAL to progress!
- Do not use Wikipedia, MediaWiki & associated infrastructure for this - wrong tools!
- Use non-Wikimedia associated hosting, preferably commercially supported services to reduce volunteer load (Wikia, WordPress, Tumblr, etc.)

Develop funding stream to pay people to work on diversity

- Avoid conflict of interest: can't be 100% WMF-funded since funding comes from general WP supporters who don't all support changes for diversity
- Needs accountability to people (donors) focused on diversity, not Wikimedia projects in general
- Needs multi-year continuity

Support existing culture of social justice

- Create and give meaningful awards for furthering diversity in unpopular ways
- Write and talk about culture of social justice in Wikimedia community
- Publicly praise leaders who take action
- Fund repeating in-person conferences
- Increase travel scholarships

Fund research into paid work already being done

- Insistence on uncompensated work is discriminatory and anti-diversity
- People are paid to contribute to Wikimedia already: WMF (code), consultants, Wikipedians-in-residence
- What can we learn from existing paid work?
- Can we benefit from but not be co-opted by corporate capitalism?

More discussion?

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