



# Lessons Learned 2021

In 2021, we wrapped up the second edition of the [Wikimedia Accelerator UNLOCK](#).

Once again five project teams went through the three-month program. The thematic focus was (Re)building trust in the digital age, challenging our participants to look for solutions that make a contribution to strengthening trust in information and trust in technology (find more information in our [blog post here](#)).

To help them develop open-source prototypes from their initial ideas, we provided the teams with needs-oriented coachings, peer-to-peer collaboration sessions, experts from within and beyond the Wikimedia network, as well as a scholarship (where needed) – true to our motto:

*We accelerate your ideas. Together we build the future of Free Knowledge.*



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UNLOCK is a program  
by the non-profit organization  
Wikimedia Deutschland e. V.



## Sharing our lessons learned

Throughout this second edition of the UNLOCK Accelerator we continued to experiment and learn from new and previous challenges. It was particularly helpful to look back at our evaluation from the previous edition and implement some of our earlier findings. However, we also found that some learnings that went particularly well last year were not true to this edition, leading to some unexpected outcomes that surely kept the journey an exciting one.

Therefore, in this document we wish to share our core lessons learned from UNLOCK 2021 with the intention of highlighting and making freely available what went particularly well or poorly in the planning and implementation of the program. Perhaps we will also inspire someone who can use our recommendations as a helpful resource in the development of their own work. In addition to its documentation purpose, we also want to use the results in the next editions to further develop and advance the program.

The basis of this document are 1:1 feedback sessions as well as anonymous

surveys with the participants of the program, regular debriefs and retrospectives with all persons involved in the implementation (e.g. coaches, jury members, organizational and communication teams), as well as our own evaluation sessions following each milestone of the program.

Our core lessons learned are clustered according to the following elements of the program:

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As a side note: This document is by no means exhaustive. We opted to share only our greatest learnings from each category as a means to break the evaluation down to what we find to be the most useful insights. Several learnings also seemed repetitive from the first edition, or better put, were re-confirmed. Therefore, for the full picture, we recommend also looking into our [learnings from the first edition of the UNLOCK Accelerator](#).

# Outreach & communication

This year's application period ran from April 1st to May 31st. The focus of our communicative work was to expand UNLOCK's visibility across Europe, both within the Wikimedia community and among other social entrepreneurs, developers, and creatives, and to generate applications for the program. For this, we tested new communication measures (for example by launching social media campaigns) and greatly expanded and professionalized our social media presence.



**4 Kampagnen**  
**15 blog posts**  
**203 Twitter posts**

## Our key take-aways

This year, we placed more focus on direct scouting, which proved to be a good complement to our other measures. The scouting itself was extremely time-consuming and getting access to the interesting projects was challenging: Not all programs and events make their information publicly available and contacting them through the organizers was mostly unsuccessful.

Activating our network both within and beyond Wikimedia to promote the call for application was slow and in some cases did not happen at all. Possibly the commitment to and identification with UNLOCK before the start of the program is not sufficiently given.

Just as in the previous year, the effectiveness of press work was rather low, so we believe that press relations is not the appropriate measure for promoting the program and calling for participation.

We found that visuals and moving images in particular (e.g. GIFs, videos) as well as testimonials from former program participants have drawn the most attention on social media and could be used more. Much of our target audience seems to be on LinkedIn, so creating a channel and thus using it more

seems reasonable. Agenda surfing, meaning taking up topics that are already being discussed in the media even for our own communication could be a stronger focus.

Unfortunately, we received only a few applications to the program. We suspect that after more than a year of restrictions due to the pandemic and the increasing frequency with which people participate in online meetings, a purely virtual program is not attractive (any longer). In addition, the thematic focus may have been too narrow, as there may not yet be "enough" people working on such solutions. A community in this thematic area still needs to be built.

We were able to increase the visibility for the UNLOCK program with our communication measures. This was particularly evident in the increase in positive feedback from our network outreach, as well as website visits and impressions on Twitter.

On a European level, we have not yet been able to establish ourselves as a brand. Having a strong partner at our side could help position ourselves and tap into new networks.

# Application selection process

UNLOCK was open for applications from teams across Europe with a specific project idea on how to fight the lack of trust in technology and information. Following an eight-week application process, the applications received were reviewed on the basis of three criteria: program fit, idea fit and team fit.

To tackle the workload, a 14-headed, international jury was appointed. This UNLOCK jury acts as an advisory board, lending their diverse expertise, experience and knowledge to the process and supporting the UNLOCK team in properly assessing the project ideas. The jury reviews the submissions based on a predefined assessment framework. Find more information on the jury members and the review process in our [blog post here](#).

Unfortunately, as we received much fewer applications than anticipated, the jury was not active in its full capacity. The entire process was streamlined and five of the jury members were no longer involved.



**8-week application phase**  
**24 applications**  
**14 jury members**

## Our key take-aways

In its spontaneous redesign, the flexibility and understanding of the jury members was key and had been a criteria in the prior selection of the jury members. Additionally, setting up clear roles and expectations, remaining in touch about these and checking in regularly on how prepared the jury feels for their tasks.

Unlike in the last edition, the jury members no longer had to evaluate all applications on all three assessment criteria. Instead, we established what we called three “gates”: Only applications that fulfilled all requirements for the program fit by the UNLOCK team were then reviewed by the jury according to their idea fit; Lastly, the applicants invited to an online interview were evaluated on their

team fit, which was done together with the coaches who would be working with the participants directly. This lightened the evaluation process and helped the jury members better understand and focus the lens with which they reviewed the applications.

For the first time we attempted to construct a completely virtual selection process with all interaction happening in a digital whiteboard. This means also a jury meeting was skipped this year. Unfortunately, communication amongst the jury members was therefore lacking. A joint meeting was asked for and would have made it easier to exchange, feed off of each other’s thoughts, create synergies and make joint decisions.

## Support by the UNLOCK team

The UNLOCK team was available to the participants and coaches throughout the program as a point of contact for all organizational and content-related questions. We saw our main role here in creating the space and providing the tools that the teams needed and could use to strengthen their competencies and networks. To do this, we offered a variety of formats that enabled teams to share ideas with each other and provide mutual encouragement and support.



### 3 team members:

**Kannika Thaimai**, program lead

**Lucia Obst**, program management & community engagement

**Mia Kunert**, program & communication support

**30+ hours of 1:1 exchange with the program participants**

## Our key take-aways

Over the course of the program, the UNLOCK team managed to be perceived as a unit and thus established itself as the voice of the program. Participants particularly emphasized that they always felt wonderfully supported by the UNLOCK team.

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The positive response to the joint development of a playbook to kick off the program reinforced how important it was to have a common set of values to get to know each other and build trust within the group. It contributed to a particularly positive, safe and open working atmosphere. The participants notably appreciated that the UNLOCK team also lived up to and transported these common values.

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On all event days, we facilitated joint check-in rituals to set the stage for the respective day. It was important to us to create shared

moments and build connections across project teams. (Check out the [UNLOCK Toolbox](#), which is an extensive and constantly growing collection of agile and collaborative methods to unleash creativity and the power of collaboration.)

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The coaches also highlighted the shared rituals, the safe workspace, and the room for sharing and mutual support as particularly positive. They also found the flexible program structure with the right balance between set expectations and flexibility in implementation that they received from the UNLOCK team to be particularly helpful in aligning their coaching hours with the needs of the teams.

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The participants emphasized that the connection to Wikimedia Deutschland gave credibility to their projects and opened up the world of free knowledge to them.

## Support by the coaches

Throughout the program, each project team was paired with a coach. As an experiment and because fewer teams joined the program as intended, this year, we also paired two of the teams with two coaches, creating a tandem. The coaches guide the teams to develop the full potential of their projects by offering their knowledge, methodological support and a fresh view from the outside. To support the teams in the best possible way we offer needs-oriented coaching as the main element of the program. This means that the coaches have a lot of freedom in responding to the individual needs of the teams and their projects. Meet the coaches in our [blog post here](#).



**7 coaches**  
**countless coaching sessions**

## Our key take-aways

Altogether, the coachings were considered the most beneficial part of the program according to the participants; from helping them create structures and establish methods far beyond the program, challenging and advancing their ideas all the way to helping them grow as a team.

Since the project teams are at different stages when they enter the program, they also go through their own product development process and coaching experience. Realizing that they will not be at the same place at the conclusion of the program, that they require differing support and that there is no room for comparison, gave the coaches peace of mind and reassurance that they could act in the best interest of the project team that they were paired with.

Further, introducing a mid-way evaluation was considered a potentially better and more structured way to assess the progress of each individual team in future editions.

Although establishing tandem coachings was a short-term decision, the setup was greatly appreciated.

The coaches enjoyed taking advantage of each other's skill sets and having a partner for sparring and decision making, and for dividing up the working hours.

All coaches were also able to jump into another team or get external experts in for input sessions. This was also welcomed: The coaches enjoyed diving into the other team's project work and dynamics and thus being more involved in the program as a whole; The teams benefitted from a broader set of expertise and were confronted with more perspectives.

A deeper exchange amongst the coaches that had already joined the program in 2020 and the newest additions to the program was lacking. The coaches didn't notice until far into the program that sharing their experiences would have been beneficial. Additionally, the UNLOCK team could have paired the tandem coaches accordingly, but hadn't done so as other decisions had prevailed.

## Cohort events

The program has a duration of three months. It starts with a kick-off event and concludes with a public Demo Day in which the participants present their program results. Inbetween, the participants got together monthly as a cohort for a week-long working session each, the so-called sprints. All events were organized and conducted by the UNLOCK team and were mandatory for all participants. Aside from the events the teams were able to determine for themselves how much time they (could) spend on their project. Insights into our events can be found in the blog posts on our [kick-off event](#), and the [second sprint](#).



**3 months filled with  
140 sprint hours  
47 check ins/outs & energizers**

## Our key take-aways

Joint rituals in the mornings for checking-in and energizing moments in between proved mandatory to keep energy levels up. Skipping exercises for the sake of keeping up with the time schedule never worked well. Physical exercises and creative challenges worked particularly well with this group. Those in which everyone gets the chance to speak up also helped to pick up on the current vibe and moods, acknowledge them and react accordingly.

The cross-team working and reflection sessions were particularly appreciated as a means to learn from each other and to exchange thoughts and experiences. Thereby, small working groups worked very well to maximize focus and participation. A great success was drawing away facilitation bit by bit and leaving the teams to self-organize in individual sessions. This worked well for methods that had already been established and were somewhat familiar to the participants.

Sessions with a specific hands-on working mode proved more enticing than mere lectures and better grasped the participants' attention.

Further, ending a session with a specific "homework", a task to do or reflect on following the session, was not something we designed for, but where it did happen it helped the teams break down the input into more manageable chunks and have a clearer understanding of how to apply the learnings to their own project.

Several experts were brought in for input sessions. Those worked best where the speakers were not only briefed on content, but also on the overall dynamic of the group, the vibes and working types of the participants.

Amongst the participants, the concern was voiced at some point that not all content provided in the cross-team working sessions is equally relevant to all participants and their project development. Coming to realize that we will not be able to cater to all needs at a given moment in time and communicating this openly is key in managing expectations and taking the pressure off of the event design; as is stating the goal for each session clearly in advance to help the participants position themselves to the session and to stay focused.

# Community

Each UNLOCK project aspires to make a contribution to the creation of an open and informed knowledge society; a project that sets new impulses and improves the free use of knowledge across the world. And the teams of this year's UNLOCK cohort were united not only by the will to drive their own project forward, but also by their belief that we can go farther through collaboration and exchange. The program is designed to hold numerous communal, cross-team moments, both for structured knowledge transfer and more social get-togethers.



**5 project teams**  
**14 participants from 7 countries:**  
**France, Germany, India, Netherlands,**  
**Portugal, Spain, Sweden**

## Our key take-aways

To strengthen the understanding of what we are jointly working on and how we can stand together for a common goal, organizing a keynote speech on the topic of the program helped to remind and inspire.

This year the participants were more eager to keep learning and to engage in collaborative moments of exchange and support. Most interactions across the teams were not related to the topic of this year's edition, but focused more on exchanging experiences to build empathy and understanding along the process, and on sharing expertise on specific topics such as methods, data sets and other technical advice.

The participants of the program had varying degrees of knowledge on wiki tools, open source setups and Free Knowledge as a concept. The mix really advanced a feeling of community as those more experienced gladly shared their

insights, and the teams sought for help amongst their peers.

The social get-togethers were organized once during each sprint. They followed a theme and were moderated. Despite the high spirits, unfortunately, the setup hindered a more informal, organic dynamic to unfold. Leaving the space to the participants for them to shape as desired might have more effect.

The virtual setup of the program ran highly professionally, technically smoothly and all participants were well versed in the online etiquette. Further, the setup made it possible for international participants to join. And yet, the yearning for physical meetings was still strong. Building trust and active participation across screens is still tough and takes a lot of time and building a sense of community virtually has not proven to be particularly simple.

# Scholarship

As part of the support provided by the UNLOCK program, participants were able to receive a stipend of 1,000 euros per month. This offer was taken up by 12 of the 14 participants who applied for the scholarship. All applications were granted.



**12 scholarships granted  
1.000€ each month per  
scholarship holder**

## Our key take-aways

According to the feedback of the recipients the stipend allowed them to invest more time in their project work, or even to work full time on their projects during the UNLOCK program and not have to pursue part-time jobs.

Participants felt that the stipend acted as a signal of validation and appreciation for their contribution to the program and their project work.

The stipend was not perceived as a means to implement the products

themselves. At the start of the program 90% of participants stated that they had only very little financial resources available in order to work on their project. Throughout the 3-month program this number reduced to 20%. The remaining 80% had some funds available, of which only 10% reported to have a lot of financial resources available.

The grant disbursement and processing across Europe went smoothly.



## What next?

**Altogether we received a ton of feedback as well as a lot of praise on the second edition of the UNLOCK Accelerator.**

All participants indicated that the program was helpful to them in the implementation of their project. Even more so, prior to the program only 40% of participants claimed to have somewhat to a lot of time to work on their project. At the end of the program it was 90% that indicated that the participation in the program made it possible for them to spend a lot of time on their project work.

When asked about what skills for implementing their idea the participants have developed or strengthened over the course of the program, the answers were manifold, ranging from formulating a vision, prototyping, user research and testing to project planning and team work, and even coding.

For us as the organizing team, looking back, the second edition has confirmed that there isn't just one way to design or implement the program. Unforeseeable events can always throw you and what might work for one cohort, might not be the right setup for another. Programs like this one live from the people who actively participate in them. It is their good ideas and impulses that give the program its form. With that in mind, our biggest learning probably is to dare to keep experimenting while maintaining an open mind; to dare to be flexible and to react to the dynamics that unfold.

With the third UNLOCK edition in the works we also look forward to realizing some more specific changes from our catalogue of learnings in the future, such as establishing a partnership for implementation, expanding the scouting work and establishing a mid-point evaluation for the teams to track their progress.

We can hardly wait to experiment some more in the 2022 edition of the UNLOCK Accelerator and to find the best way to support even more people and their projects contributing to an open and informed knowledge society.

