

DEI Research Summary

A summary of research to date on diversity, equity, and inclusion in Wikimedia Foundation Product and Technology teams

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Executive Summary

Report Purpose

This report is a summary of research efforts to date by the Product Development DEI Working Group, and is an interim step in the ongoing efforts to develop a DEI framework that guides the product development process.

The insights in this report were derived by reviewing qualitative interviews and survey results from past DEI Working Group efforts, as well as through direct consultation with DEI Working Group members. Additionally, they reflect Chat Mow LLC's experience consulting with global organizations tackling similar challenges.

Research Goals

Goals for this overall research effort (of which this report is an interim step) include:

- + Explore inclusion inclusively
- + Listen first to understand and set a baseline to track future progress
- + Seek outside expertise, but drive change from within
- + Surface challenges, while sharing bright spots and best practices
- + Articulate actionable opportunity areas to embed DEI practices into the flow of work

Team Member Asks of Leadership

Across teams, there was a desire for help from leadership in the following ways:

- + **Provide clarity around what, exactly, DEI means at WMF.** Teams expressed enthusiasm and a general understanding of DEI's importance for WMF, but they craved a more defined, shared language to align and engage more deeply.
- + **Make goals explicit by defining DEI-specific OKRs.** Teams want a clear signal that they are to prioritize this work, and that organizational progress will be tracked and measured with a global perspective in mind.
- + **Devote additional resources so that teams have the capacity and capability to embed DEI practices more deeply into their work.** Teams want to do more, but they do not feel like they have the resources to do so.

Next Steps

The Product Development DEI Working Group will incorporate the results of this report into a DEI framework for the product development process that will articulate a broad approach to DEI for the Product and Technology Departments, and outline specific measures for teams to begin to take.

Insights and Opportunities

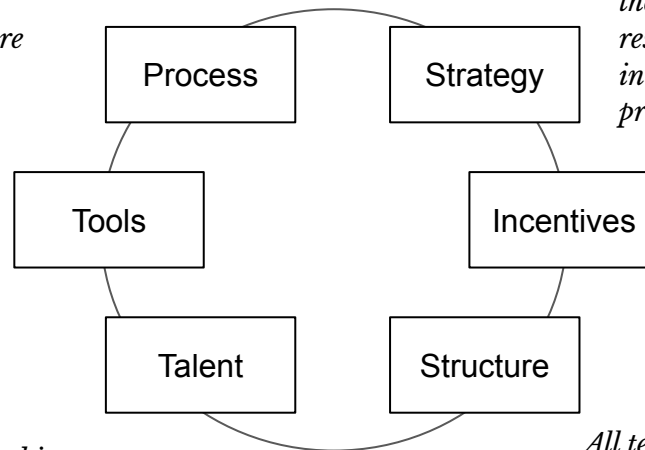
The report summarizes conversations through the lens of six key organizational factors: strategy, incentives, structure, talent, tools, and process.

These categories capture a comprehensive view of the organizational conditions in the Product and Technology departments have set that inform how readily DEI can be embedded in the product development process. Insights are based on 15 group interviews and a broadly distributed survey.

User perspectives could benefit from appearing earlier and more consistently in the product development processes, even for infrastructure and platform teams.

Tools to measure DEI impact in WMF communities are challenging to incorporate given the importance of user privacy. Doing so requires coordination across Product and Technology.

People generally aspired for greater demographic representation within teams. More teams could benefit from user research, analysts, PMs, or community relations specialists if they don't already have them..



Teams crave more clarity around DEI goals from the top of the organization. They also require more resources — time, money, and expertise — to incorporate DEI into the product development process.

Employee incentives do not explicitly reward good DEI-related behavior.

All teams operate under resource constraints and need to be smart and structured about how they connect with other teams, experts, communities, and volunteers to bring DEI to their work.

Best Practices Identified in Interviews

Bright spots were identified across all six organizational factors, and there is significant potential for Product and Technology teams to learn from one another. A sample of identified brights spots are below, highlighting teams that had particularly thoughtful or novel approaches.

Process

- + **A ticket triage processes** to respond effectively to requests and preserve capacity for new idea exploration
(Core Platform team)
- + **A regular community survey cadence** to make sure community needs are consistently being surfaced
(Community Tech team)
- + **Processes to help more team members stay informed** to ensure all team members have the context to participate in more team strategy conversations
(Search team)

Tools

- + **Use of usertesting.com and commissioned user research** to make user needs are surfaced and tested even with limited time and resources
(Multiple teams)

Talent

- + **Established job description and interview best practices** to reduce bias and recruit as inclusively as possible
(Technical Engagement team)

Strategy

- + **Use of user research in strategy** to rigorously incorporate broad community perspectives in key strategic decision making moments
(Multiple teams)
- + **PMs Discussing Strategy 1-on-1 with teammates** to provide different forums for team members' voices to be heard outside of group settings
(Growth team)

Incentives

- + **Champion recognition** to encourage the representation of diverse causes in the product development process
(Multiple teams)

Structure

- + **Added intentionality around explicit 'champion' roles on teams** to ensure that representing diverse perspectives is treated as a formal job responsibility
(Growth team)

Purpose and Goals

Developing WMF products in a diverse, equitable, and inclusive way starts with deep departmental introspection.

In line with WMF-wide ambitions around diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Product and Technology departments have committed resources and energy towards understanding and evolving its practices in service of more broadly and more deeply embedding DEI principles into WMF product development process.

This report is a summary of research efforts to date by the Product Development DEI Working Group, and is part of ongoing efforts to develop a DEI framework that guides DEI in future product development.

The insights in this report were derived by reviewing qualitative interviews and survey results from past DEI Working Group efforts, as well as through direct consultation with DEI Working Group members. Additionally, they reflect Chat Mow LLC's experience consulting with global organizations tackling similar challenges.

Explore inclusion inclusively

Listen first to understand and set a baseline for track future progress

Seek outside expertise, but drive change from within

Surface challenges, while sharing bright spots and best practices

Articulate actionable opportunity areas to embed DEI practices into the flow of work

Explore inclusion inclusively

The DEI product development framework should not be mandated as a top-down initiative. In order to model inclusive practices, qualitative interviews were conducted across **15 WMF product and technology teams**, garnering perspectives from a significant amount of team members. A survey was also distributed to incorporate the perspective of those who could not be interviewed.

Lead with listening to understand and set a baseline for future progress

This research serves as both a tool for learning, and a qualitative snapshot of the state of DEI in product development against which the departments can track and evaluate future progress.

Seek outside expertise, but drive change from within

This report reflects the external perspective of Chat Mow LLC, but DEI efforts as a whole have largely been driven by the Product Development DEI Working Group. Ownership of future change will continue to be driven from within.

Surface challenges directly, while also sharing bright spots and best practices

Research efforts focused on identifying current and potential barriers to DEI in the Product Development Process. At the same time, it seeks to amplifying best practices that individual teams have organically developed so that other teams might apply them.

Articulate actionable opportunity areas to embed DEI practices into the flow of work

The insights in this report prioritize actionable measures that can drive behaviors and outcomes. As such, it aims to not only identify nuanced cultural dynamics and prevailing team member mindsets, but also search for the designable organizational conditions and tactical best practices that will directly improve how products are developed at WMF in the future.

Insights and Opportunities

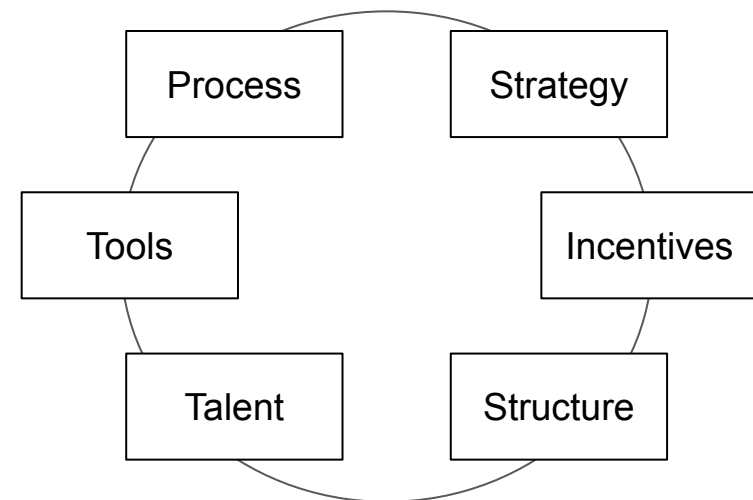
It is challenging to directly ‘design culture’, but organizations can deliberately set the conditions that encourage desired outcomes and behaviors.

In this section, we will capture insights and opportunities through the lens of six organizational factors: strategy, structure, talent, tools, incentives, and process.

Through these lenses, we capture a comprehensive view of the implicit and explicit conditions that the Product and Technology departments, and the teams within them, have set, and we discuss how these conditions encourage or impede DEI in the product development process.

Broad observations on organizational culture and behaviors underlie all of these factors, and shifting culture relies on designing each of these factors with intentionality — the organization’s prevailing cultural norms are both an input and output of these factors.

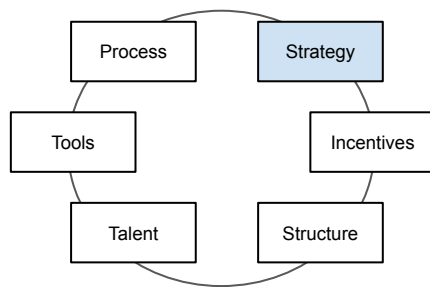
While some factors are more foundational than others, they work jointly as a system — if any of these factors is ignored it can impede DEI in the product development process.



This approach to organizations is analogous to gardening — while it is very hard to command plants to grow, a gardener can set fertile conditions for growth by actively ensuring it provides appropriate soil, water, and sunlight.

Strategy

Setting relevant and clear goals



Explicit strategy alignment is foundational to the success of DEI in product development. If front-end strategy is not aligned with, and explicit about, DEI, it is very hard for other factors to make up for it.

While strategy alignment alone cannot facilitate profound change if other factors aren't designed carefully and accordingly, it is often an essential first factor to tackle.

Teams want clear guidance from leadership on how to prioritize DEI, and more resources to incorporate it into their work.

44.8% of respondents identified with "I would like more guidance from WMF leadership on the process for inclusive development".

Less than 30% of survey respondents felt they devote an appropriate amount of time and energy to diversity considerations.

Teams generally identified two levels of prioritization. At a high level, annual planning and OKRs set a broad direction and contextualize *what* a team should prioritize. It is a key moment to contextualize a team's work within broader organizational goals. Teams are then typically left with a significant amount of autonomy to decide *how* to achieve those goals.

Of note, few if any teams mentioned explicitly addressing DEI in their OKRs. While there is risk in overly prescriptively mandating specific DEI measures, there is an opportunity to explicitly encourage product and technology teams to treat it as an explicit organization-wide goal.

Strategy

Setting relevant and clear goals

Within each team, PMs (where applicable) generally worked with team members to set detailed priorities. Where foundational user research was available, it was a valuable resource for teams to prioritize with user-centered rigor.

“We use the new editor experiences project's recommendations to set our initial course. You'll remember that project recommended in-person help, human to human help, and test recommendations. And so that narrowed the potential space.”

- Growth team member

27% of respondents selected design/research/data/analytics as their top choice for increasing DEI impact on products

The use of user research was inconsistent in strategy activities, magnified by the fact that many teams creating infrastructure or platform products and features do not have a simple and direct link to communities — end-user interactions are often downstream from them. But where investments in research were available, it brought clarity and rigor that often simplified or sped up the decision making process.

Some teams coordinated informally with other experts or teams in the organization to incorporate user research when they didn't have their own experts or resources, which suggests that there might be benefit from more coordinated efforts.

Strategy

Setting relevant and clear goals

Socially developed strategies generally incorporate a combination of user feedback, team feedback, expert insight, and stakeholder feedback.

Incorporating team member input was a bright spot across many teams, and team-level strategies tended to be crafted and maintained through high levels of team consultation.

There were also several teams who made explicit efforts to keep their strategies up to date and maintain iterative and live dialogue with team members as strategies were adapted between annual planning sessions.

Encouraging teams to think of strategy as a constant intonation between learnings and input creates more opportunities for DEI to be a strategic priority without the pressure to ‘get it right’ once per year.

Successful strategies are socially developed, and iteratively revisited.

“Marshall is really good at sharing how our quarterly goals have shifted or stayed the same. There's always a pretty long document that we collaborate on, that we look through beforehand and we can look at questions and comments about where we think some priorities might shift for the year. I think that's been a really good process for us, having that regular cadence of always checking in, all coming from all of us.”

- Growth team member

“Our team brainstormed some set of features to work on...we narrowed it down to eight internally, then we went out for community conversation and had community members weigh in...and so then our team took all that information, had an offsite and narrowed it down to like three things we really wanted to do.”

- Growth team member

Strategy

Setting relevant and clear goals

Goal clarity helps foster and resolve healthy debate.

“There are definitely disagreements and conflict...fundamentally, people end up going back to the purpose. What's the goal of the work? What are we trying to accomplish?...I think the team is very talented at civil discourse. People are able to have disagreements and it doesn't seem to trickle into any other aspect of the work.”

- Language team member

Strategic clarity is an important way that teams can improve psychological safety. It allows discussion to be about how well the work contributes to team goals rather than how inherently ‘good’ it is, a much more subjective parameter.

Within the context of WMF’s cultural propensity for cohesion, there are many other organizational conditions that can and should be designed to improve psychological safety, but goal clarity is particularly important because it allows for an objective way for debates to be resolved. In so doing, it may help team members challenge work more without feeling countercultural.

Strategy

Setting relevant and clear goals

Questions to ponder

How might we develop a shared language around DEI to ensure everyone is on the same page?

What explicit, organization-wide DEI goals might we want to set across all product and technology teams?

How might we work with teams to craft context-specific DEI goals that are right for them?

How might we bolster resources and collaboration around user research?

How might we encourage teams to regularly check in on whether DEI is being appropriately prioritized in their work?

How might we more broadly use goals as a tool for discourse?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ Use of user research in strategy

Involving researchers more directly in planning (where available), seeking insights from external or past reports, and/or sharing research across teams deliberately
(Multiple teams)

+ PMs Discuss Strategy 1-on-1 with teammates

In addition to group strategy discussions, create space for individual voices to provide input directly
(Growth team)

Recommended Ideas to Explore

+ Explicit DEI goals in OKRs

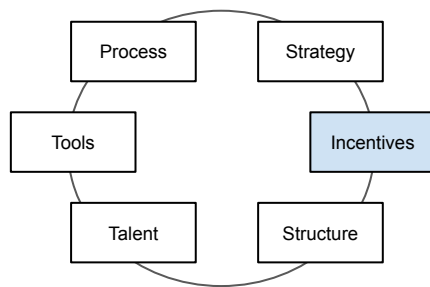
Incorporate nesting goals at organization, department, and team level (including both front end and back end teams).

+ Strategy offsites

Build DEI discussions into strategy moments with intention and consider a strategy offsite cadence more frequent than once per year

Incentives

How desired behavior is rewarded



Incentives include **both financial and non-financial** mechanisms to identify, recognize, and reward desired behavior. It is very challenging, ethically questionable, and generally expensive to incentivize employees enough that they engage in behavior that they explicitly do not believe in — so incentives need to compliment existing aligned intent.

There was a significant amount of evidence in interviews to reinforce broad belief in DEI. The role of incentives, are thus, primarily as a reinforcement mechanism. They often work to enforce explicit organization-wide strategies.

Incentivizing DEI as a product development priority does not necessarily have to alter behavior, but it does have to reinforce DEI as a priority.

“It’s important to be incentivized to be introspective about our process...not to say that we don’t value it intrinsically, but (it’s about) being scrutinized — in the best way possible — (and having) clear communication that we have the time and space and incentive to focus on this.”

- Editing team member

There was little to no identification of explicit or structured use of incentives to reward DEI-fostering or prioritizing behavior in the product development process, however during the interviews a significant amount of praise and recognition was shared between team members.

Creating more intentional forums for informal and formal incentives alike is thus an open opportunity area for the product and technology departments. These can range from recognition programs to performance management criteria and compensation.

Incentives

How desired behavior is rewarded

Questions to ponder

How might we incentivize DEI-fostering behavior without becoming transactional about it?

How might we signal an institutional commitment to DEI work through incentives?

How might we balance formal and informal incentives, as well as financial and non-financial rewards appropriately?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ **Champion Recognition**

Explicitly recognizing champions of various perspectives and causes is an important way to legitimize and empower them.

(multiple teams)

Recommended Ideas to Explore

+ **Reinforce strategy**

Incentives that work in order to reinforce strategic DEI priorities create a cohesive and consistent message.

+ **Incentivize individual, team, and organization-wide behaviors**

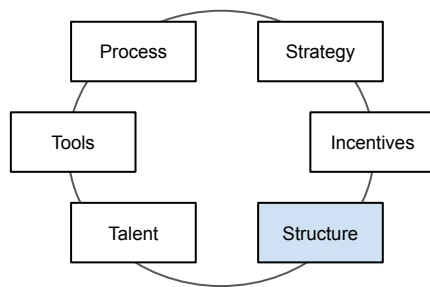
Just like strategies should be nesting, incentives need to reward at different levels.

+ **Incentivize with the gift of (more) time**

Having the opportunity to work on DEI initiatives can be a reward in and of itself when enough bandwidth is cleared to do so.

Structure

Role and relational clarity



As a networked and team-based organization, the Product and Technology Departments rely on informal structures and team autonomy to encourage adaptability. It's a suitable model for software organizations that need to respond rapidly to changes and coordinate in complex ways. The trust that this structure places in high quality talent is an important driver of WMF's culture.

While additional formal structure at a department level likely risks impeding flexibility, at team levels more structural consistency would pave the way for DEI to systematically live throughout the organization.

Teams are lean, interdisciplinary, and tackle high-complexity challenges. That means context is high, and incorporating new perspectives and second opinions is challenging.

"I think language parsing is a pretty esoteric technique. If you want to get things right, there's a lot of details and it is a higher skilled area that you need to work in. And so I think volunteer contribution is by definition going to be limited."

- Parsing team member

There are inherent technical barriers to inclusion in WMF product development process, that make many types of consultation and inclusion less easy. While these impede typical channels for including broader perspectives such as the inclusion of volunteers mentioned above, they are also areas of opportunity for longer term investments in communication, education, and mentorship.

The resource toll of those efforts can be particularly high, so such investments must be made judiciously and likely not just at team level, but just because there are short term challenges across the organization does not mean that investments are not worth making in technical areas.

Structure

Role and relational clarity

The pull of reactive work will always be strong in live, resource-constrained environments.

“As a structural issue, we're definitely subject to...’the squeaky wheel gets the grease’

- Parsing team member

56.9% of respondents identified with the statement “Our team sometimes/often has to compromise on inclusivity consideration because of a lack of time and/or resources.”

But teams have an opportunity to create distinct structures that handle both proactive and reactive development priorities.

“We do a (rotating) weekly chore wheels where we check what the feedback is and summarize the feedback for all team members. And if there's something really specific that stands out. We definitely have an eye on it.”

- Android team member

Resource constraints were a noted reality for all teams. Teams grappled with the unpredictability of responding to urgent requests, fixing unexpected bugs, and appeasing large and vocal communities. Anticipating reactive demands, and building roles and responsibilities that share the burden of monitoring and responding to them can help get ahead of unpredictability.

In general, teams need to deliberately find ways to cultivate for the future or they will constantly be caught optimizing for the present and near term.

Less than 30% of survey respondents felt they devote an appropriate amount of time and energy to diversity considerations.

8.6% of survey respondents specifically identified more space and time in the development schedule as being most impactful for them to deliver products that equitable, inclusive and serve diverse communities.

Approximately 37% of respondents wanted greater access to community/people/outsideers.

Structure

Role and relational clarity

Still, some teams were resourceful in incorporating new perspectives.

The Inuka team hired an agency in India to understand its users and based some of their initial research on the findings contributing to the roadmap.

iOS partnered with organizations that have blind users to create a more inclusive experience (American Federation for the Blind).

WMF's networked structure allows teams to be resourceful and flexible about seeking help from outside their teams when needed. This can help teams add capabilities and capacity — it can help incorporate new perspectives not already represented on the team, and can generally alleviate some of the time and resource constraints that are often at odds with the rigor required for DEI work.

When engaging with external resources, it is important to think of providing basic role and decision clarity, even for informal relationships, otherwise additional perspectives may increase complexity and confusion and effectively decrease efficiency.

Product and technology teams are positioned to create intentional connections to other parts of the organization, outside experts, and volunteers.

"People on this team have tried to think about how we can interact well with other people...set up some volunteer developers who have come and taken up some tickets...and put a lot of time and effort into this..I'm really proud of it."

- Anti-Harassment team member

"We got to engage an external research agency a few months ago and they conducted a bunch of research. We learned through that."

- Readers Web team member

But teams must be deliberate about role and decision clarity when making those additional connections.

"One of the very unique aspects of the foundation have been the committees that are in place. While unique, they also are gigantic bottlenecks in that there is no clear line or a delineation of who can actually make a final decision on some things."

- Readers Web team member

Structure

Role and relational clarity

Questions to ponder

What investments do we want to make, department-wide, in lowering technical and contextual barriers to our work?

How might we ensure we're creating as much time and space for proactive work as possible?

How might we set and reinforce norms around role clarity hygiene for all forms of informal and formal collaboration?

How might we better collaborate with our global communities and volunteers?

How might we better understand and build for local knowledge, needs, and challenges?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ Add intentionality around 'champion' roles

Take stock of what informal champions exist on the team, and which ones would be important to add in order to better embed DEI in product development work.

(Growth team)

Recommended Ideas to Explore

+ Establish user or community councils for feedback

Create more formal structures around user or community councils so that product teams can seek feedback quickly without needed to recruit new perspectives every time.

Curate these councils for intentional representation, and consider rotating members through for additional variety.

+ Make DEI an explicit PM responsibility

Add specific measures to job descriptions and provide a playbook of best practices to be shared across all PMs.

+ Establish a framework for role clarity to be used in every collaboration

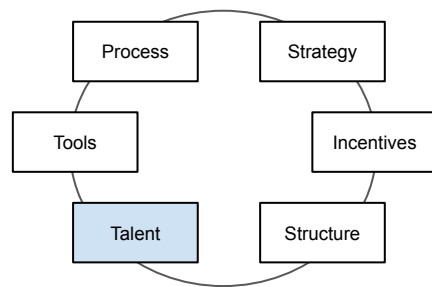
For example, encourage team members to identify use the RACI (responsible, accountable, consulted, informed) framework for any new collaboration.

+ Identify and redesign structural barriers for specific underrepresented groups

Many teams aspired to create more welcoming conditions for women engineers, for example.

Talent

Recruitment, resourcing, and development



Talent models vary by team, and benefit from being developed in collaboration with broader WMF talent resources. The geographic breadth of the talent base and broad software industry talent dynamics factored deeply into team considerations, but many teams have found ways to bring DEI to their talent efforts with intentionality.

It is important that teams are not discouraged by any inherent geographical or industry challenges to recruiting talent that better broader perspectives. Talent is a highly impactful and controllable lever to help DEI in the product development process.

Recruitment challenges often stem from time zone constraints and software product talent availability contrast with WMF's global mandate.

“When we're talking about a global organization and we're talking about a global reach, sharing the knowledge of all humans, I think we're not very diverse.”

Many teams aspire for improved diversity in basic demographic areas.

“I'm going to get that obvious one out the way. I think there's lots of dudes...”

But a few basic measures can bring significantly more intentionality to the hiring process.

“Whether it's writing the job descriptions or designing the interview questions...we try to be very conscious of underrepresented diversity.”

“Remove arbitrary restrictions from job descriptions, like ‘must have seven years operating piece of software X’ ...reduce them to more pragmatic statements about the...actual characteristics that we're looking for.”

Talent

Recruitment, resourcing, and development

User researchers, analysts, PMs, and community relations specialists were particularly valuable in channeling community and user perspectives.

“I think one of the things that could benefit from with more resourcing is research support. Right now, we make the best of what we have. If we had more capacity, I think there could be a parallel stream of more explorations for future projects.

- Inuka team member

Team composition also varied by team. Some had dedicated user or community-facing personnel, while others did not. This was largely a function of team size and the nature of their work — platform and infrastructure teams naturally prioritized those roles less in hiring. But most teams stood to benefit from user research capacity, capability, and general emphasis to incorporate end-user perspectives, and despite resource constraints,

several teams were able to resourcefully and judiciously find help understanding and serving diverse and marginalized user groups.

The Editing team has a dedicated Computational Linguist Engineer with expertise in IMEs.

Collaboration across teams to share and convey user insights was particularly unaddressed opportunity, and seeing researchers (or, at the very least, seeing their work) as important shared resources and knowledge will be key to remediating deficiencies in incorporating perspectives in the product development process.

Talent

Recruitment, resourcing, and development

Questions to ponder

How might we help all teams become more profoundly user-centered than they are today, regardless of their product's inherent distance from users?

How might we not allow talent pipeline challenges to hinder building inclusive teams?

How might we make the most of department-wide user and community-facing expertise?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ **Establish job description and interview best practices**
Create standards for inclusive language and practices in all candidate touchpoints.
(Technical Engagement Team)

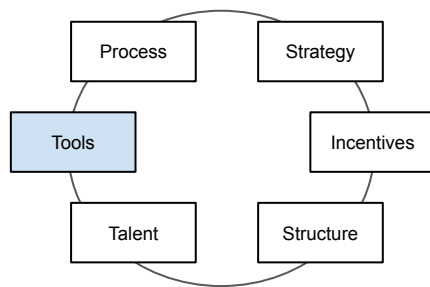
Recommended Ideas to Explore

+ **DEI-related Expert Network Directory**
Build and grow a shared directory of external contributors who have helped improve DEI in the product process, including, but not limited to, design researchers, community managers, language specialists, cultural specialists, and accessibility experts.

+ **Budget for analyst and design research capacity during annual planning**
Creating shared annual resource plans that stem directly from OKRs and are tied to specific user needs can help with shared resourcing across teams.

Tools

Organizational software, methods, or spaces



In addition to the broad suite of software tools that the product and technology departments produce for each other and for communities and end-users, team tools form the organizational infrastructure that shapes many internal behaviors. They include planning and collaboration tools, prioritization methods, and user feedback tools.

Generally, organizational tools are informal and vary from team to team. There is a significant opportunity for teams to be more intentional about adding tools to embed DEI into product development, and for sharing of tools across teams.

User feedback tools have the potential to bridge part of the gap created by limited research capacity.

“We have an annual community (survey)...every year people submit proposals for what they would like us to work on.”

- Community Tech team member

Having tools to surface community and user feedback is not enough — those tools need to be managed thoughtfully and with an explicit DEI lens. Equity implications are particularly high when teams sort through the priorities of different communities, or forget to factor in language barriers.

“Historically the way the survey operated was that it would focus on the biggest communities so smaller projects, smaller communities might not be represented. So last year in our survey, we said we weren't taking wishes for Wikipedia, Wikidata, and Comments, and instead we wanted to focus on smaller projects.”

- Community Tech team member

Tools

Organizational software, methods, or spaces

Metric tools were lacking, and impeded specificity and accountability in DEI actions. Teams identified the need for more DEI metrics to track and monitor DEI in team talent representation and in prioritizing DEI work via OKRs.

Measuring representation in community and users presented a unique challenge, as understanding demographic data is generally seen as being at odds with WMF's prioritization of user privacy, and dedicated efforts will be required to find creative solutions.

People craved metrics to turn intention into action.

"Clearer guidance on metrics for accountability (both quant and qual) would be extremely useful."

- Survey Participant

Metrics currently exist mainly in recruitment, and they need more refinement to reflect a global view.

"Our (hiring) diversity metrics are very US-centric. African American is a category, but African isn't."

- Search team member

Tools

Organizational software, methods, or spaces

Tools can ensure blind spots aren't missed.

“Naïké introduced a risk assessment process for us to start thinking about risk when we're doing initial planning... Specifically, being able to assess general software risk of making any changes to our huge platform versus risks that are specific to a particular initiative.”

- Core Platform team member

Less than 23% of respondents believe their team has the tools and resources it needs to build products that are inclusive for the community.

Useful tools can be as simple as formalized processes or heuristics that, if they include explicit DEI considerations, are great vehicles for systematization. But they can equally systematically ignore or negatively impact DEI.

Missing a DEI lens in a tool inherently means that perspective is missed repeatedly if the tool is used over and over

“It would probably be helpful to be explicit about whether particular Wikis have a higher percentage of people we're trying to get to participate more. I'm thinking along the lines of gender, race...that's absent (from our heuristic for choosing partner Wikis).”

Tools can be negatively biased at scale.

“We have run into cultural, social, racial issues in the use of AI or machine learning tools....our computer aided tagging tool that's powered from Google and has plenty of bias problems. We even had a tense moment with our community members around this topic and if it should exist, etc.. We've tried to adjust that, but I imagine we will continue to run into AI troubles with our community for the foreseeable future..”

Tools

Organizational software, methods, or spaces

Questions to ponder

How might we share tools across teams to maximize our resources for user research and feedback including non-english speakers?

How might we better toolify informal practices and processes?

How might we set and measure DEI goals while still maintaining strict standards for user privacy?

How might we audit the tools we use most to ensure that opportunities aren't missed or biases perpetuated at scale?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ User feedback and testing tools

More widespread use and sharing of results from behavioral surveys or usertesting.com.
(Multiple Teams)

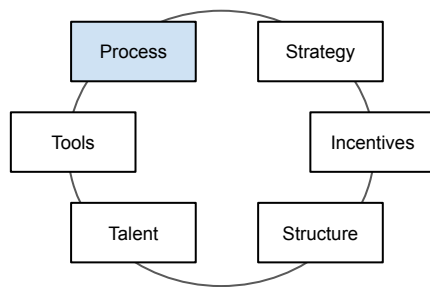
Recommended Ideas to Explore

+ Embed DEI in commonly used tools

Kanban boards, decision heuristics, or process checklists can all be used to advance or hinder DEI in the development process.

Process

The flow of work



Relying too much on standardizing process can hinder flexibility and autonomy, especially in agile environments where teams are comprised of highly capable employees. But there are opportunities within the Product and Technology departments to formalize good DEI practices in an effort to make sure they happen earlier or more consistently across teams.

Generally, teams could benefit from incorporating research, analytics, and user testing earlier, and more frequently.

“Just last week, we were talking more about how do we integrate analytics earlier in our process to make sure that we are thinking about that as we develop and even design things.”

- Android team member

27% of respondents selected design/research/data/analytics as their top choice for increasing DEI impact on products

Given the path dependencies of early decisions, incorporating more user perspectives early in the product development process was particularly important. But while more research earlier would help bring more perspectives to the table, ensuring that best in class research methods were used will also determine the extent to which DEI issues are thoughtfully addressed.

Process

The flow of work

There's an opportunity for periodic DEI issues to be examined earlier and more consistently.

“Accessibility has been a factor, but not consistently. It's the kind of thing that I sometimes look at. I have an extension that shows a bunch of accessibility stuff on the screen and issues will come up, but I don't think we spent much time thinking about that as we're developing new features.”

“It would be nice to automate stuff. Have any new screen we make not be mergeable unless it's fully accessible...it would be nice to stop it early rather than have it be an after the fact thing, like, now that the release is totally buttoned up, let's make it accessible.”

Many teams found it easier to point to moments where they considered DEI in product development, but far fewer did so consistently. Even fewer pointed to consistencies across teams.

Team inclusion is also an area that can be aided or impeded through process because it often requires consistent communication, context-setting, or exposure, rather than a single solution.

Processes can reduce barriers to team participation by providing context

“One of the stated goals of the process is to increase collaboration and decrease the lottery factor of sharing knowledge around the team. One of the ways we're doing that is talking about tickets more, having meetings... triaging together instead of everybody handling their own thing and making their own decisions...”

“One of the ways that I hope that will help is that it shares knowledge across the team and makes people feel more comfortable and emboldened to talk about tickets and work that the team is doing that they maybe didn't feel a part of before.”

Process

The flow of work

Questions to ponder

How might we embed research and analytics more deeply into our processes?

How might we identify areas where DEI solutions are known, but consistency and hygiene are needed?

Best Practices Identified In Interviews

+ Ticket triage processes

Establishing processes to effectively and evenly distribute the responsibility of responding to tickets (often in Phabricator) can help teams manage reactive work better.
(Core Platform Team)

+ Regular community or user survey cadence

Having a regular cadence by which a team or set of team connects with different communities and seeks their views on a range of priorities can help keep a picture of needs up to date.
(Community Tech Team)

+ Processes to help more team members stay informed

Establishing natural communication points for information sharing within teams and between them.
(Search Team)

Themes and Tensions

Progress will require thoughtful navigation of organizational tensions.

In addition to the insights and opportunities derived directly from the interviews, there are common industry norms shared amongst similar product organizations outside of WMF that must be navigated carefully as the groups dive deeper into DEI work.

This section identifies some of those major tensions relevant to WMF team based on outside experiences. It is to be read as a series of ‘watch out’ recommendations from Chat Mow LLC.

The more representative an organization or team is, *the more deliberately it needs to check its biases and blind spots.*

There is enthusiasm for DEI, *but ultimately many teams feel like they are too busy to act on that enthusiasm.*

The awareness and ability to proactively live DEI values differs between intra and inter-team interactions. *Scaling and systematizing new DEI norms is challenging.*

Cultural norms encourage cohesion within teams, *but this must not lead to deference or sameness.*

Mindset and cultural shifts are important, *but DEI needs to be seen as an act of strategy to be successful.*

The more representative an organization or team is, the more deliberately it needs to check its biases and blind spots.

It is common in many organizations for DEI to be primarily associated with better talent recruitment, and while significant resources should be devoted to hiring, progress in that area raises important future considerations.

The first, speaks to a distinct aspect of WMF — that with its breadth of global end users and its immense capacity as a tool for the knowledge of the entire world, **diverse representation should be an endless pursuit and aspiration.** WMF should consistently monitor progress and set talent diversity goals, incorporating both demographic and psychographic dimensions, but it will realistically never quite fully represent the perspectives given the inspiring reach of its products and it needs to be prepared for the ongoing and constant nature of this ambition, not seeing it as a goal to achieve and dismiss.

The second consideration stems from the fact that the intractability of the constant pursuit of greater talent diversity can mean that a **natural emphasis on representation can be mistaken as the end goal of DEI efforts in and of itself.** Ironically, new DEI needs often arise with greater representation, including dynamics where a single person or small group of people are tacitly tasked with representing whole demographic populations, while it is unfair to ask them to speak for the needs or views of entire cultures, races, genders, or other perspectives.

As a result, DEI progress in product development will require teams to incorporate tools and methods that check team blindspots, understand the nuances of intersectionality and identity, and practice rigorous inclusive and equitable research methods.

There is enthusiasm for DEI, but many teams feel like they are too busy to act on that enthusiasm.

Product development teams at WMF have widely varying roles and are in various stages of product maturity — some are maintaining very mature and broad platforms, while others are in the midst of introducing discrete new initiatives.

Regardless of context, the more reactionary a team's workflows are, the less deliberate they tend to be in zooming out to broader contexts, seeking outside expertise, or addressing the needs of new or underserved communities.

There are many inherent structural dynamics at play that set teams on a path to prioritize reactionary activities that maintain the status quo.

Rather than explore and incorporate new DEI measures in their product processes, it's easy for much of a team's time to go towards reacting to bug fixes or a development backlog.

Given finite time and resources, responding to the feedback of the largest communities may represent the greatest value for effort.

Admirable 'scrappy' methods and processes — user testing with friends and family, using dated foundational user research, or skipping exploratory activities — may all be reasonable shortcuts to make up time at the expense of unnecessary rigor and consideration

Creating infrastructure or platforms to support other product teams removes some teams from the end user implications of their work, relying on teams that are closer to the community to relay insights related to DEI.

There are times where each of these actions is appropriate, but they often sacrifice DEI. Managing capacity is fundamental to each team's work, and it is important that all teams create the capacity to contribute to departmental DEI goals, regardless of their context.

The awareness and ability to proactively live DEI values differs between intra and inter-team interactions. *This can make scaling and systematizing new DEI norms challenging.*

Introducing cross-organization initiatives, sharing knowledge, and raising the floor towards best practices can be challenging in highly autonomous structures. While autonomy is at the core of WMF's culture, it must be balanced with group goals.

It's important to be mindful that there are risks to different models of embedding DEI into product development:

- + **If it's supposed to be everyone's job, it often ends up being nobody's job**
- + **If it's a few people's part-time job, it might end up being more expensive and slow than having dedicated resources**
- + **If it is one or two experts' full-time job, too many people see it as someone else's job**

DEI efforts must navigate these extremes and seek to provide clarity around goals and roles at individual, team, and organization-wide levels.

Cultural norms encourage cohesion within teams, but this must not lead to deference or sameness.

Product and technology teams generally exhibited several structural predispositions to high cohesion orientation:

A lot of the **work is high in context**, where project-specific histories or organizational interdependence and complexity mean that it's not always possible to seek new perspectives without spending unrealistic amounts of time and energy to bring them up to speed. New perspectives are a great way for long-held assumptions to be questioned or challenged, and this is a challenge for many teams.

WMF product development teams are also lean and multi-disciplinary, and often **comprised of individual domain experts**. Left unchecked, this can often mean that there's a gravitation to trusting expertise without seeking second opinions.

The **speed of work and predisposition to team-wide** discussions as a tool for discourse can make for particularly challenging dynamics for already-marginalized team members to have their voices heard.

Even something as heartening as an **observable cultural emphasis on cohesion**, exhibited throughout many interviews, can inhibit appropriate discourse and dialogue.

While there was no suggestion in the research that this is a unilaterally cohesive organization — degrees of conflict varied by team and there were several mentions of friction or avoidance between teams or with other parts of the broader WMF organization — prioritizing DEI adds additional importance to monitoring and maintaining the intricate balance of surfacing and ensuring **healthy kinds and amounts of team tension**.

Mechanisms needs to be very deliberately built into workflows with explicit norms in order to do so.

Mindsets and cultural shifts are important, but DEI needs to be an act of strategy to be successful.

There was a general tone of introspection around the behavioral and cultural norms that surround product and technology teams, and how they contribute to or impede DEI in the product development process.

While thoughtfulness around behavioral factors are important, they are not a substitute for making necessary and **significant tangible investments and prioritizing resources with rigor** to make consistent forward progress.

There is no shortage of opportunities for the product and technology teams to improve DEI in the product development process. The amount of ideas, interpretations, and potential avenues means rallying the organization around **a clear, shared future vision of the future** of DEI in product will likely be more important in determining its success than the amount of sheer enthusiasm in the departments.