

Designing outreach programs for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples

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Preferred attribution: Mary Beth Sanate, Community Toolkit for Greater Diversity (2019).

[Editor's note: The author of this module refers to those constituencies that have access to the Internet, however tenuous or unreliable, but not the digital literacy or capacity to use it for the purposes of knowledge production and consumption. These constituencies may access Wikipedia but they do not necessarily know that they can contribute to it or that there are economic, social and political benefits to contributing to their own representation on the Internet. Language may pose another barrier. Only those members of ethnic minority groups and indigenous communities who can read and understand a popular language such as English have access to the knowledge on Wikipedia. This module refers to outreach programs targeted at such groups and communities. However, their inclusion will not be feasible unless the groups that are relatively more privileged also undergo similar education.]

The views expressed in this learning module are the author's own. Nevertheless, the module has been heavily edited for clarity, context and readability. "Community Toolkit for Greater Diversity" lays great emphasis on the active participation and undiluted voice of the author of every module. In the case of "Designing outreach programs for ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples" we made the decision to substantively edit the module in favour of better context and readability. To that end, the editor has added several notes in square parentheses. The author has expressly approved the published version of the module.]

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Wikipedia aims to house the sum of all human knowledge, but there are ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples that are underrepresented or unrepresented on the encyclopedia. To bridge this gap, it is essential to create awareness [about their lack of representation] and to create opportunities and avenues for their participation in the Wikimedia movement. To begin with, one should make them understand the advantages and benefits that Wikipedia [in particular] and the Internet [in general] offer. Once they are convinced of the importance and need for making use of the Internet, they will be motivated to contribute to Wikipedia. In turn, Wikipedia will benefit from their participation.

Objectives of the outreach program

An outreach program intended for promoting inclusivity among contributors to Wikipedia and its sister projects should include:

Long-term objectives

- Integrate the information about the Internet with the traditions of indigenous communities and ethnic minority groups. [**Editor's note:** *How a group is represented in easily discoverable information on the Internet, and in turn, in public imagination is tied to ownership of such information. One of the ways to assert ownership of this information is to start an online narrative about social customs, practices and traditions of the community.*]
- Underrepresented groups have access to the Internet. They make use of amenities for accessing it for amplifying their voices.
- Create knowledge on Wikipedia about the art, culture, economy, social customs, social structure, polity, environment-related practices and traditional knowledge of indigenous communities.
- Students make use of Wikipedia as the secondary source of knowledge/information. Access to a vast repository of knowledge free of cost may lead to economic advancement.
- Create a local pool of knowledge resources among second-generation leaders in the community. [**Editor's note:** *Elders possess the most knowledge about the community, its history, practices, culture and so on. However, community leaders in the younger generations are better placed to learn to use and make the most of Wikipedia.*]

Short-term objectives

1. Identify target groups, which may include youth, farmers, bearers of traditional knowledge, women, local entrepreneurs, and survivors of violence and conflict. **[Editor's note:** *Several indigenous peoples face conflict with the government, corporations, state actors or non-state actors from 'mainstream society', often over ownership and control of natural resources. The situation gets compounded in places where prolonged armed conflict occurs. Ethnic minorities may face the same issues.*]
2. Create online avenues for gathering and sharing first-hand stories from the ground about ethnic minorities and indigenous people.
3. Train and build capacity among the primary target group(s) for digital literacy.
4. Conduct advanced training for the target group(s) to produce knowledge about their communities as well as to consume knowledge and information.

Methodology

The methodology to be adopted for conducting the outreach program must be inclusive and based on democratic values and principles. The program should be implemented in a manner that it does not disrupt the harmony and solidarity within an ethnic community and its relations with other ethnic communities. **[Editor's note:** *The topic of ownership of collective knowledge can be sensitive, complex and thorny. Wikimedians should be extremely careful while organising, carrying out and publicising their activities for outreach and engagement with ethnic minorities and indigenous groups. These activities should not result in unintended consequences for the minority/ indigenous group or for the Wikimedians involved.*]

In order to fully engage members of the target group(s):

1. We should make use of simple and familiar technologies [such as affordable devices and popular mobile phone apps], which can be easily understood and applied by the communities. **[Editor's note:** *"We" in this learning module refers to the prospective organisers of the outreach program.*]
2. We could consider residential training [that is, programs that require participants to stay at the site of training for a defined duration].
3. There should be a plan for continual and consistent engagement of the individuals trained at such programs. Such engagement includes field work, online correspondence [with peers and mentors] and short, regular meetings. It ensures that the group of trainees stay informed of the latest developments and updates [regarding outreach, the progress of programs and inclusivity in the Wikimedia movement].
4. The use of online sources of knowledge and information such as Wikipedia can be taught to youth groups who already have access to and make use of the Internet.

5. After completing #3 and #4, a local community of Wikimedians and resource persons needs to be brought together. [via meetups in person, local mailing lists, social media groups with restricted access, *etc.*] In the future, members of the Wikimedia community will act as intermediaries between local indigenous groups/ ethnic minority groups and global communities.
6. Where Internet connectivity is poor or unreliable, alternative ways of accessing the Internet may be explored. [**Editor's note:** *Alternative modes of access may include community-owned network infrastructure.*]
7. We should initiate and run a “community e-information centre”, a resource hub for local ethnic minorities and indigenous groups. In rural areas and villages, the centre should preferably be managed by local Wikimedians trained via the outreach project. The e-information centre may also serve as a marketplace, a platform for discussing the community's issues and promoting its traditional values via media, and so on. [**Editor's note:** *By “community e-information centre”, the author refers to a brick-and-mortar room or kiosk where community members access the Internet for the purpose of consuming and producing knowledge and information. Using the resources at the centre, members may be able to contribute to or make use of Wikipedia and its sister projects.*] It will be a way of bridging the gap between ethnic minority/ indigenous groups and more privileged populations. It will also serve as a process for coping with the trend of development while retaining minorities' economy, culture and tradition.

Preparing the design for the outreach program

- The location and habitation of the ethnic minority or indigenous group should be identified. The group's origin, traditional and current sources of livelihood, way of life, the issues they face, the nature of problems they cope with, their hopes, aspirations, values, interests, beliefs and practices may all be included in the content necessary for the program.
- The factors that are still relevant to the changing situation [in terms of the group's economic status, environmental conditions, the loss of native or indigenous languages and so on] should be clearly spelt out. The community should be actively consulted and informed in determining the way to bridge the gap [so that they may actively access and contribute to] Wikipedia or its sister projects.
- It is necessary to address these two questions: “What are the things ethnic minority/ indigenous communities are forced to cope with? What are the things that the world could learn from people who are underrepresented?”
- Answers to the above questions will also address the knowledge gap between younger generations and older ones, especially the bearers of traditional knowledge. It will also serve as a learning process for all parties involved, a process of equal economic development, peace and justice.

Anticipated impact

The impact of the outreach programs designed in keeping with this learning module could include one or more of the points stated below:

- The primary target group(s) will be equipped with better knowledge and understanding of using the Internet.
- They will be in a position to pass on their newly acquired digital literacy skills and knowledge to other people, including members of their community.
- The community at large will become more aware of their surroundings, environment, ecology and trends in global development via online sources of knowledge and information. Their outlook, worldview, thought processes and learning capacity will broaden, which would positively impact their personalities. They will become enlightened citizens with greater sensibilities and a better understanding of the society and the world they live in.
- Wikipedia, its sister projects, the Wikimedia movement in general, and sources of free and open knowledge will get enriched and improved. It will be a win-win approach.

The way forward

Organising a one-time outreach program should be the beginning and not the end of the process. It may take considerable time for the target group(s) to adopt and apply their newly acquired skills of contributing to free and open knowledge. Learning to make effective use of the Internet while retaining traditional practices and values will definitely take time.

Outreach efforts need the evolution of an “information movement”. One of the prime ways to enable it is to start “community e-information centres”.

Learning and communication will happen via online networking among diverse peoples living in different parts of the world. That may lead to equitable participation in this great venture [of free and open knowledge] and, in turn, greater human development.