Wikipedia:Wikipedia Signpost/2019-09-30/News from the WMF

News from the WMF

How the Wikimedia Foundation is making efforts to go green

By Lydia Hamilton and Deb Tankersley

This article was originally published in Wikimedia Foundation News (https://wikimediafoundation.org/news/2019/09/19/how-the-wikimedia-foundation-is-making-efforts-to-go-green/) and Wikimedia Space (https://space.wmflabs.org/2019/09/24/how-the-wikimedia-foundation-is-making-efforts-to-go-green/). Wikimedia Space is a new project of the Wikimedia Foundation that allows both volunteers and Wikimedia employees to contribute to a news site about the Wikimedia movement. This column in *The Signpost* has previously republished items of interest to our readership from the WMF News site. In the future we expect to republish from either site. —S

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A green city environment (8 October 2015, 10:16:24) by Øyvind Holmstad, CC-BY-SA-4.0

How the Wikimedia Foundation is making efforts to go green

We at the Wikimedia Foundation strive to ensure that our work and mission support a sustainable world.

Today, we are releasing a sustainability assessment that chronicles the total carbon footprint of the Foundation's work and commits us to reducing our emissions.

This plan, over two years in the making, will commit us to becoming more environmentally sustainable and conscious of our environmental impact while we work to make free knowledge available to every human being. You can read the full document on Wikimedia Commons, which holds much of the media used on Wikipedia, and find a short summary of the report below.

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Late last year, the Wikimedia Foundation worked with the Strategic Sustainability Group (http://www.sustainabilityconsulting.com/) to research our current practices with regards to the environment, help establish baselines, and advise on a possible roadmap forward.

The consultation included the environmental impact of all direct spending of the Wikimedia Foundation, including its internet services, office, distributed staff and contractors, travel, and major events. The consultation did not include the impact of indirect spending, such as grant-funded activity, cash investments, or endowment investments; nor did it look at the totality of the Wikimedia movement's emissions.

The sustainability report we've published today details that the Foundation caused approximately 2.1 kilotonnes of CO_2-equivalent impact in the calendar year 2018:

- 56% was due to electricity usage (data centers and other facilities).

- 26% was due to global air travel.

- 11% was due to hotel stays.

- 7% other.

This impact is approximately the same as the emissions of 251 average US homes' energy use for one year, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency's greenhouse gas equivalencies calculator (https://www.epa.gov/energy/greenhouse-gas-equivalencies-calculator).

What are some of the environmental strengths of the Foundation?

- We are making best efforts to ensure our servers run on sustainable energy and using simple technical architecture when effective, as aligned with our privacy and non-commercialization values. **This means that Wikipedia and the Wikimedia projects (https://wikimediafoundation.org/our-work/wikimedia-projects/) are sustained with approximately one-thousandth the amount of servers of comparable volume websites.**

- Green building features are already in place through property management.

- Wide remote workforce policies and practices, with an office location in an urban area with lots of public transit options; moreover, our many remote workers had half the carbon impact of those in San Francisco, numbers which were very low relative to comparable organizations.

- Our paperless policy and wide use of cloud-based workflows reduces impact

- Telecommuting is already a core part of the internal culture.

- There is strong enthusiasm across the organization, including in senior leadership, for exploring sustainability impacts and opportunities.

What are some of the environmental opportunities for Foundation?

- Explore hosting more virtual meetings and events, rather than in-person.

- Explore carbon offsets as a way to reduce overall carbon footprint in our data centers.

- Engage stakeholders across all channels: employees are eager to learn more and get involved. How can we coordinate action with the wider communities and volunteers?

What are the next steps for the Foundation?

- Create a sustainability policy statement, definition, and context of what sustainability means.

- Develop a sustainability framework with roles and responsibilities, including operations, events, and technical infrastructure.

- Identify and track green key performance indicators. Create a reporting template and schedule for aggregating, validating and communication of results.

For more information about the Wikimedia Foundation's sustainability efforts, please see our presentation of the report at Wikimania 2019 (https://wikimania.wikimedia.org/wiki/2019:Environme ntal_sustainability/Wikimedia_Foundation:_What_we%27ve_learned_about_environmental_sustaina bility), the annual conference which brings together the community of volunteers who make Wikipedia and the Wikimedia projects possible. You can also ask us a question on the discussion page at meta:Talk:Sustainability.

Lydia Hamilton, Director of Operations, Operations
Deb Tankersley, Program Manager, Technology
Wikimedia Foundation

+ Add a comment (https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?editintro=Wikipedia:Wikip edia_Signpost/Templates/Comment-editnotice&title=Wikipedia_talk:Wikipedia_Sig npost/2019-09-30/News_from_the_WMF&action=edit&preload=Wikipedia:Signpo st/Templates/Signpost-article-comments-end/preload)

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This reads as recycled promotional spin and a puff piece for the WMF rather than a real Signpost article. The WMF CEO is literally famous for being an international travel consumer. "The executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation was on road 200 days last year." Nat Geographic (https://www.nationalgeo graphic.com/travel/features/far-and-away/globalist-katherine-maher/)

When asked about this recently on Twitter, Katherine failed to make any commitment to reducing her (or her executive team's) international flight consumption. It is noticeable that there is no indication in this report as to whether air travel consumption by the WMF management team went up or down as an annual trend, instead just counting an estimated total percentage of energy consumption based on (presumably) self reporting by survey. Telecommuting may be mentioned, but it is weird and contradictory to have a

CEO actively promoted and lauded as a hero for spending 200 days on the road rather than making any actual measurable commitment to picking up a telephone, holding a video conference, or holding a VR conference session, and thus making a few more aircraft flights unnecessary, slightly more often this year than last year.

With regard to getting volunteers to ask questions on Meta, did that 10 days ago, but the WMF's well known established routine is to avoid answering any tricky questions and respond with radio silence (as evidenced by the fact that *not a single one of the many questions raised by volunteers on the discussion page* linked in the article have been replied to by any WMF employee).

This is virtue signaling, as was piggy backing on the Climate Change Strike on the WMF website last week. It's a jolly good idea to deliver something meaningful and measurable before waving flags about how great we are. Thanks! --Fæ (talk) 11:20, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

> This ++ Maury Markowitz (talk) 11:27, 30 September 2019 (UTC)
>
>> I have not seen any calculation of how much net CO_2 consumption is produced, or prevented, by the WMF's distributed staff model. Somewhere else (last issue?) I read that over 50% of the staff telecommutes, including the chief of staff. If the consequence is that one executive travels a lot, maybe that actually saves on emissions? Without more information I wouldn't leap to condemning the air travel – at least not because of emissions alone. - Bri.public (talk) 17:47, 30 September 2019 (UTC)
>>
>>> +1, Bri.public. We are carbon based life forms, designed to communicate in real life. When on-wiki communication becomes problematic, meeting in person becomes even more important. Optimizing for both carbon impact and an effective organization will require ongoing adjustments. Granting sufficient time off for long-distance train travel might be part of the process. Oliveleaf4 (talk) 14:43, 6 October 2019 (UTC)

Highlighted on the Meta discussion page is the fact that the *2017* WMF:Resolution:Environmental Impact made an official board level commitment to publish an environmental impact statement from the 2018 annual plan onwards. Volunteers have yet to find any evidence that this happened. --Fæ (talk) 12:48, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

I was surprised to learn that Wikimania Sweden 2019 still didn't offer remote presentations, as I had something very valuable to share but was not really willing to emit so much CO2 just to get there (nor to Wikimania Thailand on 2020). The Wikimedia Movement has usually been quite visionary and ahead of its time, but so far in sustainability matters, we're still behind. On the bright side, I was thrilled to learn about the Sustainability Initiative! Sophivorus (talk) 19:11, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

Are there any 100% remote companies larger than GitLab? 73.222.1.26 (talk) 19:31, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

- I'm glad to see Fæ alluding to what was being reported in *The Signpost* almost exactly a year ago but for which the articles were met with some warped criticism for misogyny. It doesn't matter what gender a Wikipedia executive director is, their traditional failure to meet serious issues and constitutional crises head on is well known. It's the stuff of heads of state and prime ministers: empty promises or blatant evasion, and their carbon footprint and

apparent working altitude remain high - on taxpayers' and/or donors' money. Kudpung กุดผึ้ง (talk) 19:57, 30 September 2019 (UTC)

Hello! We've posted answers to many of these questions on the Sustainability talk page (https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Talk:Sustainability); please continue the conversation there. Thanks! DTankersley (WMF) (talk) 16:11, 1 October 2019 (UTC)

- This is ridiculous propaganda. Contrast with the recent action of WMF flying about 35 people halfway around the world to have a group discussion that could have been handled via internet tools. This included a self-righteous "protest" against climate change by the participants (clenched fists aloft!) in what appears from the photograph taken to be the lobby of a resort hotel in Tunis. Fix this sort of crap, then talk. And don't ever brag. Carrite (talk) 16:43, 2 October 2019 (UTC)

- Lydia Hamilton and m:User:DTankersley (WMF)should be ashamed of themselves for concocting such a typical piece of fact evasion. Did they learn how to do this on a course for political candidates? More disturbing is the WMF's flat out refusal to provide details of flights by WMF staff. Kudpung กุดผึ้ง (talk) 08:14, 3 October 2019 (UTC)

Wikipedia's positive impact on environmental issues far out weighs its carbon footprint. To begin with, one might quantify its impact on the market for paper encyclopedias and other reference works: fewer trees cut down, less paper making, printing and distribution impacts. But far more important is Wikipedia impact in providing a source of fact based information on climate and other environmental issues, where public debate (at least in the U.S.) has been poisoned by highly politicized positions on both sides (it's a socialist plot on the right, we're all gonna die on the left). Rather than spending WikiMedia's limited resources on projects that will have at best an infinitesimal impact on the world's environment, I suggest the foundation redouble its effort on Wikipedia's core mission which can have a significant net effect.

Specifically, there are a huge number of articles in Category:Renewable energy by country, and its subcategories, along with their non-English counterparts. Many of these articles were written with great enthusiasm years ago and filled with data on the then current situation in their locale (down to individual states in the U.S.), but may no longer reflect what is happening now. Finding ways to encourage regular updates of these articles would be far more useful than micro-analyzing Wikimedia's utility bills. Wikimedia might, for example, develop grants to encourage university programs in environmental science to adopt articles dealing with their geographic area, and update them whenever new statistics are published. Another possibility would be to work with Wikidata to develop standard templates for environmental data that could be transcluded in articles in different languages. I'm sure there are lots of other possibilities. The potential impact of better coverage of environmental issues on Wikipedia would exceed the impact of marginal changes in Wikipedia's office practices by orders of magnitude.--agr (talk) 21:31, 3 October 2019 (UTC)

> This is a weird way of using whataboutism. The Wikimedia executive team is literally famous for being large consumers of air travel, as the sources demonstrate. Being committed to reducing that number of flights (whatever it is) rather than increasing them from one year to the next, is a perfectly fine *operational choice* that the WMF management team or the WMF board of trustees could make today to meaningfully back up its political choice to join the Climate Strike, without any impact on updating articles. --Fæ (talk) 11:30, 4 October 2019 (UTC)

>> Wikimedia activities should be evaluated on their effectiveness in advancing the goal of free knowledge, not on how many air miles they generate. Of course electronic

communications should be encouraged wherever suitable, but if it takes air travel to get better coverage of environmental issues, say, then I'd rather staff fly than shift their focus to less useful activities just because those activities don't require travel..--agr (talk)

I heartily agree with agr that the most effective action our movement can take is to improve our article content. Our articles on climate change mitigation issues are woefully outdated. Personally I'd emphasize trying to improve our articles that cover issues from a global perspective. E.g. one thing we badly need is for editors to read the IPCC's Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C and use it as a source for articles, essentially taking that tome and transforming its messages into the basis of understandable encyclopedia articles. Clayoquot (talk | contribs) 17:03, 4 October 2019 (UTC)

Eh paper encyclopedias are technically carbon sequestration. The other problem is that by the time you go down to the reader level you need to factor in the carbon footprint of their viewing devices. While yes there will be some low powered solar stuff somewhere there is someone using an overlocked FX series CPU and a couple of vega 64s to view the thing.©Geni (talk) 16:35, 5 October 2019 (UTC)

Uncited, uncalculated, and very, very unlikely. Greenwashing feelgoodism at its lowest.Qwirkle (talk) 18:28, 6 October 2019 (UTC)

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