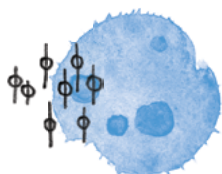# Crowdsourcing Expertise:

A Working Guide for Organizing a Wikipedia
Edit-a-thon at a Science Conference

SCIENCE | Simons Foundation
SANDBOX

Crowdsourcing Expertise:

A Working Guide for Organizing a Wikipedia
Edit-a-thon at a Science Conference
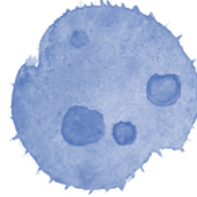
Table of Contents

Making a Wikipedia Edit-a-thon Happen

At a Science Conference

In a conference packed with hard-science sessions, there may not initially be an obvious place for a Wikipedia edit-a-thon in the program. However, these events can work well as part of a science communication or public engagement track. Geoff Hunt, public outreach coordinator for the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB), organized an edit-a-thon at the ASBMB 2016 Annual Meeting:

> "Thanks to the efforts of its Public Outreach Committee," he says, "the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology (ASBMB) regularly hosts outreach-themed sessions at our annual meeting, including communication training workshops and an outreach-themed poster session. Upon being approached by the Simons Foundation about the possibility of running a biochemistry and molecular biology-themed Wikipedia edit-a-thon session at our 2016 annual meeting, the society quickly arranged for the event to be added to the ASBMB meeting agenda."

Hunt included the edit-a-thon in ASBMB's Game Night session, which included opportunities for networking and sharing science trivia.

Similarly, the American Geophysical Union (AGU) organized an edit-a-thon as part of their Sharing Science program. Sharing Science aims to equip scientists with the tools they need to make their work accessible to a general audience.

Somewhere Other Than a Science Conference

Although science conferences proved most efficient for the Year of Science campaign, there are a number of viable settings to host an edit-a-thon, from the Guggenheim Museum in New York City to local public libraries.

An obvious venue for scientists, students, and educators are colleges and universities.

If you have access to the internet and space to sit and work, you have the foundational tools to organize an edit-a-thon.

Marketing an Event

Newsletters/E-blasts

For science conference edit-a-thons, people already planning to attend the conference are obviously essential marketing targets. News about the event should go out in organization newsletters, be included in content related to the meeting (e.g., the meeting program, reminder emails, etc.) and be featured on organization- and meeting-related blogs.

The first priority of any marketing effort should be to target facilitators. The importance of securing facilitators is explained in Section IV of this guide, but here is an example from a bi-weekly email digest organized by the American Society for Cell Biology (ASCB). We hosted a pilot Year of Science edit-a-thon at their December 2015 Annual Meeting:

Example 1

> **Seeking facilitators for Wikipedia edit-a-thon**
> ASCB is looking for experienced Wikipedia editors to serve as facilitators at our Wikipedia edit-a-thon at the annual meeting in San Diego, December 12-16. Facilitators will receive free registration to the entire ASCB meeting. If you are interested, please email [CONTACT; EMAIL ADDRESS] with some information about your interest and experience with Wikipedia. [EVENT PAGE]. Refreshments will be available.

To register facilitators, one can simply collect names via email or create a Google form, like this one, to streamline the process.

Once you have secured facilitators, the focus should shift to attracting as many attendees as possible:

Example 2

> **Help us edit Wikipedia on December 13**
> Please join us on December 13, any time between 8:00 a.m.- 12:00 p.m. at the San Diego Convention Center in Room 31A to improve the cell biology content on Wikipedia. No Wikipedia experience required; there will be facilitators on site to assist you. Just bring your own laptop! For more information visit: [EVENT PAGE]. Refreshments will be available.

As referenced in that example, an event page should be created and should include all essential information (a brief description, time, location, etc.). Any marketing materials should link to this page. For guidance, this is the event page from our edit-a-thon at the American Society of Plant Biologists conference.

It's important to note that attendance tends to be more robust when the event is marketed as a 'drop-in' session. Most edit-a-thons are roughly two to four hours long, but potential attendees should be encouraged to join for however long they can.

Social Media

Outreach efforts on Twitter and other social media channels are mandatory. At science conferences, there is often a designated conference hashtag (e.g., #AGU16), and it's important to include this hashtag in all posts. Below are some #YearofScience tweets:

Before the Session

AAAS Annual Meeting
@AAASmeetings

Learn how to edit Wikipedia pages at #AAASmtg. **Use your expertise to help improve scientific information online:** meetings.aaas.org/wikipedia?utm_ …

For Recruiting Facilitators

Am Geophysical Union
@theAGU

Have you edited #Wikipedia **before? Want FREE** #AGU16 **registration? Sign up to be a facilitator for our edit-a-thon!** ow.ly/Haqs305DURq

During the Session

Jessica Polka
@jessicapolka

Just created this article at the #ASMMicrobe2016 **wikipedia edit-a-thon! Join us now until 12:15, SW lobby lvl2** en.wikipedia.org/wiki/R_bodies

Posts made while the edit-a-thon is happening are especially effective. Conference attendees browsing their social media accounts and looking for their next session are often eager to drop in. It can also be useful to create an event-specific hashtag to centralize all attendee tweets (e.g., #AAASwiki).

3.

Involving the
Wikipedia Community

One of the most common misconceptions about organizing an edit-a-thon is that you have to be a Wikipedia expert (or even a casual editor) to do it. These events can certainly be organized by beginners, and the Wikipedia community is an incredible resource for getting started.

Lane Rasberry, Wikipedian-in-residence at Consumer Reports, provided invaluable support for Year of Science edit-a-thons. Below is his advice for engaging with Wikipedia content experts:

Wikimedia Chapters and WikiProjects

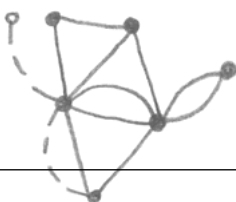"Various sorts of Wikipedia editors organize as groups and can be helpful points of contact. The Wikimedia chapters in various cities and countries have local membership to develop Wikipedia articles in their regional languages. Other groups, called WikiProjects, have international membership but meet online according to subject matter interest. WikiProjects in the sciences include Medicine, Chemistry, Mathematics and others. Anyone wishing to share information in Wikipedia should consider contacting whatever local meetup and online WikiProject seems relevant. In the United States, the chapter in New York City can be emailed at wm-nyc@wikimedia.org for further referral to friendly groups throughout the U.S. and beyond."

For several 2016 Year of Science edit-a-thons, members of local Wikimedia chapters came to the event, providing an additional layer of support, and in many cases gave a brief overview of best editing practices.

Requesting Support from Wikipedia Editors

"Wikipedia's editors are available by request to provide support and make new users more welcome to contribute to articles. Start the request for support by contacting a Wikipedia editor. Tell them what kind of articles you intend to edit, what sources you intend to cite, and whether your project will be a one-time check-in or whether contributors will be around to accept feedback and questions. Wikipedians will ask the questions necessary to set you on your way. Some of the services available include help setting up accounts, library reference services to identify sources, technical support with editing, community feedback on writing, and audience metrics reporting. Find Wikipedians for conversation by registering an account and navigating the help forums online."

On Wikipedia, the help forums can be found here.

4.

Logistics:
Your Event is Here; Now What?

<div style="border:1px solid black; display:inline-block; padding:4px">The Importance of Facilitators</div>

In Section II, we detailed some effective methods for recruiting facilitators. Here's why having facilitators at your event is important:

Who they are:
Facilitators are typically moderate-to-heavy editors of Wikipedia. For edit-a-thons at science conferences, they are usually already planning to attend the conference.

What they do:
They get general attendees started on Wikipedia. This ranges from creating accounts, directing them to useful, quick editing tutorials, and guiding them through those first few edits. Their job is to make their fellow attendees feel comfortable enough to get started. In some cases, they give a brief best editing practices overview to begin the session. Whereas most attendees should be encouraged to drop in and out of the event according to their schedule, facilitators should stay for the duration.

What we gave facilitators:
For the 2016 Year of Science edit-a-thons, the Simons Foundation offered to cover the cost of conference registration for those willing to serve as facilitators. This proved quite effective, but if the resources aren't there, don't worry — we encountered several volunteers willing to do it for free.

How many you need:
It depends on how experienced your facilitators are and how many people you anticipate attending. As a general rule of thumb, we recommend one facilitator per every 10 attendees.

<div style="border:1px solid black; display:inline-block; padding:4px">What Should People Edit?</div>

Potential attendees may be discouraged from participating in an edit-a-thon because they don't know what pages to edit. It's important to start with a central theme, and at science conferences, that theme is obviously inherent (cell biology, geophysics, etc.). When it comes to specific pages, there are several ways to get started:

Start with your area of research or interest, and go from there:
Within a given area of study, there will almost certainly be pages that need to be improved, or even created. Do some digging: there are Wikipedia resources like this one to get started.

Create a list of pages ahead of time (or have a facilitator do it):
At the AGU 2016 edit-a-thon, one of our facilitators, Wikipedia user RockMagnetist, created a list of geophysics articles and resources on Wikipedia. Of course, similar lists can be generated on other platforms.

Start with a (female) scientist:
One of the major focuses of the Year of Science has been closing the gender gap on Wikipedia. Female scientists are dramatically underrepresented on Wikipedia — contribute to closing that gap by creating a new female scientist entry.

Necessities and Bonuses

WiFi and Audio/Video:
Of course, you need access to the internet to edit Wikipedia. Beyond that, there should be plenty of power outlets so that people can charge their laptops, especially if they're planning to stay for the entire event.

Space:
A closed room is preferred, but Year of Science edit-a-thons have been hosted in exhibit halls and makeshift breakout spaces. Any space should have seating and tables, and be at least relatively quiet. Round tables are preferred for collaboration, but most setups will do.
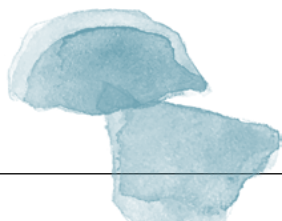
A Point Person for Every Event:
Someone who can coordinate IT problems, greet and direct facilitators, welcome attendees, etc. should be on site for the duration of the event.

Food:
Although it's not essential, it is often useful to provide food and beverages at the event. We've offered refreshments ranging from coffee and pastries to beer and nachos. It doesn't have to be much, but a little goes a long way.

Giveaways:
If you have t-shirts, buttons, copies of magazines, leave them for attendees to take. People will most definitely take them.

Potential Roadblocks

Timing:

Although an event can be held at any time, it's best to avoid scheduling an edit-a-thon against any 'blockbuster' sessions at science conferences. We've found that 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. start times produce the most attendance, especially if paired with lunch.

Managing Accounts:

If too many users (more than six) try to create an account from the same IP address, they could be blocked out. To avoid this, it's useful to encourage people to create accounts ahead of the event. You should also request account user rights. Once you're granted these rights, users can register via your account. If you run into trouble, Wiki experts are available online to assist you in real time.

5.

Measuring Impact

The Wiki Education Foundation Dashboard Tool

To capture metrics such as the total number of attendees, how many articles the group edited or created, and how many times the articles are viewed, a [Wiki Education Foundation Dashboard page](#) should be created. [Here is an example](#) from a particularly successful Year of Science edit-a-thon. Before anyone starts editing, they should be registered on the event's dashboard page.

Below, the Wiki Education Foundation team explains why the dashboard tool is effective:

Why They Built It

"The Wiki Education Foundation built its Dashboard to assist instructors who incorporate Wikipedia assignments into their classroom. It functions as a management tool to log students' usernames and activity on Wikipedia, which is crucial both for staff support and grading. In the spirit of the Wikipedia community's collaboration and openness, Wiki Ed partnered with the Wikimedia Foundation to develop an instance of the Dashboard that is global across all languages and Wikimedia projects."

Utility for Edit-a-thons

"The Program & Events Dashboard (P&E Dashboard) serves as a tool for event organizers in the Wikipedia community. The P&E Dashboard is optimal for organizers of edit-a-thons to document outcomes of an event. Any logged-in user can create a program and use it as a meet-up page for attendees. Organizers can use this program homepage to offer advice to new editors, list articles that need improvement, or link to Wikipedia help pages. With an enrollment link, attendees easily log their usernames as participants. They can assign articles to work on, review others' work, and see the cumulative impact to Wikipedia during the event."

Beyond Tracking Metrics

"Within the Dashboard, edit-a-thon participants can access online training modules about Wikipedia-editing. The trainings cover everything from Wikipedia essentials and editing basics to evaluating sources, editing medical topics, and avoiding plagiarism and copyright violations. Edit-a-thon organizers may assign a few of the modules as a starting point at the event, giving attendees some background on how Wikipedia works and how they can participate."

Social Media and Follow-up

Encourage all of your attendees to post on social media (why do they value Wikipedia? What did they work on during the event?). As mentioned in Section II, an event-specific hashtag will centralize all attendee posts, providing instant feedback. After the event, consider reaching out to a facilitator or attendee and asking them to write a blog post or something relevant to you or your organization.

6.

What's Next?

Reaching Students and Sharing Knowledge

Hosting a successful edit-a-thon can have immediate and lasting results for science students and educators around the world. But sustaining momentum once the event is over can be tricky. Below is the Wiki Education Foundation on their classroom model, and how you can contribute, long-term, to the wider distribution of scientific knowledge:

"Wikipedia's immense popularity makes it a powerful platform for the dissemination of science information. It's also an ideal place for students to familiarize themselves with scientific concepts while training to become science communicators. That's why hundreds of higher education instructors assign students to write Wikipedia articles as part of their coursework. Instead of writing a paper that gets thrown away at the end of the term, students research and write about course topics while contributing to a resource millions of people read every day.

When it comes to scientific literacy, undergraduates are in a unique position. They're studying advanced science and understand the jargon of their field, but they're still connected to those who don't, and remember what it's like. The challenge of explaining what they've come to learn (not just for an exam, but to really be understood) makes them ideal candidates for bridging the gap between dense academic scholarship and a curious public.

Teaching with Wikipedia transforms a classroom's boundaries. Every day, students write papers, translate articles, or share photos with their class. Wikipedia assignments change the classroom into a global audience. Students learn, and then share that learning in their own words, for real readers.

A traditional assignment looks like this: An instructor asks students to write a paper. They'll go to the library or online, find quality sources, and report back what they've learned for a teacher who already knows. Wikipedia adds a twist. The student learns about her topic, but also practices communicating that learning with the public. In the process, she encounters questions she may not have considered on her own and practices reframing what she has learned.

Students have delivered thousands of well-sourced articles on important science topics to Wikipedia, including many that had previously been overlooked. They're written by students studying the topic, and overseen by faculty members who are experts in their field. Students critically assess existing content, identify what's missing, and fill gaps with clear language cited to reliable sources. Along the way, they gain crucial science communication skills and millions of readers get access to clear, reliable science information. It's a win-win.

The Wiki Education Foundation (Wiki Ed) is a nonprofit organization that helps instructors teach with Wikipedia. It isn't connected to Wikipedia, but values it as the world's most-viewed source for information, and wants that information to be safe, reliable, and trustworthy. By helping instructors and students, it helps to fill content gaps — like those in the sciences — on Wikipedia.

Wiki Ed provides several kinds of support for classes working on Wikipedia:

- assignment design guidelines based on our experience supporting hundreds of classes
- online training to introduce students to Wikipedia policies and procedures
- printed handbooks offering advice for students and instructors
- staff support by phone, email, and video during the term for students and instructors
- metrics about student edits, including the amount of content added and pageviews their articles receive

If you're interested in teaching with Wikipedia, visit https://teach.wikiedu.org or reach out to Wiki Ed at contact@wikiedu.org."