

# Opportunities for Public Libraries and Wikipedia



## IFLA

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We work to improve access to information and cultural heritage resources for the global community in this rapidly changing digital and print environment. Our key initiatives include access to digital content, international leadership, outreach, cultural heritage, and multilingualism.

In our professional programmes we build the capacity of our members, and set the professional agenda through development of guidelines, standards, publications and events around the world.

IFLA's status as the global organisation for library and information services ensures that our voice is represented through formal relations with the United Nations and other organisations.



## The Wikipedia Library

The [Wikipedia Library](#) (TWL) focuses on how to improve Wikipedia's role in the research ecosystem. This started with helping Wikipedia's volunteer editors access reliable sources to improve Wikipedia, and has since expanded to support other kinds of reference access and public engagement. As part of this mission, TWL helps knowledge professionals fruitfully share their collections with the public and engage with Wikipedia and other Wikimedia projects. The Wikipedia Library is funded by the non-profit [Wikimedia Foundation](#).

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## Executive Summary

Wikipedia is a powerful tool for public libraries, especially in parts of the world where access to other resources is cost-prohibitive: it supplements library resources with timely, useful information; acts as a tool for librarians answering reference questions; provides a pathway to primary and secondary sources and citations; helps library clients perform research; and provides a vital platform for recording local knowledge, in local languages, not typically supported by the larger research and publishing industry.

Experiments within existing communities suggest that by engaging in Wikipedia, public libraries can expose both their staff and patrons to more complex and sophisticated strategies for dealing with the changing digital landscape. Public libraries and their supporting networks would greatly benefit from a strategy for engaging with Wikipedia. Wikipedia strategies could also serve other library needs, encouraging engagement with a key 21st-century resource for education and learning, providing a model for developing and teaching complex digital literacy skills, and creating a venue for sharing local cultural heritage with a wider audience. These opportunities are even more present in the context of the developing world, where libraries have become de facto access points for digital information yet may not have capacity or resources to invest in digital tools.

Equally, Wikipedia has the potential to point clients to libraries, where resources in their areas of interest can be found. Wikipedia-library engagement connects Wikipedia with the important role libraries play in bridging inequalities in access to information, while also being a source for local and regional knowledge and resource discovery.

## Introduction

Libraries and librarians have long been the facilitators of access to knowledge and information around the world. With the rise of the Internet, online resources have become an additional library reference resource, and libraries have been at the forefront of integrating digital resources and services into their operations. In addition to resources provided by libraries, many reference questions can be resolved through easy-to-access websites on the internet. With the help of skilled librarians and teachers, individuals can acquire the media and information literacy skills needed to select and use online resources effectively. Of the vast choice of online sources, only a fraction have maintained the commitment to neutrality, free and open access, and general public good embraced by libraries. One of these aligned projects is Wikipedia.

In a world of information overload, librarians are references heroes: they have research expertise, and Wikimedia projects need that expertise. Moreover, many libraries want to have connections to local users who are eager for knowledge. Wikipedia can be used as a tool for libraries for engaging with local communities of knowledge seekers. If social media is about talking with engaged learners, Wikipedia is a great way to start collaborating with them.

Early interactions between library communities and Wikipedia were sometimes antagonistic, with many librarians doubting Wikipedia's reliability and authority. This relationship has evolved into active collaboration following a few changes: Wikipedia's content improvement over time, together with its increasing importance as a general interest resource and as an academic research tool. How did this collaboration emerge? Library communities from around the world have begun engaging with Wikipedia, as a teaching tool, as a means of disseminating knowledge, and as a central part of the internet research ecosystem.

If Wikipedia is a virtual (online) door to knowledge, while libraries have been a real door (offline), the two communities should work together to provide new levels of access to information to humanity.

To meet this mission, one can focus on the following strategies:

- Provide information to librarians on how to integrate Wikipedia into the daily work of a library
- Share the Wikimedia movement's philosophy and strategies with librarians (i.e. collaborative work, knowledge sharing and open access to the results of this work)
- Help volunteers contribute alongside networks of libraries or cultural institutions to encourage participation in the creation of open data and promotion of open access
- Promote digital literacy among patrons
- Promote the spread of local content related to the region and to library's specific knowledge (for libraries with thematic holdings)
- Train librarians and broader communities about copyright and free licensing with tools like Creative Commons.

## Opportunities: Model projects

The GLAM-Wiki initiative (**G**alleries, **L**ibraries, **A**rchives and **M**useums with Wikipedia) helps cultural institutions share their resources with the world through high-impact collaboration alongside experienced Wikipedia editors. It provides unparalleled opportunity for the custodians of our cultural heritage to present their collections to new audiences. Wikipedia gets hundreds of millions of pageviews per day, has more than 280 language versions, and includes more than 40 million articles. Its content is created and maintained by thousands of dedicated volunteer “Wikipedians” around the globe. From this collective effort, many members of the public, from academic researchers to medical students, amateur genealogists to young students, use Wikipedia to find information and resources.

Collaboration with this vast community can be an open and adaptive initiative, where every public library takes advantage of its own unique characteristics: environment, staff, users, etc. Here you can discover some recommended projects or activities, like Wikipedia edit-a-thons, editing trainings, or routes to document your city. Among all possible collaborations, each public library can choose the one that best suits their context. From the simplest to organize, as a small Wikipedia editing workshop, to the most complex, as photographing and cataloging the monuments of the local town or uploading public domain materials from the library’s collection, every library can choose its way of interacting with Wikipedia depending on their availabilities/desires/goals and their related communities. These efforts work especially well when library networks organize shared initiatives -- that way the burden of organizing materials and developing experience with programming for Wikimedia projects doesn’t fall on the individual library’s staff.

The GLAM-Wiki community has organized various types of outreach events, each meant for a specific audience and each with a specific purpose. These include GLAM-Wiki conferences directed at GLAM professionals, GLAMCamp workshops that bring together Wikipedians for coordination efforts, and other outreach events, such as Edit-a-Thons and Backstage Passes, that are often specific to a singular institution.

Libraries around the world have found success partnering with the Wikimedia community on a wide range of projects, that fulfil a number of goals. The following sections highlight these opportunities:

### Creating and transforming digital audiences

- **Creating new customers and services:** Wikipedia’s philosophy connects with an essential goal of libraries: to share knowledge and to protect its transmission. Therefore, librarians can obtain training and resources to be exposed to new opportunities offered by digital platforms, such as broad public collaboration. Library employees are learning to collaborate in library units away from public engagement.
- **Basic Wikipedia workshops:** Normally run by a local volunteer, in some cases run by librarians, a library can organize public workshops which engage its communities and local Wikimedia organizations in how to write on and use Wikipedia. It is a good

way for starting a small community of editors, with usually one workshop per semester or trimester.

- **Information literacy:** Wikipedia is a massive continuing education platform. Librarians can design and conduct activities to educate a range of users on how to evaluate and use Wikipedia for their own purposes. Libraries often offer basic digital skills courses, including to retired people. Understanding how to use and contribute to Wikimedia offers the opportunity for people to share information about their local area while learning how digital collaboration technologies work. Libraries could include Wikipedia editing and Commons uploading as activities within their courses. Public librarians can also include "how to use Wikipedia" in their basic educational group visits to the library, as a way of strengthening critical evaluation of digital sources. When a school visits the library, they teach how to look for information at their computers and on Wikipedia.
- **Wiki reading clubs:** Many public libraries have book clubs. An innovation is asking one of the readers to improve the Wikipedia page of the writer or the novel and show it to the rest of the group of readers on their next meeting -- and also benefit the wider public with quality information about that book.
- **Favourite writer:** A public library chooses a favorite local living writer and works with volunteers to write articles related to that author. This connects writers more intimately with the library, encouraging them to then engage with the library in other activities. This strategy has been popular in Catalonia.

## Content outreach

- **Local edit-a-thons:** Public libraries are the best at promoting local content and engaging with local communities. Even small libraries often have unique collections on local history. When organizing an edit-a-thon, local Wikimedia communities can frequently contribute by sending a volunteer trainer and the library looks for the rest of the attendees.
- **Wikipedian in residence:** A Wikipedian in Residence works with a specific GLAM to examine and execute ways that institutions can broaden content on Wikimedia in relation to their collections — without compromising the mission and visions of either. When resources aren't available for one institution to hire a Wikimedian in Residence, coalitions or networks of organizations can hire the Wikipedian, for example the [York Museum Trust](#) or at the [Metropolitan New York City Library Council](#). In some communities, volunteers are able to fulfil these extensive liaison roles.
- **Digitisation:** Many libraries may have rarer collections of material that would get a large audience on Wikimedia, but they may lack the skills, equipment and money to digitise it. One opportunity would be to do a joint digitisation project, perhaps through grant funding or with organizations, like Internet Archive, to digitise materials from libraries and make it available to a worldwide audience through Wikimedia projects. Similarly, Wikimedia communities can help train volunteers in skills important to digitization such as copyright clearance and description, as well as a platform for sharing those digital materials in Wikimedia Commons.

- **[Wiki takes your town](#)**: The Wiki Loves Monuments campaign works to document, through photography, the heritage monuments in every country in the world. This project has created heritage lists, which can be easily used to organize "out of the library" activities, where small teams take a photo scavenger hunt of heritage buildings around the community. Photo opportunities are not limited to officially recognized heritage sites. Photos of City Hall, the library building, the town square, bridges, railroad stations, etc. may be used to illustrate Wikipedia articles on any municipality, large or small. Afterwards Wikimedia volunteers can help with the upload procedure on Wiki Commons, so that images can be used to illustrate Wikipedia.
- **Multilingual cooperation**: Wikipedia is an international community and with Wikipedia's more than 280 languages there is an entire world to reach out to in regards to your content! For more details, see the [Engaging a different language or cultural community How-To Guide](#). Many smaller Wikipedias have very few editors, so sometimes building skills for a few editors in diaspora or immigrant communities will greatly expand the impact of that language Wikipedia.

## Librarians editing Wikipedia

- **Write**. Wikipedia is never finished, and GLAM content is no exception. Institutions, artists, writers, and local history or special collection topics can all have articles written about them. Some of these articles already exist and need to be improved, while other topics need to be created from scratch.
- **Translate**. Articles on many topics relevant to your library's patrons may only exist in a single language, often English. Ideally, readers should be able to access information on any topic in their own language—content related to the [Musée d'Orsay](#), for example, should be available in [Standard Chinese](#) and [Hindi](#), not just French and English. If you are fluent or familiar with multiple languages, why not try doing some translation work?
- **Upload**. No Wikimedia content is truly complete without images and other media. Share images of older works in your collection that have never had high-quality, freely-licensed photographs created of them.
- **Distribute**. Larger institutions often upload thousands of media files to Wikimedia Commons at a time, but these efforts can go to waste unless the reader actually sees the content. Whenever files are uploaded, the community needs diligent users to find places in which the new material can be used effectively.
- **Transcribe**. When older documents are digitized, it is not always possible for their contents to be transcribed automatically. The Wikisource community provides an excellent opportunity to bring digitized document images into rich, computer and human transcribed digital documents. Maintaining an accurate and complete online record of digitized documents can greatly improve the availability and accessibility of information, particularly for researchers and content editors. The Wikisource community also provides the digitally transcribed documents for integration into digital libraries in multiple formats including EPUBS and PDFs.

## GLAM partnerships

- **Partnering your local GLAM community:** Working in Wikimedia environs allows libraries to connect with other GLAMS in physical ways (getting in touch with archivist and museum workers and planning activities in different places) and in the digital way (sharing the technological framework). Furthermore, libraries can digitize and make available to citizens a vast heritage of written and graphic culture, and connect them with the collections of related institutions. Beyond the printed and written culture, they can collect, digitize and preserve other cultural heritages, such as oral tradition and local culture which inform further research.
- **[QRpedia](#):** QRpedia provides multilingual QR codes which point to all of the available language versions of a Wikipedia article. Some libraries have coordinated collaboration with the local tourism board to organize contests or events to better document and translate local heritage buildings on Wikipedia and later on printed QRpedia codes around the town.
- **Librarian trains a Librarian:** The shared benefit of the library community of understanding and learning about Wikipedia has led to significant interest for more training amongst librarians. The Wikimedia community finds that Wiki-Librarians get a lot of value from teaching and training their colleagues at other libraries, providing professional development and valuable conversations about topics like copyright, free and open knowledge, and collaborative publishing practices.
- **Leading a local Wikiproject:** Some librarians have coordinated “WikiProjects” to document the history, people, culture and economy of their town or community. These kinds of projects lend themselves to systematic collaboration with other educational and information communities in the local context.

## Considerations and tips

- **Outreach without extra budget:** Public libraries don’t need extra budget or extra staff to be involved with Wikipedia. Instead of investing in big projects, best practice is to integrate a small Wikipedia layer into existing work. Wikipedia is a long-term project: small actions add up to huge impact, and creating experience on smaller projects, makes it easier to create bigger projects. Small projects might include bibliographic guides, book clubs, local collection surveys or digital literacy.
- **Once you edit, you are a Wikimedian:** There are various degrees of familiarity with the Wikimedia community, and Wikipedia projects are constantly evolving. Moreover, professional assumptions that librarians hold are new and sometimes challenging for the Wikimedia community. Learning to not fall into an “them and us” framework requires active listening from both communities-- but ultimately the shared desire for shared knowledge make all collaborators in this effort Wikimedians. One way to create a presence in the community is to create a user account: without a user account contributions are recorded publically under your IP address and leaves your contributions to the projects disconnected. In the Wikimedia community user accounts can act as anonymous pseudonyms used to protect privacy or be associated with real names or professional identities.

- **Event planning:** Live events with the Wikimedia community have their own challenges, because of the blend of digital and physical activities. General tools for planning events can be found at [Event planning process](#) and more specific strategies for GLAMwiki events can be found at [Coordinating a GLAM outreach event How-To Guide](#) and the [Edit-a-Thon How-To guide](#).

## Opportunities: Success stories

Below is an incomplete list of examples of success stories involving Wikipedia and public libraries:

- The Catalonia Network of Public Libraries has [over 150 libraries regularly participating](#) in a wide range of activities, and this participation includes a wide array of libraries, both public libraries and research libraries. Similar projects are developing [in the Netherlands](#) and the Wikimedia Community [in Asturias Spain](#).
- Local libraries are actively involved in New South Wales Australia and [participated in the #1lib1ref campaign](#). Wikipedia contribution has become a touchpoint for profiling their local organization's research materials and expertise, alongside working on local history.
- In the Czech Republic, [Seniors Write Wikipedia workshops](#) have been a continuing education program in partnership with a local library, Czech volunteers developed a curriculum for seniors to begin editing Wikipedia. A similar effort is being [pursued for Sanskrit Wikipedia](#).
- Campaigns like [Wiki Loves Monuments](#), [Wiki Loves Africa](#), [Wiki Loves Earth](#) and [Art+Feminism](#) have been great ways to document local knowledge all over the world. Libraries have been important sponsors and hubs for supporting these campaigns and other "Wiki Loves" events.
- Public libraries can host Wikipedia edit training through collaborations like the Wikimedia Australia and State Library of Queensland [project](#). These events provide excellent opportunities to reach and train communities in digital literacy, especially communities or cultures with high risk of lost knowledge or languages, such as non-native speakers of national languages. The Wikimedia community has seen a number of successful projects in this space, for example in Queensland and as part of [Afrocrowd Initiative](#) in New York with the Haitian Creole community.
- Donations of public domain and expired copyright photographs, sound and map collections to Wikimedia Commons provides broad access to historical archives, promoting their discovery and reuse. For example, State Library of Queensland donated 50 000 historic photographs and the British Library's Mechanical Curator project released a million images via Flickr Commons from which Wikimedia editors have extracted and catalogued more than 50000 historic maps. For countries with a history of European colonisation access to these digitised resources can provide significant historical materials then what has been previously available via public libraries.
- Several libraries have donated digitized books to Wikisource: Gallica gave French Wikisource over 1200 books in 2010, but other language communities have seen smaller donations in the last year. Often, as in the case of Biblioteca di Trento (Italy),



librarians engage in proofreading and formatting ebooks with the community, organizing training and workshops for both library staff and patrons. This approach has been successful also for archives, as NARA or Archive du Québec. The digitized books, have subsequently been transcribed and integrated to ebook libraries broadly used across the library sector.

## Conclusion

The relation between Wikipedia and public libraries has been growing since the early documented collaborations before 2010 and continues to expand, improving the local Wikimedia community.

As more and more libraries pursue these kind of partnerships, the mutual interests of the Wikimedia and the public libraries community become clear and intertwined. Synergy is generated both in libraries and other community centers which have not collaborated before.

Many libraries see other win-win benefits generated from these project. First, the library community incorporates an open and powerful group of volunteers who help them prioritize resources towards digital initiatives, which are attractive for funders and other supporters. Second, Wikipedia benefits from the prestige of being prescribed and promoted from the information professionals of library centers, as guarantors of neutrality and the proper use of information resources.

Both Wikimedia projects and the larger library professional networks have an opportunity to grow. Welcoming librarian liaisons among Wikipedia volunteers encourages sharing of best practices from both communities increases transparency in all processes, and more importantly, works towards the common mission of free, accessible, open knowledge.