



## Philip Greenspun-Wikimedia Foundation illustration project proposal

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### 1. Introduction.

Illustrations (photographs, sketches, 3-D models, diagrams, graphs, charts, maps) are a powerful tool in learning and teaching. What can take pages of text to explain may be understood in a single picture. A visual representation can inspire understanding of a novel concept far more quickly than the textual equivalent. Illustrations are also accessible to the non-literate, unlike text, and can be more easily adapted for use in different languages and contexts. For these reasons it is clear that focusing on illustrations will further the Wikimedia Foundation's mission to "develop educational content ...and to disseminate it effectively and globally".

The content of the Wikimedia projects is almost entirely created by volunteer editors. For this reason, it is difficult to direct the development of particular topics. There are some self-organised efforts to prioritise particular topics, but in general the rate of development of content on any given topic generally represents the relevance or interest of the topic to the editors. This can be seen in English Wikipedia (~300 articles under the category 'Cameroonian people', pop. 17 million, cf. thousands of articles under the category 'New Zealand people', pop. 4 million), English Wikibooks (where some half of the Featured books refer to computer hardware, computer programming or computer software), and Wikimedia Commons (where images of nature are overwhelmingly European and North American).

Some dedicated Wikimedians will choose to create content that they don't have a natural interest in, because they want to see content that is diverse, representative and balanced. However these editors are generally few in number and swamped with work.



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### 2. What this project will do

The donor will

- Provide money to fund the creation of “key illustrations”.

The Wikimedia Foundation, via the Volunteer Coordinator, will

- Oversee the project
- Provide guidance to the project co-ordinator
- Facilitate communication to and from the donor regarding the project
- Advise on the payment method to be used

The project co-ordinator will

- Identify the “key illustrations” (here, mainly diagrams and sketches) that are needed to improve Wikimedia content (primarily, Wikipedia, Wikibooks and Wikiversity)
- Publicise the project within Wikimedia
- Facilitate specific editors to create specific illustrations (more on this below)
- Oversee the payment of editors for their work
- Report to the Wikimedia Foundation on the progress of the project, at specified intervals and on request.

It is recognised that this is the first project by the Wikimedia Foundation in paid content creation. Therefore the specifics of how the project progresses are recognised as an experiment, and open to adaption depending on the response of the Wikimedia community.

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WIKIMEDIA FOUNDATION Inc.

200 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue South #358 • St. Petersburg, FL, 33701-4313 • USA

Tel.: 1.727.231.0101 Fax: 1.727.258.0207



### 3. Project co-ordinator

My name is Brianna Laugher; I'm a 24 year old computational linguist living in Melbourne, Australia. I graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Arts (Chinese)/Bachelor of Science (mathematics).

I first started with Wikimedia when I registered at the English Wikipedia in April 2005, with the username "pfctdayelise" ("perfect day elise"). In October 2005 I registered at Wikimedia Commons ( <http://commons.wikimedia.org/> ), the media archive, and since then I have spent most of my "wiki time" there. In January 2006 I became a site administrator there. I first became familiar with the working processes of many aspects of the community, including deletion, quality controls, media annotation and organisation, helping new users, and technical software features.

For the last twelve months or so I have moved away from the daily minutiae to focus on broader concerns such as, "How do we relate to the other Wikimedia sites?", "How can Wikimedia Commons directly support the Foundation's mission?" and "What is the ultimate aim of this site? How do we know when we're succeeding?" I have also been involved with several initiatives that aim to recognise the significant milestones Wikimedia Commons reaches, and recognise and thank the editors who make significant contributions to the site. I believe the site has the potential for spectacular success if we can keep the feeling of community. Reflecting on our small successes is important for the self-esteem and motivation of the community.



#### 4. Background: The current situation regarding illustration creation

(This section only refers to SVGs, which is a file format for vector graphics. Vector graphics are generally preferred to bitmap format such as PNG and JPG, for two reasons: one is that they can scale infinitely without loss of detail, and the second is that they are much easier to edit, which naturally suits wiki editors!)

Wikimedia Commons currently has around 103,000 SVGs, which represents nearly 6% of our total number of files. Although some of these are simply copied from existing resources, this number does reflect the substantial original contributions of hundreds of editors. Some self-organised “wikiprojects” of note:

- Insignia and flags
- Chinese characters and their stroke order
- Maps of India
- Chemistry (chemical structure diagrams)

Several SVGs have been designated as “Featured pictures”, i.e. Commons’ “best of the best”. These include diagrams of a floppy disk, a personal computer, the endomembrane system, the human heart, ant morphology, pulleys, the human eye, a fishing reel, a flower, a complete neuron cell system, the human skull, the electromagnetic spectrum, amphipod anatomy, a piano, a sextant, a loom, a trombone, an oil well, and Polychaete anatomy. Two topographic maps are also featured, and a map of the major highways of India.

A high standard is expected – and met – for these images. There is a small but productive community of SVG editors who actively correct mistakes and improve these kinds of diagrams. For most editors an SVG file is a new kind of document, so the



learning curve can be steep. Some help files and documentation exist, but they tend to be spotty (like much open source documentation).



### 5. Aims of the project

- Create diagrams that would otherwise be unlikely to receive attention due to their topic or complexity
- Raise awareness of the value of illustrations and encourage their use where appropriate in the Wikimedia projects
- Grow the community of illustration creators within Wikimedia.



### 6. How the project will run

- The project co-ordinator will create a list of desired illustrations, drawing on input from the Wikimedia community and also comparing our coverage to existing works such as illustrated encyclopaedias, children's encyclopaedias, high-school (middle school) level textbooks. Illustrations for universal-interest subjects, culturally significant non-Western artefacts, historical artefacts and science subjects will be prioritised. These priorities attempt to redress the inherent existing bias in illustration creation. (So something that is likely to be created regardless of this project will not be included.)
- The project co-ordinator will form a "Review Group" of Wikimedians who have experience with SVGs
- Some "issue tracker" software will be set up to process the requests. One request or issue will represent one illustration to be created. Editors will be able to "assign" the requests to themselves. By assigning the request they are pledging to create the required illustration. Editors will be limited in how many requests they can assign concurrently (I suggest 3). If an editor doesn't submit a request (i.e., supply the designated illustration) within a certain time frame (I suggest 2 weeks), the request will be unassigned and someone else may take it up. Once a request is submitted, the Review Group will evaluate the work with regards to stated guidelines. If it falls short they may negotiate with the editor to improve it. If it is not sufficiently improved, the submission will be rejected and someone else may take it up. If the submission is accepted then the editor will be paid the agreed amount for the work.
- Complete a "Round 1" as above, within say 2 months with 50 released requests. After this evaluate how successful or otherwise it was: how many images were completed? Should the monetary amounts be adjusted? If it is deemed unsuccessful due to sheer lack of interest from Wikimedians, consider a switch to directly commissioning specific



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artists for specific works. Otherwise continue with Round 2, taking into consideration what worked and what didn't from Round 1.



### 7. Guidelines for accepting illustrations

Three “deal breaker” guidelines:

- Must be the editor’s original work, and the editor must release it under an acceptable free license
- The illustration must be accurate
- File must render correctly on MediaWiki.

Other guidelines:

- Use SVGs where possible for easy adaption
- Create language-neutral illustrations (for example numbered diagrams, rather than directly labelled with text)
- Create illustrations accessible to the vision impaired (e.g. colour-blindness)
- File should not have any author “watermark” (the author is sufficiently credited on the image description page)



### 8. Money and payments

The Wikimedia Foundation will advise on the specific payment methods to be used.

I suggest having 2 or possibly 3 different payment amounts. One, a “normal” amount, should probably be around US\$40 to US\$50. Creating a high quality illustration probably takes a minimum of five hours work. So this amount is, in my estimation, a reasonable recognition of the time and effort of the author. The amount paid should be significant enough to encourage the editor to switch from their normal activities towards this project. If the amount is too small, I suspect the response would be, “Why bother? It’s not worth the return”.

A second amount would be a lower amount, say US\$15, and would be assigned to simpler or lower priority requests. These would be specifically targeted towards encouraging new people into the illustrator community.

A third amount, say US\$80, may be appropriate for a very small number of high-priority complex requests. (Perhaps if a work is not fulfilled in a first round, the amount could increase in the next.)

$$\begin{array}{r} \$15 \times 200 = \$3000 \\ + \$40 \times 435 = \$17000 \\ \hline \\ = 635 \text{ illustrations for } \$20000 \end{array}$$



### 9. Questions and issues

The Wikimedia community may balk at paying for content creation when it has not yet been demonstrated that requesting it is "enough" to prompt its creation. This may be pre-empted by publicising the topics that require illustration a month before formally beginning the project. Either way, we win: either the illustrations get created for free, or we have shown that this is not possible.

What type of illustrations? I expect primarily diagrams. I recommend to specifically exclude maps, animations and most sketches. Some sketches may be worth commissioning, for topics that are unable to be photographed and deemed sufficiently worthy, e.g. portraits of Greek gods. However they are much harder to evaluate for accuracy.

Timeframe? I have outlined a fairly slow process that could last for up to two years. This is to maximise the potential involvement of new users.