



WASTE REPORT for May 9, 2016

Wikiwaste: studying the Gender-Gap on Wikipedia

Have a question? Often Wikipedia has an answer. But if your question is, **“Why is the federal government spending \$70,000 to study gender disparity among Wikipedia contributors,”** you might get back, “results not found: did you mean ‘government waste?’”

That’s right! The National Science Foundation (NSF) spent \$70,000 funding a New York University study to investigate the gender gap among contributors to Wikipedia.¹ If you are not familiar, Wikipedia is a free on-line encyclopedia where, **“[a]nyone with Internet access can write and make changes to Wikipedia articles.”**²

According to Wikipedia, it is true that only about 13 percent of their regular contributors are female. However, **there is no measurement for how much content female Wikipedians contribute or provide.**

What is clear is that whether male or female, a small minority of users provide any content to Wikipedia; just 25 percent ever make an edits/contributions and 0.004 percent of users are classified as regular contributors - which still only requires one edit every 30 days.³ Nonetheless, all users can edit content if they so choose, meaning this is an issue of self-selection.

Even under tighter budgets, NSF has seen a 22 percent increase in funding since President Obama took office. This year’s budget asks for nearly \$8 billion to support this agency, stating:

NSF is vital because we invest in basic research and people who make the discoveries that transform our future. Those discoveries are a primary driver of the U.S. economy, enhance our Nation’s security, and give the country the competitive edge to remain a global leader.⁴

One has to wonder where the study of gender disparity among Wikipedia contributors fits in.

¹ http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1322971&HistoricalAwards=false

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Wikipedia_contributors

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Wikipedians>

⁴ http://www.nsf.gov/about/budget/fy2017/pdf/01_fy2017.pdf