



## 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 \$70k 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 \$70k funding a New York University study to investigate the gender gap among contributors to Wikipedia.<sup>1</sup> 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.”**<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.**<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD\\_ID=1322971&HistoricalAwards=false](http://www.nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1322971&HistoricalAwards=false)

<sup>2</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Wikipedia\\_contributors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About#Wikipedia_contributors)

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

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.nsf.gov/about/budget/fy2017/pdf/01\\_fy2017.pdf](http://www.nsf.gov/about/budget/fy2017/pdf/01_fy2017.pdf)