Note: this is a top-level summary of our strategic plan. An in-depth version is available on request.

Wikitongues Strategic Plan, 2021-2024

Vision

Wikitongues is building a world of global equity between peoples: where everyone has the resources and the right to speak their language, teach their language, and keep their culture alive.

Mission

Wikitongues supports cultural equity by safeguarding endangered languages, expanding access to critical linguistic resources, and directly supporting language revitalization projects.

Challenge

7,000 languages are spoken or signed today, but more than 3,000 languages could disappear in a generation, erasing centuries of cultural, historical, and ecological knowledge. Language extinction is not inevitable: with the right resources, anyone can reclaim their ancestral language and teach the next generation. However, institutional support for language revitalization is scarce, creating a resource bottleneck that prevents the global majority from keeping their cultures alive.

Landscape and Opportunities

In the past decade, a small network of language revitalization nonprofits and academic institutions have emerged, representing emergent philanthropic interest and the foundation of social infrastructure of language diversity. Meanwhile, the Internet’s continued expansion has created demand for more language options in language learning, interpretation, and technology. However, for-profit language industries remain focused on a small fraction of the world’s languages.

Theory of Change

Language revitalization is measurable. Over a generation, as an endangered-language community grows their population of proficient and native speakers, they reawaken their mother-tongue. In a global scale, then, the trend of language extinction can be measurably slowed by supporting the creation of new revitalization projects for a majority of endangered-language communities—in a world, making language revitalization accessible for all who want it.

Beginnings (2013-2021)

Wikitongues began as an all-volunteer project in late 2013, and incorporated as a non-profit in 2014. Our original mission was narrow: crowdsource content, especially oral history videos, in every
language. Over time, in response to feedback from our community, we expanded our focus to supporting grassroots language revitalization, answering the question: “How do I save my language?” In 2019, we formed a coalition of language diversity nonprofits to raise awareness about UNESCO’s International Year of Indigenous Languages. In 2020, we partnered with the Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages to develop the Language Sustainability Toolkit, a beginner’s guide for language revitalization. In 2021, we tested that resource with four language activists, to positive results. This was also the year that we operationalized, hiring two full-time staff members.

Language Revitalization Accelerator (2022-2025)

In 2022, at the start of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages, we launched the Language Revitalization Accelerator, a pilot program for making language revitalization accessible to all who want it. Over three years, Wikitongues will seed or accelerate language revitalization projects for 75 languages across every continent. Each year, we will post an open call for language activists, select a cohort of the most promising individuals, and give each an unrestricted grant of $2,000, a year of training based on the revitalization framework outlined in the Language Sustainability Toolkit, and specialized in-kind support as they launch mother-tongue projects in their communities. The cohort cycles will adhere to the following schedule:

- April 2022 - April 2023: first cohort, 15 language activists
- April 2023 - April 2024: second cohort, 21 language activists
- April 2024 - April 2025: third cohort, 39 language activists

In addition to helping participants launch stable revitalization projects in their communities, we will identify cross-cultural constants in language revitalization, improve the framework outlined in the Language Sustainability Toolkit, and identify staffing needs for operating at a larger scale. After the close of the final cohort in April 2025, we will evaluate what worked well and what didn’t, publish an evaluation of the program, and develop a plan for scaling.

Scaling for mission success (2026-2032)

At our current capacity, Wikitongues can support revitalization for an average of 25 languages per year, which is insufficient for the challenge of at least 3,000 endangered languages. To meet our mission, we will need to scale our capacity by at least 5X, enabling us to work with up to 100 language communities per year. We should use the remainder of the International Decade to build up that infrastructure. How we do so will depend on our findings from Accelerator in 2025, but we have begun to outline how we think that growth should be implemented:

- In 2026, we will expand the Accelerator to support 100 language communities per cohort cycle; each cycle will last three years and we will onboard a new cohort every other year. The extended timeline is to account for the generational pace of language revitalization and the gap year between new cohorts is there to give us time to do vital grassroots outreach.
- Each cohort will be broken down into overlapping working groups based on region (e.g., Southern Africa) and thematic focus (e.g., childhood education). The purpose of overlapping working groups is to cultivate regional solidarity and facilitate knowledge-sharing between participants, and to give us a structure for maintaining technically and linguistically qualified support staff.