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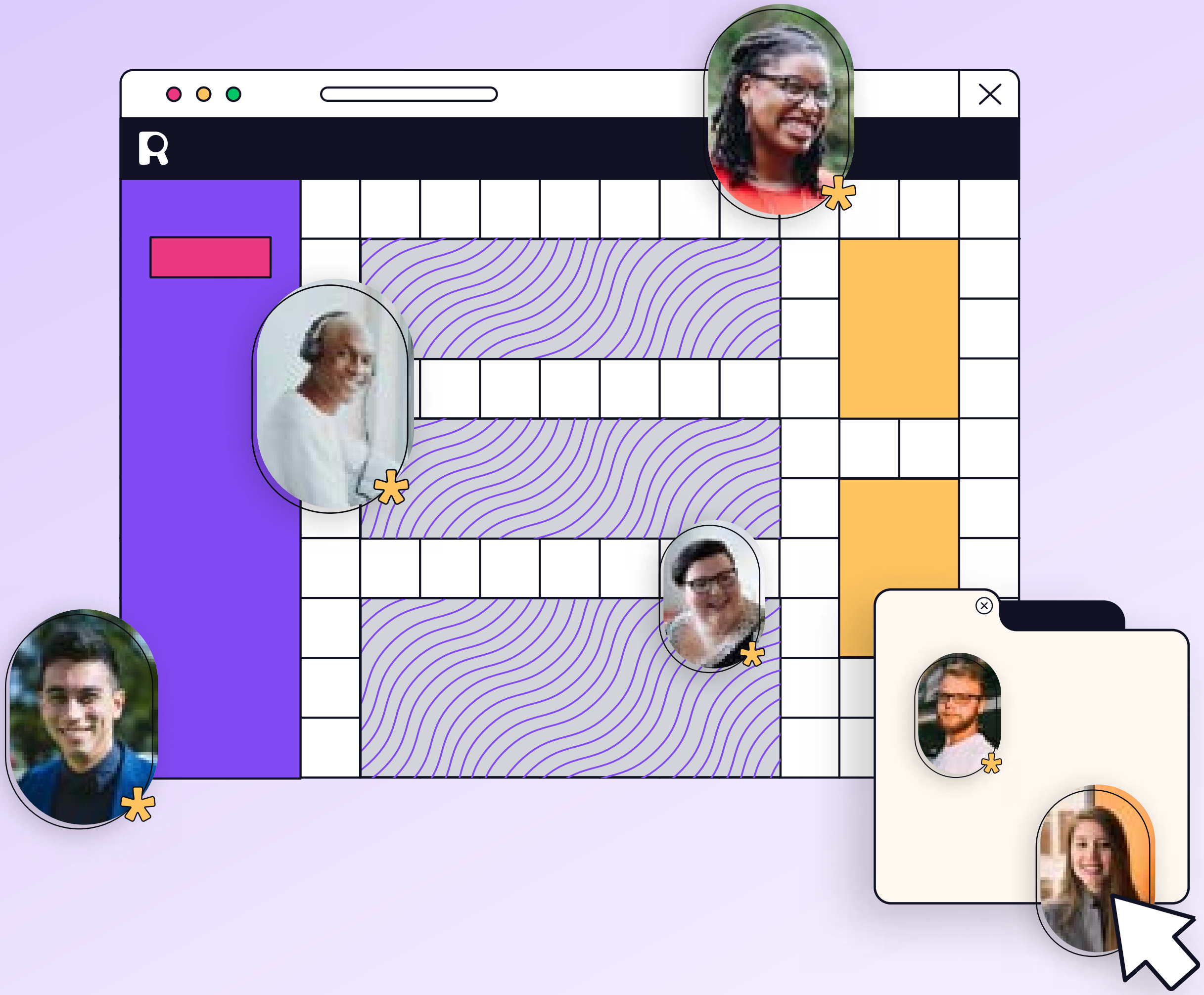

# The Definitive Guide to Participant Management and Recruitment

ebook . 2023

# Chapter 7



# Chapter 8



# Conclusion

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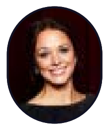
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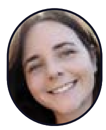
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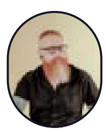
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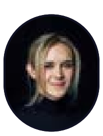
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You can read more about them at the end of this ebook.

# Introduction

Participant Management and recruitment for internal users are foundational steps in the UXR process. If you can build an A+ Participant Management experience throughout the research process, you can leave an incredible impression and drive affinity with your brand, product, and team.

That's why we built The Definitive Guide to Participant Management & Recruitment. We want to help UXR teams in every industry and organization optimize their recruitment and Participant Management strategies.

**Here's what to expect from this guide:**

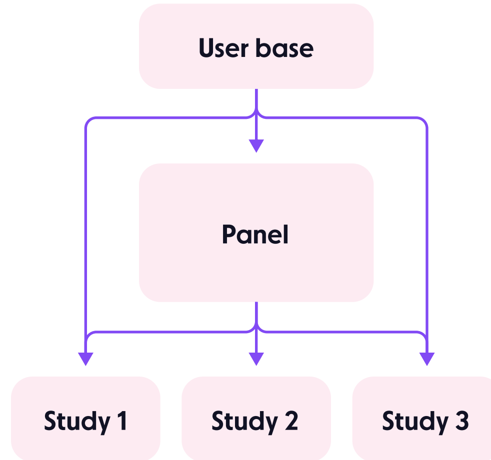
1. Learn why Participant Management and recruitment go hand-in-hand and why you can't have one without the other
2. Discover step by step how to build and manage a panel, and if you even need one
3. Dive into what makes Participant Management and recruitment difficult and how to overcome those challenges
4. Dissect the argument of build vs. buy when it comes to your tools and learn which is better
5. Find best practices how to begin democratizing research at your org
6. Get steps you can take today to start building an A+ Participant Management strategy

Thanks for joining us on our exploration into Participant Management and recruitment. We hope you use this guide to build and optimize your own Participant Management and recruitment strategy and process so you can continue to enable your Research team to find the best insights from your users.

# Important terms to understand

## Participant Management

Participant management is the strategy for how teams should engage with and manage their users for research. Participant management guides panel building, panel management, and recruitment. While Participant Management is a strategy, it is also a job with many tasks and responsibilities. These tasks include, but are not limited to tracking participant info and activity, scheduling research sessions, sending emails and other communication, handling consent, and incentives.




*The following three terms are all components of your Participant Management strategy. These terms are interconnected but slightly different. It's important to understand exactly what we mean when we discuss each one.*

## Panel

A subset of users who have explicitly opted into your research program and have been screened to fit specific profiles for research needs. Often a panel is filled with loyal customers and people who expect to be part of multiple research projects that span a long period of time. There are pros and cons of panels, and not every team will build or need one — something we'll discuss later on.

## Panel Building

Determining what you need the panel for, the types of participants you want, how you will organize and structure your panel, the tools you will use, and beginning recruitment. Panel building is a continuous, unending process that should ensure participant profiles remain fresh and that there is a constant influx of new perspectives into your organization's research process.

## Panel Management

Once users have opted in to joining your panel, the panel management process begins. Panel management is all about keeping your data fresh and your participants engaged so that the benefits of your panel can be realized (e.g. rapid recruitment of high quality participants).

## Recruitment

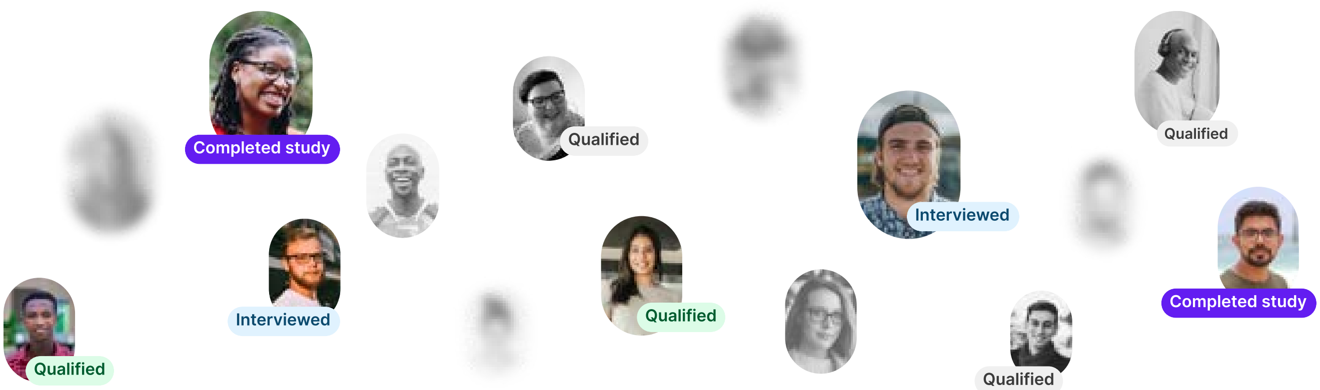
Populating a panel or a study with people from your user base who fit specific criteria. Recruitment activities include everything from the initial outreach, screening, gathering consent, scheduling (sometimes rescheduling), and sending a thank-you note with incentives. Whether recruiting into a panel or for a specific study, you can view the process as a funnel that can be optimized, to drive up better response rates and a higher take rate for research.

# Why should you invest in building an A+ Participant Management Strategy?

We've already discussed a little why Participant Management matters, but we want to dive deeper. Participant Management is both a task and a strategy in your research efforts. It's a big — and important — job and usually needs someone dedicating all their time to it, so that the rest of the Research function (UXRs, PWDR, etc.) are enabled to quickly find the right participants and do research. We'll dig more into who typically handles Participant Management later on.

You can't manage participants if you don't have any. That's why recruitment is so integral to Participant Management. You can't have one without the other.
Here's why:

**For your panel of participants to be most efficient and beneficial to your researchers and your organization, you need to recruit the right people.**




## The right people = better participants = better insights

We want to be clear that when we talk about recruiting, we are specifically meaning recruiting people from your user base — though both non-users and users have a place in the research process. We want to focus on recruiting from your user base because it is important that when you need to recruit your users you can do so with accuracy, efficiency, and privacy in mind.

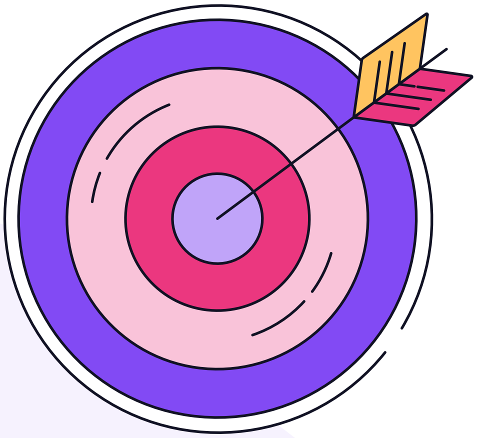
Once you've recruited your users (which isn't an easy task), you need to manage those participants to ensure that research goals can be met quickly.

Along with better insights, managing your participants ensures:

- **research has a strong foundation**
- **data is secure and organized**
- **your participants are happy**

A large aspect of Participant Management is building trust and community with your users. Through your research and panels, you are giving them a voice to share their feedback and experience with your product. This is why it's so important to have a strong Participant Management strategy in place.

In short, Participant Management doesn't exist without recruitment, and recruitment is inefficient without Participant Management. To build and manage a pool of participants, whether in a panel or not, you must conduct thoughtful and thorough recruitment of the right people.



# Why Participant Management matters and who handles it

**Crystal Kubitsky**
UX Research Ops Lead
MongoDB

**Danielle Cleaver**
UX Research Ops
gusto

**Krista Lipps**
Sr. UX Researcher
doximity

“Participant management is so important as a foundational piece for any research practice.” That’s what Crystal Kubitsky, UX Research Ops Lead at MongoDB told us in a recent webinar we hosted on building Research Ops from the ground up.

It’s simple. You have users and you want to talk to them. And Participant Management is the key to doing that — and doing it well.

So, what happens when you invest in Participant Management?

- 💥 **You unlock new insights for your organization.**
- 💥 **You create a delightful experience for participants.**
- 💥 **You leave an A+ impression and drive affinity with your brand, product, and team.**
- 💥 **You ensure you are talking to the right people — your users.**
  As experience designer Flávio Bezerra said, “They’re the ones that can best tell you the struggles and show you how your product can really impact their world.”

## Who handles Participant Management?

"You're always going to need someone at the base of Participant Management," said Danielle Cleaver, former User Experience Research Ops Program Manager at Gusto. The question is, who? Here's the short answer: It varies.

## Introducing: The Research Function

It's become clear that many people are involved in user research and it's not one specific role that handles Participant Management in an org. When we refer to the Research Function, we are referring to anyone that is involved in research. That could mean someone performing research, enabling research, or merely someone who is an involved stakeholder.

Some specific roles that may fall under the Research Function are User Researcher, UXR Ops Coordinator, Research Ops Leader, Product Manager, and Designer.

Each of these roles looks different depending on your organization, the maturity of your research practice, and the users you serve.

For some organizations, a User Researcher handles Participant Management whereas other organizations may have a dedicated Research Ops lead handling recruitment and Participant Management. And there are dozens of examples that fall somewhere in between.

**"You're always going to need someone at the base of Participant Management."**

**Danielle Cleaver**
UX Research Ops at Gusto

To be fully inclusive and speak to the wide array of situations within various organizations and industries, we find it best to address the Research Function.

When it comes to who should handle Participant Management, there is no one right answer. That being said, we've seen examples where Participant Management thrives when there is at least one dedicated Research Ops professional.

## The case for Research Ops

“Participant management and recruiting is a specialty. If you want it done well, you need someone specializing in it,” explained Danielle. “Not just your data team.” And not your researchers. The bottom line is this: If your researchers are doing Research Ops, they aren’t spending their time doing research.

Enter: Research Operations. Now, not every team will have the budget or bandwidth to add a Research Ops role to their org, but if it’s at all a possibility, we highly encourage it. Here’s why:

- **It allows user researchers to do research**
- **It helps you scale your research practice.**
- **It amplifies the value and impact of research**
- **It provides tools and processes to support user researchers**
- **It connects the research team with the rest of the organization**

## What if you don’t have Research Ops?

We know we sing Research Ops praises, but hiring a Research Ops person isn’t always an option — and that’s totally okay! There are countless examples of stellar UXRs who run the whole show. One of our favorites is Krista Lipps, Senior UX Researcher at Doximity. Prepare to be amazed...

Think of all the tasks within Participant Management and recruitment and add those to the usual tasks a UXR has and you get Krista’s workload and responsibilities. 😵 Basically, Krista was spending HOURS of time on the ops side of research — meaning she was hardly doing any research.

Luckily Krista found a solution that helped her run the whole show AND get back those precious hours: Rally.

The right tool can make a huge difference both for teams with Research Ops and for teams without.

"I've saved SO much time with Rally," said Krista. "I can't even convey how much time I have saved. It really has relieved a lot of the pressure."

So, when you find yourself in a situation where you're wasting hours on the manual ops work and you can't bring on a Research Ops person — consider adding a new tool to your tool kit (especially one that removes the need for some of the numerous tools you probably already are using).

We'll discuss Rally and the case for buying tools later in section 6.

## When should you hire a Research Ops role?

At a webinar in October, Crystal Kubitsky shared some important signals that indicate it's time to hire Research Ops:

1. The number of projects requiring research exceeds the capacity of the team on an ongoing basis.
2. When evaluative concept research is either getting less attention or forcing the team to not give attention to other generative topics.
3. When non-researchers are asking to do research themselves or starting to do it anyway on a regular basis.

## How do you make the case to leadership for a Research Ops hire?

Without leadership buy-in, a Research Ops hire likely won't happen. It's important to make a strong case to leadership for why Research Ops is essential to the success and impact of the research team.

The signals Crystal shared are the perfect fuel for your case. Show the numbers and how much time is being taken up by manual admin tasks. Share examples of non-researchers asking to do research and explain the need for processes and systems.

> **"I can't even convey how much time I have saved with Rally. It really has relieved a lot of pressure."**
>
> 
> Krista Lipps
> Senior UX Researcher at Doximity

# The ideal Research Ops state

The best way to build a thriving Research Ops function is to have a team of Participant Management Coordinators. To give you a real-world example of what this looks like, here are two Research Ops stars:

**Caitlin Faughnan**
UX Research Ops Coordinator

GitLab

Caitlin is the UX Research Ops Coordinator at GitLab. In her role, Caitlin handles multiple UX Research projects from start to finish, including managing incentives, budget, and procurement of tools. You'll find more about Caitlin and her role at GitLab later in this ebook.

**Agustina Di Clemente**
Research Ops Specialist

TravelPerk

Agustina is the Research Ops Specialist at TravelPerk. In her role, Agustina helps TravelPerk's teams plan, execute, and analyze their studies. She takes care of participant recruitment, incentives, and administrative tasks, and collaborates with other teams to ensure GDPR compliance. As part of the UX Research Team, she supports all TravelPerk's two Researchers and Research Manager along with non-researchers to make their lives easier. "I love being the bridge between our users and our Product team. The most rewarding part of my job is when the researcher says 'this was fast and the users we targeted were just perfect!'" She is passionate about automation and always looking to improve our processes and work more efficiently.

Chapter 2

# What makes Participant Management so hard?

Caitlin Faughnan
UX Research Ops Coordinator
GitLab

"It's a lot to get done, especially if you're a team of one," said Caitlin Faughnan[1], UX Research Ops Coordinator at GitLab Inc[2].

> **What's "A lot"? 😵**
>
> Once a research request is submitted, Caitlin would start working on it and ensure she had all the right information. This usually led to back-and-forth conversations with the person making the request. (Here's a helpful template for kicking off a research study.)
>
> Then Caitlin would create her screener. "I need to make sure that the screener is comprehensive, and it's actually targeting the people that they want," she said. The screener stage is especially important because "if a screener goes out and it's not targeting the right people or filtering people out, you essentially have to start the recruitment process all over again."

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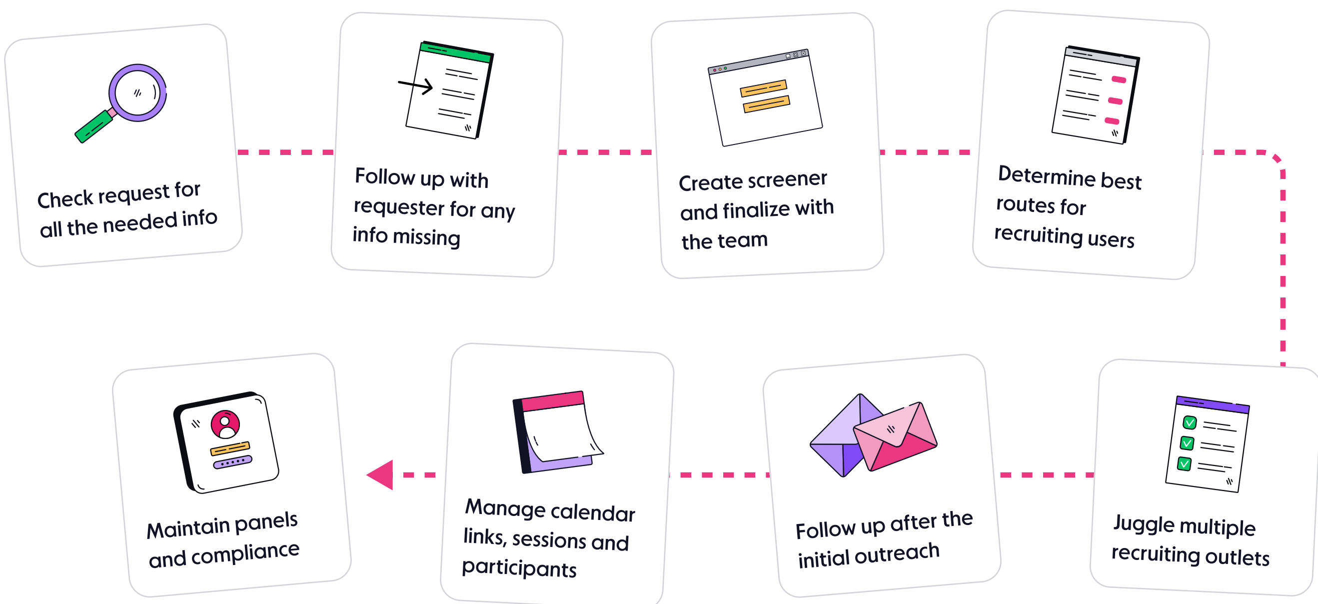
1. *The comments made in this chapter by Caitlin Faughnan do not necessarily reflect the views of GitLab Inc.*
2. *In certain instances, references to GitLab mean GitLab Inc. and in other instances, references to GitLab are a reference to GitLab, the DevSecOps platform.*

"Once the screener is shared and the criteria is ironed out, it's picking the route or routes that need to be used." These routes include combining various SQL queries within the data warehouse within GitLab (the platform) or using tools like Respondent. Basically, Caitlin has to juggle multiple outlets for recruiting users — something that is both time-consuming and inefficient. This is a problem not unique to GitLab that many in the ReOps industry face.

After the initial outreach, Caitlin goes through the process of following up. Caitlin then has to ensure calendar links are sent, sessions are booked, participants have everything they need, and that incentives are sent. "And that's just the recruitment cycle." Caitlin still has to maintain panels, ensure research is compliant and ethical, and help evangelize research at her org.

Now imagine this entire process multiplied by 26 — the number of projects Caitlin was working on at one point. 🤯




We hear this often — it's "a lot." But what exactly does that mean? When you're handling Participant Management you're going through all the steps of recruiting users, keeping their information updated and organized, enabling your team to conduct research, setting boundaries and rules and enforcing them, managing schedules, tracking incentives — the list goes on.

It's no secret that Participant Management is challenging. If it wasn't, we wouldn't be making this guide. But it's important to note that though "the core problems are all the same, just are amplified in different ways, depending on what you're recruiting for and who you're recruiting," said Caitlin. Many of these challenges will resonate with anyone who handles Participant Management, but it's likely there will be some that you never encounter.

Instead of just listing these core problems Caitlin is referring to, we wanted to categorize each challenge into one of three buckets:

| 👾 | 🔥 | 💗 |
|---|---|---|
| **uncommon challenges** | **high-priority or "hair on fire" challenges** | **lower-priority but still important challenges** |

- 🔥 Recruiting, recruiting, recruiting
- 🔥 No central view into who you've reached out to and how they've been contacted
- 🔥 No way to track participants and data
- 🔥 No tracking for contact frequency
- 🔥 No way to know what incentives have been sent or accepted
- 💗 Have to pull data from multiple sources
- 💗 Duplicative & varying metadata
- 🔥 Multiple people within a company are talking to users
- 🔥 Stakeholders are doing their own recruiting
- 🔥 Tool overload & tool jumping
- 💗 Lack of integrations/tools don't play nicely
- 🔥 Everything is manual and not scalable
- 🔥 Stakeholders aren't on board with processes and guardrails
- 💗 Getting participants into pool/panels
- 🔥 No guardrails or training for non-researchers
- 💗 Unprofessional, non-branded assets
- 💗 Juggling multiple calendars for setting up research sessions
- 💗 No organization or good filtering process for participant data
- 🔥 Ensuring GDPR compliance & ethical Participant Management
- 🔥 Don't have a secure place to store all participant information
- 👾 Language barriers, privacy rules, and international incentives for international research & recruiting
- 💗 Difficult to communicate with participants in a professional and easy way

# What are some common pitfalls you may encounter in Participant Management?

From conversations with Research Ops leaders at companies like Gusto, GitLab, OutSystems, and MongoDB, here are some common pitfalls you may encounter and should try to avoid with Participant Management and recruitment:

- **Not setting boundaries with stakeholders, leadership, and those requesting research**. It's important to know your capacity & limits.

- **Not communicating expectations and timelines**. Similar to the first point, it's essential to communicate the timeline for research up-front. Be transparent about what someone requesting research should expect in terms of deliverables & due dates.

- **Not being transparent with leadership**. Leadership visibility and buy-in can be extremely powerful. One way to secure that buy-in quicker is to be transparent from day one with your processes, abilities, goals, and current projects.

- **Not recognizing that your users are PEOPLE**. "They're not tools or numbers," said Danielle Cleaver, former User Experience Research Operations Program Manager at Gusto. It's essential to treat your users as real people, something we'll dig into in section 4.

- **Not being familiar with the unique elements of recruiting for your users**. There will be some strategies that you'll need to employ that are specific to your users. With recruiting for User Research, it's not one size fits all.

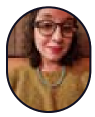
- **Not building processes that scale and can be democratized.** "Democratizing research also means democratizing ops," said Danielle. As she mentioned above, Participant Management is a specialty and without strong, clear processes, democratizing ops can be more of a hurt than a help.

- **Not putting effort into your communications with your users.** How you communicate with your users and what those communications look like matter. Good communications can cause delight for your users, boost brand awareness, and maybe even entice users to reply. (We'll discuss this more in section 4.)

- **Not collecting information from your users that is most valuable for research.** Asking the right questions will help your research and recruiting be more effective now and in the future. It's also important to collaborate with other teams and stakeholders when determining what information you need from participants.

# What does good Participant Management look like?

**Lourenço Rodrigues**
UX Researcher
outsystems



**Lilian Rega**
UX Researcher
outsystems

**Crystal Kubitsky**
UX Research Ops Lead
MongoDB

**Danielle Cleaver**
UX Research Ops
gusto

A good Participant Management strategy should be:

- **Scalable** — Are your processes easily repeatable?
- **Secure** — Are you following compliance guidelines and ensuring participant data is safe and secure?
- **Streamlined** — Does your strategy remove unnecessary steps and automate when possible?
- **Accessible** — Do the right people have access to the right things within your processes and strategy?
- **Efficient** — Is your Participant Management strategy solving your problems and lightening the load on you and your researchers, or doing the opposite?

Ultimately, your Participant Management strategy should make your job easier and enable your researchers to do research.

## How do you determine if your strategy is working?

As you take a closer look at your Participant Management strategy, there are more questions to ask yourself to determine what's working and what success should look like. Here are some questions to ask based on criteria shared by Lourenço Rodrigues and Lilian Rega, UX Researchers at Outsystems:

- are you getting the number of users you need for your studies?
- are you accessing the right users?
- are you populating studies with users quickly and in an appropriate time frame?
- are you enabling GDPR compliant and ethical research?

If you answer yes to any or all of these questions, you are heading in the right direction to building and maintaining a successful and thriving Participant Management strategy.

## Essentials of a strong Participant Management strategy

It's easy to create a lengthy laundry list of criteria your Participant Management strategy should be hitting, and looking at a list like that can feel overwhelming. That being said, in addition to the questions we shared above, there are a few more essentials we encourage you strive to incorporate into your Participant Management strategy that will strengthen it and make it more effective for both you and the people you're supporting.

1. Consistent Communication 🗣️
2. Prioritized Focus on the Participant Experience 💗
3. The Right Tools (or Tool) 🛠️
4. A Deep Understanding of Your User and Their Journey(s) 🛤️
5. Compliant & Ethical Processes ⚖️

### 🗣️ Consistent Communication

Everyone involved in Participant Management and recruitment should be consistently communicating their process, progress, and expectations. Danielle Cleaver, former UX Research Ops Program Manager at Gusto, sends out a weekly message that details the status and timeline of current studies. "Over communicating helps people feel relaxed and more focused on conducting their research."

> **"When you manage participants, you manage people... there needs to be a process for maintaining those relationships."**
>
> 
>
> Danielle Cleaver
> Former UX Research Ops at Gusto

### 💗 Prioritized Focus on the Participant Experience

"When you manage participants, you manage people — specifically people who have a stake in the relationship with you and your organization," said Danielle. "There needs to be a process for maintaining that relationship." We'll explore the Participant Experience more in our next section, but it's important to highlight here because it is essential. If your participants have a negative experience with research, it reflects poorly not just on you and your team, but also on your organization and product.

### 🛠️ The Right Tools (or Tool)

The right tools can make all the difference for your Participant Management and recruitment. Taking the time to evaluate your needs and goals and identifying where a tool can solve a problem is an essential step to do early in the process of building and refining your strategy. In section 6, we'll explore tooling and why buying is better than building as well as share some real examples.

### 🛣️ A Deep Understanding of Your User and Their Journey(s)

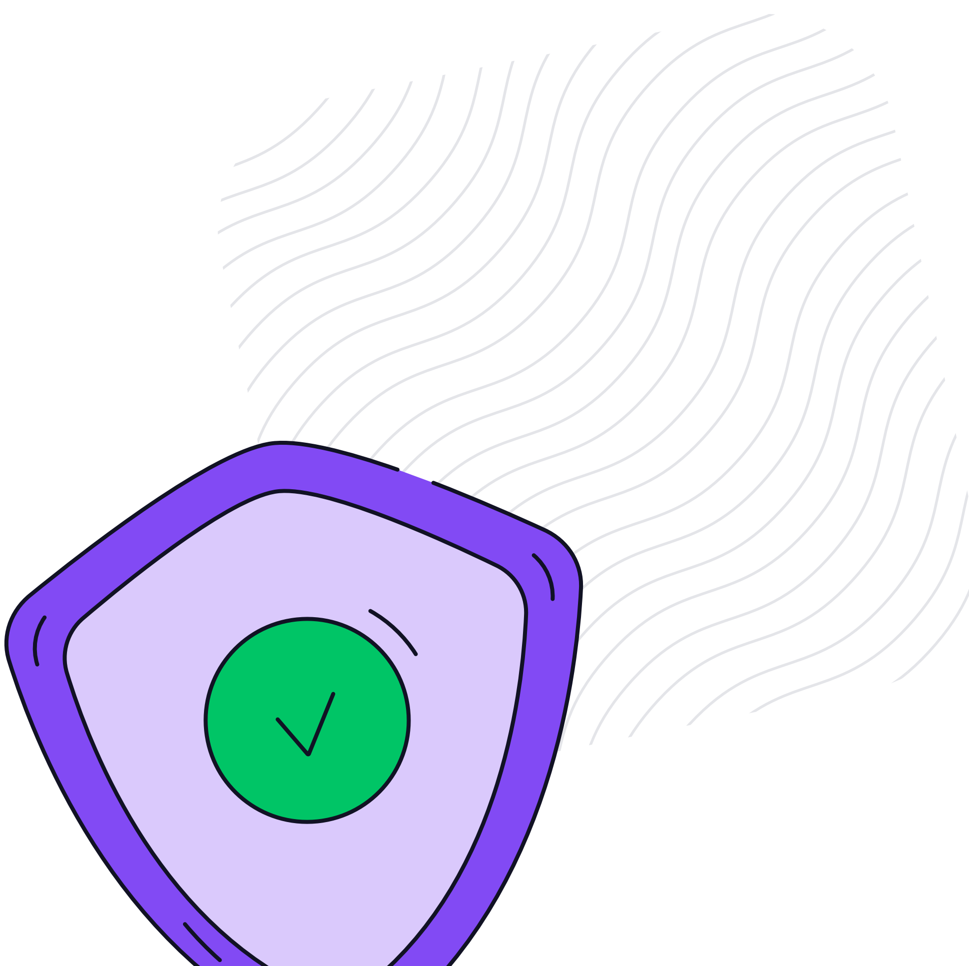
- What is the best way to reach your users?
- What messaging will resonate with them?
- What incentivizes your user to participate in research?
- What hesitations might your user have with participating in research?

Additionally, understanding and defining the journey or journeys your user will take when participating in research is a foundational piece to building your processes, something Crystal Kubitsky, UX Research Operations Lead at MongoDB guides us through in section 6.

### ⚖️ Compliant & Ethical Processes

"Consent is super important and embedding that within the Participant Management process has been a challenge everywhere I've been," said Crystal. She also pointed out that though it's ideal to embed consent into your process and tools, that's not always possible. It's essential to understand what types of consent are needed and when. Meeting with your legal team or any legal counsel can be valuable for gaining this understanding and incorporating it into your strategy. We'll discuss consent more in section 5.

These processes make up governance, which empowers researchers and non-researchers alike to properly recruit and run their own studies. A great example of how governance looks within Participant Management and recruitment is Rally's Automated Governance feature, which enables safe and compliant research, prevents over contacting, eliminates over-sampling of participants, and lets you create templates.



# The Participant Experience (PX)

Chapter 4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UX Research Ops Lead
MongoDB

Caitlin Faughnan
UX Research Ops Coordinator
GitLab

Danielle Cleaver
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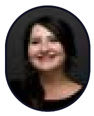
gusto



Anna Reger
Senior Research Ops Manager
Babbel


## What is the Participant Experience (PX)?

The Participant Experience is every interaction and touchpoint your user has with research. Crystal Kubitsky, UX Research Operations Lead at MongoDB, walked us through what this usually looks like:

**1.** **User becomes aware of a study & decides to apply**

**2.** **User applies for the study**

**3.** **User is accepted and prepped to participate**

**4.** **User participates in study**

**5.** **User is thanked and compensated**

It's important to note that this description is a high-level, broad breakdown of the average PX. Every organization and research team will have their own unique additions and each step above can be broken into even more steps.

## Why does PX matter?

Your participants are also your users and real humans.

**A poor participant experience can**

- destroy relationships and trust you've built with users
- damage the brand of your org
- affect other teams who also build relationships & communicate with users
- lessen the value and impact of research
- hurt the support and buy-in research has from leadership
- limit your connections & reach with users

**Whereas, a good participant experience can**

- lead to better research insights
- increase trust and build better relationships with users
- boost brand awareness
- encourage more participation in research
- show the value of research

Basically, if your users have a bad experience with your research, you don't just lose them as research participants, you may also lose them as customers of your product or service. A good participant experience leads to happy users and more quality research insights and impact.

## Who is responsible for the PX?

"Anybody who is conducting the research," said Crystal. "But it's the job of Research Operations to make every researcher or designer aware of the importance of ensuring that we have a great experience with our participants."

Additionally, Research Ops needs to make the participant experience both easy and consistent for those involved.

> **"It's the job of Research Operations to make every researcher or designer aware of the importance of ensuring that we have a great experience with our participants."**

Crystal Kubitsky
UX Research Operations Lead at MongoDB

# What does a good PX look like?

Every participant experience will look slightly different. Every user is different and how they interact with you and your product is unique. Because of this, some elements of an excellent PX will be specific to your org. That being said, here are some universal characteristics of every good PX:

**It's scalable and consistent**

**It prioritizes promptness and transparency**

**It is personalized and promotes your brand**

**It is managed in one place**

Let's dive in:

**It's scalable and consistent.**

Crystal recommends asking these questions:

- Can this be reused easily with minimal manual or tedious work?
- Can we maintain consistency and meet the needed pace of research?

You are not the sole owner or instigator of PX at your org. Many people will be involved in handling the PX so it's essential that you build processes and practices that can be easily repeated by anyone and scaled as your needs, your team, and your user base grow.

**It prioritizes promptness and transparency.**

Communication plays a major role in the PX. How quickly you respond to and communicate with your users can make or break their experience. There are important things you should communicate with your users both before & after their participation.

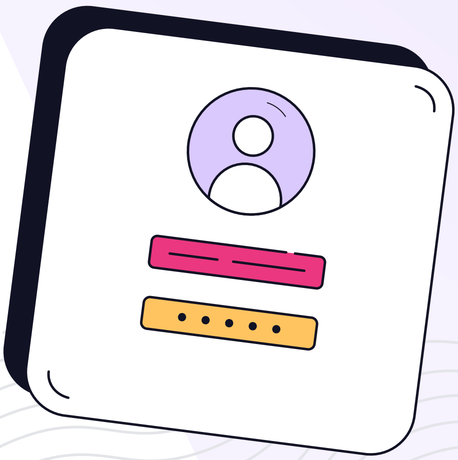
BEFORE: Clearly explain what participating with your user research entails — what you need from them, what they will get from you, what your research is for, how they found you, etc.

AFTER: Share when incentives will be paid, what will happen to information and data that's been collected, and if findings or results will be shared. "If able, share the results or findings with people who participated and thank them by showing them how they helped," said Caitlin Faughnan, UX Research Ops Coordinator at GitLab.

**It is personalized and promotes the brand of your org.**

Not only are your participants real humans, so are you and your team. If your communication feels robotic, it may dissuade users from participating in research. There are two ways to solve this: Utilize your brand and make the experience more personalized. When she was at Gusto as their UX Research Operations

Program Manager, Danielle Cleaver, ensured all communication between her researchers and participants was customized. "We didn't want an email to come from no-reply@gusto.com, we wanted it to come from UX Research at Gusto because if they replied, we would get back to them."



- Ensure all communication comes directly from the researcher conducting the study. *For example, if someone was conducting a study, every email the participant receives would come directly from that person.*
- Put faces to names by having all researchers add updated profile pictures in their emails.
- Insert your company's logo into emails, landing pages, and screeners.
- Use your company's branded fonts and colors whenever possible.

**It is managed in one place.**

"What we're hoping to have is one centralized place to manage all the participant connections that we would need for any research, whether it is a survey, unmoderated test, or interview," said Crystal.

This centralized place would let Crystal and her team look at who they've talked to, when they last were contacted, how often they've been contacted, how much they've been paid, the feedback they've given, and what information has been gathered about them.

The challenge? "There hasn't been a tool yet that can do all the things we need, so there are a lot of workarounds, which are challenging to communicate and adhere to," she said.

This is exactly why we built Rally, the User Research CRM, which provides one place to manage all Participant Management and recruitment. And while Rally won't eliminate the need for other tools to conduct research, it does offer seamless integrations to CRMs, like Salesforce, and research tools, like Qualtrics.

# How to build a good Participant Experience

"Similar to any other kind of design project, you document what you would like the process to be. You create an example, you test it, make refinements, and then launch," said Crystal. "It's simple, but I wouldn't say easy. It involves a lot of work."

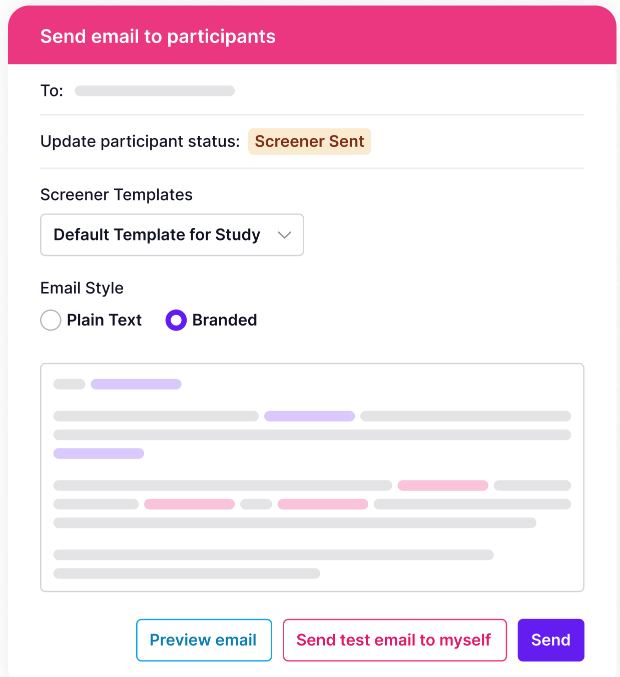
Crystal summed it up well. We'd like to add a few more tips that will help you accomplish the project of building a good PX.

**Make your communications branded and personal.**

"At the end of the day, the participant should know why they were contacted and how those communications looked," said Danielle. "If your company has design principles, you should apply those to the Participant Experience." Associate your communications with your brand by including your logo and using the brand fonts and colors when possible.

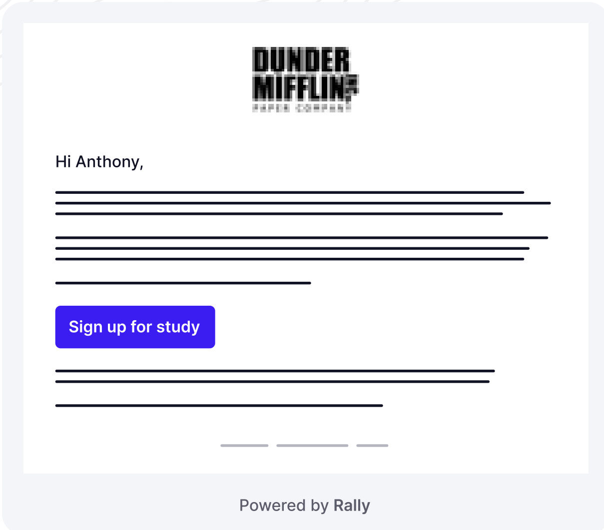
"It's also important that they associate research with real people. Name the researcher participants will speak to so they know they'll be interacting with an actual human and be primed for the experience," she said.

Danielle recommends utilizing a preview feature for emails so you can make sure branding and personalization are present as well as catch any last-minute copy or formatting errors. "If users see weird things in the footer of your email, based on how you're processing your email or what platform you're sending from, it's going to affect their experience," she said.




Quick checklist:

- ☐ Include your company's logo
- ☐ Use brand fonts and colors
- ☐ Address emails from actual researchers
- ☐ Keep all comms within a study from the same researcher
- ☐ Utilize preview features for emails




> **"It's not just about the ones who end up participating in research."**

Danielle Cleaver
UX Research Ops at Gusto

**Don't forget the "little things."**

For Danielle, the little things matter and can make users feel more like respected people than just numbers. One little thing you can do is make sure your screeners end with a line like "we're sorry if we fill up."

"It's not just about the ones who end up participating in research," she said. "People don't think about the folks who fill out a screener and aren't selected."

> *What about the folks who fill out a screener and aren't selected?*
>
> "It would be really nice to have a process set up that would send an email to folks in this status," said Danielle. Here is what Danielle recommends doing for those who fill out screeners and aren't selected:
>
> - Close the loop by thanking them and explaining that it wasn't a fit or you won't need their help this round.
> - Try to use them in some other research capacity and offer that option.
> - Let them know that you will keep them in mind for the future.
>
> "Make sure to be gracious," she said. "It matters in the long run."

**Look for opportunities to delight.**

Often the little things we mentioned above can be moments of delight for your users, and participating in research should be a delightful experience. Investigate your current PX and look for moments where you can cause delight in participants.

### How to drive delight with your users:

- 🥰 Pay your users right away
- 🥰 Provide incentive options that account for your participant's work or lifestyle
- 🥰 Check in with participants to make sure incentive offerings are worthwhile
- 🥰 Anticipate your participants' questions and provide answers ahead of time
- 🥰 Always have someone available to answer any questions your participants may have
- 🥰 Pre-screen as much as possible to ensure you get the right participants and don't waste your users' time
- 🥰 Offer flexibility and patience whenever needed
- 🥰 ALWAYS say thank you
- 🥰 Follow up with your participants to learn what you're doing well and what you can improve
- 🥰 Really listen to your participants and show you value their perspective, experience, and feedback
- 🥰 Maintain a positive and appreciative tone
- 🥰 Be responsible with how often you communicate
- 🥰 Use humble, gracious language
- 🥰 Make the journey participants go through as seamless as possible
- 🥰 Set clear expectations and consistently meet them

### How to plan for participant hesitations, concerns, and questions

With all participant questions, try to reply within 1-2 business days. If you cannot answer in that time, Caitlin Faughnan, UX Research Ops Coordinator at GitLab, recommends letting the participant know you are seeking an answer and give them a timeline for when to expect a response. "The follow-through aspect is especially important for building trust."

For Caitlin and her team, the two main hesitations participants have are regarding incentives and whether an email is real and genuine.

**💰 Incentives**

It's important to understand that not all companies will legally allow employees to accept incentives. You also need to ensure you do not incentivize any government employees, since that could be seen as bribery. Here's what Caitlin and her team do to plan for this hesitation:

- Mention in your email the exact dollar amount they will receive and how they'll receive it.
- Caitlin has found that some people have concerns with Amazon gift cards and don't want to participate, so Caitlin tries to make sure it's clear there are other options than just Amazon gift cards.

  *Her team uses Tremendous, which has a wide range of choices so often Caitlin will respond to hesitations with Amazon gift* *cards with something like this: "We completely understand! We use the Amazon verbiage as it is the widest available gift card option globally, however Tremendous (our incentive provider) will be sending out your gift card. With Tremendous there is a wide range of options to select from (depending on where you are located). You can check out their catalog of options here!"*

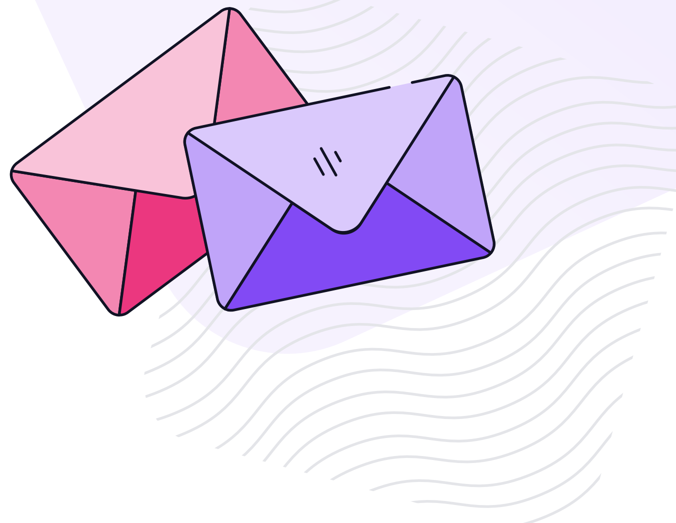
**Is this email genuine?**

We dive more into this — which is the biggest question Caitlin and her team encounter — in the sections below. Caitlin recommends approaching this as a time-sensitive question. "We want people to know the emails are real and not fake and to solidify trust."

Though her teams' responses may vary, they will always confirm the email is genuine, verify it came from the research team, and include a non-hidden link to a screener or survey.

**"We want people to know the emails are real and not fake and to solidify trust."**

Caitlin Faughnan
UX Research Ops at GitLab



## How to build rapport and genuine communication with your users

Caitlin shared her tips for building rapport with participants and making communications feel more genuine, which will both help build a strong community and keep users engaged and excited to participate.

- Put a face to the name by allowing participants to reply and ask questions to a specific researcher.
- Use first names when possible when communicating with panelists.
- Try to reply within 24-48 hours.
- Follow-up with participants when it makes sense to.
- Be mindful of participants' culture and location (when known).
- Write to participants like it is a conversation — don't be rigid and stiff!
- Make sure every researcher has a profile picture attached to their email.
- Include links to the researcher's LinkedIn or other social media.

### How to make your communications not look like spam

When communicating with users, many may be weary of spam and not trust what is being sent to them. Caitlin shared some tips on how to make communications not look like spam and hopefully get more opens and responses:

- Add in extra verbiage that doesn't feel robotic or computer-generated so emails don't all look the same and feel more personalized.
- Give a personal email for users to reach out to for questions once they're participating in a live study.
- Explain why a participant is receiving this email (e.g. you were identified as X through product usage).
- Send test emails.
- Have a reviewer for every email.
- Keep subject lines uniform and consistent (this will help users begin to become familiar with your Research function and recognize when emails come from the researcher).

## How do you enable your team to recruit with Participant Experience in mind?

The best way to enable those who are communicating with participants to provide a good PX is to educate and train them, provide helpful materials, and monitor and give them feedback.

Once you've defined what a good PX looks like, you'll want to educate and train your team. Crystal is currently building an onboarding program for anyone who wants to recruit for or conduct studies. After going through this program, the person should feel comfortable facilitating a good participant experience.

"The onboarding program focuses on helping people new to research at our organization know what to consider when recruiting and where they can find support and templates to make the work easier," she said. The following are questions Crystal tries to answer in this program:

- what's involved in recruiting?
- when should you use a general audience vs. a specific audience vs. a proxy audience?
- how many people do you need for different research methods?
- where should you look for participants?
- how much should you offer as an incentive?
- how should you screen for the right participants?
- when should you involve Research Operations?

- how do you close the loop with participants?
- what are some sample outreach for social media, email, customer service, vendor recruiting partner, etc.?

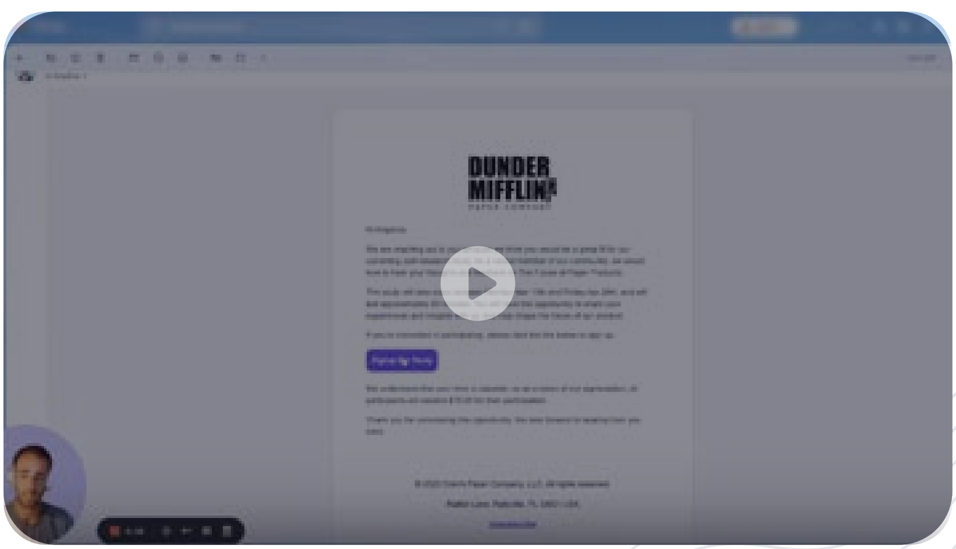
A great addition to training and onboarding programs is educational materials that your team can access, like:

- example projects,
- templated communication that has the right tone and voice,
- sample screeners that include required questions,
- other questions someone may want to include in a screener, and
- language around incentives and other important topics.

And lastly, **it's essential to review what your team is doing and provide feedback**. At MongoDB, Crystal said the first study someone conducts is always checked before recruiting begins to ensure they are following best practices and creating a good PX.

The experience users will have when they participate in User Research matters. "We try to have good conversations with our participants because we need the data and we want it to be a positive experience," said Caitlin.

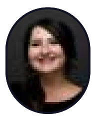
Rally can help you build a delightful and efficient Participant Experience. For example, here's the PX of a participant signing up for a study in Rally:




Learn more here

# The importance of ethical and compliant research

**Crystal Kubitsky**
UX Research Ops Lead
MongoDB



**Anna Reger**
Sr. Research Ops Mgr.
Babbel

**Kaela Tuttle-Royer**
Research Ops Mgr.
Airtable

**Tyreek Houston**
UX Researcher
CONSENSYS

In this section, we'll break down what compliant and ethical research looks like and how to ensure you're practicing both when it comes to your Participant Management and recruitment.

*Disclaimer: We are not legal professionals, and though we hope this section is helpful to you, we recommend you also consult your legal team or counsel when it comes to ethical & compliant research.*

## Compliant Research

### GDPR Compliance

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a European security and privacy law. Regardless of where your organization is based, if you offer goods or services to or process the personal data of EU citizens or residents, GDPR applies to you. Being GDPR compliant will help you avoid hefty fines (we're talking 4% of your company's revenue or €20 million) and ensure your customers can trust you with their private information and data. GDPR matters especially for User Research since you are gathering and storing PII (Personally Identifying Information).

**Governance**

The processes and guidelines you'll build for consent, privacy, and information storage. Governance ensures that both researchers and participants are protected and that research is compliant with GDPR and other regulations. Your role when it comes to governance will be to understand GDPR and how it relates to User Research, establish ethical and compliant processes, create templated consent forms, and maintain PII.

**Consent & Consent Forms**

While NDAs are not always necessary when it comes to research, gaining consent from participants is a must if you want to enable ethical research. Consent forms are also often required by law. When a participant gives consent, they are indicating that they understand their rights, privacy, and expectations and are willing to participate.

**PII (Personally Identifying Information)**

Any information that can identify a person. This could be a name, address, phone number, email, etc. GPDR defines PII as any of the following: name; physical attributes; location data; online identifiers; an identification number; economic, cultural, or social identity of a person; and health information.

**NDA (non-disclosure agreement)**

A legal document that establishes a confidential relationship between a company and the person signing. Typically an NDA is used to ensure ideas and information are not stolen and shared with competitors or outside parties. In User Research, an NDA may be used if the researcher or participant may learn sensitive or confidential information during the research session that shouldn't be shared.

## What do we mean by ethical research?

Practicing ethical research means you understand that your users are real humans and your most valuable asset and treat them as such. A major part of ethical research is diversity and inclusion. "The world is a big, diverse place, and we want to make sure that we're creating products that can actually serve the world," said Tyreek Houston, UX Research Lead at ConsenSys.

"As the UX field continues to evolve and more researchers enter the practice," he said. "It's important to keep diversity and inclusion at the highest level of importance, so that value can be delivered across all audiences and a positive impact can be made at a much larger scale."

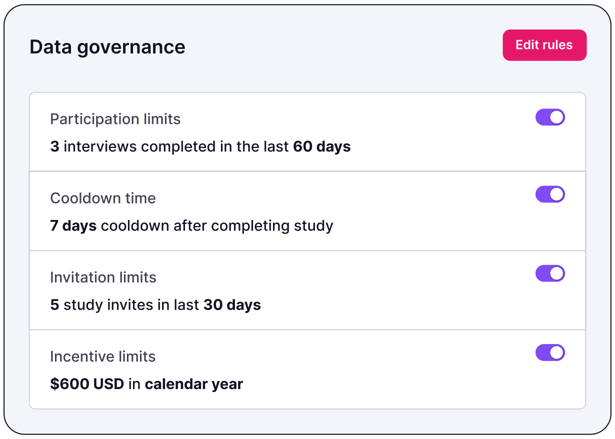
Ethical research also means you:

**only collect necessary data and information**

*disclose exactly how this data will be both used and stored*

**do not over-contact participants**

*set outreach rules in your research CRM*




**pay participants immediately**

*determine and set payment amounts before starting research*

*communicate the payment timeline and expectations to your participants*

*use a safe and secure payment method*

**do not over-contact participants**

*set outreach rules in your research CRM*

**set clear expectations for your participants early on**

*create templated messages to be used for each study with essential information*

**consider diversity and inclusion in your recruitment process**

*consider factors like age, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, socio-economic status when defining your target population*

*use different recruitment methods to find a wider and more diverse audience*

- *ask non-invasive questions to understand where people are located and what ethnicities they identify with*
- *keep in mind people with disabilities or who have limited access to technology*

**are transparent in all your communications with participants**

- *communicate to your participants your research methods, payment timeline, frequency of contact, research findings, and location and personal data access*

**avoid bias**

- *do not recruit the same participants for new studies within a certain timeframe (peek our Governance feature above 👆)*
- *try to focus on recruiting fresh participants who have not participated in any research (💡 Tyreek said this will "reduce participant bias, randomize your participant sample, and increase confidence interval when collecting/ analyzing data.")*
- *if you can't access these fresh participants, recruit those with the furthest "last participated" date*
- *when speaking to participants, as a moderator, manage your body language and minimize agreeing bodily gestures*

**are respectful and considerate to participants**

- *always thank your participants and when you can, share with them the impact their participation made*
- *show consideration by tailoring your incentives to your users wants or needs*

## Before you start building compliant and ethical processes

Kaela Tuttle-Royer, a Research Ops professional who has led research teams at companies like Airtable, Spotify, and Dropbox shared some things to consider before building compliant and ethical processes.

1. Determine your personal ethics and learn what your research leaders care about so you can be aligned.
2. Understand the policies and confines of the market you are operating in.
3. Think through Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DIB).

"It's important to think through how to access a true representation of your user base when recruiting," she said. "That's why you must ask how you can make your research more inclusive."

## How to enable and practice compliant and ethical research

1. Conduct an audit.
2. Understand privacy and compliance.
3. Automate and templatize what you can.
4. Educate your researchers on compliant and ethical research.
5. Help your researchers develop empathy for your users.
6. Embed consent into your process.
7. Set up a process of deletion.
8. Pay incentives immediately.
9. Get leadership buy-in.
10. Stay up-to-date on compliance policies and standards.

Now, let's go deeper into each of these steps.

## Conduct an audit.

Before you begin, meet with key stakeholders to determine the purpose and goals of your audit.

1. **Evaluate the current state of compliant research at your org.**
    - Does your organization and team fully understand GDPR obligations and responsibilities?
2. **Evaluate processes and tools.**
    - What are the data implications of these tools and processes?
    - Is all information both perceivable and understandable to at least one of your participants' senses (sight, sound, etc.)?
    - How are you processing the personal data of your participants?
        - How secure is the storage of personal data your team is processing?
        - What is your team currently doing to minimize the level and amount of data you are collecting?
        - What is the current process for gathering informed consent?
        - How is your team communicating with participants regarding the use of their data?
        - Does your team have systems, procedures, and training to recognize personal data breaches?
3. **Assess any risks you see within your current processes and tools.**

To get deeper into GDPR, we recommend consulting with your Privacy & Legal departments.

## Understand privacy and compliance laws and regulations.

"Privacy and compliance oftentimes are seen as blockers for researchers," said Kaela. "They care about them, but it slows them down to have to think through the processes and how to gate information."

It's your job to find ways to make compliant research as easy as possible. "This is where tooling can become really important." To understand privacy and compliance, consult with your legal team or any legal counsel. Follow step 2 that Kaela mentioned above and research the policies that would directly affect your users. For example, what might change when you're operating in a market like India versus in the UK where GDPR is a bigger deal?

While it's important to work closely with your legal team and legal counsel, it's equally as important to loop in your security team. Tiffany Stanfield, Senior UX Researcher, Research Ops at Pendo, recommends bringing your security team into your research processes early on. They can help you with data storage and be another level of assurance that you're staying compliant.

## Automate and templatize.

Anything that needs to be somewhat consistent or has very specific parameters or language can be templatized. Choosing to create a template can make a process or task self-serve and more efficient. For example, consent forms are a great thing to turn into templates that researchers can use.

At a 2022 webinar, Crystal Kubitsky, UX Research Ops Lead at MongoDB, recommends asking these questions when determining what to automate and templatize:

- What are things that are unnecessarily consuming my attention?
- What can I delegate to others through templates or automation?

Automating and templatizing alleviated pain points for Crystal and can also help when you are a small team or lack resources.

Here are some things you can templatize:

- discussion guides
- research projects
- consent forms
- evaluative tests
- screeners
- emails
- responses to common participant questions

Anna Reger, Senior Research Ops Manager at Babbel, has built messaging templates for some of the communication that goes out to participants. Doing so ensures that certain levels of compliance are being met and that communication remains consistent.

When it comes to automating, one thing Kaela explored was building a script that runs automatically and anonymizes participant information. This could also be a formula that auto-generates a tag to anonymize data.

It's equally important to document and keep thorough record of your research activities, including participant consent forms, data collection materials, and research findings.

## Educate your researchers.

"Research Ops sets up the processes, but researchers handle most of the data. Everyone needs to care about it and be on the same page," said Kaela. After setting up these processes, it's your job to train, educate, and enforce them.

Anna hosts regular training sessions that go over GDPR rules. These training sessions are obligatory for the researchers and enabled colleagues. It's easier to follow a process correctly when you understand the why behind it. Educate your team on why compliant research matters and what their exact role is in ensuring their research stays compliant and ethical.

👁️ Anna's vision for what these training sessions will accomplish:

- all reports are delivered anonymized
- transcripts, icons, and made-up names are used
- if personal data must be used, it is centralized and located in approved tools

📄 Anna's agenda for the training sessions:

- Why am I here? (stress the importance of the topic)
- Theory on GDPR (GDPR and CCPA, PII and personal data)
- What is personal data? (clear examples with focus on combination of the data)
- Compliance in our research process (go through research process and identify personal data)
- Pseudonymization and anonymization techniques
- Quiz and discussion of questions

Another way to educate your researchers is to create FAQ guides. Kaela said this is a great way to ensure everyone is on the same page and to help your researchers feel empowered and confident.

To build her FAQ guides, Kaela utilizes her own personal experience as a recruiter and researcher. "I like to use 'real world' FAQs," she said. For example, with consent forms and privacy, Kaela likes to include answers to questions like:

❓ What if my participant won't sign an NDA?

❓ Due to the new WFH life of our participants, what if I capture a participant's child in my video recording?

❓ What if my participant can't take compensation?

Kaela will also proactively answer questions from the researcher's perspective, such as:

- What if I see something inappropriate?
- What if I'm sick and can't attend the session?

Lastly, Kaela always uses common questions to guide her FAQs, like:

- What do I do with my media files after a session?
- What do I do if ReOps is OOO?
- What if I really like this participant and want to invite them for future research?

### Help your researchers develop empathy for your users.

"Our users are the most precious asset we have in research," said Anna. And since they are your most precious asset, you need to handle their data and privacy right and also treat them like real people.

Treat your users like they are your mom. That's what Kaela tells her researchers to get them to care about handling user data the right way. "The only time you're ever going to confidently have compliant and ethical research is if you can get your researchers to empathize with their user community and understand the impact not being compliant and ethical can have on research."

So, how do you do this?

Both Anna and Kaela recommended making your researchers experience being a participant.

1. Add your researchers to your panel and invite them to a project. Anna said she invites researchers to a project they've personally created as an opportunity for feedback.
2. Ask your researchers to go through the entire process as if they were a user and think "How would I feel if this was my experience with this research program?"

Ideally, this will help your researchers develop empathy for their users, understand how important compliant and ethical research is, and see the value in various processes and templates you've built.

> **"The only time you're ever going to confidently have compliant and ethical research is if you can get your researchers to empathize with their user community."**

Kaela Tuttle-Royer
Former Research Ops Manager at Airtable

## Embed consent into your process.

Ideally, consent should be incorporated into your screener or as part of your scheduling process. What makes gathering consent difficult? Crystal explained it can be challenging to track when you gathered consent, what the context for consent was, and what version of consent a participant was given. "You need to make sure that your consent is for specific information and a specific purpose," said Crystal. "It should be attached to the context of the project with GDPR."

> In Rally, you can...
>
> 📄 create consent templates
>
> 🚫 eliminate over sampling
>
> ✋ prevent over contacting
>
> 💰 set incentive limits
>
> 🔍 audit and track user contact status and history
>
> 👮 blocklist to enforce do not contact
>
> 🔗 sync opt-outs across your customer data sources
>
> 🔒 securely store and manage sensitive participant data/PII

It's important to meet with your legal team or any type of legal counsel when you are creating your consent documents and process. Crystal met with legal to review what MongoDB's consent types are and to ensure that the language aligns with their privacy policy.

"We've talked through the degree of flexibility for gathering consent — how can we reduce the friction but still enable consent to be gathered and not forgotten?" Once you've met with legal to determine those answers, you can then provide your team with the tools and guidance they need to gather consent appropriately.

To properly gather informed consent, provide clear and detailed information about the research, its purpose, the type of data you're collecting, and how that data will be used. You should also make it clear to your participants that they can withdraw from your research or panel at any time.

## Set up a process of deletion.

It's important to delete participants' personal data when it is no longer needed. And once you have this process set up, you need to communicate with your participants so they know how long their data will be stored.

ReOps should create a sheet (Anna created hers based on [Kasey Canlas's talk in ReOps Conf](#) 2022) that includes:

- involved tools
- why we need to store the data
- where the data is stored
- who has access to data
- who controls the tool that stores the data
- involved personal data
    - *typically includes:*
        - *information used to communicate with and identify the participant (first and last name)*
        - *information needed to contact participant (email address or phone number)*
- reasons for data collection
- how to handle data (anonymize, delete, and retain)

**Anna's guidelines on anonymization and deletion:**

- Delete personal data from emails and reports. To delete personal data means to pseudonymize or anonymize it.
- Determine the appropriate amount of time to keep participant data (e.g. 6 months, this number should give you enough time to set up, run, and report out research).
- After that determined time period has passed, all personal data must be anonymized or deleted.

**Anonymization in action**

1. ReOps sends out reminder to anonymize emails and reports where personal data is older than X months (determined above).
2. Researchers anonymize personal data older than X months.

    *Delete email communication from personal company email.*

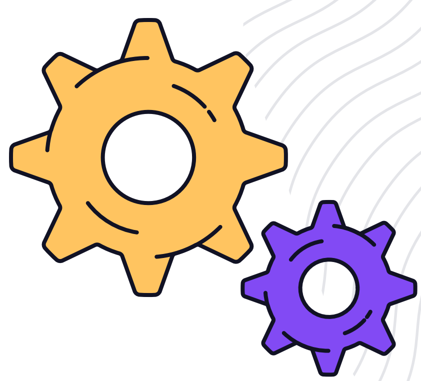
    *Replace screenshots with icons and real names with made-up names.*

    *Remove videos and provide transcripts.*

    *Delete or replace digits contact data.*

    *Delete or replace digits in UUID.*

3. ReOps checks the automated/manual anonymization.



**"It's very important to have a good incentivization process in place."**

**Anna Reger**
Senior Research Ops Manager at Babbel

## Pay incentives immediately.

"It's very important to have a good incentivization process in place," said Anna. To properly incentivize your participants and ensure they are paid immediately, follow these steps:

1. Determine the payment amount and type. Before you begin your research, choose an incentive amount based on the length of research, level of effort required, and your allowed budget.
2. Communicate the payment details. Clearly communicate details like the payment amount, payment method, and when the payment will be made.
3. Make the payment ASAP. Pay your participants quickly after research ends, or at least within 24-48 hours.

Use a secure payment method. This will keep the participants' personal and financial information protected.

*Anna's tips:*

- *Consider incentivizing for all types of research and pay as soon as possible.*
- *Explore other options for incentives. You don't have to only offer Amazon gift cards. Currently, Anna is looking into options like donating to charities or other sustainable alternatives.*

## Get leadership buy-in.

Identify leaders who value compliant and ethical research. You may first need to educate your leadership on why compliant research matters. But once you get buy-in, "get close with these leaders and lean on them," said Kaela. "Make them tell the story and make them hold the team accountable for practicing compliant and ethical research practices."

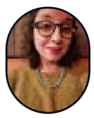
Chapter 6

# Tooling: Build vs. Buy

**Caitlin Faughnan**
UX Research Ops Coordinator
GitLab

**Danielle Cleaver**
UX Research Ops
gusto

**Lourenço Rodrigues**
UX Researcher
outsystems



**Lilian Rega**
UX Researcher
outsystems

For many years, cobbling together 10 different tools was the only option for building your own Participant Management and recruitment tool. But now that the User Research function is growing, there are more tools on the market that are more purpose-built than any home-grown solutions. Of course, we'd be remiss if we didn't recognize that we're selling a platform here, but we hope to provide an objective perspective on why buying a User Research CRM is preferable to building a home-grown solution in most circumstances.

Here are two reasons why a UXR team may choose to build and why, in each case, buying is still the better option:

**1.**

**Building an internal tool from scratch**
Though you can tailor this to your exact needs, it takes a lot of manpower and time to build — time that you could be spending researching and building a better product.

**2.**

**Leveraging other tools**
This solution only provides temporary relief. Ultimately, tools not built for the unique requirements of User Research quickly cause more headaches and end up making you work more, not less.

Based on these points, it's clear that buying is the best option when it comes to tooling. Another quick reason why buying is the better option is this: When you buy, you are buying from a team of dedicated engineers, designers, researchers, and product managers whose sole day-to-day job is building software that solves the problem you are facing. They are highly motivated to continue building upon the solution and solving more of your team's problems.

Luckily, a new category of software is gaining some steam that can enable and optimize your Participant Management and recruitment. Rally is the market leader in a new category of Research Ops platforms, the User Research CRM.

While some have chosen to buy Participant Management and recruitment tools like Rally, others have still decided to build their own. We'll explore both buying and building as well as some cases of those who built their own solution and now have decided it's time to buy a better tool.

# The Case for Buying

With the rise of User Research, the number of tools on the market has grown to an almost overwhelming number. Many tools can be grouped into two categories: open research platforms and all-in-one research platforms.

## Why should you consider a purpose-built, open research platform?

Purpose-built research platforms are designed to meet the specific needs of a particular user or task. An example of a purpose-built platform that is also an open research platform is Rally, where we've built a User Research CRM to help you manage and streamline Participant Management and recruitment.

Here's what makes an purpose-built, open research platform the best choice:

- no unnecessary or useless features
- easy to use
- optimized for what you need
- flexible and open
- integrates with other tools

## The Quick Case for the User Research CRM

CRMs can be great and powerful tools — but only when they are built for their intended users. And in this case, there are no CRMs out there that are built specifically for User Research. Until now. 😲 With Rally, you can:

- manage the operations around the entire research process (i.e. recruitment, participants management, and incentives)
- integrate with systems like Salesforce and Snowflake to reduce data silos and give teams accurate customer information
- integrate with other research tools like Qualtrics and SurveyMonkey to automate survey invitations and tracking across tools
- facilitate Governance, a system of rules on customer outreach to promote research democratization
- eliminate the hours of manual work and spend more time researching
- remove the need for many of the tools teams are currently using (and not always liking)
- work with a team of talented engineers and designers who can provide quick support
- rest assured that your data is safe with [Rally's SOC 2 Type II certified and GDPR and CCPA compliance]
- ensure you're housing PII and other data in a secure and safe place

[Learn more about Rally.]

# Open research platforms vs. all-in-one platforms

Open research platforms are flexible and modular systems that can integrate with other tools and software. All-in-one platforms are comprehensive solutions that include all the necessary components and features. Though all-in-one platforms may sound perfect, they are far from it.

While an all-in-one platform may be a jack of all trades, it's almost always a master of none. You'll likely see a long list of features, but many of those features are less developed. So, when examining an all-in-one platform, make sure it can back its features up with some depth.

A great alternative to all-in-one platforms would be a tool that does one thing excellently and integrates with other tools that do the same, AKA an open research platform.

Why would you choose an open system vs. an all-in-one system?

**Choose an open system if:**

- you want flexibility
- you use a variety of other tools and systems
- you want to customize your workflow
- you have complex or specialized requirements

**Choose an all-in-one system if:**

- you want a simple solution
- you want to eliminate the number of tools you use
- you want high-quality features
- you want attention to detail
- you are OK with a higher quantity of features that are likely less developed

Though an all-in-one system can seem cost-effective and a faster, simpler solution, open systems are the way to go when it comes to your research tool kit.

An open system will allow you to tailor your tool to your unique research needs, scale your research function, integrate and exchange data with all your tools (this is called interoperability). If you'd like to read more about interoperability, read this piece by Casey Gollan, UX Research Operations Project Manager at IBM.

## Questions to ask when procuring a new tool

Casey recommends asking these three questions when examining a new tool:

1. Can I move my data in and out in standard formats?
2. Can this platform connect with others?
3. Can I build on this platform?

Other questions to ask include:

- what is the cost of this tool?
- what specific tasks or needs does this tool support or solve?
- what level of support or resources are available for this tool?
- what are potential risks or downsides?

## Making the case to purchase a tool

Leadership buy-in is an essential part of the purchase and procurement process for a new tool. Here's what you should prepare to share with leadership and stakeholders to make the case for the tool you choose.

1. Clearly define the need for the tool
2. Share the pros and benefits of the tool
3. Create a cost-benefit analysis
4. Identify risks and downsides
5. Share successful case studies for the tool
6. Pitch an implementation plan

## Tips for going through the procurement process

"Procurement is a test in patience, communication, and follow-through," said Caitlin. "You need to become a pro at all three."

**Follow-up, follow-up, follow-up.**
"The procurement process won't move along with just the procurement team. Be very involved in the process — check status updates, push people to complete their items, make sure invoices are actually paid."

**Take time to write a good business case.**
"A good business case helps take some of the pressure off if you can anticipate and proactively answer some of the questions you may encounter."

**Stay in touch with the contact for the tool you are hoping to purchase.**
"The procurement process can leave people in the dark and staying in contact is a way of being transparent with the person/company you're trying to do business with."

## Build → Buy with PandaDoc

The Research team at PandaDoc built their own solution within Salesloft. The team reached the point where their solutions weren't meeting their needs.

After investigating tooling options, PandaDoc decided Rally was the best fit. "Rally was the best tool we'd tried all year," said Eugene Lazovsky, a Product Researcher at PandaDoc.

Here's more from them on their decision to abandon their built solution for a tool they can buy:

**"We decided to use Rally because it would replace multiple tools, streamline our process, and allow us to be in control of our process."** - Max Vasyliev, UX Researcher at PandaDoc.

**"Compared to all the software that is out there in the market, Rally definitely stood out and offered the best solution for recruiting our user base."** - Anastasia Perelaiko, UX Researcher at PandaDoc.

Read more about PandaDoc's experience with Rally →

Though it's clear that buying a tool is the better option, some may still find that building their own tool works best for them.

## The case for building

We talked to two UXRs and one ReOps leader who have built or are in the process of building their own internal tool.

👷👷: **Lourenço Rodrigues, UX Researcher and Lilian Rega, UX Research Specialist at Outsystems:** After evaluating various tools, Lourenço and Lilian decided that building their own internal tool was the best solution to their problems and for their situation. They are currently in the process of building their tool.

👷: **Danielle Cleaver, former UX Research Ops Program Manager at Gusto:** When Danielle joined Gusto, the research team had already decided to build their own internal tool within Salesforce. Though Danielle was not involved in the decision to build vs. buy, she has spent much of her time at Gusto making the case for using their internal tool.

## Why build?

For the team at Outsystems, building became the clear solution after evaluating multiple other tools. "We needed to build a very rich research program," said Lourenço.

OutSystems's product supports the end-to-end application development process, involving many different product users. To find these product users, the research team needed to gather complex information about each user and their company.

To properly utilize the immense amount of information the team gathers, they **needed powerful search and segmentation abilities within a tool.**

Here are other reasons why building a tool may be the best option for you:

- You have specific rules and needs that other tools cannot accommodate for.
- You want flexibility to change your tool and craft it exactly to your needs.You have the engineering resources internally to support immediate changes.
- There are multiple programs besides research within your organization that your users can participate in.
- You have many complex internal systems that your solution would need to integrate and play nicely with.
- You have enough time and budget to cover your efforts and the efforts of other teams like design and engineering.
- You need to adhere to strict security and privacy rules and regulations or want to minimize data leaks. (Despite this point, external tools will often remain a better and more secure option for housing PII and other sensitive information, particularly compared to spreadsheets.)

# Before you build...

**Here are some tips from Danielle:**

💁 Keep in mind the people who may only touch your tool once. Your tool will likely be very niche and personalized, so those who won't use your tool frequently may make mistakes that hurt your tool's usability. You will need to set up all potential users of your tool with the knowledge and experience to properly navigate it. We'll dive more into how to do that later on.

💁 Scaling is one of the most important things to think about when building. You won't always be using your tool for studies of 8-20 people. Eventually, your tool may be used to send screeners to thousands of people. Keeping that in mind will save you a lot of revisions and rebuilding.

💁 Think of your tool as a product you are building and utilize your team. "Specializations exist for a reason," said Danielle. "You need to have people on the team building the tool who can think about all the pieces of product development."

# What to prioritize when building your own tool

**1. Compliance**

"We've always kept that as our number one," said Danielle. "Are we opening people to risk What's our flexibility to undo something if there's a problem?"

**2. User friendliness**

It's important to make your tool user friendly for your researchers and non-researchers. Here's how:

- Create and share a list with your team that details all potential errors someone may encounter while using your tool. Also include what may trigger those errors, what they mean, and how to solve them.
- If possible, involve a designer when building your tool. For example, Danielle and her

team realized there were UI elements that were creating confusion and added steps. "We didn't realize buttons need to have a certain look and feel and need to follow the same pattern as the rest of the tool initially," she said. "Having a design system from the start would have saved time, effort, and money."

**3. Integrations**

Your tool shouldn't just integrate with other tools your researchers use, it should also play nicely with the systems and tools used by cross-functional teams.

Here are some questions to ask:

- Is data updated and accurate in all tools across your org? Do they automatically update and connect?
- Are filtering and tagging systems consistent?
- How can your tool automatically coordinate with other customer outreach efforts?

**4. User research**

One pro of building your own tool is crafting it to your team and their unique needs and workflow. To do so, you need to understand your users — both researchers and non-researchers.

- 🔍 Who could potentially try to use your tool?
- 🔍 Should they have access to your tool?
- 🔍 What can you do to give them a different level of access?
- 🔍 How can your tool work at the scale that they'll need?

## Metrics of success for your internal tool

Here are some metrics of success and goals to consider when building your internal tool:

- 🥇 Does your tool help people spend less time completing an end-to-end process?
- 🥇 Does your tool reduce the number of tools you need?
- 🥇 Does your tool enable you to find the right people to contact, contact them, and schedule sessions with them?
- 🥇 Can you create and store screeners and consent forms within your tool?
- 🥇 Can you manage and send incentives using your tool?
- 🥇 Is it easy for a new person to navigate and successfully use your tool?
- 🥇 Does your tool help researchers recruit for both niche, difficult populations and simple, easy populations?
- 🥇 Does your tool help you standardize processes and create a cohesive and consistent research practice?
- 🥇 Does your tool help you practice and enable compliant research?

# Measuring success — whether you build or buy

Here's what Danielle has put together to help her team best use their internal tool:

- **Set up a regular cadence to audit your tool** and determine if it's still meeting the needs of your team and hitting the success metrics you've chosen. Here are some important things to keep in mind when auditing:
  - keep your highest use cases in mind
  - differentiate between what's a blocker vs. what is painful; address the blockers first
- **Do what you do best — user research.** "Talk to the most general users of your tool and look at the error tickets and failure dates to identify issues," she said.
- **Train your researchers and non-researchers in your tool.**
  - Create a video walk-through that they can watch on their own time.
  - Build a Wiki that covers high-level instructions and training.
  - Put together a doc with best practices and tips for navigating your tool.

Though building your own tool can solve some of your problems, it ultimately will always be a starting point when it comes to optimizing and streamlining your Participant Management and recruitment. Buying a tool will always be the better choice. And when it comes to buying a tool, a User Research CRM like Rally is the best option.

> **"Compared to all the software that is out there in the market, Rally definitely stood out and offered the best solution for recruiting our user base."**
>
> Anastasia Perelaiko
> UX Researcher at PandaDoc

# Panel Building 101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Crystal Kubitsky
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MongoDB


Caitlin Faughnan
UX Research Ops
GitLab


Sarah Wormann
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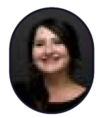

Anna Reger
Sr. Research Ops Mgr.
Babbel

A user research panel is a list of people who have not opted in to a specific study and instead have opted in to participate in future research studies. There are many ways user research teams utilize panels. Some organizations, like GitLab, use panels for participants who are difficult to recruit.

Two main types of panels are short-term or temporary panels and evergreen panels. Let's take a look at GitLab for some examples.

**Short-term/temporary:** For example, in Caitlin's experience, the GitLab UX research growth team asks for a panel of people who have used GitLab for less than three months. Since this panel has a specific time frame as a requirement for panelists, it becomes redundant after 3 months. These panels often require very purposeful recruiting of specific types of users.

**Evergreen:** First Look is GitLab's research program and their largest, ongoing panel. Participants sign up with an interest in participating in any research at GitLab. Recruiting for evergreen panels can be more broad and less targeted.

Other panel types include panels that are automatically populated, meaning the entire user base is a panel, and panels that are constantly being refreshed and overhauled.

## Why build a panel?

- Quickly access engaged participants who have already opted in to research
- Start creating a community of your users
- Perform research studies that have a longer timeline
- Access users who are difficult to recruit
- Study complex behavior or usage

Before we discuss how to build a panel, let's review what a good panel — and a bad panel — looks like. Research Ops leader Kaela Tuttle-Royer shared some characteristics of good and bad panels.

## What a bad panel looks like

- 👎 No activity
- 👎 No communication — both internal and external
- 👎 No research studies or inquiries sent in months
- 👎 No use from researchers
- 👎 Clunky and inconsistent experience for panelists

## What a good panel looks like

- 👍 Expectations are properly set for everyone internally and externally
- 👍 Participants are thanked promptly and personally
- 👍 Everyone understands what the panel is for and how it operates
- 👍 Admin levels and governance levels are set
- 👍 There's a clear process for using the panel
- 👍 Information and data is displayed in a way that's easy to understand and digest
- 👍 It's built into the research lifecycle

"It's built into the research lifecycle" means:

1. **Your panel solves for (or elevates) your already existing process.**
   - If you are having a hard time identifying certain participant types, start your panel by populating it with your audience.
   - If you cannot handle all the recruitment requests from your researchers, make sure your panel is built within a tool that can help alleviate those struggles.
   - If your team relies heavily on behavioral data to recruit, make sure that the panel you're building properly speaks with your internal systems to ensure you capture this data in your panel.
2. **The information on how to leverage your panel exists within every aspect of your documentation.**
   - "How to conduct research" guides should always mention things like when to use a panel, how to adapt the process for using the panel, how to capture consent from panel participants, how to compensate participants, etc.

> **"If your panel doesn't fit seamlessly into HOW research is done, you'll never be able to realize the true potential and impact of it."**

Kaela Tuttle-Royer
Former Research Ops Manager at Airtable

🏆 The secret to an excellent panel: **Build a humane panel** 🏆

The best panel is one where your panelists feel they have control and autonomy:

- they can opt in and opt out easily
- they understand what data they are sharing, why they are asked to share it, and how it's used and stored

they are empowered to ask questions and receive answers

they know who is on the other side of the panel and research

"A humane panel is where groups of people come together to talk. It's not just a transaction and a place for a list of data to be used in the future," said Kaela.

As you work on outreach, think through how you can make your panel a good use of your participants' time, said Kaela. For ideas, check out our section "How to build community on your panel."

## 3 things to prioritize when building a panel

Here's what Caitlin recommends you focus on when building your panel:

🔒 **Data privacy**

❓ **Screener questions**

🤝 **Team buy-in**

### 🔒 Data privacy 🔒

"From day one, a researcher should show trustworthiness and transparency to potential panelists," said Caitlin. Here are some things you can do:

- Try to follow the strictest rules.
- Engage legal in order to address questions and/or concerns.
- Ensure all verbiage you use is correct.

### ❓ Screener questions ❓

"If you have the right questions at the start, it's much easier to get real people that you need," she said. "You'll want to make sure you are inviting the right people and not wasting their time on the wrong studies."

When a participant signs up for a panel, they aren't always only signing up for one specific study. This means you need to spend time thinking through the information you want to gather.

For example, Caitlin's team needs software engineers, but the research team also more specifically needs people doing certain tasks within the software engineer role. Because of this, they are making their screener questions more task-based instead of role-based.

### 🤝 Team buy-in 🤝

"There is a lot that needs to go into building and maintaining a panel," Caitlin said. Your team can help you decide the best questions to ask and can also help promote and populate your panel.

## How to build a panel

### Step 1: Figure out WHY you're building

If you don't clearly understand why you are building your panel, it will likely be built poorly, go unused, or turn into a bad panel like we described above. Once you know why you're building you can begin scoping.

## Step 2: Determine scope and bandwidth

If you can, explore these questions with everyone who will be involved in the panel:

- What is the goal of this panel?
- Do you have the time to build this panel and keep it engaged?
- What's the ecosystem that this is going to live within?
  - Am I building it internally?
  - What tools do you need to build this panel?
- Who will be using this panel?
- Will this panel only cover UXR needs or will other departments benefit too?
- What access does each person need?
- What data is needed to make the panelists worthwhile for research efforts?

> 💡 **Tip from Kaela:**
>
> 🤯 If your team is already at capacity, then you need to ensure you're building a panel that is minimal to low lift for your team (and perhaps more self-serve for the researchers — if you choose self-serve, make sure you understand the compliance and privacy implications behind a move like this).
>
> 🌾 If your team has the resources, make sure you understand the lift not only to build the panel but also to scale it and keep it going. It's easy to think about what it takes to build, but thinking about what it takes to keep something going is where panels can quickly become a waste of company resources.
>
> 💗 Ultimately, be thoughtful about what other teams exist at your company. A lot of times you'll have community teams that have individuals who are experts in this space and can help share the lift.

## Step 3: Determine what information you need from participants

Similar to your scoping exercise, engage with other teams beyond Research Ops and Research to figure out what information you need to collect from your participants. Crystal offered these questions to explore:

- What information does a panelist need to provide?
- What characteristics do we need to collect about our user to help us target them?
- How often are these characteristics likely to change? — deprioritize information that changes frequently
- Will they need permission from their company to join your panel?

Crystal recommends asking for as little information as is necessary in your screener to get panelists in, then you can incentivize them to provide more information later. Kaela said you should try to get data from panelists in the most effective way possible with the least amount of lift.

How do you get data in the most effective way possible?

- Understand what data you need to make a panelist a potential participant for research. Ask questions that give you those answers.
- Look for a panel that can “speak” with your systems. If you can consistently pull the data you need from participants from other data sources, you can limit the number of questions you ask panelists.
- For any data you ask panelists to submit, make sure you either have a way for them to update it as things change or a way for you to check their answers against your current state.

> 💡 **Tip:** Set an automated reminder ~every 6 months to remind panelists
> - if they’re included in the panel
> - that they can opt out at any time
> - to update their information if anything changes

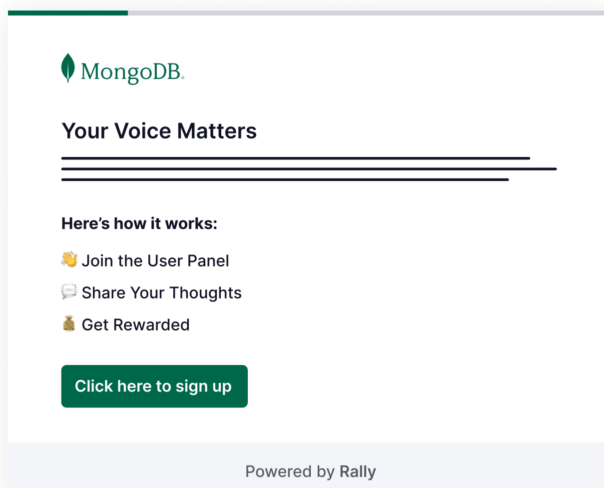
Once you have this information, it’s important to organize it in a way that is easy to understand and digest, said Sarah Wormann, Research Ops Specialist at Sonos.

## Step 4: Plan how to populate your panel

How will people become aware of your panel? What will outreach look like? “I’m a big proponent of just promoting it everywhere possible,” said Tiffany Stanfield, Senior UX Researcher, Research Ops at Pendo. Here are some ways and places to promote your panel:

- Events
- Third-party forums
- Social media
- Internal communities
- Email
- Email signature blocks
- Current surveys being sent to customers/participants
- Customer success managers

“Discover all the points where you can make someone aware of your panel and then have a landing page to learn more,” said Crystal.




A public-facing landing space should entice someone to sign up and answer the majority of questions they may have about joining, Crystal explained. Here are some questions that should be answered on your landing page:

- how often will I be contacted to participate?
- what type of activities might I be participating in?

- what kind of impact will my involvement have?
- is there a commitment?
- can I leave at any time?

As you work on outreach, think through how you can make your panel a good use of your participants' time, said Kaela. For ideas, check out our section "How to build community on your panel."

💡 **Tip from Anna**

As you recruit for your panel, be flexible. The opt-in process for your panel should be capable of covering different ways of how your users get to the panel. Even if you recruit for a certain project, build an opt-in so the users can be invited again. This will create sustainable ways of reaching out to users who did not get to be interviewed for the project they initially were planned for.

## Step 5: Admit participants and share important information

Important questions you should proactively answer for your panelists include

- what is the commitment?
- how flexible is it?
- how can I leave?
- what is expected of me?
- how can I opt out?
- how and when will I be contacted?
- who will be contacting me?
- how will links be sent? (this is important for privacy concerns)

## Step 6: Keep your panel fresh and warm

What does this mean?

- ensuring your panelists can opt out
- giving panelists the opportunity to update their information if your panel will exist over an extended period of time
- making sure data is as accurate as possible at all times
- giving power back to your panelists
- ensuring your panel and the tool and method you are using to maintain your panel is meeting the needs of as many stakeholders and use cases as possible

"Any time you can give responsibility and power back to your panelists, you'll have people who are more engaged. It feels less of a trap and more like a volunteer experience and they're excited to do it," said Kaela.

💡 **Tip from Anna**

As you build and scale your panel, make sure to consider and differentiate between different user groups. For example, **B2B participants should never be contacted for B2C studies**. Try to think through scenarios like this when developing templates or utilizing automation.

## How to build community within your panel

"You need to help panelists know that when they engage with you and your research, it will amount to something," said Kaela. When thinking about building a community within your panel, she said. "You have to think about the return on investment for them."

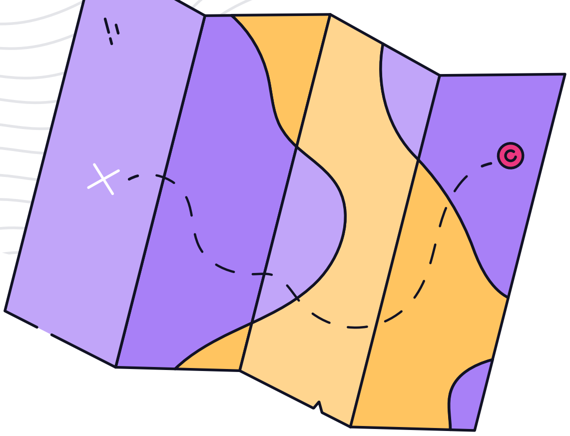
What can you give back to your panelists?

- access to help requests — offer panelists exclusive access and help when they have an issue with your product
- results of research with panelists who contributed
- clear expectations
- genuine and human interaction and rapport with your research
- swag
- access to beta testing opportunities
- a donation to charity or a tree planted in their name

Kaela also recommends finding a strong community partner within your company. Ultimately, "don't think of the community within your panel as something you need to have solved right away," Kaela said. "You can baby step into it."

## 5 top tips for panel building

- **Build a really good business case for your panel**. Nail down how you are going to build and manage your panel.
- **Don't be afraid to push for a panel**. "I've seen panels come to all their glory and they can be beautiful if you do it right," said Kaela. "So if you believe in the value that it can add, you should push for it."
- **Identify your participant journeys within your panel**. Crystal does this before she begins building. Understanding the types of experiences your participants may have can be helpful. For example: joining the panel, leaving the panel, being recruited from panel for a specific project, and engaging with that specific project.
- **When recruiting for your panel, explain why the participant is receiving the email**. This is something Caitlin recommends to help plan for participant hesitations and concerns.
- **Make sure you are working with something that you can duplicate easily**. Anna Reger from Babbel said this is how she manages panels that are constantly needing to be refreshed and renewed. But it's great advice for any panel you are building.





# Democratization

**Christopher Nash**
Research Democratization Lead
Dropbox

Democratization is quite a hot topic in User Research and Research Ops and there are many opinions on what it means, what it looks like, and how to do it. We spoke to Research Democratization Lead Christopher Nash to get some answers.

Nash started his User Research career as a research recruiter then moved into a role as an embedded researcher and later a research manager. In recent years, he has created and led democratization programs at both Dropbox and Airtable.

“A good democratization program requires guidelines, guardrails, and oversight,” said Nash. Read along to learn more about democratization and what guidelines and guardrails you should implement to build a strong democratization program.

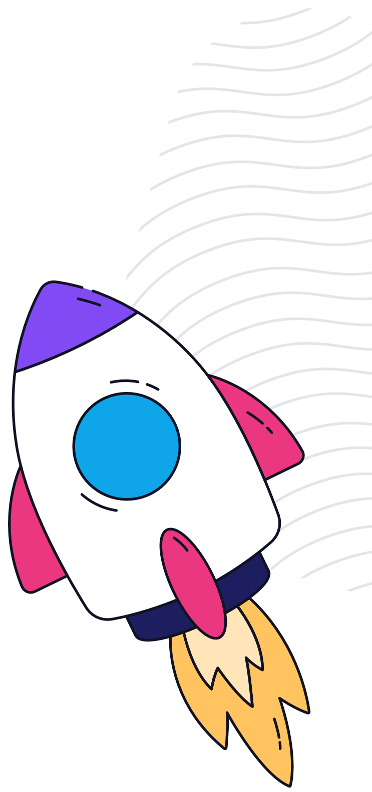
## What do we mean by democratization?

“There’s a lot of fear and anxiety around democratization among some in the Research community because people assume democratization just means handing over the keys to UserTesting.com and walking away,” said Nash. “That’s not at all what I mean when I talk about democratization. A proper democratization program is intentional, well-resourced, and provides significant guidance, guardrails, and oversight."

There is no one correct way to democratize. Context is everything. You should build the program that will work best in your context, taking into account your goals, your team, your product, your industry, and your org's research maturity. It's important to spend time determining what democratization means to you, your team, and your stakeholders. Alignment on a clear vision for your program will enable you to build a strong democratization program and reap the benefits listed below.

One belief that Nash does hold strongly is that not all research is appropriate for democratization. You don't want to have Designers or PMs trying to create personas or journey maps or any sort of foundational research. In most cases, tactical evaluative research projects are the only type of research that your partners should be leading.

Once your goals are clear, you're ready to start building. Here are some best practices and guidelines for democratizing Research from Nash.



## How to start democratizing Research

First, why would you want to democratize research?

- Your professional research team can focus more of their time on foundational strategic research
- More basic evaluative research can get done (such as usability studies or language testing)
- Increase awareness, understanding, and knowledge of User Research among your cross functional partners
- More people in the company have the opportunity to learn from users directly
- Enable organizations to scale insight volume and velocity
- Change the culture around User Research
- Free up researchers' time to focus on the most strategic research questions

Now, here's how to start democratizing research at your org.

## Dedicate a person to democratization

"Researchers are always overworked, and adding democratization to their plate is not going to lead to happy researchers or a good democratization program," said Nash.

Ideally, this person should be a researcher or an ops professional with significant research experience. "This person's role is not just to guide non-researchers and researchers to recruit users, it is also about educating partners on how to talk to customers and how to make sense of what you hear — things that need to come from someone with research experience."

It can be difficult to advocate for a person dedicated to democratization, especially when headcount is constrained. "But that one person can be a real force multiplier and help a lot of folks do research," said Nash. "One democratization lead can facilitate a lot more research projects than one embedded researcher could conduct."

A dedicated resource can also be much more responsive. "If you have someone who is dedicated that can answer right away, then all of a sudden your partners feel incredibly supported," he said. "They will remember that you were able to help them when they really needed you. That engenders a lot of goodwill and confidence in the program generally."

Being able to dedicate an entire role to democratization can't be done by everyone and whether you're able to will depend on the size of your company and the maturity of the Research program.

Whether or not you can dedicate a person to democratization, the next important thing to do when building your program is to start with the principles.

**"Researchers are always overworked, and adding democratization to their plate is not going to lead to happy researchers or a good democratization program,"**

**Christopher Nash**
Research Democratization Lead

## Start with the principles

Nash recommends you ask the following questions when determining the principles that will guide your democratization efforts and program:

- How do you want democratization to work at your company?
- What makes sense in your company for your product and for your customers?
- What kinds of research do you expect non-researchers in your company to be able to do?
- What kinds of research do you absolutely not want non-researchers to be able to do? (Nash said, “I strongly believe that tactical evaluative research is the sweet spot for democratization. Partners should be focused on research that will inform tangible product decisions. Partners should not be trying to create personas, or jobs-to-be-done, or other foundational generative research.”)
- What does it take to get access to the tools you use for research?

## Define the swim lanes as much as possible

"Your partners won't know all of the detailed processes that go into a successful research project. They need clarity on responsibilities and timelines. What activities are their responsibility, and what can they rely on a researcher to do, or on ReOps to do to support their project?"

To define the swim lanes, answer these questions:

- What can a non-researcher expect from research or ops to help them conduct research?
- What will non-researchers be expected to do on their own?
- What users are non-researchers allowed to access and talk?
- What users need extra approvals?
- How long should it take to complete a project?"

## Get non-researchers to record what they learn

“This is one of the biggest challenges I’ve found,” said Nash. “It’s essential to create a culture around the importance of documenting what you did and why.”

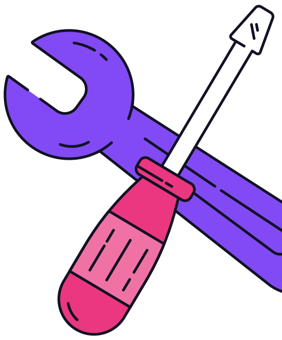
Here’s why: Your team and organization need to understand where insights, findings, and backing for decisions are coming from. “Encourage people not to write for their team but instead to write for the person who is going to join the team in six weeks,” said Nash.

Nash said you should make this requirement as lightweight as possible. “They don’t need to write a 45-slide deck, it just needs to make it clear to the next person what was done, who we spoke to, and why we made these decisions.”

“Think, how is this person going to be able to come in and understand what you did and why without having to track you down, or repeat the research you’ve already done?”

### Find the right tools

A major part of democratization is giving access to your research tools. It’s important to find tools that can allow non-researchers to safely and responsibly conduct research. We dive into why Rally is a great tool for democratization down below.



## Democratizing participant recruitment

“Democratizing recruitment is fraught — it can be concerning to give folks unfettered access to customers because you don’t know what they are going to do with it,” said Nash. “They’re not trained researchers and don’t know what they need to do to protect the privacy of the participants, craft a good participant experience and protect the brand.”

That’s why Nash recommends democratizing recruitment later in your democratization process. “It’s a fantastic step,” he said. “Just not where I’d start.”
Here are situations where you could consider democratizing recruitment sooner:

- it’s easy to find customers
- you have a strong ops team
- you already have good processes
- you already have an established democratization program
- you have multiple non-researchers who have already done recruitment

Nash recommends requiring whoever is wanting to recruit users to first clearly explain what they are trying to do, what they are trying to learn, and who they are trying to reach out to and why.

“One of the strongest gates you have is access to customers, and this is one of the gates you can keep,” he said. “Whoever is doing the recruiting needs to safeguard the experience of participants because you need to make sure that they have a positive experience, and hopefully are willing to come back.”

## How to ensure you are democratizing safely, effectively, and responsibly

**Identify what specific product decisions you want to inform with this research.** “You and your partners should agree on this before recruiting begins, or before giving access to a tool. Make sure that the research questions are well-defined and worthwhile. Partners should be able to articulate how they expect the research will inform specific product decisions."

**Build gates, not barriers.** "We don't want to set up barriers just to make things difficult, but we do want to establish moments in the process that facilitate some oversight. Build in places in your process that non-researchers need to get feedback before moving to the next step."

**Evaluate and give feedback.** “I like to let partners make the first draft of each deliverable (research plan, screener, discussion guide, etc.). This gives me a window into their own research maturity, so I understand what level of help they need. And it makes every edit a learning opportunity. Every time I rephrase a question for the partner, I explain why I'm phrasing something in exactly that way, and this is where they learn the most about practical research techniques.”

## 2 ways to effectively train non-researchers

There are two types of resources you can use to train non-researchers: static resources and live resources.

### Static resources

“These should be documents that are not too long but still granular enough to properly explain how to do evaluative research,” said Nash. Examples include:

- outline of the study-building process
- how to write a discussion guide
- how to write up your findings
- how to think about analyzing research findings
- how to think about the fidelity of your prototype
- how to think about the data that goes into your prototype

### Live resources

"Going through a process with a group of people and doing something together and practicing live can be very effective," said Nash. "But turnover in this industry is insane and since people are always coming and going, you'll have to produce live resources regularly." Examples of live resources include:

- workshops
- live trainings
- process or tool walk-throughs/demos

"Workshops can be great when you have a team that needs a little extra push to get started," said Nash. Ultimately though, "if you're going to rely on live resources, you have to supplement them with static resources," said Nash.

## Prove the value of democratization

"Proving the value of research generally is one of our disciplines biggest challenges," said Nash. "But it may be a little easier in the case of democratized work because nearly all democratized research should be evaluative research."

Ideally, your partners should have articulated the specific product decisions they need to inform so that when a project is done, you can document the outcome of each decision and the degree to which research informed each one.

At the end of a quarter or year, you should be able to share things like:

- how many projects you enabled
- how many customers were spoken to
- how many decisions were influenced by research
- specific wins where you can identify a decision that was informed by a democratized research project that ultimately moved a company metric

Documenting your democratization successes is important because it will help you maintain resourcing and show how your efforts have led to better business decisions and better outcomes for your users, said Nash.

# How Rally can help you democratize research

Rally's User Research CRM can enable safe, responsive, and effective customer communication and recruitment at scale and support you and your team in democratizing User Research. Here's how:

**Track and manage all interactions** your team and others within your organization have with your users.

**Set rules** around contact frequency, research participation, total incentives paid out, and more with Rally's Governance feature.

**Create branded templates** so that everyone can stay on brand and your participants get a consistent experience no matter who is doing the research.

**Support a level of access** that makes sense for your team. For example, Observers can be added to studies within Rally for view-only access.

As you enable more people to conduct User Research, you're allowing more people to potentially access sensitive and private information. Rally uses single sign-on, has best-in-class security infrastructure, and is GDPR compliant, so that your user data is kept under lock and key.

# Why choose Rally

With our User Research CRM, we make it easy to build and manage your Participant Management and recruitment processes so that you can find your users, manage their data and participation in ethical and compliant ways, and make your research delightful for them.

Rally enables you to:

- **Tap into your user base for research**
- **Build a panel of your users**
- **automate recruitment for studies**
- **Maintain a live sync of data from customer databases**
- **Implement governance rules to safely democratize recruitment**

For a more in-depth breakdown of our features, take our interactive product tour!

Get a Demo

# Acknowledgements

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to the many individuals who generously gave their time and expertise to make this ebook a reality. Without their invaluable contributions, this project simply wouldn't have been possible. We are humbled by their support and thrilled to have had the opportunity to collaborate with such talented and dedicated individuals. We are eager to see where their futures take them and are confident they will continue to achieve great things in their careers. Please take a moment to learn more about each of our contributors.

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Tyreek is a seasoned UX Researcher that helps Web3 companies uncover the unmet needs of their current and potential customers. Since 2016, he's worked in the technology field as a listener, learner, and leader. He takes pride in delivering quality research and building meaningful relationships. He's a New Jersey Native, a fitness enthusiast, whole foods advocate, and blockchain champion. One of his biggest goals in Web3 is to make it more inclusive.

**Agustina di Clemente**
Research Ops Specialist
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Agustina is the Research Ops Specialist at TravelPerk. She is passionate about automation and making things run in an efficient way. She is obsessed with customer feedback and enjoys being the bridge between TravelPerk's users and the Product team.

**Crystal Kubitsky**
UX Research Operations Lead
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Crystal is a research leader with a passion for empowering researchers to do their best work. Crystal has over 15 years experience in research in a variety of industries including entertainment, education, healthcare, law, finance, and technology. She is also an advocate for ethical research, efficient processes, and healthy experimentation.

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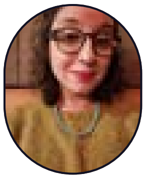
Danielle is the former UX Research Ops program manager at Gusto, a payroll & HR tech company. She started her career in this field as a UXR participant coordinator, then coordinator trainer. She's set up rapid/rolling recruitment programs at both YouTube and Gusto and built an in-house participant management system, and is an active member of the ResearchOps community.



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UX Researcher
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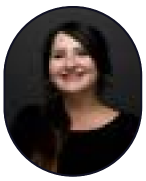
Lilian is a Brazilian UX Researcher who has been working in Research Ops for the last four years. She has experience in many different fields such as finance, healthcare, and IT.



Anna Reger
Senior Research Operations Manager
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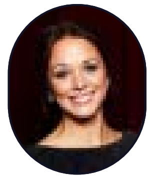
Anna has a background in academic research and UX Research. She is a passionate language learner and loves Research Operations because of the dynamics and flexibility it has throughout an organization.

Tiffany Stanfield
Senior UX Researcher, ReOps
pendo

Tiffany leads Research Ops at Pendo. Pendo has a research team of 7 that works closely with a larger design team. She has an academic background in physical sciences and began her career in academic research. Tiffany started exploring market research and got a position in B2B consulting. Now in her Research Ops function, Tiffany supports UX researchers, design, brand design, product marketing, and sometimes the marketing team. A large part of my day-to-day is maintaining our research panel, teaching and training the orchestration of recruitment, and helping to share the impact and insights of our research team.



Kaela Tuttle-Royer
Research Ops Professional
Airtable

Kaela has grown up in Research Ops with her first role being a dedicated recruiter at Dropbox. She found a passion for her users and the practice of Research Ops and had the chance to test, own, and grow a global research and insights ops practice at Spotify and later at Airtable. Kaela loves mentoring people in ReOps (and general operations), finding ways to use my role to benefit the users, connecting people across organizations, and using metrics to prove how ReOps and Research makes an impact.

Caitlin Faughnan
UX Research Operations Coordinator
GitLab

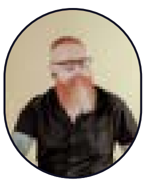
Caitlin (or Cait) is originally from New York, and currently living in Dublin, Ireland. She has a background in Psychology with a focus on Cyberpsychology. If she's not working, you'll catch her reading (fiction mainly), playing her Nintendo Switch, or on an adventure with her teacup yorkie Pogo and labradoodle/wolfhound mix Effie. "Before you ask the question – yes, Pogo's entire body is smaller than Effie's head but they are still besties (...mostly)." Cait's been working in the ReOps space since 2019 and with GitLab since January 2021. Prior to this, she worked as a Research Operations Coordinator with the back-end of the Google Play store, Google Cloud Enterprise, and Google Maps Timeline teams. Currently she's the only Research Operations Coordinator at GitLab where she keeps the values of transparency, collaboration, and accountability at the forefront of her work. She loves problem-solving and being resourceful – things you'll do almost daily in the ReOps world!

Lourenço Rodrigues

UX Researcher

outsystems

Lourenço is a UX Researcher at OutSystems where he promotes and values contact with users. He has been working in the digital domain for 20 years, mostly designing, understanding and improving people's experience on websites and applications. Lourenço started as a developer, went through digital marketing, specialized as a web analyst, and gradually entered the domains of usability and User Experience. He worked at Innovagency, Vodafone Portugal, and has been at OutSystems since 2015.



Christopher Nash

Research Democratization Lead

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Nash is an industry veteran, having co-founded two startups during the dot-com boom, where he was often the person in the room advocating for users' needs. He has since crafted a career in User Research, starting as a research recruiter, then working as an embedded researcher, and as a research manager. In recent years, he created and led democratization programs at both Dropbox and Airtable.

Oren Friedman

Co-Founder & CEO

Rally

Oren is one of Rally's Co-Founders and our CEO. He lives and breathes all things Research Ops, having spent the last 8 years of his career in different research organizations. He's passionate about enabling Research teams and their stakeholders to do their best work.

Krista Lipps

Senior UX Researcher

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Krista is an adept, ever-curious UX professional who genuinely seeks to make life easier and happier for others. Her experience spans several industries including tech, insurance, public libraries, and military, as well as environments both large and small, remote and in-person. She currently serves as Senior UX Researcher at Doximity, a platform for healthcare professionals.

Sarah Wormann

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Sarah lives in Boston, MA and has worked at Sonos for over three years, and recently transitioned into a Research Operations role. Previously, she worked in the education and nonprofit fields. In her spare time she loves painting, running along the Charles River, and hanging out with friends and family!

Lauren Gibson

Content Marketing Lead

Rally

Lauren leads marketing and content at Rally, where she is dedicated to connecting and amplifying the voices of the User Research and Research Ops community. With her experience in building marketing functions for startups, Lauren is passionate about creating powerful content that resonates with people. When she's not working, Lauren enjoys reading and staying active through exercise. She currently resides in Boston with her husband.


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