Digital Services Factory

How to recruit participants for user research

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When doing user research, you will need to recruit participants to part-take in your research activities.

Participants should be the people/citizens/organizations that use your service.

For better results, your research participants should cover many ranges of categories, such as:

- Educated or non educated
- Familiar with the internet or not familiar at all,
- From age 18-90
- Familiar or actual users of the service that need to be implemented
- Users of assistive technologies
- People that need specific help to use the service that need to be implemented
- Or a specific category of people that might need to be interviewed for a better understanding of their perceptions

Identifying target groups of users

To help you select the right type of participants for your research, it is helpful to identify the different types of users of your service.

Use existing data to help you do this, including looking at:

- country demographic statistics
- government and industry statistics
- service performance data and analytics
- user profiles done by other similar governmental departments
- results from industry equivalent research
- the types of users that contact your support channels

Decide the method of research

According to the service, and the stage of the project that needs to be implemented, the research team should decide whether to do qualitative or quantitative research.

The number of participants you chose for your research will depend on whether you are doing quantitative or qualitative research methods. For quantitative research you will need hundreds of participants to get a statistically significant result. For qualitative user research, 5-8 participants will help you to learn 80% of usability issues for a design.

Depending on your chosen research method, your research team must decide if your research should involve:

- a small range of participant citizens or companies
- a large amount of participants
- or include the whole reference population in the study

Define your participant criteria

The criteria should clearly specify the type of people that you want to participate in the research.

Depending on the service and the planned research, criteria might include participants to be from:

- a particular demographic – for example, young people aged 18 to 25
- a specific target user group – such as small business owners, job center staff or women that just had a baby, etc.
- particular experience – for example, people who have recently applied for a government grant
- a problematic situation – such as people who paid penalties because of delays, mistakes or wrong documentation

Further of the above points, participants should cover a variety of the below criteria as well:

- ages (18 – 90)
- genders (M, F, O)
- ethnicities (any)
- disabilities or impairments
- social status
- educational level, university level
- financial status
- geographical location
- levels of familiarity with the internet or technologies
- familiarity with devices: eg. laptop owner, tablet, or smartphone, iOS vs android

This will help your team to get research findings from a diverse and representative selection of your users.

Recruiting participant for user research

Based on the above decisions, the research team could find participants from the ways below:

- Work with a recruitment agency company
- Visit a support location, for example a Civil Service Center
- Visit a Main service Point (such as the Post office, Hospitals, Governmental authorities, etc.)
- Reach out to users from the database of your own product (only with consent of the citizen/user)
- Create a research panel with citizens who have provides their expression of interest to participate
- Posting on social media, like Linkedin, Instagram, Twitter, airtasker
- Advertise through newspaper articles, emails, posters and letters
- Recruit internally within your company
- Talk with relatives, friends and others to expand the audience/participants
- Connect with networks or groups who involve your target users, such as mothers groups or recent migrant community groups
- Contact Participants from previous research that already gave their consent for future participation

Some other questions to consider when deciding on your research participant sample are:

- Is there any bias in the types of participants you are selecting?
- what are the pros and/or cons on selecting participants from past research rounds
- What potential effects non-respondents might have on research results.

Incentives

It's normal for members of the public to get an incentive in return for their time. You should also consider compensating third-party organisations who help you find participants.

How much this is will depend on the type of participant and the length of the research session. You can ask agencies for advice on how much you should give.

You may need to pay extra expenses to help disabled participants take part in research – they may need a helper, taxis or someone to help with communication like a sign language interpreter.