



user interviews

by

User Testing

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WORKSHOP

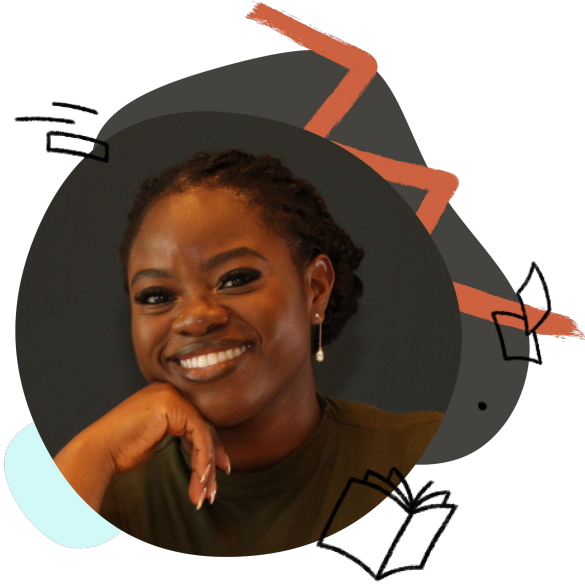
MAY 27

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT 101

Facilitated by Eniola Abioye – CEO | UX Outloud



Meet Eniola!



Eniola Abioye

CEO at UX Outloud

- Oakland born and raised :)
- Qualitative UXR for 11 years and a CEO for 6 🎉
- Tech-focused UX career coach making career strategy and upskilling approachable
- Previously led research at Meta, Silicon Valley Bank, Kaiser Permanente
- 35 countries and counting!

Welcome!

AGENDA:

- ★ Recruitment Landscape
- ★ Build a Recruitment Plan
- ★ Design an Effective Screener
- ★ Vet, Protect and Mitigate Risk

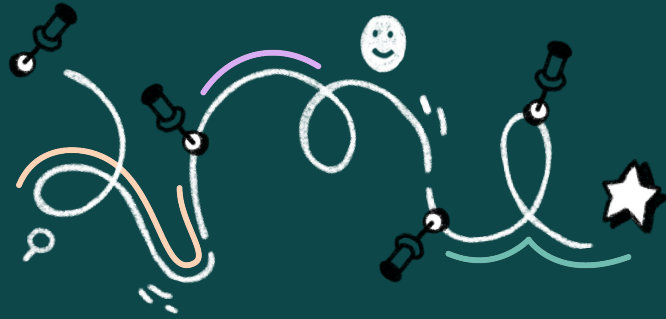


HOUSEKEEPING:



- 🗨️ Feel free to ask questions anytime by dropping them in the chat. Comments are welcome too!
- 🗨️ Slides will be made available to you so for now, just focus on digesting the content

Recruitment Landscape





Recruitment is an essential quality control lever for human centered research

Recruitment is the process of identifying, screening, and scheduling people who match your research criteria — so that the insights you generate reflect the experiences of the people who actually matter to your research question.



Recruitment is also one of the biggest challenges for Researchers, according to the State of ReOps

“Four out of 21 ReOps specialists in our study reported that combating increasing [participant fraud](#) is a primary focus in participant recruitment and management. Incidents include participants using AI to circumvent open response screeners and even using AI during live sessions...some tactics include recruiting more niche profiles, employing external vendors for participant recruitment, and hand-screening or double-screening participants.”

“I’ve kind of gone back to the basics of research operations, focusing on manual recruitment and the old ways of calling and getting to know future participants in a more human and authentic way. It’s been really interesting to return to the bare roots of what research operations was like,” said one participant.

Source: [The State of Research Operations 2025 by User Interviews](#)



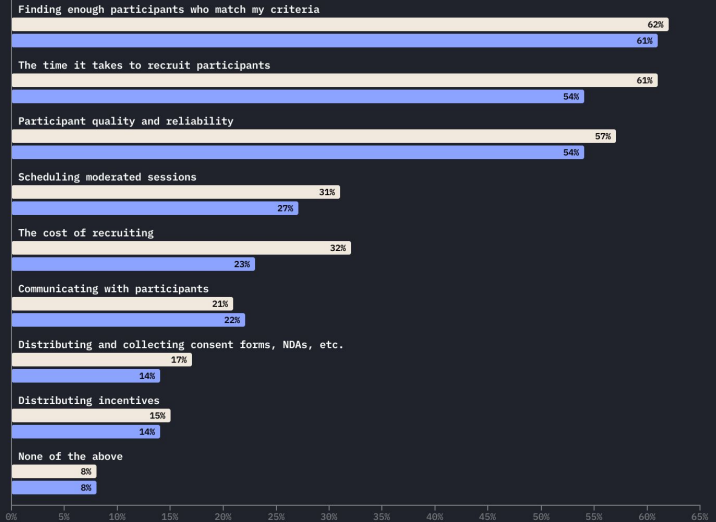
RECRUITMENT LANDSCAPE

If recruiting feels like it's getting more difficult these days, you're not alone

The time it takes to recruit, scheduling moderated sessions and the cost of recruiting are challenging for more researchers this year than last, according to SOUR 2025.

Common Recruiting Challenges

2024 2025



Source: User Interviews - State of User Research Report (2025)

Based on survey responses to the question: "Do you currently experience challenges or pain points with any of the following aspects of recruiting?"

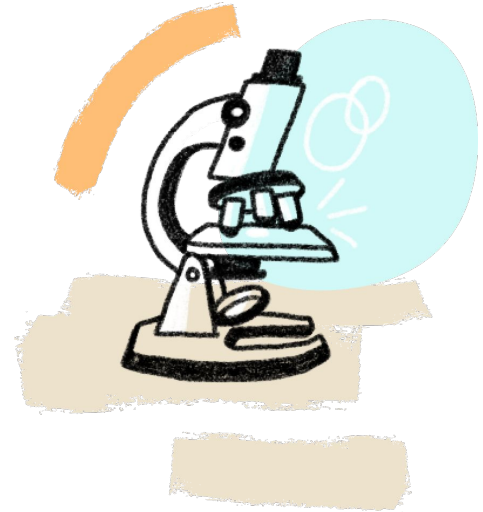
What's your biggest recruitment challenge right now?





Recruitment shouldn't be a logistical afterthought in your study plan, it can make or break a study

- Finding participants who actually match your criteria
- Outreach methods and panels
- Dealing with no-shows and drop-offs
- Getting budget and stakeholder buy-in
- Fraud and low-quality respondents
- Recruiting for B2B or hard-to-reach audiences





The risk of bad recruitment isn't just wasting project costs, it's also the resources spent on implementation

Expert user problem

Recruiting people who are too familiar or “close” to the product (i.e., product team members or long-term power users) only. Their fluency in the product is not representative of the majority.



Vocal minority problem

Recruiting through self-selection channels (e.g., opt-in panels, community forums) that attract people with strong opinions, high engagement, or axes to grind. They typically represent the extreme ends of the spectrum.



Availability bias problem

Recruiting the most “convenient” participants rather than those that are most relevant to the research question.





Synthetic users can be valuable when used correctly, but this data shouldn't be consumed in place of lived experiences

WHERE IT HELPS:

- Early ideation and concept exploration
- Generating early hypotheses
- Accessibility and inclusivity testing
- High-volume edge case generation



WHERE IT FAILS:

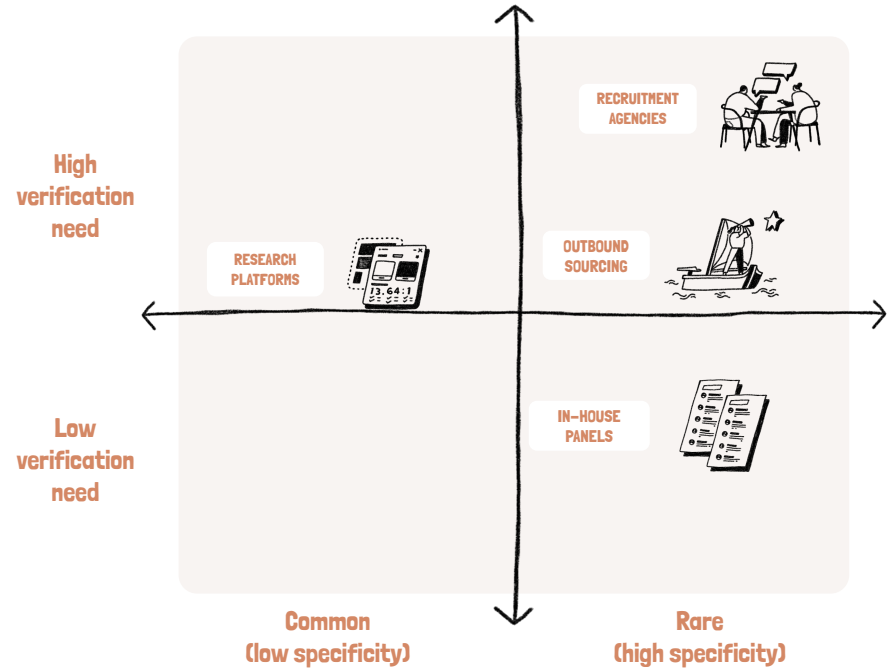
- Basing behavioral decisions on attitudinal patterns
- Simulated emotional and contextual nuance
- Novel behavior patterns
- Regulatory liability to test products with genuine users



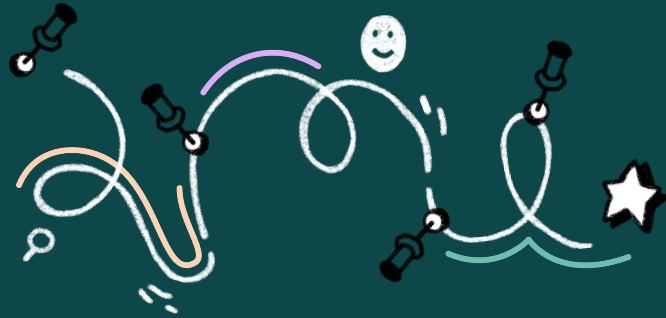
Recruitment sourcing options

Choosing the right approach depends on 3 key questions:

- How rare is the user experience I'm looking for a representation of?
- What confidence level am I looking for? (typically depends on product lifecycle)
- What's my timeline?

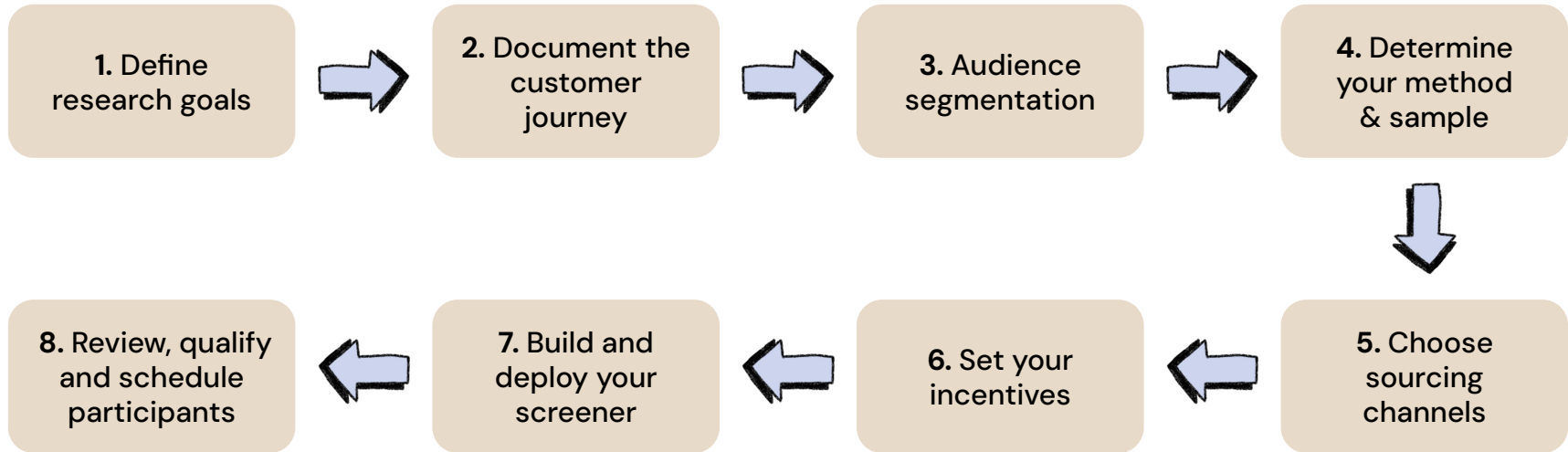


Build a Recruitment Plan





The journey from defining research goals to scheduling sessions can be broken down to 8 steps



Case Study: Improving the product discovery experience of the Sephora mobile app





Step 1 – Define research goals

Scenario: The UX research team suspects that customers are struggling to find products that match their specific needs (e.g., skin type, concerns) using the app's browse and filter experience. Leadership wants to know whether investing in rebuilding the filter system would have a substantial impact on sales.

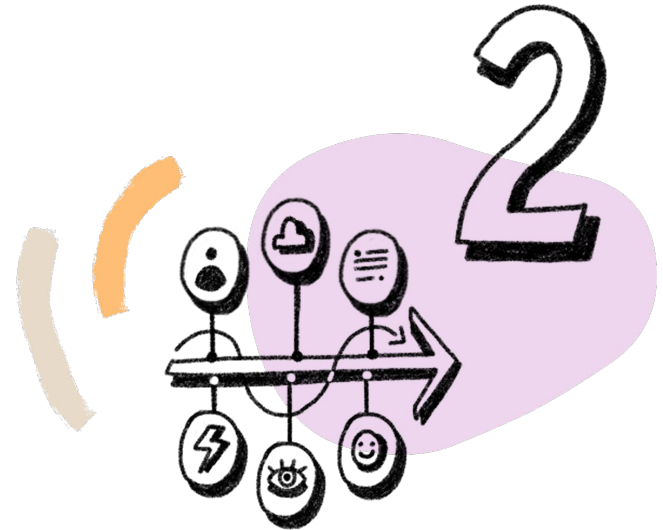
Research goal: Provide an evidence-based recommendation on whether to rebuild the filter and discovery system, or optimize what exists using in-app sales as a metric.





Step 2 – Document the customer journey

1. **Conduct secondary research** – what is known already about how users navigate the app?
2. **Data analysis** – explore conversion rate at each step of the sales funnel through implicit data
3. **Build a journey map** focused on behaviors, not demographics





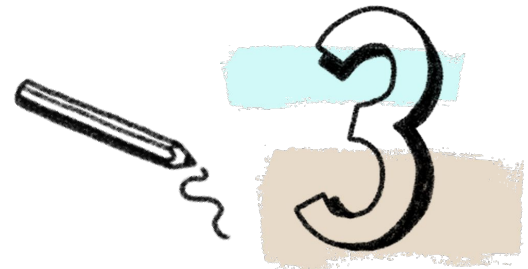
Step 3 – Audience segmentation

Must-haves:

- Purchased beauty or skincare products online at least once in the past 60 days
- A mix of those who have used the Sephora app (not just website) in the past 30 days and those who have never used it
- Shops across at least two product categories (e.g., skincare + foundation)
- Mix of Beauty Insider loyalty tiers (Insider, VIB, Rouge)
- Range of skin tones and skin types represented
- At least some participants who also shop competitor apps (e.g., Ulta, Amazon Beauty)

Disqualifiers:

- Sephora employees or immediate family members
- Beauty industry professionals (MUAs, estheticians) – too expert to represent typical shoppers
- Anyone who only uses the website, never the app



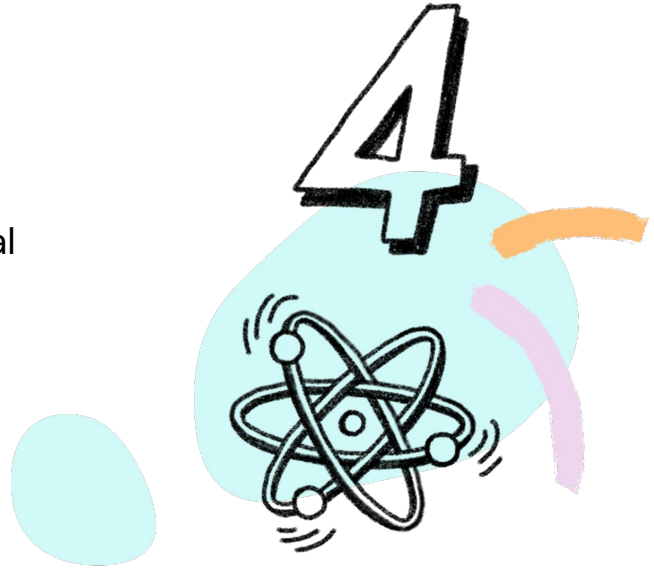


Step 4 – Determine your method and sample

Based on the product being in the growth phase of its lifecycle and the depth of insights needed, the team decides to run qualitative focus groups.

Eight 90-minute focus groups of 3 people

*the team over recruits by 25%, targeting 30 participants total with 6 people on the waitlist





Step 5 – Choose sourcing channels

1. **Internal panel of Sephora app users** – a warm audience with relevant product experience
2. **External consumer panel** to find users that shop for skincare products in person and online – avoid loyalty bias and maximize recruitment pool





Step 6 – Set incentives

Phase 1 (60-min moderated session): \$125 Amazon gift card — competitive for a one-hour consumer study, avoids brand-specific incentives that could skew participant motivation or responses.

Critical context is the timeline of the study; if time or the pool of potential participants are constraints, incentive is a lever





Step 7 – Build and deploy your screener

Collect demographic data to ensure a mix across locations, skin types, income, employment, etc. (do not use to disqualify)



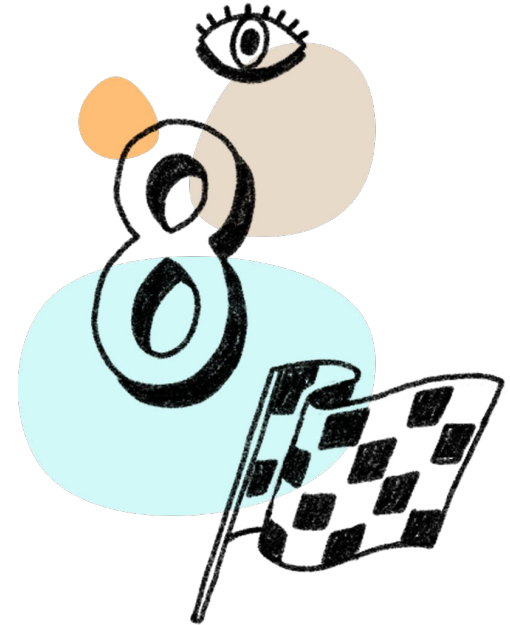
Behavioral questions might look like:

1. *"In the past 30 days, which of the following apps have you used to browse or buy beauty products?"* [multi-select, includes decoys like Target and CVS — Sephora must be selected to qualify, but it's not the only option shown]
2. *"How often do you purchase beauty or skincare products online?"* [frequency scale — must be at least monthly]
3. *"When you last shopped for skincare online, what was most important to finding the right product?"* [open-ended — surfaces language and priorities, also catches generic AI-generated responses]
4. *"Which of the following best describes your primary skin concern?"* [multi-select — used for segment diversity, not qualification]
5. *"Do you work in the beauty or cosmetics industry?"* [disqualifier — any yes response routes out]



Step 8 – Review, qualify and schedule participants

- **8 open-ended responses** flagged as generic or near-identical – likely copy-paste or AI-generated – disqualified
- **6 respondents** claimed to have used the app in the past 30 days but also selected "I don't shop online" as their primary shopping method – internal inconsistency, disqualified
- **4 respondents** self-identified as working in beauty retail in the open-ended field despite answering "no" to the direct disqualifier question – disqualified



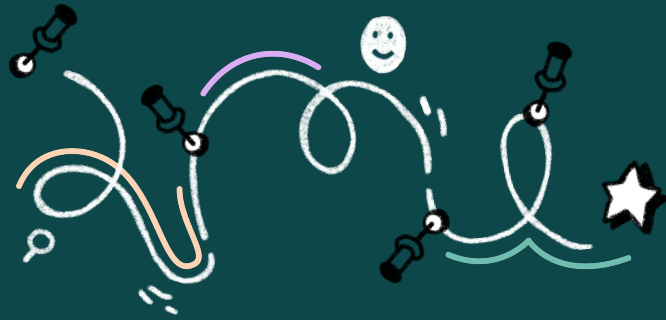


Common failure points in the process

- Defining participants by demographics instead of behavior or context
- Underestimating lead time, especially for B2B or niche audiences
- Screeners that telegraph the "right" answers, attracting professional respondents
- Skipping fraud mitigation and accepting all qualified applicants at face value
- No-show rates cratering a study because there's no buffer or waitlist

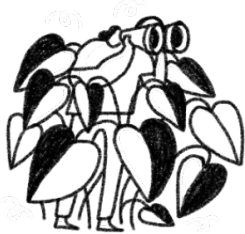


Design an Effective Screener



Q1. Which bracket describes your age?

- Under 18 (disqualify)
- 18–24
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55+



LOGIC: Quickly disqualify minors.
Provide age ranges rather than asking directly for a number to prevent the sharing of unnecessary PII.

Q2. What is your gender identity?

Select one

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary / gender non-conforming
- Prefer to self-describe: _____
- Prefer not to say

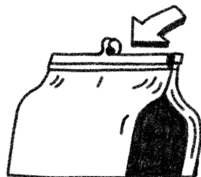
LOGIC: Screener only – used for participant diversity.



Q3. What is your approximate annual household income?

Select one

- Under \$35,000
- \$35,000–\$59,999
- \$60,000–\$99,999
- \$100,000–\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to say



LOGIC: No disqualifier — used for demographic diversity. Flag if sample skews heavily to one bracket; Sephora's customer base spans mid to upper-mid income.

Q4. Where are you located?

Select one

- Northeast US
- Southeast US
- Midwest US
- Southwest US
- West Coast US
- Outside the US (disqualify)

LOGIC: Study is US-specific. Capture region for diversity – avoid an all-same-city sample.





5-min break

Q5. In the past 30 days, which of the following have you used to browse or buy beauty or skincare products?

Select all that apply

- Target app or website
- Amazon
- Ulta Beauty app or website
- Sephora app
- CVS or Walgreens
- IPSY or Birchbox
- I haven't shopped for beauty products recently (disqualify)

LOGIC: Recruit a mix of users across all apps to reduce the risk of customer loyalty skewing results.



Q6. When was the last time you used the Sephora app — not the website, but the mobile app specifically?

Select one

- Within the past week
- Within the past 2 weeks
- Within the past month
- 1–3 months ago
- I'm not sure I've used the app
- I use the website, not the app

LOGIC: Screener only, not a qualifier.
Only shown to users who selected Sephora in Q1.

Q7. Do you have a Sephora Beauty Insider account?

Select one

- Yes, and I'm an Insider (entry level)
- Yes, and I'm a VIB member
(flag for loyalist segment)
- Yes, and I'm a Rouge member
(flag for loyalist segment)
- I have an account but I'm not sure
of my status
- No, I don't have an account

**LOGIC: Screener only, not a qualifier.
No disqualification. Used to build the
loyalist vs. casual shopper split for
the Sephora segment. Only shown to
users who selected Sephora in Q1.**

Q8. When you shop for beauty or skincare products using the Sephora app, how often do you do each of the following?

Rate each on a scale: Never / Rarely / Sometimes / Often / Always

- Browse by category or product type
- Use filters to narrow down products
- Search for a specific product by name
- Read reviews before adding to cart
- Use the "match" or shade finder features

LOGIC: Screener only, not a qualifier. Responses used for segmentation and discussion guide preparation. Flags participants who report never browsing or filtering – flag for review but do not auto-disqualify.

Q9. How often do you purchase beauty or skincare products online — on any app or website?
Select one

- Less than once every few months (disqualify)
- About once every 1–2 months
- About once a month
- Two or three times a month
- More than three times a month

LOGIC: "Less than once every few months" disqualifies. All other responses continue.

Q10. Think about the last time you used the Sephora app to look for a product — not to buy something you already knew you wanted, but to find something new or figure out what would work for you. What were you looking for, and how did you go about finding it?

Open text — minimum 2 sentences requested

LOGIC: Fraud and quality check. Flag responses that are: fewer than 10 words, clearly generic ("I looked for makeup and found it"), near-identical to other responses, or describe an experience inconsistent with their Q1/Q4 answers. Reviewed manually before qualification is confirmed.

Q11. Which of the following best describes your primary skin concern when shopping for skincare?

Select up to two

- Acne or breakouts
- Hyperpigmentation or dark spots
- Dryness or dehydration
- Sensitivity or redness
- Signs of aging (fine lines, firmness)
- Uneven texture
- I don't shop for skincare / not applicable
- Other: _____

LOGIC: Screener only – used for participant diversity and discussion guide tailoring. Not a qualifier. Aim for mix across categories in final selection.

Q12. Which of these best describes your skin tone?

Select one

- Fair
- Light
- Medium
- Tan / olive
- Deep / rich
- Prefer not to say



LOGIC: Screener only – used for participant diversity. Not a qualifier. Aim for mix across categories in final selection.

Q13. Do you, or does anyone in your household, work in any of the following industries?

Select all that apply

- Beauty, cosmetics, or skincare (retail or brand side)
- Market research or UX research
- Advertising or marketing
- None of the above (required to continue)

LOGIC: Any selection other than "None of the above" disqualifies. Beauty industry, market research, and advertising backgrounds are all excluded to avoid professionally savvy or brand-biased respondents.

Q14. Are you able to participate in a 90-minute video call, sometime in the next two weeks?
Select one

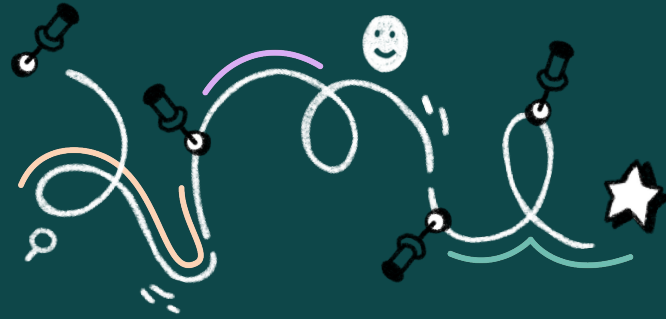
- Yes (continue)
- No (disqualify)



LOGIC: Disqualify hard nos.



Vet, Protect and Mitigate Risk





Pre-screening and pre-work go a long way to vet participant quality

The research participant pool has changed significantly – the growth of paid research platforms has created an increase of dishonest responses to screening criteria.

(visual) screener logic → open-ends → digital fingerprinting → pre-session call → in-session questions.

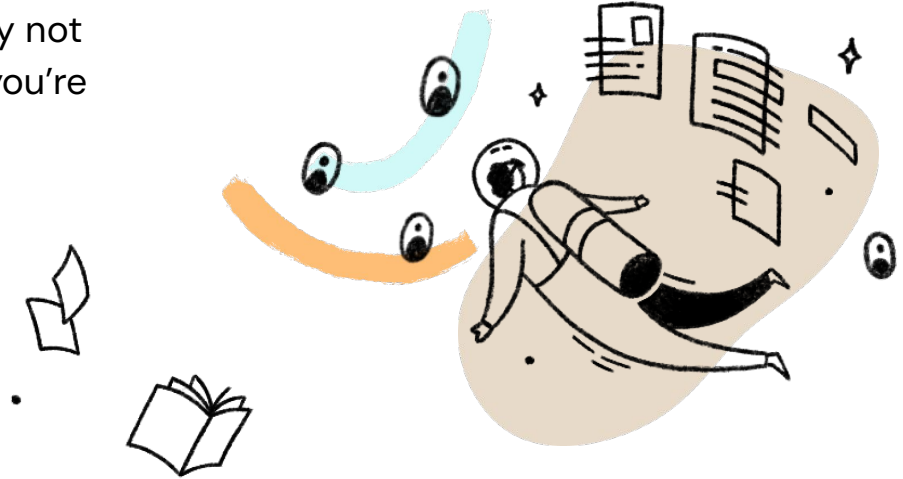
All of these layers work together make each session worthwhile.





For in-depth research like interviews and focus groups, add open-ended questions to the screener

Open-ended questions in the screener add another layer of healthy friction to disqualify those who have trouble sharing their experiences freely or may not be the right fit for the depth of conversation you're hoping for.





Research fraud is risk worth mitigating in the recruitment design

- **Professional respondents**
 - Research participants who regularly complete studies and depend on incentives as income
- **Click farms**
 - Rapid survey completion schemes with little genuine engagement
- **AI-generated responses**
 - Open-ended fields completed by LLMs resulting in generic answers
- **Identity misrepresentation**
 - Users misrepresenting screener responses to be approved as a research participant





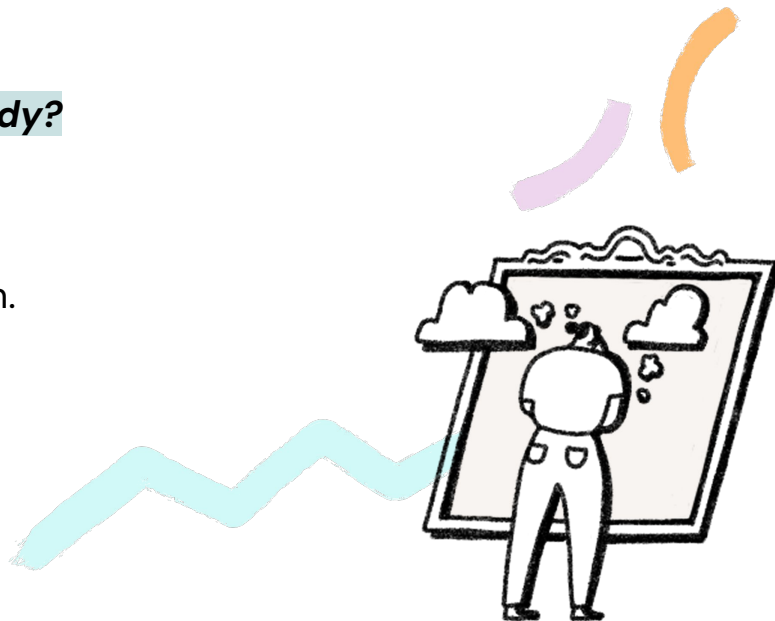
In order to protect participant PII, only collect the data needed to screen participants intentionally

Before adding any field to your screener, ask:

do I actually need this to recruit or run the study?

If the answer is no, remove it.

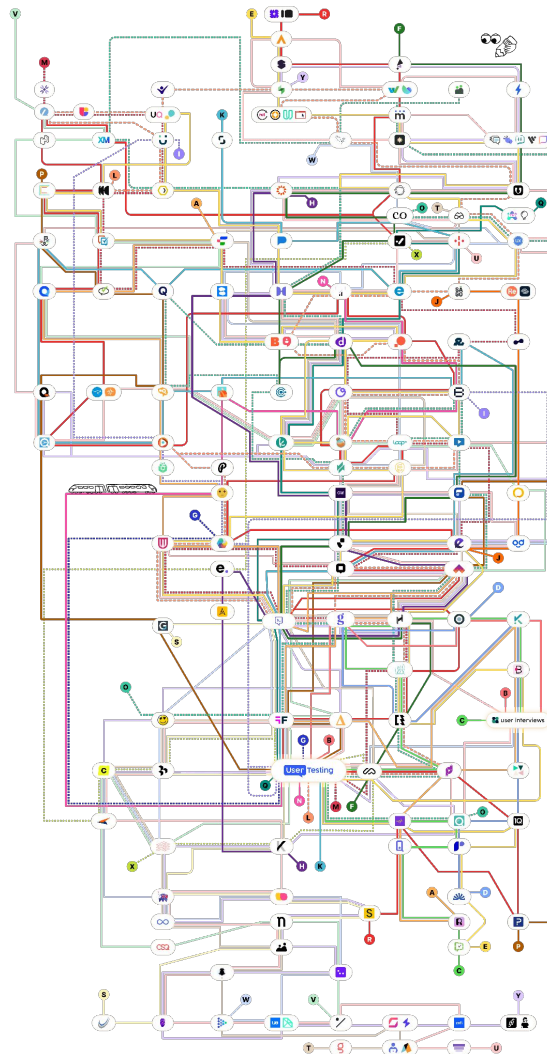
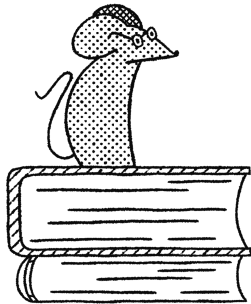
Collecting data you don't use is not harmless and creates unnecessary liability for your organization.



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UX Research Tools Map



UXR Software Categories

Research Operations

ReOps tools and features help you find the right participants for your research and streamline participant management.

- A Participant Tracking & Management
- B Document Signing
- C Scheduling
- D Incentives
- E Participant Panel

Research Methods

Research Methods tools help researchers gather detailed, task-based feedback and behavioral insights to answer a specific research question or enable a particular business decision.

- F AI Moderated Research
- G Accessibility
- H Synthetic Research
- I Beta Testing
- J Biometrics
- K Diary Studies & Mobile Ethnography
- L Usability Testing
- M Specialized Studies
- N Playtesting & Games Research
- O Interviews & Focus Groups
- P Insight Communities
- Q Video Surveys
- R Surveys

Analysis & Insight Management

Analysis and Insight Management tools help organize, analyze, and synthesize research data.

- S Centralized Feedback & Analytics
- T Research Repository
- U Qualitative Analysis
- V Quantitative Analysis
- W Transcription
- X Text Tagging & Data Labeling
- Y AI Research Companion

THANK YOU!

Questions

<https://userinterview.ws/demo>



[BOOK A DEMO](https://userinterview.ws/demo)

