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# Research Repositories for Tracking UX Research and Growing Your ResearchOps

**Summary:** Organize user research in a research repository to communicate and track insights across teams and over time for success and to grow ResearchOps.

By [Kara Pernice](#) on October 18, 2020

**Topics:** [Managing UX Teams](#)

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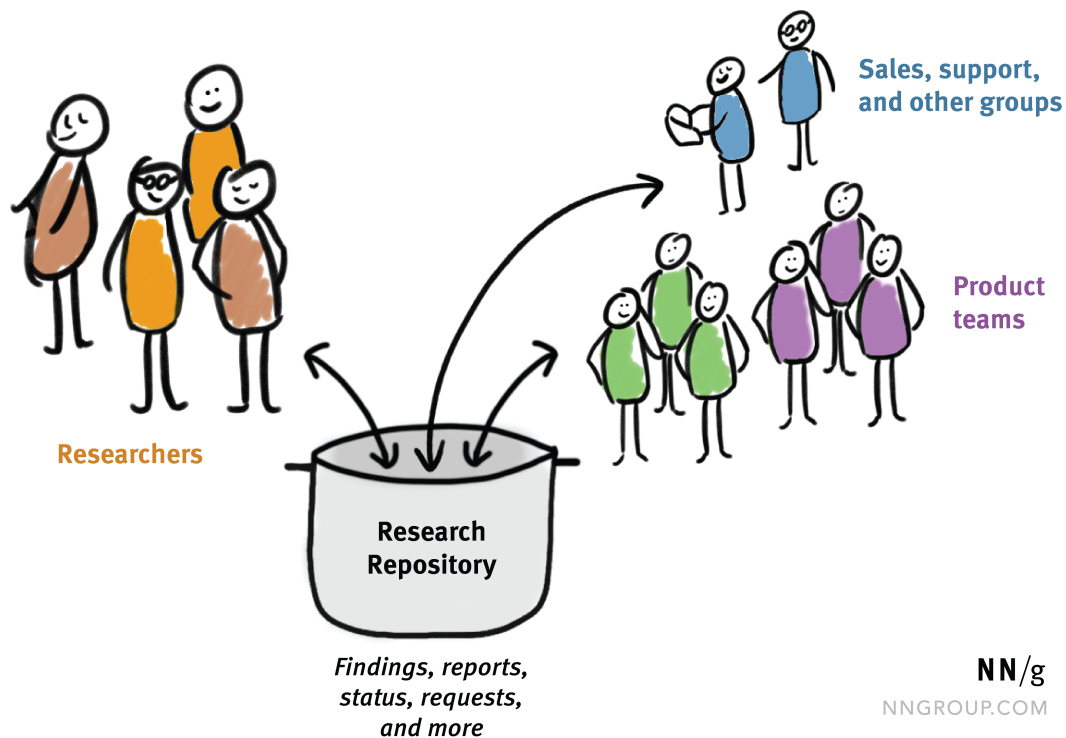
Every UX team needs to organize its user research in a research repository. I first worked on a research repository in the early 1990s. The lessons I learned then still hold true today, as the UX community gets serious about managing and growing user- research programs. These efforts now fall under the umbrella term [“Research Ops”](#) (with “Ops” being short for “operations”).

## What Is a Research Repository?

A research repository is a shared collection of UX-research-related elements that should support the following functions at the organization level:

- grow UX awareness and participation in UX work among leadership, product owners, and the organization at large
- support UX research work, so UX professionals may be more productive as they **plan and track research**

## Everyone Benefits from a UX-Research Repository



*Researchers usually add the most information in a repository, while others around the organization consume content from the repository to gain a shared idea of how users act.*

## Relevant Elements in a Research Repository

There are two main types of content in a research repository:

- The **input** to doing UX research: information for planning and conducting research
- The **output** from doing UX research: study findings and reports

Before making a repository, analyze the UX-related processes and tools used (currently or in the near future) in your organization. Consider creating a [mind map](#) of how research gets done, or even a [journey map](#) or [service blueprint](#) of how research is initiated and results are used on development teams.

## Example Research Repository

Search:

Select:	Filter:	List of Findings:																								
<a href="#">Reports</a> <a href="#">Findings</a> <a href="#">Recordings</a> <a href="#">Transcriptions</a> <a href="#">Plans</a> <a href="#">Schedules</a> <a href="#">Requests</a> <a href="#">Methods</a> <a href="#">Resources</a>	<div>Product <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Topic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Severity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Contact <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Status <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Research Method <input type="checkbox"/></div> <div>Date <input type="checkbox"/></div>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Product</th> <th>Topic</th> <th>Severity</th> <th>Finding</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>GoFreeBo.com</td> <td>Login</td> <td>High</td> <td>Don't see the login button</td> </tr> <tr> <td>GoFreeBo.com</td> <td>Login</td> <td>High</td> <td>Hard to tap on phone screen</td> </tr> <tr> <td>GoFreeBo.com</td> <td>Login</td> <td>Medium</td> <td>A little hard to read on phone</td> </tr> <tr> <td>GoFreeBo.com</td> <td>Login</td> <td>Good</td> <td>Noticed the "remember user name" checkbox</td> </tr> <tr> <td>LiveUpBo.com</td> <td>Login</td> <td>High</td> <td>Don't know login benefits</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Product	Topic	Severity	Finding	GoFreeBo.com	Login	High	Don't see the login button	GoFreeBo.com	Login	High	Hard to tap on phone screen	GoFreeBo.com	Login	Medium	A little hard to read on phone	GoFreeBo.com	Login	Good	Noticed the "remember user name" checkbox	LiveUpBo.com	Login	High	Don't know login benefits
Product	Topic	Severity	Finding																							
GoFreeBo.com	Login	High	Don't see the login button																							
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LiveUpBo.com	Login	High	Don't know login benefits																							

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*Example research repository, with left global navigation and filters for easily narrowing down content*

Some important components that can be housed in a research repository include:

### Infrastructure

- **Research team's mission and vision** communicate what the team is about, how it works, and how it hopes to work in the future. This information can help others to understand the team's capabilities, what they can expect, and what they can request. An example mission is: *The UX-research team provides user and customer research and guidance for all products, services, and systems at the organization in order to maximize usefulness, usability, efficiency, enjoyment, and support for the organization's vision.*
- **Descriptions of research methods** help the team learn or be reminded of a process and the reasons for different research types. Method descriptions and best practices can promote consistent high-quality work and even teach a less experienced researcher.
- **Tools and templates for conducting and analyzing research**, such as

templates for test plans, protocols, reports, interview scripts, user tasks, consent forms, notetaking and tips for using [remote-research](#) or [analysis](#) tools could also be housed here

## Research Planning

- **Strategic research plans** for the organization and for individual projects — like you might see in a research [roadmap](#) — can keep researchers and the rest of the team focused on the most important areas to research as opposed to every single product feature. When stored in a research repository these are easy to find and access
- **Schedules** make research accessible to everyone, by sharing the date, time, location, research method, and what's being studied. Armed with this information, anyone can join or ask to join in on studies, or at least look for findings upon completion
- **Detailed [research plans](#)** communicate that research will be happening and how. When stored in a repository they serve as a vision document to align stakeholders and the rest of the team.
- **Research requests** enable product teams to request user research to be done. Depending on the research team's size, mission, planning, and culture, research requests may not be available at all organizations. Research requests can give insight in the research needs at your organization and can drive UX-team growth.

## Data and Insights

- **Research reports** tell what happened in the research study. They include overarching themes, detailed findings, and sometimes recommendations.
- **Research insights** are the detailed findings or chunks of information acquired from each research study. While findings also appear in reports, saving them as their own entities makes it easier to digest them, mark their [severity](#), track their status, and link to specific design and development assignments in the backlog or project database. In other words, each insight is digestible and easy to see, and thus more likely to get addressed.
- **Recordings and transcriptions** stored in the repository or, alternatively, linked from the repository. They make user data easily accessible

linked from the repository, they make user data easily accessible.

Summarizing and transcribing each video allows teams to search for exactly what they're looking for. (Fun historical note: In the early 1990s, when usability-testing recordings were too large to store online, my team at Lotus created a video library. Developers could check out the physical videotapes as one would a book at a library. People were so dedicated that they borrowed them to watch the tests they had missed, and sometimes we had to make extra copies of tapes to meet the demand.)

- **Raw notes and artifacts from research sessions** are often trashed after they have been analyzed. But some teams keep the notes in case they might be useful for future analysis — for example, if a team was in a rush and focused on one area of the design at the time of the study, later it may be able to revisit the notes to glean insights related to other aspects of the design. Those notes could help inform journey maps, personas, or other user-focused artifacts.

## What Is NOT Always in a Research Repository

- UX-data **analysis** is usually done with specialized tools. The result of the analysis could be a text file (for example, for quantitative data analysis done in software such as R) or could be hosted online in a tool-specific format. If the latter, then the repository can link to the result of the analysis. For example, researchers may have conducted [thematic analysis](#) using Dovetail; the full research report can include a link to that board so team members can see the reasoning behind the findings.
- A **participant repository or panel** is usually not stored within a research repository, even though [recruiting research participants](#) is a core function of user research. That's because the goals and audience for the two repositories tend to be quite different. But it can be helpful for them to link to one another.

There are many other components that research teams need to track internally but that are less likely to be part of a research repository, even though they may be linked from it: user stories in a backlog, participant recruiting tools, and budget tracking for research projects.

# Convenience and Findability Features in a Repository

People should be able to easily find and discover information about research. Findable and accessible information makes it possible for the team to easily be part of a research project and feel ownership about the findings. Here are some repository attributes that make it easy to use:

- **Supporting tags and metadata**, to help people find items by the most granular topics
- **Searchable** by keyword (e.g. for research on a certain product feature), project, team, finding, severity, status, and more
- **Hosted in a tool that people can easily access**, use, learn and that matches the organization's culture and [mental model](#)
- **Portable**, so that repository elements can be easily exported to other applications or formats

## Summary

Research repositories store and organize information about UX research. They collect not only methodology-related documents, but also research results at various levels of granularity (from individual findings to reports). Their purpose is to streamline the work of the research team and also to make research widely available and easy to consume throughout the organization.

For more information about the growing ResearchOps community, see <https://researchops.community/>.

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