

Open Forest Transition // GitHub research report

June 7, 2019

Research summary

As part of transitioning ownership of project repos away from 18F, we conducted a lightweight evaluation of the various GitHub repos that house our project documentation.

Goals

To understand whether the Open Forest documentation in GitHub gives the technical team the information they need to do their work and that this information is findable.

Research questions

- Is it clear what each repo is for and what you can expect to find there?
- Can technical staff find the information they need to maintain the Open Forest application?
- What, if any, opportunities are there to improve our internal documentation?

Methods and participants

Four developers on the Forest Service vendor team participated in 30-minute usability test sessions. We documented sessions via video recordings and hand typed notes.

Findings and recommendations

1. Navigating among the different repos is difficult. Participants struggled to recall what kinds of information were stored in the different wikis, and it was common for folks to expect the same types of general project information in the [platform](#) and [program](#) repos. When participants viewed the [repos page](#), they found it helpful but suggested it include a repo directory at the top of the page to help them navigate more quickly.

Recommendations:

- Include a prominent link to the [repos page](#) in every README
- Consider adding a basic repo directory to the top of the [repos page](#)

2. The [fs-open-forest-platform](#) is “home” for the product team. The platform repo is where the team spends the most time, and it’s usually their first stop when they are looking for general project information.

Recommendations:

- Add a prominent link to the repos page in the platform README
- Consider consolidating the information contained in the program wiki into the platform wiki and sunsetting the program wiki altogether.

3. People struggle to find where they are and what they’re looking for in the [wiki](#). People do not appear to understand the relationship between the side nav and where they land on the home page. A common pattern is to scroll to the bottom of the home/executive summary page, then scroll back to the top to scan the right hand nav menu.

Recommendations:

- Make the title of the homepage match the corresponding nav item
- Subdivide the wiki side nav into smaller chunks
- Reevaluate category names in the wiki side nav menu to make them more intuitive

4. README descriptions of repos are difficult to understand for some users. A few users were not clear on the purpose of each repo until they had experience working on the project. Participants noted that the description of the [middle layer API repo](#) is overwhelming.

Recommendations:

- Revise repo descriptions to make them plainer language
- Link services mentioned in the repo descriptions to external references

Appendix

Research protocol

Introduction [2 min]

Thanks so much for making time to chat with me! The goal of our time today is to understand whether the Open Forest documentation in GitHub gives you the information you need to do your work. We want to make sure that information is easy to find and understand for the open Forest technical team. Given your role as _____, your feedback is invaluable! There are no wrong answers--you are not being tested in any way. We really just want your honest reactions so that we can make the documentation better. Just to let you know how your information will be used, any notes or recordings from this session will not be shared outside the research team. I'll be looking across all of the sessions to pull out themes and writing it all up in a short report. Sometimes I use quotes to illustrate key themes, but any quotes I use will be anonymized.

During the session, I'll want to watch you do some tasks using your computer. While I'm doing that, I'd like you to try and think aloud as much as possible. I know it might feel awkward, but it's really helpful to me to know what's going on in your head behind your actions.

Before we get started, do you have any questions for me? If you do come up with questions or need a break feel free to speak up at any time.

Just so that I don't miss anything, I'd like to get a recording of our session. Is that ok with you? [start recording] Now that the camera's rolling, I just want to confirm, do you consent to being recorded?

Warm-up questions [5 min]

- Before we dive into the tasks, I'd like to know a little more about you! Tell me a little bit about your job role?
- When did you join the Open Forest team?
- In general, how has the onboarding experience been for you?
- What information did you need?
- Is there any information you needed that you had a hard time getting?
- What could have made it better?

Tasks [20 min]

Now I'm going to walk you work through some tasks. Try and think aloud as we proceed. I'm going to give you a scenario, and then I'd like you to show and tell me how you'd react.

Scenario 1

A researcher on the project has just completed a round of usability testing. You notice that you've been assigned to several new issues that the researcher has added to the board in the "in progress" column. It is the middle of the sprint, and you're now confused about what you should be working on.

Task 1.1

In about a minute or two, talk me through how you'd approach getting clarity on what you should be working on?

Task 1.2

Show me how you'd go about double checking your understanding of the team's working practices and communication norms.

- Happy path: fs-open-forest > wiki > how we work

Probes: What do you think this repo/wiki is for? What information do you expect to find here?

Scenario 2a (for back end devs)

Open Forest becomes wildly popular and the current plan for one of our managed services in Cloud.gov is insufficient. You realize that you need to upgrade the brokered service plan in Cloud.gov, and you want to understand what that will entail before you begin the process.

Task 2.a

Where would you look to find out how to change environment variables?

- Happy path(s): <https://github.com/18F/fs-cloud-gov-migration>
- **OR** fs-open-forest > wiki > Ongoing-site-architecture > <https://github.com/18F/fs-cloud-gov-migration>

Probes: What do you think this repo is for? What information do you expect to find here?

Scenario 2b (for front end devs)

The Open Forest design team creates a new component that extends the Forest Service's current fork of the US Web Design System. After implementing the new feature, you want to make sure the component gets added to the FS USWDS for others to be able to use.

Question:

Where would you look for information on how to update the FS WDS that Open Forest uses?

Scenario 3

In the course of onboarding a new permit type, the team has encountered a need to change the Open Forest middle layer. The team is considering redesigning the architecture to move more of the permit generation capability within Open Forest.

Task 3.1

Show me where you'd look for information on the current architecture to help inform your point of view on the decision.

- Happy path: <https://github.com/18F/fs-open-forest> > wiki > ongoing site architecture

Question (if time)

Talk me through how you'd make sure that any changes to the architecture are documented and findable in GitHub.

Probes: What do you think this repo is for? What information do you expect to find here?

Wrap up question

If there were one or two things you'd change about the GitHub repos and the documentation, what would they be?

Closing

Thanks again for your time! We really can't make the documentation better without you! If you have any questions for me, don't hesitate to reach out.