



Treasury Board of Canada
Secretariat

Secrétariat du Conseil du Trésor
du Canada

The wordmark for Canada, with a small crown over the letter 'a'.

GC Design System

Comparative analysis

September 2021

Compared 21 design systems

13

from the
private
sector

- [IBM - Carbon](#)
- [Material Design \(Google\)](#)
- [Salesforce - Lightning Design System](#)
- [Adobe - Spectrum](#)
- [Shopify](#)
- [Intuit-Quickbooks](#)
- [Fluent \(Microsoft\)](#)
- [Mailchimp](#)
- [Base-Uber](#)
- [Atlassian](#)
- [Dynatrace - Barista](#)
- [Modulz - Radix](#)
- [Sprout Social](#)

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from gov

- [GOV.UK](#)
- [Australia](#)
- [New Zealand](#)
- [New South Wales](#)
- [US Web Design System](#)
- [France](#)
- [Québec](#)
- [Ville de Montréal](#)
- [Clone \(Talent Cloud\)](#)
- [Aurora \(GCCollab\)](#)

Aspects of the design system

Compared the design systems on these aspects:

- Navigation
- Inclusion of content guidance
- Visual foundations guidance
- Component guidance
- Versioning and history of components

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	Design system	Internal nav	Content guide within the D Visual language		Component documentation	
2	Non-gov design systems					
3	Shopify	Top and left nav	As a separate "Content" page.	Design	Description (no header) Example (coded) Code snippet Props (seems to be customization?) Accessibility Best practices Content guidelines Related components	
4	IBM - Carbon	Left nav + tabs	Within the "Guidelines section"	Within the "Guidelines section"	Overview Live demo Formatting Content Behaviours Modifiers Related References Feedback	
5	Salesforce - Lightning Design System	Left nav	Limited, under Design guidelines.	Design tokens	Description (no header) Example (coded) About (component) Base structure (with code snippets) Examples (with code snippets) Layout (with code snippets) Style hooks overview Overview of CSS classes	
6	Intuit-Quickbooks	Left nav	Yes, as a separate Content page	Spread over Foundations, Product guidelines and Marketing guidelines	Description (no header) Appearance and behaviour (image, not working) Content guidelines Examples	
					Description (no header)	

Navigation

- 23/23 have navigation between elements within a section (20/21 have it on the left)
- 11/23 have both a top and left nav (top nav for the sections in the design system, left nav for elements within that section)
- Some mobile version of navigation are better than others ([USWDS](#) is pretty good)

Take-away:

- Making the design system a separate product, with internal navigation, seems like a must

Content guidance

- A minority (8/23) have separate “writing guidance”
- 15/23 have at least some content guidance within specific component guidance

Take-away:

- Component guidance should have some content guidance specific to that component
- The “overarching”, non-component-specific guidance from the Canada.ca Content Style Guide should be in a separate section, within the design system.

Visual foundations guidance

- 20/23 have some kind of separate “visual foundations” section
- No consensus on a name for such a section. Contenders: Styles, Foundations, Basics, Design tokens...

Take-away:

- The design system needs a separate “Foundations” section, however we choose to call it

Component guidance

- There are many differences in how guidance is presented in the design systems
- Commonalities include a description, examples and variants (with code), customization, when to use and not use, content guidelines, accessibility guidelines, etc.)

Take-away:

- There are many ways how we could present guidance for developers and designers for each component. Having 2 separate tabs is an option, but not the only option.

Component history and versioning

- Only 6/23 have a clear changelog or version history at the component level

Take-away:

- There's an opportunity to figure out the best way of conveying changes, versioning, how to upgrade, etc.