



NYS Design System



**Office of Information
Technology Services**

State: New York

Agency: NYS Office of Information Technology Services

Award Category: Digital Experience: Enterprise Solutions

Project Start: February 2024

Project End: Ongoing

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Executive Summary

Every click is a crossroads. For millions of New Yorkers, technology stands at the forefront of justice, opportunity, and hope. Yet for many, the online face of government too often becomes a junction of uncertainty and exclusion. A single online error can mean the difference between a missed paycheck, a lost home, or being denied vital care.

In New York, a state where diversity stretches from the remote peaks of the Adirondacks to the busy streets of Queens, from the quiet harbors of Montauk to the farmlands of Chautauqua, digital walls once towered where bridges should have been. Websites across agencies differed in appearance, function, and complexity. For residents, this meant wrestling with a patchwork of forms, links, and screens. Many were slow and inconsistent. Essential services lay hidden behind broken interfaces and inaccessible forms. Barriers closed off not just access to help, but to the comfort and affirmation of belonging, leaving many feeling like strangers in their own state. For so many, the digital journey began on a dark and winding road, uncertain and without a guide.

In less than a year, the New York State Design System (NYSDS) unraveled the tangled digital patchwork, once stitched from dead ends and blind turns, and reweave it, thread by thread, into a single unified roadway. Each thread became a lane; each seam, a bridge- turning frustration into opportunity and uncertainty into confidence. The road that once was dim is now illuminated, and where the path once was blocked, bridges now rise.

NYSDS is a modern, open-source library of user interface components, design patterns, accessibility standards, and code resources. It gives every ITS and agency team a shared digital foundation. It is a living, breathing promise that all New Yorkers, regardless of age, ability, or address, deserve to be welcomed, understood, and empowered by the state they call home. NYSDS is the heartbeat of a new era. One that proves that technology, when guided by compassion and humanity, can restore the very soul of public service.

What is the New York State Design System?



Component Library

This is a collection of common front-end code grouped together in components that can be shared and reused across multiple codebases, often with design, state, and default behavior built-in.



Design Libraries

This is a library of icons, styles, components, and variables that can be shared and reused across multiple design files for consistent design and prototyping.



Design Tokens

A collection design decisions stored in key-value pairs, abstracted so they can easily be used across a wide range of platforms, design and code.



Typography

A collection of standard NYS brand-approved typefaces that need to be used in both design and development product work.

Idea: The Open Road to Belonging

WHAT PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY DOES THE PROJECT ADDRESS?

Imagine: An elder veteran in the Bronx, hands trembling as he attempts to refill his prescription, only to be caught in a never-ending loop of broken links and blinking errors. A single mother in Buffalo, heart pounding as she scrambles to secure food for her children before they wake, lost in a maze of shifting buttons and broken forms. A small business owner in the Catskills, one late night away from losing his license and the dream he built, met with contradictory instructions that twist and tangle.

Idea: The Open Road to Belonging (Continued)

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Each journey begins with the hope that help is just a click away. Yet, time and again, that hope dissolves into digital confusion, leaving the most urgent needs unmet and lifeline services just out of reach. What should be simple- renewing a license, applying for help, paying a bill- becomes a test of patience and privilege. Behind every “Page Not Found” is an elderly veteran cut off from the care he relies on, a mother missing the opportunity to put food on the table for her children, a small business owner watching years of hard work and perseverance hang in the balance. It is moments like these where technology becomes an impassable roadblock, denying residents the security of feeling at home in the place they love.

**“Mom, why can’t I find where to renew my license?
Why does every page look different?”
— Actual NYS resident feedback, 2024**

WHAT MAKES IT DIFFERENT?

For years, the promise of digital government was held back by one invisible, painful barrier: inconsistency. Hundreds of websites were designed in isolation; each stitched together by different hands, telling a different story, speaking a different language. This left residents wandering in a digital maze, too often giving up before help could be secured. And the cost? More than dollars. It was trust eroded, time stolen from families, and the heartache of being shut out. For some, this did not only mean frustration, but total exclusion.

The challenge was clear: How could New York create one unified experience that feels as welcoming and inclusive in Buffalo as it does in Montauk? How could a digital foundation be built where every resident, regardless of ability, background, or region, feels at home every single time they need help?

Unlike many states, New York’s approach actively integrates design and code through shared Figma libraries, reusable NPM modules, and a transparent proposal process open to the whole state. NYS’s commitment to staffing and innovation sets it apart.

WHAT MAKES IT UNIVERSAL?

In a whirlwind that redefined urgency, the NYS Office of Information Technology Services (ITS), armed with a newly mandated objective from the Governor’s 2024 State of the State Address, set out to build something groundbreaking: a digital foundation inclusive enough for all. Its open, flexible structure means that it can be adopted for any type of application, serving the needs of all agencies. Its universal standards ensure a seamless, accessible experience, no matter the need.

Implementation: Paving the Road Together

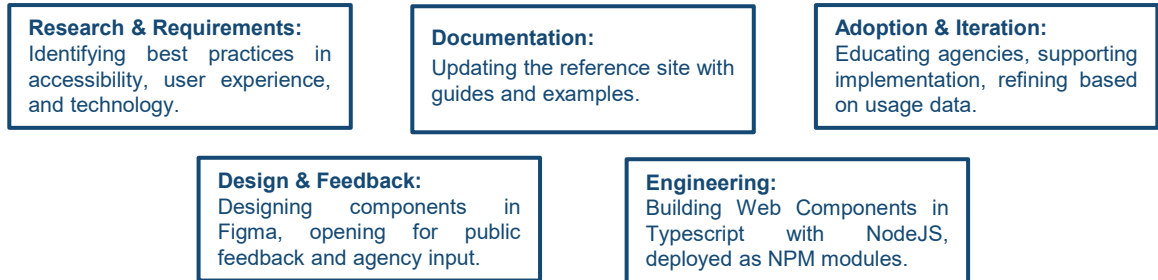
WHAT WAS THE ROADMAP?

The solution was as radical as it was simple: hear every voice and pave the way for all.

Implementation: Paving the Road Together (Continued)

The New York State Design System (NYSDS) team began not with code, but with empathy. They resolved to let every voice, especially those who had too long felt unheard, guide the process. They heard stories from every corner of the state. Instead of gathering specs, they listened with intention, absorbing every frustration and hearing every complaint. Stories of defeat, stories of exclusion, but also stories of hope. They listened to families, veterans, and small business owners. “Can you make this feel like New York?” one person asked. “Can you make it work for *me*?”

The project followed an agile process with two-week sprints:



WHO WAS INVOLVED?

Out of the digital shadows, a small but determined NYS Design System Team emerged, driven by a need to answer these critical questions.

HOW DID YOU DO IT?

What followed was a journey marked by uncertainty and sleepless nights. Working around the clock, nights and weekends, the team raced against deadlines and years of siloed systems. Some days, the way forward seemed to vanish, and, in its place appeared technical hurdles, budget concerns, and feelings of doubt. But amid each setback, the vision grew clearer: if it does not serve everyone, then it serves no one at all.

Fueled by principle and the stories entrusted to them, the team built, broke, and rebuilt. Decisions were measured not by lines of code, but by the potential to transform lives. A single button’s shape would be debated for hours if it meant someone might find help faster. Barriers were met with relentless advocacy. At times, the way forward felt impossible, but every challenge just further clarified the mission.

What began as a mandate evolved into a movement. Where barriers once stood, new roads were constructed. The team bridged the gap between design and development, leveraging cutting-edge Web Components and Figma libraries that united engineers and designers in a shared language. Every new component, every shade of blue, every field on every form, was tested and refined with feedback from those it was designed to serve.

The lanes widened. NYSDS became not just public and open-source, but an open invitation to collaborate and provide feedback. Teams across the state, from expert engineers to grassroots designers, could propose components, share pain points, and all shape the journey together. The team didn’t just build a system; they built a community, constructed from the voices and dreams of New Yorkers.

The initial roadmap projected a year. The team delivered the first release in less than five months: a testament to what is possible when harmony drives progress and inclusion steers the way forward.

WHAT DID THE PROJECT MAKE BETTER?

Before:

- Across the fractured digital landscape, New Yorkers wandered through hundreds of conflicting interfaces. Where bridges should have connected, digital dead ends blocked the way. Those with disabilities were often shut out entirely.
- State agencies spent months duplicating work, reinventing buttons, forms, and styles that did not seem to fit together. As patchwork platforms multiplied, so did the distance between them.
- The presence of fragmentation was undeniable. Residents searching desperately for help, and public servants longing to provide it, all desired one unified roadway.
- With every misstep, trust faded, and the path home for New Yorkers grew dimmer. The digital landscape was shadowed and uncertain. The journey felt endless, with no sign of welcome at the end.

After:

- **Unified by Design:** For the first time, New Yorkers from every region, city, and town can travel in unison along a seamless digital highway. Digital services look, feel, and behave as one. The difference is not just technical, but it is profoundly human. People know that they belong, no matter where their journey begins.
- **Accessible by Design:** Every component is tested and re-tested for ADA and WCAG compliance, setting a new standard for inclusion and ensuring it is not an afterthought, but the foundation. The NYSDS isn't only compliant, it is welcoming to all. Keyboard navigation, screen reader support, and detailed accessibility guidance are built in from the start.
- **Efficient by Design:** Early adopters have reported development times cut by 30-40%. One agency, struggling with a build that once took six months, launched it in under three. Designers have logged over 7,000 component insertions. Over 120 professionals collaborate and build together on a shared channel. Ideas and improvements are offered and accepted from every corner of the state.
- **Trust by Design:** *[Actual resident feedback]* "For the first time, it feels like New York is looking out for *me*." "I know I can get what I need, no matter which site I'm on."
- **Open by Design:** The road is not just open, but it is built in the open. Every standard and every solution is shared, raising the bar for all who journey with us, ensuring the bridges we build today endure for the future.
- **A Model by Design:** Using Web Components, mirrored Figma libraries, and a transparent, collaborative proposal process, the NYSDS has transformed a project into a movement, lighting the way for any state also ready to transform digital barriers into bridges.

HOW DID YOU KNOW?

The Human Difference:

Imagine a young mother, recently immigrated, finally able to apply for benefits on her phone, since the form is in plain language, and it is fully accessible. Picture an aging veteran who, after years of frustration and lost time, can now navigate a clear portal to access the care he earned. These are not abstractions. These are neighbors, families, residents, and they are proud to call New York home. Today, mothers, veterans, elders, and newcomers alike are not lost, but found.

Impact: From Digital Shadows to Open Roads (Continued)

Measurable Outcomes:

30–40% Faster Development: Agencies can launch faster, serve citizens quicker, and save resources.

7,000+ Component Insertions: Demonstrates fast, statewide adoption.

120+ Active Community Members: Sharing, building, and shaping the way forward together.

Consistent, Accessible Experiences: Across dozens of new and legacy applications.

Hours Returned to the Public and Public Servants: Less time lost. More trust restored.

“I used to dread helping my mom with online forms. Now, she does it herself. Thank you for making it feel like New York is really for everyone.”
— Daughter of NYS resident, 2025

WHAT NOW?

VISION FOR THE FUTURE: *Lighting the Way Forward*

NYSDES is more than a mission; it is New York’s ongoing promise to its people. No matter who you are, or where your journey begins, you can depend on your digital government to welcome you in, and help you find your way, simply, openly, and seamlessly.

NYSDES is a living system. It grows as we listen to new voices, learn from new feedback received, and overcome new challenges together. The future is bright, and full of possibility: expanded multilingual capabilities, mobile-first features, and deeper collaboration with every agency and resident who dares to dream of something greater for New York State.

Government can be personal. Digital can embody dignity. When one state leads with vision and heart, it can illuminate the way for all. Today, New York’s road is no longer shrouded in darkness, and the path home shines bright, guiding each resident forward and promising that, wherever their journey begins, they are never alone.

Leadership:

This transformation was made possible by visionary leaders in New York State’s Office of Information Technology Services, who believed in building not just stronger technology, but a stronger New York. Their belief in human-centered design and in the brilliance and compassion of the NYSDES team sparked a movement that will carry New York forward for generations to come.

NYSDES is more than a system; it is a beacon at the edge of every screen. When technology is led by empathy and tuned in to the human heart, government becomes a guide, illuminating the road home. Those who once wandered in digital shadow now find a bridge where walls once stood, a guide who knows the way, and the assurance that, at last, someone left the light on for them, and home is waiting.