



ARCHITECTURE DECISION RECORD (ADR)

Decision Summary: Designate VA Design Systems as an Enterprise Standard Utility within the SWF category Design.

Approved by the VA Chief Architect (OIT/OCTO) on March 2025

Context

VA applications must deliver consistent, accessible, and user-centered digital experiences for Veterans and VA staff. Without a standardized enterprise design framework, teams may introduce inconsistent user interfaces, fragmented design patterns, and accessibility gaps across applications.

The Software Factory (SWF) category for Design provides guidance for reusable design patterns and user interface standards across VA digital services.

VA Design Systems provide a framework-agnostic set of reusable UI components, design patterns, and accessibility standards that support consistent application design across platforms. These tools are maintained by the VA.gov platform design team and are widely used within Veteran-facing services.

This ADR formalizes the designation of VA Design Systems as the Enterprise Standard Utility for design patterns and reusable UI components across VA applications.

Decision

VA Design Systems is designated as the Enterprise Standard Utility for the Software Factory (SWF) category Design.

VA Design Systems will serve as the default enterprise framework for reusable UI components, accessibility standards, and design patterns across VA digital services.

Alternative design frameworks may be considered but require architectural justification during solution intake and review.



This designation promotes reuse, improves accessibility compliance, and strengthens design consistency across VA applications.

Rationale

Designating VA Design Systems as the Enterprise Standard Utility aligns with VA's architectural principles of reuse, standardization, and accessibility.

VA Design Systems provide a centralized library of reusable UI components and design patterns that support consistent user experiences across VA applications. Leveraging this enterprise capability enables programs to implement accessible and consistent user interfaces without developing custom design frameworks.

Adopting a common design system:

- Promotes consistent user experiences across VA digital services
- Improves accessibility compliance across applications
- Reduces duplication of UI component development
- Simplifies governance and architecture review during solution intake
- Enables reuse of established design patterns and components

Formal designation within the Software Factory (SWF) ensures architectural alignment while maintaining flexibility for justified exceptions.

Impact(s)

Operational Impacts

- VA Design Systems continue to operate under centralized governance and support
- Teams will align design efforts with the designated enterprise standard
- Deprecated styles must be replaced with Foundation CSS

Architectural Impacts

- Establishes a default design standard within SWF
- Reduces introduction of duplicative design frameworks
- Improves accessibility and consistency across VA applications
- Strengthens reuse and architectural governance during solution intake and review



For questions or further clarification, contact the Enterprise Architecture team at ea@va.gov.

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