

April newsletter

👋 Hello, and welcome to the April issue! We hope everyone is taking care of themselves, and we are very anxious to get back to the office and see all of you soon.

The month of April was a relatively quiet one for Design Systems as we adjusted to working remotely. We've also spent a lot of time this month analyzing the user interviews we conducted over the past several weeks. Our goal is to learn how Seeds can better serve all of you, and we're building our roadmap for the next quarter directly off of this research.

In this month's newsletter — catch up on what's new from Design Systems, learn more about Design System residencies, hear directly from our latest resident, Jules Simplicio, and find out what's on our radar for next month.

NEW What's new

- **We gave our Analytics patterns a spring cleaning.** Thanks to guidance from the designers on the Analytics zone, we've taken our existing Data Visualization pattern and broken it up into three distinct pages:
 - [Charts](#) covers our chart formatting best practices, as well as color rotations.
 - [Data states](#) outlines how we communicate the state of our data to users.
 - [Data visualization](#) provides a standard language for how we handle data, including number and table formatting.
- Thanks to our designer-in-residence, Jules Simplicio, **we shipped a custom Figma plugin for generating project cover sheets.** You can [install the plugin here](#), and keep reading to learn more about Jules and their residency!
- As a part of an ongoing initiative to improve responsive experiences in our app, we defined a set of **standardized breakpoints for our developers.** We also created some [new tooling](#) and [documentation](#) to help them build responsive UI with ease.
- In direct response to developer feedback, [we've overhauled the technical process for contributing to our component library.](#) These process changes should eliminate frustrations and make it easier for new developers at Sprout to get started.



Jules Simplicio

Residency Recap

Last year, the Design Systems team created a program that allows designers and engineers from across the organization to join our team for a temporary “residency.” Residents get hands-on experience building and maintaining our systems, and the DS team benefits from the contextual knowledge of that resident.

Jules Simplicio is a designer and developer on the Publishing zone who joined us for a residency during the month of March. We asked Jules to reflect on their time with Design Systems, as well as the value of working outside of your comfort zone.

We’ve included some excerpts from Jules’ retrospective here, but [you can also read their entire piece online if you’d like.](#)

Jules! We so enjoyed having you as a resident. Why don’t you start by telling us why you wanted to work on design systems?

Before the residency, I had an interest in what it would be like to be a systems designer. My assumptions were that I would be able to help the rest of the organization with tools that promote rapid designing, and to upkeep a living system that is used by our entire team. Systems thinking and building are also some of my interests as a Product Designer. I wanted to specifically work on the process of designing and creating components, and to further my developer skills.

Your first project was designing and developing [the Breadcrumb component](#) from scratch... how did that go?

While previously working in the Publishing zone, we designed a feature that needed a breadcrumb trail to allow users to navigate and situate themselves within the app. I proposed the Breadcrumb component a few weeks before my residency, and then created a design proposal that helped my teammates give input on the design options.

Besides providing actual visuals inside of the design proposal, I provided written pros and cons of the design options, and a written background research of breadcrumb UX patterns. By providing background information alongside designs, I was able to better convey the reasoning behind what I designed.

Writing about a component and its usage was the hardest part for me. I had to communicate in clear words about a very technical concept. Writing about UI and

UX is tough because you have to be good at writing *and* technical writing. I was able to get a ton of feedback from my design system teammates along the way, and I also pressure tested the proposed component page with other designers outside the team.

Overall, I thought this project ran smoothly and was a success. I believe everything worked well because I looped in several designers and engineers along the way of designing and building the component.

You created [our first custom Figma plugin at Sprout](#), which generates cover sheets and project templates for designers. Tell us a little bit about how you tackled that.

I started the project by doing research on the Figma plugin development process and the Figma API. I learned how to write and test a plugin on Figma while developing it, which was very helpful. Figma asks you to install TypeScript and Visual Studio Code, which make it very easy to develop and test the plugin while the software watches for code changes.

The first challenge with building the plugin was figuring out how to easily return custom designed covers with all of the project's information on it, without having to manually build them with code.

I created a library file with each cover design as a component. Figma allows you to pull components from team library files when you are writing a plugin with its API. [This] was really great because our team now has the ability to update the designs in the library file if needed, without me having to programmatically change them in the plugin code.

Overall, this project was both challenging and fun. I had to learn some things for the first time, and I had to rely on a lot of online documentation which is a great exercise. After launching it to the organization, I presented it during one of our product design team weekly meetings. I was able to quickly receive feedback from the team which led me to tweak the plugin to make the user experience of it better. So far the whole team has been using the plugin to generate their file covers and structure and it has been a blast to watch it work successfully.

What did you learn from your time on the team?

There are many different opportunities for designers and developers in a design systems team. The most obvious work is the creation, maintenance, and promotion of the design system. That is in fact an important job, to be an advocate for your own system, and to constantly upkeep it. However, there are so many other things system designers do. For example, I was able to dive into creating tools for designers with the Figma plugin, I observed my teammates create a responsive design plan for our web app, and I learned a ton about writing systems documentation.

I love that the Design Systems team provides space for experimentation with code and with design. Playing with components and being able to quickly test and prototype ideas and bring them to fruition is so valuable for an organization.

Not only do Design Systems team members focus on the actual system, but they provide so much value to the rest of the organization via UI experimentation, tooling, collaboration with other teams to provide a space for new component discussions, suggestions, and component and systems education.

Every resident that we have on the team brings a fresh perspective and ideas to the practice of design systems, and Jules was no exception. A huge thank you to them for all of their excellent work, and for taking the time to share their experience with others. [If you'd like to learn more about Jules' residency, you can read their full retrospective online.](#)

If you're interested in learning more about participating in a Design Systems residency of your own, please reach out to Chase McCoy on Slack (@chase) or [via email](#).

— Coming soon —

Going into May, the team is going to be kicking off the following major projects:

- **Rethinking Seeds' architecture.** As our organization and products grow, so too should the system supporting them. Through our research we've identified opportunities to make the Seeds website easier to use by refining our information architecture and taxonomy, updating the visual design, and adding new features and enhancements.
- **Designing a collaboration model.** While there are already tons of teams and individuals who collaborate with Design Systems, it's currently an informal process that happens off the cuff. We want to formalize how the Design Systems team partners with others across the org, so that teams can reliably plan ahead for effective collaborations with us.
- **Set up Seeds as an onboarding tool.** We'll be rolling out a new Resources page on Seeds that will serve as a one stop shop for all of our creative resources, as well as a tool for onboarding new designers.

Thank you for reading this issue of our newsletter! We'd love to hear any feedback you have about the newsletter itself, or any of the information within it. Please don't hesitate to reach out to the Design Systems team on Slack or via email at design-systems@sproutsocial.com with any thoughts or questions. Stay safe and healthy, and we'll see you next time 🙌

— Design Systems

Have questions, feedback, or ideas for the Design Systems team? [Shoot us an email](#) or [check out our wiki page](#) to get in touch and to read past issues of our newsletter. If you would like to unsubscribe from this newsletter, please send an email to design-systems-newsletter+unsubscribe@sproutsocial.com.