Design System Landscape Mapping

2 hours
Design Systems
Intermediate

Before building a new design system, map what already exists. Design system landscape mapping inventories all components, patterns, styles, and documentation across products. Teams often waste months building "new" systems when inconsistent systems are already in place. An inventory reveals what to consolidate, not just what to create from scratch.

H HOW TO RUN

1 Inventory All Systems — 35 min

(35 minutes): List every design system, component library, pattern library, and style guide that exists. Include official systems, team-specific libraries, abandoned projects, and documentation sites. Don't judge; just catalog. Most organizations have 3-5 partial systems nobody realizes exist.

2 Document Each System — 40 min

(40 minutes): For each system, document what it covers, how complete it is, how current it is, who uses it, who maintains it, and what products use it. Get specifics. "Component library" is vague. "27 React components, last updated 18 months ago, used by Product A only" is useful data.

3 Assess Quality and Adoption — 30 min

(30 minutes): Rate each system's quality (how well-built and documented), adoption (how widely used), and currency (how maintained). Plot on a matrix. High quality + high adoption = asset to build on. Low quality + low adoption = candidate for deprecation.

4 Identify Patterns — 15 min

(15 minutes): Look across the landscape. Are components duplicated across systems? Are different systems serving different needs? Is fragmentation intentional or accidental? Patterns reveal whether you need consolidation, replacement, or both.

KEY TIP

Consider these points: Hidden Systems: Formal systems are documented, but informal systems are often hidden in repos, Figma files, or team wikis.

O OBJECTIVES

- The goals are to: Document existing design system artifacts
- Identify redundancy and inconsistency
- Assess quality and adoption
- Inform strategy for consolidation or replacement

M MATERIALS

- ☐ Access to all codebases and design files
- ☐ System documentation (if it exists)
- ☐ Usage analytics (if available)
- ☐ Large mapping space (digital or physical)

P PARTICIPANTS

3 to 5 people

F FACILITATOR NOTES

REMEMBER

- Hunt for them; they reveal actual practice vs. intended practice.
- Shadow systems exist because official systems failed.
- Adoption Tells Truth: Low adoption means a system doesn't serve needs, regardless of its quality.
- A beautiful, unused system is a failure. An ugly, widely-used system is a success.
- Let usage data inform strategy, not aesthetics.