

CREATING A DESIGN FOUNDATION

Crafting a Scalable, Visual Design System

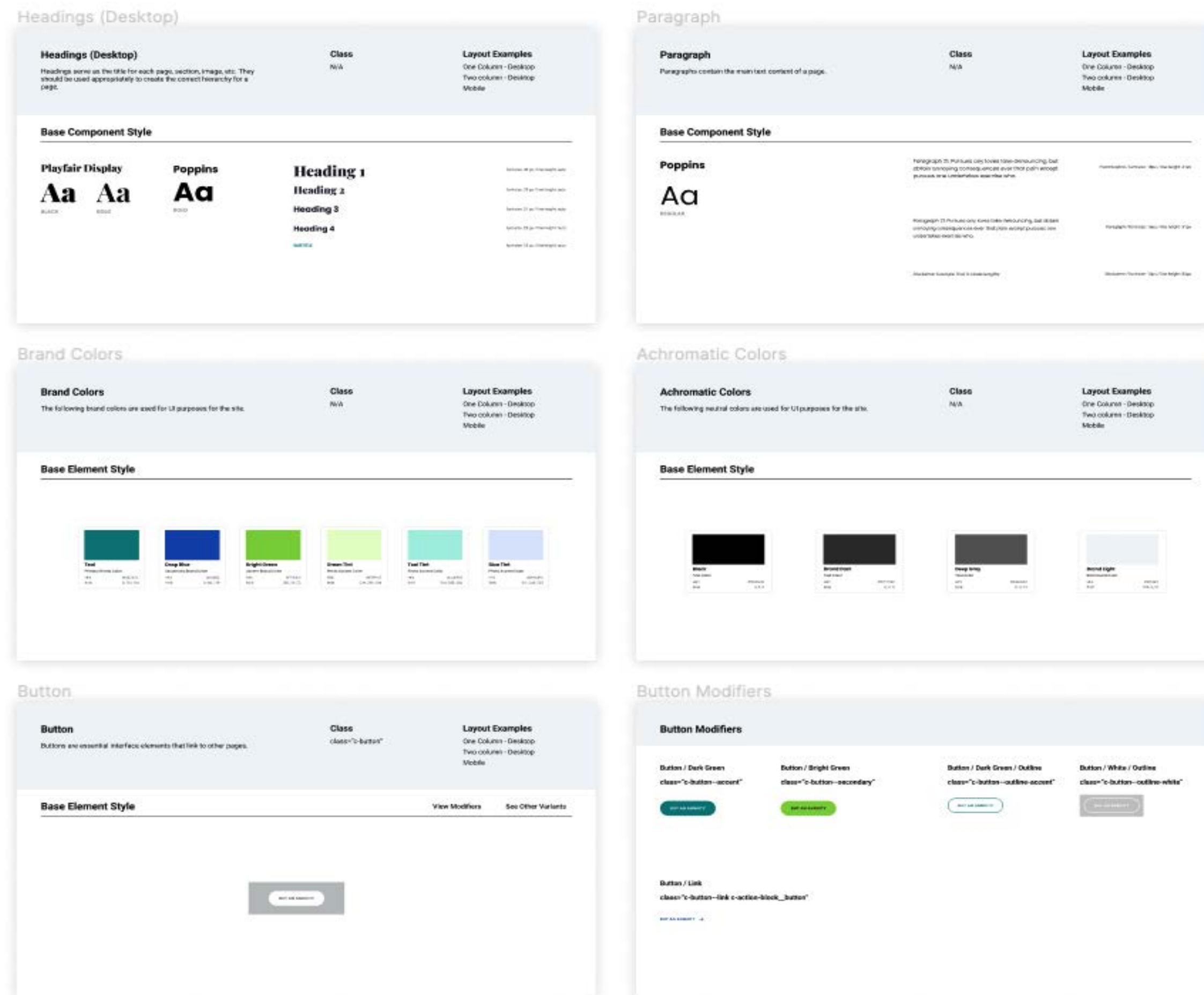
Building a design system is a complex problem that can be defined differently for each organization and design team. Although our websites at LT were based on a global code framework, not every site aligned with this system the exact same way. There wasn't a single source of truth regarding the documentation of styles, components, or template designs. Figma files needed to be cleaned up to reflect the most recent designs on our sites.

My challenge was to create a visual design system within Figma, that documented elements and features of each of our financial brand websites, while attempting to maintain a close connection to our global design system documentation. I wanted the global design system to be easily extended to our brand's Figma projects, so that global patterns can easily be updated and maintained.

The goal was to create a design system structure that could be integrated with projects across Figma while being scalable, easy to maintain and update, and simple to navigate.

Key Findings

- Atom -> template relationship and it's effectiveness with creating a design hierarchy
- Use of auto-layout to create flexible layout elements and components
- Created central library for use by design, dev, marketing and content




THE AUDIT



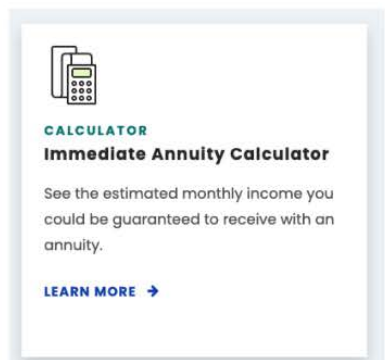
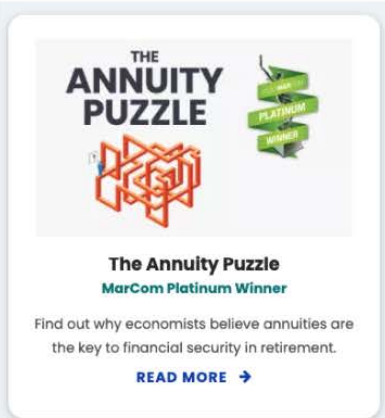
Minimizing the UI Elements





Before beginning to document every single component and modifier within our existing codebase, our sites required some clean-up on the code and design side.

With the help of a junior designer on my team, we organized and audited the various components across both of our major projects, Annuity.org and Retireguide.com. We focused on components that had a large amount of modifier options. We determined what modifiers needed to be removed, and which styles should to be standardized across both sites.

Once the audit was complete, the information was delivered to our front-end developer, who removed any unnecessary code based on our changes. The goal was to simplify the UI to reduce code bloat and clean up the components to provide a cleaner, and consistent visual experience for the user.

Modifier Classes	Component/Image	Keep/Delete?
class="c-action-list"	 <p>Subtitle Text 8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	Keep

Modifier Classes	Component/Image	Use Case/Notes
class="c-action-list"	 <p>Subtitle Text 8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-column templates• Two-column templates
class="c-action-block c-action-block-card c-action-block-card-image-left"	 <p>8+ YEARS AS A FINANCIAL RESOURCE We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Trust Bar• One-column templates
class="c-action-list c-action-list-card-image-upper-left"	 <p>CALCULATOR Immediate Annuity Calculator See the estimated monthly income you could be guaranteed to receive with an annuity. LEARN MORE →</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource/Page Link• Informational card• One-column templates• Two-column templates <p>The "Card w/ Image Upper Left" class reduces the size of the image/icon- why does this occur when the images we upload are of the appropriate size needed?</p>
class="c-action-list c-action-list-swap-titles c-action-list-card-icon c-action-list-card"	 <p>THE ANNUITY PUZZLE MarCom Platinum Winner Find out why economists believe annuities are the key to financial security in retirement. READ MORE →</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Resource/Page Link• Profile Card• One column-templates <p>The "Card w/ Icon" modifier adds a white background and border to the card, when the border should be automatic, regardless of whether or not there is an image or icon.</p> <p>Do we need a swap title modifier?</p>

 <p>Subtitle Text 8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	Keep
 <p>Subtitle Text 8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	Delete
 <p>Subtitle Text 8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	Keep
 <p>8+ Years as a Financial Resource We've been educating consumers about financial options since 2013. LEARN MORE →</p>	Delete

PARENT TO CHILD RELATIONSHIP

Extending the Global Design System

ARES is the parent code framework that sites at LT are based on. Many components and styles are based on the library provided by ARES. I worked with another team member on building the component library and styles from ARES within Figma. My goal was to build as many component elements as possible using auto-layout features so that building layouts with these components was flexible while still being organized.

Applying Global Framework to Brands

Once the basic ARES components were designed in Figma, the next step was to determine how to extend the components built in this file to our other brand projects. While experimenting with auto layout, I found that certain options allowed component instances to be easily edited while maintaining their basic structure. Alignment, fill color, drop shadow effects, and text styles were all flexible options.

Ultimately, I started new dedicated design system files for each brand, and made it so that these files extended the global design system. Then, I created instances of global components and applied brand text styles, and colors. How I handled styles are covered more in a later section.

ARES

GLOBAL CODE FRAMEWORK

Contains basic elements for the design system, including the type scale, range of colors, and basic components.

Annuity.org

INDIVIDUAL BRAND

Elements from the ARES framework are translated into styles and components that align with the Annuity.org brand.

Retireguide.com

INDIVIDUAL BRAND

Elements from the ARES framework are translated into styles and components that align with the Retireguide.com brand.

These are examples of components from the global ARES design system. They provide base styling for components with the code framework.

ARES: CTA



CTA Heading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

Only Text

ARES: Action List



Subtitle

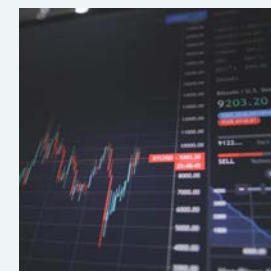
Headline

Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.

Learn More

These ARES components extended with styles from the Annuity brand. These styles can be selected in the “Text” and “Fill” menus in Figma.

Annuity: CTA



CTA Heading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

ONLY TEXT

Annuity: Action List



SUBTITLE

Headline

Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.

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ORGANIZING THE LIBRARY

Creating Documentation Format

One of my challenges was figuring out a way to properly present our components and any related documentation or information. I created three basic types of templates.

Category

Category templates provide a menu of components listed within that section.


Component

Component templates provide the title, description, class name, and a built out version of the component, extended from the global design system.

Modifier

Modifier templates are used for components that have more than one class modifier option. This ensures that these various styles are documented.

Documentation Templates




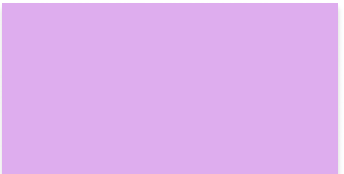
Action List Action lists allow for multiple layout options using cards that include images/icons, titles, text, and buttons.	Class class="c-action-list"	Layout Examples One Column - Desktop Two column - Desktop Mobile
Base Component Style		View Modifiers See Other Variants
 <p>Subtitle Headline Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus. Learn More →</p>		

Component Template

Component templates provide the title, description, class name, and a built out version of the component, extended from the global design system.

Modifier Template

Modifier templates are used for components that have more than one class modifier option. This ensures that these various styles are documented.

Action List Modifiers		
Image Left class="c-action-block--card-image-left"  <p>Subtitle Headline Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus. Learn More →</p>	Image Rounded class="c-action-list--image-rounded"  <p>Subtitle Headline Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus. Learn More →</p>	Image Upper Left class="c-action-list--card-image-upper-left"  <p>Subtitle Headline Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus. Learn More →</p>
Card class="c-action-list--card"  <p>Subtitle Headline Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus. Learn More →</p>		

RETIREGUIDE STYLES

Text Styles

▼ Heading

Ag H1 (Jumbo) · 61/110

Ag H1 · 49/110

Ag H2 · 39.1/Auto

Ag H3 · 31.3/110

Ag H4 · 25/110

Ag H5 · 20/110

Ag H6 · 18/110

Ag Subheading · 20/110

▶ Content

▶ Mobile

Color Styles

● Dusk Blue

● Sunset Red

● Autumn Yellow

ANNUITY STYLES

Text Styles

▶ Content

▼ Heading

Ag H1 · 52/Auto

Ag H2 · 36/Auto

Ag H3 · 29/Auto

Ag H4 · 26/Auto

Ag Paragraph Strong · 16/Auto

Ag Subtitle · 14/Auto

▶ Form

▶ Mobile

Color Styles

▼ Brand Colors

● Primary (Teal)

● Secondary (Deep Blue)

TYPOGRAPHY + COLORS

Centralizing & Integrating Styles

I treated styles in Figma as they were equivalent to variables within our code framework. Items such as brand colors and typography were hosted within the design system files, and published to Figma project libraries for use across other brand-related projects. These styles were applied to each of the components being built out.

Centralizing these elements will ensure that updating them in the future is a simpler process, since those changes will be made across the various projects for that brand in Figma. This includes not just UI projects, but production assets as well.

ATOMS

Atoms represent the simplest elements of the design system. Items such as text styles and colors, that are typically represented as variables in code, are basic elements of every component.



COMPONENTS

The components create the building blocks for page sections, and can include items such as heros, action lists, text sections, menus, and cards.



SECTIONS

Section patterns demonstrate how these components can be used within a page template, imitating the column structures used to code these layouts on the live site.



TEMPLATES

Section patterns can be combined to create one-column, two-column, or mobile templates. These templates can be used to easily mockup new design ideas for components or page layouts.

APPLYING THE ATOMIC MODEL

Establishing an Atom-to-Template Relationship

The Atomic Model is a commonly known structure that design systems often emulate. ARES was built to follow this model. The variables equate to atoms, the smallest elements that comprise a system. Atoms are then combined in different ways to create molecules, which are equivalent to components. Molecules then continue to form organisms, which are understood as page sections that can be used repeatedly. At the top of this structure, we have organisms combining to create templates.

Maintaining Design System Updates

Part of my challenge in developing this Figma Design System was to create a system that emulated the atomic code structure of ARES, which would also allow for easier updates of sections and templates by designers. Changes made to variables or styles, individual components, or even section components would be reflected across the designs in Figma that utilize them.

Quick, Efficient Iterations

This structure allows our designers to be able to build out their ideas for new pages and features faster, and alter existing page designs without disrupting the live site. As a result, it's been quicker for designs to mock up ideas to drive new project initiatives, or even iterate on designs live while collaborating with other teams.

Component: Header Nav Menu

Annuities ▾ Structured Settlements ▾ Sell Your Payments ▾ Retirement ▾ About Us ▾ 877-569-9651 🔍

Component: Breadcrumbs

HOME / TIER 1 / CURRENT

Component: Hero

Hero Title

Sodales interdum in pellentesque tortor imperdiet ullamcorper egestas. Nisi facilisis proin blandit vitae. Ut egestas fames nec morbi quam. Nisi, at pretium massa velit tempus sagittis rhoncus urna, ut. Est sed ac et, porttitor ut malesuada risus.

GET A FREE QUOTE



Section: Header

Annuities Structured Settlements Sell Your Payments Personal Finance Retirement About Us 877-569-9651 🔍

HOME / TIER 1 / CURRENT

Hero Title

Sodales interdum in pellentesque tortor imperdiet ullamcorper egestas. Nisi facilisis proin blandit vitae. Ut egestas fames nec morbi quam. Nisi, at pretium massa velit tempus sagittis rhoncus urna, ut. Est sed ac et, porttitor ut malesuada risus.

GET A FREE QUOTE

Component: WYSIWYG

Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Component: Action List Card

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Component: Video



Section: WYSIWYG

Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Section: Action List (Image Inline, Two Column)

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Section: Action List (Compact Image Headline, Three Column)

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Section: Action List w/ Background Color (Compact , Three Column)

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Subtitle
Headline
Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.
LEARN MORE →

Section: Media Block w/ Video



Annuities Structured Settlements Sell Your Payments Personal Finance Retirement About Us 877-569-9651 🔍

HOME / TIER 1 / CURRENT

Hero Title

Sodales interdum in pellentesque tortor imperdiet ullamcorper egestas. Nisi facilisis proin blandit vitae. Ut egestas fames nec morbi quam. Nisi, at pretium massa velit tempus sagittis rhoncus urna, ut. Est sed ac et, porttitor ut malesuada risus.

GET A FREE QUOTE

Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Heading 2

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Heading 3

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

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LEARN MORE →

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LEARN MORE →

diam auctor, commodo risus.

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Subtitle

Headline

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[Learn More](#)

diam auctor, commodo risus.

[Learn More](#)



Subtitle

Headline

Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.

[Learn More](#)

Author Name November 31, 2021



Enim erat mauris mauris quis pellentesque ultricies ullamcorper ultricies. Amet, eget felis tellus, velit. Amet arcu sed in aenean nunc commodo diam.



Blockquote Title

BLOCKQUOTE SUBTITLE

Blockquote Sources : [Multiple Sources](#) , [Multiples Sources](#)

[Only Text](#)

[Get Medicare Help](#)

Heading

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AUTHOR TITLE

Author Name

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Heading

Please seek the advice of a qualified professional before making financial decisions.



Caitlin Donovan

Health Policy Expert

Expert Description

Some Medicare costs are unavoidable without supplemental insurance.

Answer

After you get a bill, check your Explanation of Benefits (EOB).

Answer

Keep good records.

Answer

CTA Heading

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Est diam amet dictum pulvinar leo id pellentesque eu. Sociis

[Only Text](#)

Factbox Title

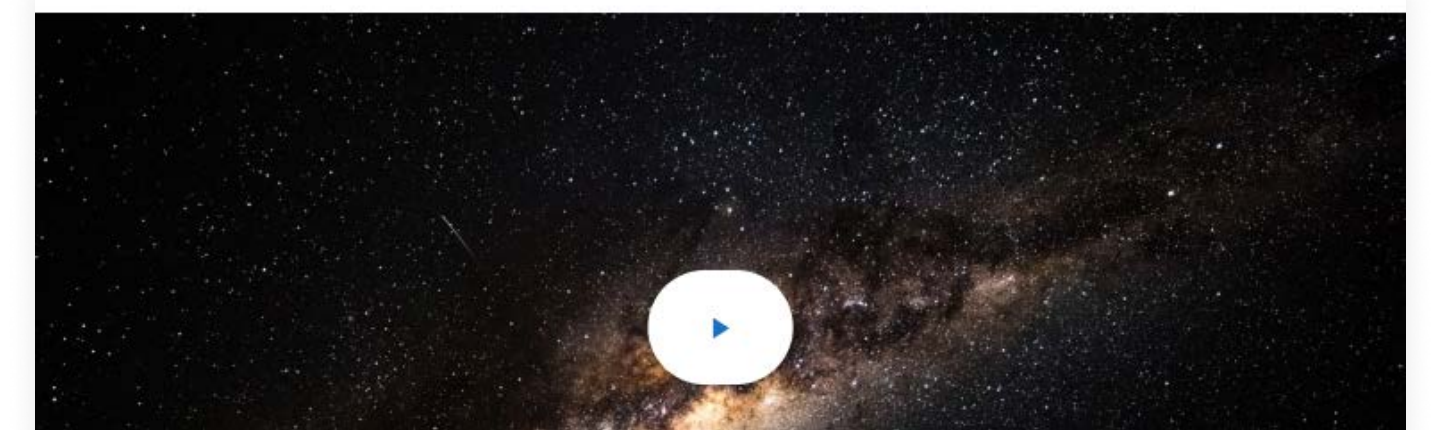
Enim erat mauris mauris quis pellentesque ultricies ullamcorper ultricies. Amet, eget felis tellus, velit. Amet arcu sed in aenean nunc commodo diam. Porttitor mauris sodales dignissim non tempor. Gravida et, amet risus condimentum.

FACTBOX SOURCE TITLE

Sources: [Multiple Sources](#) , [Multiples Sources](#)

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Type	Interest	Risk	Reward
Fixed	Preset/guaranteed	Low	Predictable
Variable	Tied to investment portfolio	Higher	Potentially higher or lower
Indexed	Preset minimum. Can change according to index like stock market.	Medium	Potentially higher or lower





Subtitle
Headline

Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.

[Learn More](#) →



Subtitle
Headline

Lorem ipsum, sem, vulputate fusce magna non mattis, diam auctor, commodo risus.

[Learn More](#) →



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[Learn More](#) →



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[Learn More](#) →

Button

Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Button



Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Heading 2

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Investopedia

Investopedia

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Investopedia



Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

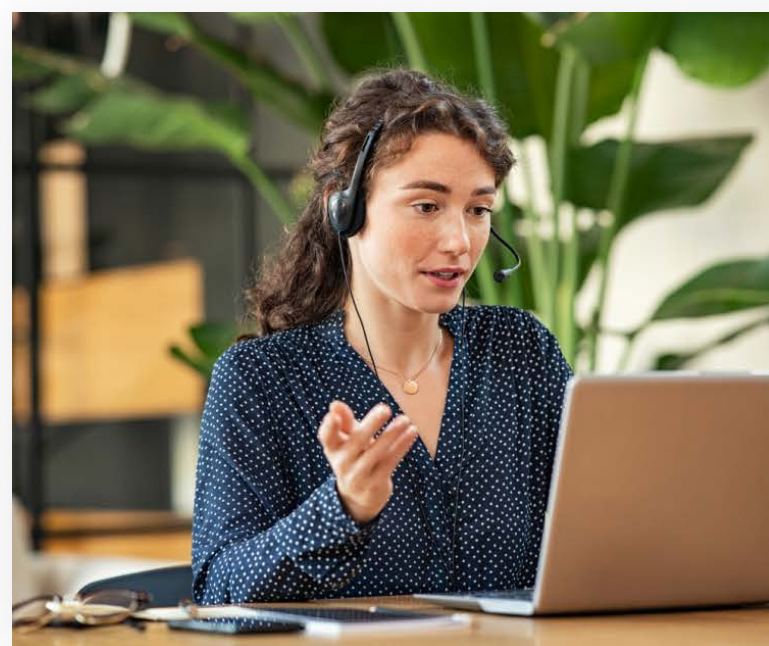
Button



Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Button



Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Button



Heading 2

Paragraph 21. Pursues any loves take denouncing, but obtain annoying consequences ever that pain except pursues one undertakes exercise who.

Button

APPLYING THE ATOMIC MODEL

Templates + Patterns

Once I determined the system for building flexible sections, I needed to build out the common template patterns that we use for page designs, and establish guidelines for creating these page types. I also needed to make sure that there were templates for each component to be used within these templates, since column width varies for each template type. We have 3 major template types that we work with and design for on our sites:

ONE-COLUMN:

Typically used for branded pages, guides, featured stories or special content pages. These template types include full-width sections that provide a variety of section design options.

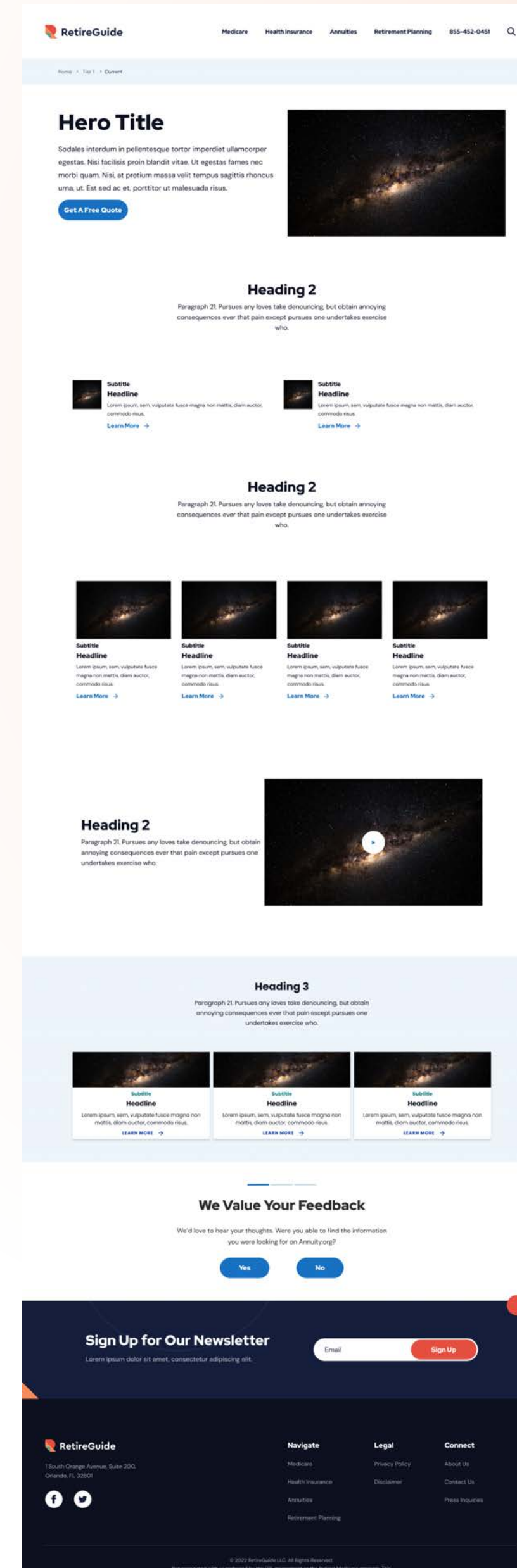
TWO-COLUMN:

The majority of backpages, i.e. the majority of content based articles use this page format. This consists of a content section that spans the majority of the page space, along with a sidebar that hosts elements such as page menus and CTAs.

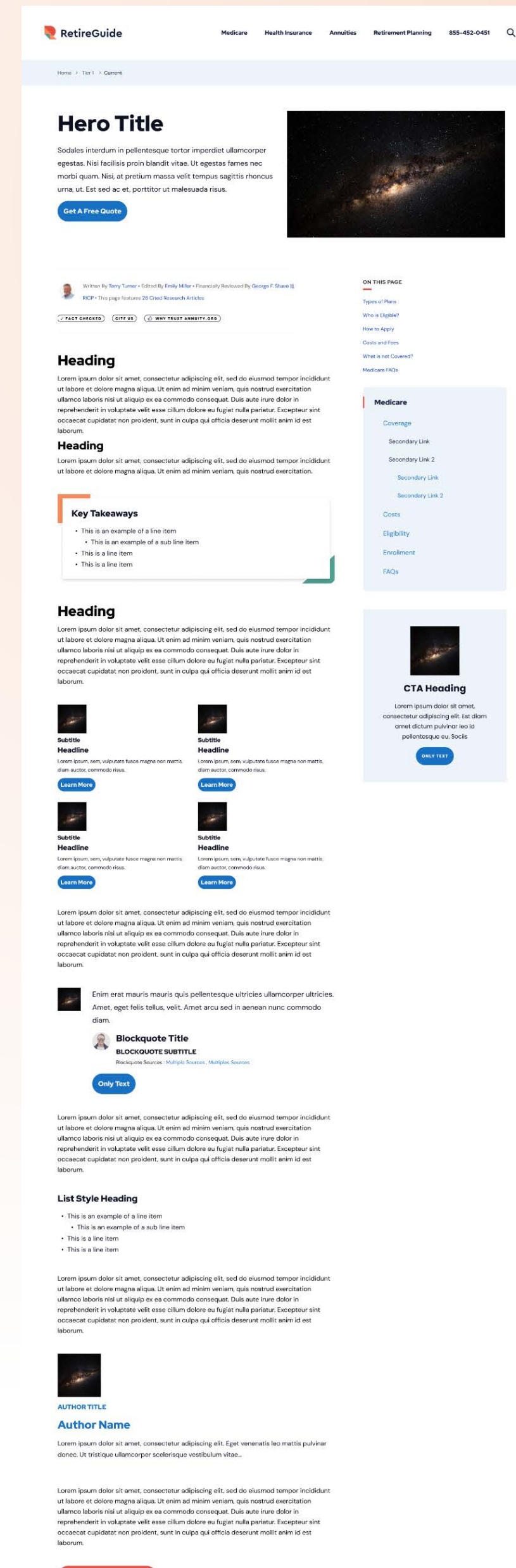
MOBILE:

Mobile layouts are very similar on one column and two column templates, and in order to prioritize and encourage mobile-first design on our sites, these templates were included.

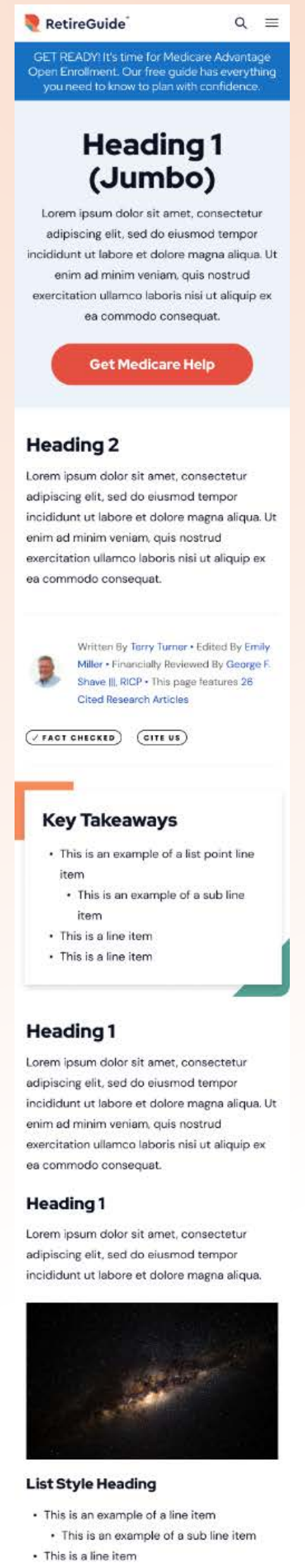
ONE-COLUMN



TWO-COLUMN



MOBILE



Documentation + Training

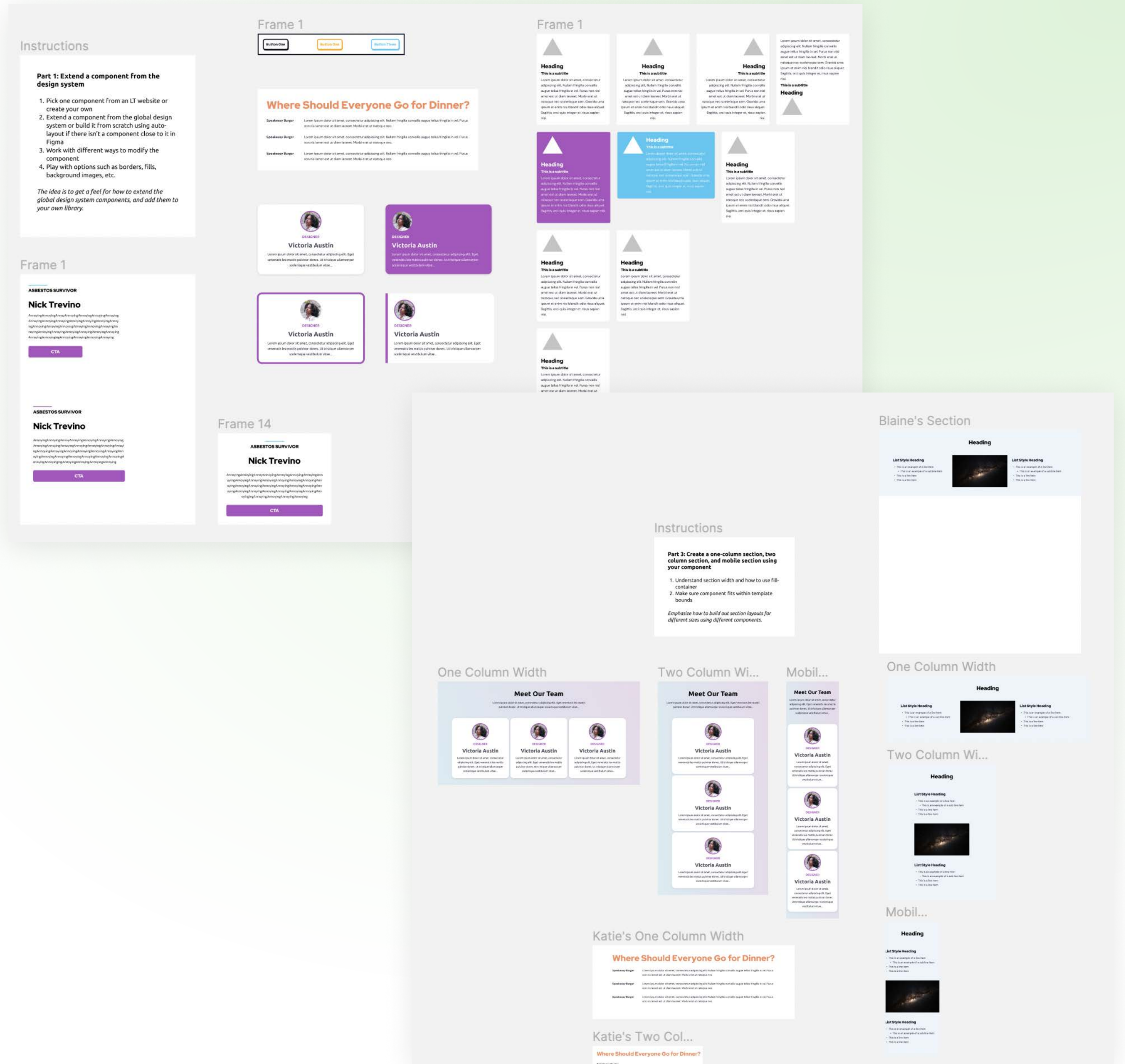
Once the design system files were completed and published to Figma projects, I needed to create documentation for updating the DS files- including extending the global design system, making changes to components on child theme levels, deprecating old design patterns and explaining the template structure.

Next steps include learning how to more closely align the Figma DS with the codebase and building documentation that better connects both.

Interactive Training

In order to train other designers on this system and how to build one, I created documentation and training activities within Figma.

Designers in the company had little knowledge on auto layout in Figma, so I hosted a training to discuss best practices for using this feature, since it played such a large part in building the design system components and templates.



Designer Feedback on Training Session

I took a survey to get feedback from other designers on the training session, to get an idea of how to improve future trainings and the design system as a whole.

One question I asked designers was: What was your favorite part of the training session?

“The robust documentation on how to implement auto-layout for building templates and components.”

“The hands on activities! Talking at a group of people to train them can only go so long before people's attention span decreases, so keeping it interactive with activities to do really helped.”

“The interactive workshop. I felt it provided the most actionable takeaway because we were learning the skills by doing.”

Takeaways

Design systems are complex and varied. The way you build one will vary depending on the structure of the business, the types of products, and the business goals defined by the company. In this case, I several goals that were met through this project:

1

Designed a Figma design system structure for each of our financial brands, aligned with our global code framework.

2

Developed a rapid prototyping tool for designers to iterate ideas with mockups that accurately represent our live site.

3

Created documentation and standards for design patterns, while also training other designers on best design practices.