

DOING BETTER AT FRONTIER

Version 2



July 2022

Doing Better is a public commitment that describes our collective actionable efforts to create positive and uplifting impact in the context of a design office. We see Doing Better as an integral part of our everyday practice.

This public commitment to do better is a living document. It is evolving, ambitious, and specific. It identifies how our roles as designers, writers, small-business owners, managers, leaders, media producers, and contributors to society will prioritize social justice, the environment, and health & wellness in our work and how we work.

This commitment is a part of our everyday actions and influences our decision-making processes. To ensure we as an office are genuinely making measurable progress to do better, we're evolving our document to prioritize committing to actionable goals related to our understanding of our greatest potential impact.

In July 2020 we published a “Doing Better” commitment on our website in response to global social upheavals.

Since then, we have been actively incorporating, discussing, and reflecting upon our commitments—internally and externally. This is our most recent update.

WHAT WE CAN CONTINUE & DO MORE OF

Here we outline what we want to do more of and how we have started to achieve these goals

Policies

HR & Policy Development

We hired an HR team, Bright+Early, from summer 2020 to spring 2022, to support us, educate us, and review our team policies and approaches. Its team became a source of accountability and of expertise on best practices, helping us develop processes and policies such as those pertaining to Feedback Culture, DEI, role guides, and parental leave.

Open Communication

In an effort to sustain open and honest discussions as a studio, we encourage independent learning and the sharing of resources in a casual format that can be returned to. For example, our Doing Better Slack channel and our Anti-Racism / Anti-Oppression resource list consolidate our shared educational resources around this topic and is actively engaged as a starting point for team discussions. We've established dedicated time for larger discussions that build upon these resources in our Friday Forum or on days such as National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, giving us opportunities to reflect, share, and discuss key learnings as a group.

Transparent Operations

As Frontier continues to grow, we all want to contribute to the type of business we want to be a part of. We have formalized a strategic plan that sets out the company's goals. This document was developed by the senior team with opportunities for open feedback from the full Frontier team and is subject to evolve with the company's growth. As part of that, we will develop an overarching planning and operational structure to ensure there is accountability and transparency at all levels within our office. This plan considers the regular occurrences of our annual events (strategic planning, review cycles, budgeting, etc.) and monthly meetings (financial updates, media planning, creative leadership, 1:1s, etc.)

Team-Wide Operations Engagement

Our Friday Forum has evolved to keep the team updated on what others are working on and what's in our pipeline. We use this time to share inspiration and recent projects, but also to review and discuss office-wide policy updates and new-business opportunities. This encourages all team members to be more connected to the business and allows for more visibility into professional-development and career-growth opportunities.

Flexible Work Model

As our office will be maintaining a hybrid form of working, all internal communications and meetings must ensure team members are included and can engage equally, whether they are on-site or working remotely.

Resourcing

In an effort to reduce fatigue from meetings and ensure our team requires less overtime due to interrupted work we're testing and evolving our meeting structures: providing blocks of uninterrupted work time in mornings and meeting blocks in the afternoon; reducing the number of standing meetings; including agendas to help make the time needed efficient; and ensuring attendee lists are focused. In these seemingly small adjustments, we're hoping to minimize over-resourcing and the sense of being overwhelmed and put people over tasks at hand.

Goalsetting

We're getting clear on what our collective vision is as an office and supporting individual team members to establish and reach their goals. These are independently driven goals that align with our overall strategic plan and individual career paths. This gives everyone the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to a Frontier they want to be a part of.

Accountability

We see accountability for ourselves and our clients as a part of our service and as a clear way to make change. For example, we can take note of client responses to Doing Better suggestions. *Did they get defensive? Did they engage in conversation? Did the suggestion result in a better outcome?* We see these as learning opportunities for how to work together to find realistic solutions that push for better, more ambitious, and considerate outcomes but are respectful of where people are.

Charitable Donations

Our 2022 budget allocates \$15,000 for initiatives related to our Doing Better initiatives, including charitable donations to True North Aid, North York Women's Shelter, CAMH, Black Lives Matter Toronto, and CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals.

We will continue to evaluate this based on our revenue goals and success on a quarterly basis.

Accessibility & Representation

Defining Accessibility & Representation

For Frontier, Accessibility & Representation is about reducing barriers to our industry and our services. To us, it is important to diversify representation and to provide meaningful opportunities and visibility to historically marginalized groups within and outside of the office. In every aspect of our work, we have the ability to contribute to a more equitable experience for all regardless of identity or abilities. This is inclusive but not limited to physical, psychological, cognitive, spiritual, gender, and racial identities.

Frontier Media

In October 2020 we started tracking our media activity to hold ourselves accountable to DEI initiatives. Since then, of our 65 published articles, email newsletters, and Instagram posts, 23 feature POC, Women, Indigenous & Non-Western perspectives. This is a start and we acknowledge we can continue to do better.

First Things First

While we've made a concerted effort to diversify our podcast interviewees, we recognize there is still room for improvement.

We are actively seeking conversations with interviewees and individuals with diverse experiences within and beyond the traditional design community. We aim to share different ways design can be used to do better and support marginalized communities.

Media Formats

We've begun to review and offer transcriptions of our podcasts and Instagram visuals. During season 3, we will publish the transcripts for each new podcast alongside the episodes. We have also been retroactively transcribing our Season 1 episodes. For 2022, our goal is to provide 10 additional transcripts for our podcasts.

Precedents

We have consciously updated our project precedents to expand beyond primarily westernized corporate examples and will continue to diversify our references.

The Frontier Website

We've taken measures to make aspects of our website more accessible, such as providing transcripts for our podcast episodes, but our website is not currently WCAG accessible. Our team will redesign our website to ensure it is WCAG-accessible.

Design Work

Unless it is an intentional design statement, we will ensure that as much of our visual output as possible, including presentation decks, application mock-ups, and Google documents, will follow recommended accessible color-contrast and typographic guidelines. WCAG resources will be shared so the team is aware of best practices.

Studio Space

Our current physical studio location remains inaccessible.

While we recognize our entire physical space cannot be completely accessible, we can ensure the accessibility is improved on our main floor by creating access with a ramp at our entrance. We'll have a ramp on hand to provide access without impeding passersby.

Health & Wellness

Collective Wellbeing

We value team culture and we believe that a positive team culture directly contributes to our collective wellbeing. We encourage internal initiatives to maintain team connection and promote physical and mental wellbeing in informal ways! To name a few, we've begun a daily Meditation Slack Channel, a weekly workout club, monthly coffee meetups, and internal creative initiatives like our rotating window displays. We will continue to seek ways to encourage independent prioritization of physical and mental health.

Flexible Work Environment

We're continuing to offer and evolve a flexible working environment (physical or virtual) that prioritizes purposeful collaboration and a sense of inclusivity while allowing for healthier work/life balances. We've held team discussions and working sessions, made room for 1:1 conversations, anonymous survey participation, collaborated with the HR team at Bright + Early, and started a new project team leading the discussion of new policies around work at Frontier.

Hybrid Work Model

Informed by our team's preferences, Frontier will take on a hybrid-workplace model. Our team can work from home or the Frontier office as they see fit, with additional benefits of extended remote work available for up to 2 months every year. This flexibility helps team members balance their work with home and travel.

Family Policy

In 2021, Frontier formalized our parental and pregnancy leave policy, with a top-up at 80% of a team member's regular salary for 8 consecutive months. Committed to equal treatment of parents who are welcoming a child into their lives, this benefit is eligible to new parents of both biological and adopted children regardless of the parent's gender and relationship with any co-parent.

Health Benefits

In 2021, we added a Health Care spending benefit to provide flexible support to our existing employee health and dental package.

Hiring Practice & Process

Expanding Outreach

We are continuing to expand our talent outreach beyond our typical network by posting job opportunities on more diverse boards than those we previously used. In the past two years, we've used the services of Where Are The Black Designers, Women Who Design, Aboriginal Job Board, WorkInc, New Canadians Jobs, and the job boards of institutions like RGD, OCADU, York, and UofT. We will continue to find more outlets to share Frontier job openings.

Hiring Process

For every role we are looking to fill, we commit to expanding our hiring pool by posting hiring opportunities in more and more diverse locations. We also set the goal of interviewing at least 3 candidates for every role, with at least 2 of those candidates representing a minority community inclusive of race, gender, sexuality, neurodiversity, or ability. We offer, but do not require, applicants the opportunity to share their identity with us.

Communicating the Process

Beyond outreach, we're continuing to build out and evolve our hiring practices and processes to be more transparent.

We now include details of what the interviewing process entails, who will be in the interviews, and practical details such as salary bands and benefits.

Our Approach

Our interview process now has two steps: a technical-skills interview and a culture interview. In the latter, we identified questions that focus on how the candidate will add to the company's culture. More team members are involved in this second step to address any biases that are unintentionally brought along. We have also developed scoresheets that help focus decision-making and increase fairness.

Hiring Timeline

We pledge to be more realistic about the time required to hire and on-board new team members. We will continue planning and allocating the necessary hiring resources to thoughtfully add to the team with full-timers, freelancers, and interns. We will also continually broaden our networks of available designers so that urgent needs can be met by more than just friends and previous colleagues.

Onboarding Process

Our onboarding process equips new team members with tools and structures to help them excel at Frontier. In addition to formal processes and protocols, we also focus on feedback culture and the Situation-Behaviour-Impact feedback technique. The conscious decision to integrate these tools into a person's onboarding helps establish the significance we put on open communication right from the start.

Careers, Mentorship, & Internships

Career Path

As our career paths evolves, Frontier has updated its lists of core competencies to ensure future opportunities for all team roles. These now include Work Quality/Job Performance, Teamwork/Collaboration, Business Development, Professional Development, and Doing Better. Most noticeably, adding Doing Better asks team members to think about how their work at Frontier has a wider impact.

Supporting Growth

We have updated the title of Manager to Support. This shift in language more accurately describes our view on allowing junior team members to actively participate in their career paths with their Supports helping to guide, suggest, and assist as needed.

Mentorship

We have initiated a few informal 3-month mentorships with applicants from past design postings. These mentorships are opportunities to help candidates receive honest feedback about their work and expectations. Our sessions allow mentees to ask for professional advice, have a portfolio review, conduct mock interviews, or seek general career support. In the future, we hope to develop more robust mentorships with a more structured program at Frontier.

Indigenous Opportunities

Education & Training

We've participated in two Indigenous-learning workshops hosted by Innovation7. Our team learned how we can respectfully engage and empower Indigenous communities and ideas in our work. Our team has continued our relationship with Innovation7 by collaborating on proposals as partners.

Dedicated Reflection

On November 30, the National Truth and Reconciliation Day, we dedicated our work day to further our own education on Indigenous issues. We found it meaningful to come together to discuss and share our reflections. We also used our social media and street-facing window to help encourage our communities to learn about the history and establishment of NDTR.

Building Relationships

Our continued learnings and partnerships help us advocate for Indigenous consultation and enrich discussions with our clients. On more than one occasion, we've encouraged and successfully built relationships between clients and Indigenous partners to engage Indigenous communities on projects that did not previously include them.

Engagement in our Media

Through Frontier Media, we have worked with Indigenous writers and thinkers on articles such as *Missing and Murdered*, *Wearing Black*, and *Saving Endangered Languages*, but we can do more to engage diverse Indigenous voices and issues in our stories. We continue our commitment to bringing Indigenous perspectives to our readers and working with individuals and organizations to co-create, activate, and realize reconciliation in Architecture, Technology and Arts and Culture.

Land Acknowledgement

We have begun key project meetings with a land acknowledgement tailored to the context. Moving forward, we will determine and share specific language that all team members can use as a starting point.

Environmental Impact

Environmentally-considerate deliverables

Where appropriate, we're bringing environmental conversations directly to our clients by opening the dialogue on the impact of a manufactured or printed design, providing conscientious alternatives where possible, and/or seeking both clients and vendors that are more ecologically aligned with our Doing Better mandate.

Impact of Our Purchases

Wherever possible, we will be ecologically and environmentally-aware with our office purchases, from printer paper to toilet paper. We'll be assessing our vendors and suppliers and making smarter, more-informed decisions based on environmental impact. This will be mindful of the cost and origin of the goods and considerate of their lifespan.

Certified Accountability

We will become a B-Corp organization. We see the designation as an effective way to communicate our Doing Better efforts while opening new opportunities and networks of similarly-minded businesses.

MAKING IT REAL

In this section, we are setting out a plan of what we'd like to achieve in our following year.

With the advice from our HR consultants at Bright+Early, we are prioritizing where to direct our efforts. This is not intended to limit us or stop us from other opportunities to do better, but it should make our goals feel more achievable.

In operationalizing our plan, we are identifying 1–3 initiatives within each of the focus areas.

	Policies	Accessibility & Representation	Health & Wellbeing	Hiring Practice & Process	Careers, Mentorship & Internships	Indigenous Opportunities	Environmental Impact
Top Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign budgets to different Doing Better Initiatives • Write and include in proposals and pitches a 3-sentence description of Doing Better and how it effects work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate the front-door ramp • Make our website WCAG-accessible • Publish 10 transcribed versions of our podcast episodes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add quarterly pulse surveys to see how the team is doing • Set up vacation-booking reminders in the spring and fall to encourage vacation time and avoid interruptions • Host an info session to give team members a thorough overview of the resources available in their benefits package 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure hiring “manager” has support (putting up job postings, interview process, etc.) • Build upon where we share job postings • Build our network of potential hires/ collaborators year-round (not just when we are in need of a hire) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a feasible and sustainable mentorship program that invites participation from any interested team members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Frontier’s approach to Land Acknowledgements • Continue the office’s learning and education • Continue to observe the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with learning and education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit our studio purchases to ensure that anything we buy is socially and environmentally considerate

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Additional Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share our Hiring Practice & Process with the whole team Check in on policies to see if revisions are needed Develop our governance model. Identify lead and general timeline. Check in on our client ethics and accountability—the type of work we take on and the kinds of clients we work for—so that we have impact in the areas that we care about (environment, social justice, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue our support through donations, advocacy, and investments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compile a list of resources that support H&W (e.g., Muscle Club, group access to organic food basket) Look for burnout and adjust resourcing to manage it; encourage communication and use of personal days when needed Include H&W in team- and individual-growth discussions. This can be accomplished by setting clear expectations and goals as part of the career path. Build up our health support, including available mental-health breaks, and potential external support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check in on hiring practices and if any revisions are needed Consider ways to receive applicant feedback on the interview process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with organizations like Innovation 7 or BAIDA to create and give access to greater opportunities for those who might not otherwise have access to them Create opportunities for industry experience by investing in a studio Internship program that provides a paid 3-6 month in studio experience to 1 candidate per year Participate in talks, conferences and fairs on topics such as Purpose Design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner with Innovation 7 on proposals Where appropriate, respectfully include Indigenous references and teachings in our work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit vendor list ,from printers to fabricators, to see if there are more sustainable alternatives Submit the application to become a B-Corp Continue to identify, pursue, and grow new-business opportunities that prioritize or positively contribute to environmental impact Host a podcast episode/ partake in a panel discussion on how Purpose Design and environmental impact align