



## AAEP Core Values & Mission Workshop Facilitator Guide

**Recommended Workshop Length:** 30-60 minutes each  
(adjustable based on group size and discussion depth)

This exercise works best when the entire team participates. Encourage input from veterinarians, technicians, assistants, client service representatives, managers, and support staff. The goal is to identify the values that reflect how the practice wants to operate and how team members want to work together.

***Please tailor this to your specific practice for the best results - make it yours!***

### Materials Needed

- Presentation slides
- Printed or electronic copy of the AAEP Practice Culture Toolkit for each participant
- Core Values list (Toolkit pages 33–34 or Brené Brown Values List)
- Pens or pencils
- Flip chart, whiteboard, or easel pad
- Markers

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### Facilitator Preparation

- Review the Core Values and Mission Statement section of the AAEP Practice Culture Toolkit (pages 31–36) prior to the workshop.
- Ensure all participants have access to the toolkit (either printed or online version).
- Print or distribute the Core Values list before the Values exercise ([brenebrown.com](http://brenebrown.com)).
- Prepare flip charts or whiteboards for group brainstorming activities.
- Review presenter notes and customize discussion questions as needed for your audience.

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### Participant Activity (can ask to be done prior to the meeting!)

- Review the Core Values list.
- Individually identify values that resonate most strongly.
- Read the Practice Culture Toolkit Pages 31-36.

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**Remember:** An effective mission statement helps guide decisions, align priorities, and communicate the practice's purpose to both internal and external stakeholders. Practices that successfully integrate their mission statement keep it visible and relevant. They incorporate it into hiring, onboarding, performance conversations, recognition programs, and team meetings. The goal is alignment between words and actions.

Creating a mission statement is only the beginning. The real value comes from consistently using it to guide decisions, behaviors, and culture. When a mission is consistently reinforced, it strengthens culture, improves engagement, and helps teams make decisions that support the long-term success of the practice. ***The strongest mission statements are not filed away after they are written; they become part of everyday operations.***



## GUIDED BY PURPOSE

### *Part One: A Workshop to Define Core Values*

#### **Facilitator Tips**

- Encourage discussion around behaviors, not just words.
- Ask participants to consider both:
  - Current strengths of the practice
  - The culture they want to create moving forward
- Focus on values that are meaningful, authentic, and actionable.

#### Slide 1. Welcome to Guided by Purpose.

Today's workshop is designed to help us intentionally define the values that guide our work. We will then use those values to create or refine a meaningful mission statement for our practice.

This workshop is not about creating words for a website or a document that sits on a shelf. It is about building alignment, strengthening our culture, and creating a shared sense of purpose that can help us to guide decisions, behaviors, and the future direction of the practice.

By the end of today's session, we will have identified the core values that matter most to us. Next time, we will create or refine a mission statement that reflects who our practice strives to be.

Slide 2. This workshop follows a progression. We will first discuss why values and mission matter and the impact they have on culture, engagement, and practice success. We will then work together to identify the core values that define our practice. Once those values are clear, we will use them as the foundation for creating or refining a mission statement for our practice. Finally, we will discuss how to integrate values and mission into everyday decisions, hiring, leadership, and team culture.

Slide 3. Values and mission provide a shared framework for how a practice operates. When clearly defined, they help guide decisions, strengthen culture, improve engagement, and create a more consistent experience for both team members and clients.

Without clearly defined values and a shared mission, we risk operating based on individual interpretations of what matters most. This lack of alignment can lead to confusion, conflict, and disengagement, making it harder for us to make decisions together as a team.

The goal of today's workshop is not simply to create words on a page. The goal is to create clarity, alignment, and intentional culture within our practice.

Slide 4. Every practice possesses an inherent culture; our objective is to ensure ours is developed with intentionality and purpose. Values and mission provide an opportunity to intentionally shape the culture of a practice by defining what matters most, how decisions are made, and how the team will work together.

Slide 5. Now that we've discussed why values and mission matter and the impact of leaving them undefined, let's focus on the foundation of the entire process: core values. Before a mission statement can be meaningful, we must first understand what matters most to YOU - the people who make up this practice.



Slide 6. Before we identify our own values, let's establish a common understanding of what core values are. Core values represent the beliefs and principles that guide how a practice operates and ultimately how clients and patients experience the practice. Core values are not aspirational slogans or words chosen because they sound good. They represent the principles that guide behavior, influence decisions, and shape the culture of a practice. When values are clearly defined and consistently demonstrated, they help create alignment across the team and provide the foundation upon which a meaningful mission statement can be built.

Slide 7. Let's identify the values that best reflect our practice and the culture we aspire to build. We'll follow a three-step process, starting with a broad exploration and gradually narrowing our focus to our core values. You should select values that best represent both the current strengths of the practice and the culture the team wants to create moving forward.

Slide 8. Now for the fun part. The words shown on this slide are examples only and are intended to help us begin thinking about the values that are most important to us and to our practice. The complete list of values is in the toolkit so let's open it up and take a look. Review the full list and identify the values that resonate most strongly with how you believe our practice should operate, serve clients, care for patients, and support one another as a team. The goal is not to immediately narrow the list but to identify the values that feel most meaningful and representative of the desired culture.

**Step 1: Select broadly at first, maybe 20 or more.**

***If you asked participants to do this ahead of time, you may skip to Step 2.***

<https://brenebrown.com/resources/dare-to-lead-list-of-values/> (*Dare to Lead list of values\_Brene Brown*)

Slide 9. Step 2: Now that we've looked at all the words and chosen the ones that best fit what we think aligns well with our culture and team, we will now narrow that list to a handful of values before developing our top tier. Let's aim for 7-10ish values and then we'll come back together to share how we've narrowed our lists down.

***Break into groups here if size allows OR write all the responses on a whiteboard or easel pad and work together as one group. Make sure everyone contributes. The goal is to group and narrow themes. Allow approximately 10–20 minutes for discussion depending on the size of the group and the amount of dialogue generated.***

Slide 10. Step 3 is to finalize our core values into a concise and descriptive list. The goal is to narrow the list to approximately 5 core values that are meaningful, memorable, and actionable.

***This is the final full-group discussion to choose the official values of the practice.***

Slide 11. Now that we have our practice's values, what is one action you will take in the next month to demonstrate our values?

Slide 12. **Take a break!!!**



## GUIDED BY PURPOSE

### ***Part Two: A Workshop to Build a Meaningful Practice Mission***

#### **Facilitator Tips**

- Keep statements clear and memorable.
- Avoid jargon or overly complex language.
- Focus on purpose rather than specific services.
- Encourage participants to think about the long-term impact of the practice.

Slide 13. Welcome to Part Two. Now that we have identified the core values that define our practice and the culture we want to create, the next step is translating those values into a clear mission statement. In this exercise, we will explore the components of an effective mission statement, review examples from veterinary and non-veterinary organizations, and begin developing a mission statement that reflects the values identified by this team. We will be using our core values as the foundation for creating or refining our mission statement.

***Remind everyone of the core values that you chose as a group if not done recently (can add an extra slide to the presentation to highlight them.)***

Slide 14. While values describe what we believe and how we behave, a mission statement explains why we exist, who we serve, and the impact we aim to make. A mission statement answers an important question: Why does this practice exist? It defines our purpose and the impact we aim to have on our patients, clients, team members, and community. It serves as a reminder of what is most important and provides direction as our practice grows and evolves.

Slide 15. Before drafting our mission statement, it can be helpful to review examples from a variety of organizations. Notice that each statement is concise, memorable, and focused on purpose. While the wording and style differ, all mission statements answer similar questions: Why do we exist? Who do we serve? What impact do we hope to make?

Try not to focus on the specific wording, but instead focus on the structure and intent of the statements. The goal is not to copy another organization's mission statement, but to identify characteristics that may be helpful when developing a mission statement for our practice.

Slide 16. These examples come from actual equine veterinary practices and illustrate different approaches to communicating purpose and impact. Notice that while the wording differs, both statements clearly describe who they serve, what they provide, and the difference they hope to make for their patients, clients, and community.

Looking at these examples, which elements resonate most strongly with our practice? Again, we don't want to copy theirs, but identify themes and approaches that may help inform the development of our own.



Slide 17. As we begin developing a mission statement, think about the unique role our practice plays, who we serve, and the difference we hope to make through our work. A mission statement does not need to be long or complicated.

Most effective mission statements answer four simple questions:

- Why do we exist?
- Who do we serve?
- What do we provide?
- How do we do it?

Let's focus on capturing our core ideas and themes for now rather than getting the wording perfect. We're just building the foundation of our mission statement; we can polish the phrasing later. Right now, let's prioritize clarity and purpose. Try writing one on your own!

Slide 18. Let's use the four mission statement prompts and identify the ideas that are most important to the purpose of our practice. It is often easier to identify the core ideas and then build a concise mission statement around them.

***Break into small groups if size allows. Allow for time to craft a draft mission statement.***

Slide 19. The goal is to develop a mission statement that is clear, authentic, memorable, and meaningful to the entire team.

***Allow approximately 15–20 minutes for discussion, depending on group size. As small group discussion progresses, look for common themes that connect the practice's purpose, stakeholders, services, and values (if size allows, otherwise discuss as a group). Teams may draft multiple versions before selecting a final statement to share with the larger group or you may use this time to get to a final draft if you are a small team.***

Slide 20. Now that we have identified our core values and drafted a mission statement, the next step is putting them into practice. Values and mission statements only create impact when they are reflected in everyday decisions, behaviors, and interactions. If they remain words on a wall, they do little to influence culture or performance. The goal is to create alignment between what our practice says is important and what we as team members experience every day.

Slide 21. A mission statement only has value if we use it. Our next step is to make it part of how we work every day. That means using it to guide our decisions, how we hire and onboard new team members, how we recognize one another, and how we approach challenges as a practice. Our mission shouldn't only be something we read on a website or hang on a wall. It should show up in our conversations, our priorities, and the way we care for our clients, patients, and each other.

One way to keep our mission alive is to ask simple questions like:

- Does this decision reflect our mission?
- Are we recognizing behaviors that support our mission?
- How can we better demonstrate our mission in the way we work together?

When our actions consistently reflect our mission, we build trust, strengthen our culture, and create a practice where people know what we stand for—not because we've told them, but because they experience it every day.



**Ask participants:**

"What are some ways our practice could keep its mission visible and relevant throughout the year?"

**Capture ideas from the group and encourage sharing of practical examples.**

Slide 22. As we wrap up, remember that values and mission statements only create impact when they influence daily behavior. These workshops weren't really about creating a document. They were about creating alignment. The words matter, but our conversations and commitments behind these choices matter even more.

Values define who we are. Mission defines why we exist. Together, they provide a framework for decision-making, culture, and long-term success.

Let's take a moment to reflect:

What is one action you will take in the next 30 days to bring our values and mission to life? It could be recognizing a team member who demonstrated it, discussing it during a staff meeting, or using it to guide a decision. Small, consistent actions are what turn a mission statement into our practice culture.

**Allow participants a minute to write down their response.**

Thank you all for your engagement and involvement. Remember, positive practice culture is not created by a statement or a few words. It is created by the actions we take every day. Alignment happens by design, not by accident.

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**Key Takeaways**

- Values define who we are.
  - Mission defines why we exist.
  - Culture is built through daily actions.
  - Alignment happens by design, not by accident.
  - Small actions create lasting change.
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**Resources**

AAEP Practice Culture Toolkit

<https://aaep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/AAEP-Practice-Culture-Toolkit-2024-FINAL.pdf>

AAEP Practice Culture Resources

<https://aaep.org/guidelines-resources/veterinarian-resources/sustainability/practice-culture/>

Brené Brown Values List

<https://brenebrown.com/resources/dare-to-lead-list-of-values/>

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