



## AACT Resource Library

# Branding Your Core Purpose, Mission & More

**Strategic statements and lists don't mean much on their own.** Like any important tool, the value doesn't come simply by having them, but from how they're used and embodied by your theatre's brand.

But if you don't start by thinking about, defining, and sharing the foundation of what you're striving for, how can you expect everything you promote about your theatre—or the people working there—to embody the same things? How can you maintain consistency? What gauge will you have to evaluate if things are on—or off—course?

By taking the time to think through these ideas and write them down, it forces you to create a clear direction in your own head, and uncovers any misalignment or confusion there might be with co-founders, team members, or the public.

These tools provide the guardrails to keep your brand on a consistent path in the larger, big-picture sense, as well as in terms of day-to-day decision-making.

### What Is a Brand?

Outside of the arts, "brand" typically refers to a product or a business with a distinct identity among consumers. That's true in community theatre, as well, although here the product is what we put on stage and the educational and community programs we offer. And the "consumers" are your audiences, the greater community, and the people who choose to work or volunteer with you.

A theatre's brand not only distinguishes it from other theatre companies, but from the many other activities that people can take part in.

In the later part of the 20th century, marketers began to grasp there was more to the perception of distinctive products and services than their names alone—something David Ogilvy described as "the intangible sum of a product's attributes." Marketers realized they could create a specific perception in customers' minds concerning the qualities and attributes of a non-generic product or service. They took to calling this perception "the brand."

Put simply, your "brand" is what your prospect thinks of when they hear your brand name. It's everything the public thinks it knows about you—both factual (e.g. you put on stage productions), and

emotional (e.g. it's fun). Your brand *name* exists objectively; people can see it. It's fixed. But your *brand* itself exists only in someone's mind.

Clearly, you want to guide people to understand and appreciate your brand. And it begins with establishing not only who you are, but what you believe in, and how you work to make positive things happen.

And that's where defining your core purpose, mission and vision comes in.

## I. Your Driving Force: The Core Purpose Statement

Your Core Purpose represents a driving force that's always present, regardless of what your theatre achieves or how long it's around. It should be a source of inspiration and guidance that outlasts any ups, downs, shifts, or pivots.

While most theatres have a Mission Statement, few have a Core Purpose Statement that puts their Mission into context. The Mission tells people *what* you do. The Core Purpose explains *why*. It's where everything begins.

### Questions to Start With

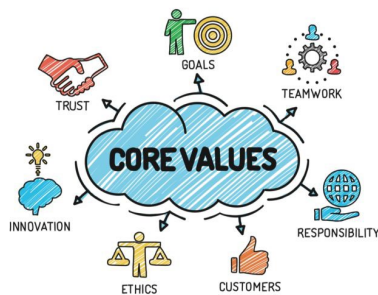
- What was the driving force for creating your company?
- Was it connected to a passion, an area of expertise, or simply an emotional drive to create a new path?
- What is your company's founding story?
- If you've been around for a while, how has it changed since your founding?

### Exercises

Distill the essence of what you wrote above into a single sentence (try it a few times):


Now distill that idea into five words or less (try this a few times, too):


Finally, use the five words above in a short Core Purpose statement again, try it a few times):

There are only so many words that are used for value statements, so corporate Purpose Statements tend to be short. When a statement is long, it loses both force and focus—a quick glance should be enough to sense what an organization is all about.

### **3M**

Solve unsolved problems innovatively

### **Merck**

Preserve and improve human life

### **Walt Disney**

Make people happy

### **Mary Kay**

Give unlimited opportunity to women

### **Patagonia**

Be a role model and tool for social change

## II. Your Mission: What You Do

This is your theatre's "envisioned future". It's a description of what your community could be like if you achieve everything you set out to do. It speaks to the impact you'll make in the lives of your community, not just the future state of your own company.

A mission statement explains how you put your Core Purpose into action, along with who benefits from your work. It outlines your direction in simple, clear language that's specific to your theatre.

### How To Define Your Mission



Your Mission speaks to the specific, current actions you're working on. It's where your theatre's brand moves from the abstract to the concrete. It focuses on the methods you use to enable your greater purpose. It aligns your team's efforts and communicates to your audiences and community how your theatre provides value to them.

#### Questions:

- What action needs to be taken to help satisfy your theatre's Core Purpose?
- What is the core segment of people that your theatre serves?
- How does your theatre deliver value to its community in relationship to their needs?
- How is your approach for delivering that value different in the competitive landscape?

### Exercises:

Try filling in the blanks a few different ways to test out different word combinations.

\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Offering - optional) (Audience category) (Benefits - optional)

\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ through / by  
 (Purpose expressed through action) (Audience category)

\_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Offering - optional) (Benefits - optional)

\_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_\_ through / by  
 (Purpose expressed through action) (Audience category) (Geographic location - optional)

\_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Offering - optional) (Benefits - optional)

### Mission Statement Examples from Community Theatres

#### Stage Left Theatre, Spokane, Washington

To tell stories, build community, and pursue equity through the production of new and existing theatrical works.

#### Weathervane Community Playhouse , Akron, Ohio

To enrich the quality of life and engage the community through theatre and education.

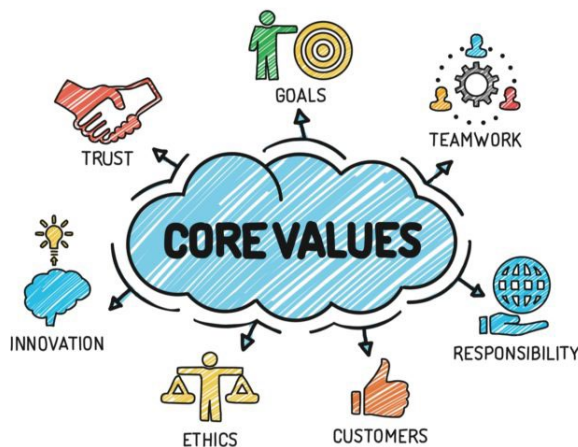
#### Cottage Theatre, Cottage Grove, Oregon

Engaging and enriching our community through the magic of live theatre.

### III. Core Values: Your Theatre's System of Beliefs

Core Values describe what you believe and how you conduct yourself, even (and especially) when things get difficult.

#### Developing Your Core Values Statement



Core Values are independent of specific artistic activities. It's a way to define the fabric of your organization's culture and how your company operates. It instills a sense of consistency and builds trust for your team and with your community.

It should be obvious how decisions align with your values. If a decision isn't aligned, your Core Values help you recognize the issue and remedy it.

Your core values are part of the fabric of your organization. In *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, Jim Collins writes, "Great organizations keep clear the difference between their core values (which never change) and operating strategies and culture practices (which endlessly adapt to a changing world)."

Your organization's core values should be well defined, documented, shared and regularly referred to when making decisions, hiring new employees, evaluating programs and services and more.

So, let's start with some basic elements that are unique to your organization.

#### Questions:

- What behaviors are important and non-negotiable, regardless of what you're doing?
- How will you conduct yourself as you work to bring your vision to life?
- How would you describe you and your team when you're at your best?
- If one word could sum up what is at your core, what would it be?

### Exercises:

Choose *between 1-3 Core Values* in each of the core values tables below. You can also write your own into the blank spaces. You should aim for 5-8 core values in total.

Values: Fundamental Values and Basic Needs (choose 1-3)			
Safety	Trust	Health	Competence
Compassion	Optimism	Curiosity	

Values: Esteem and Meaning (choose 1-3)			
Honesty	Justice	Equality	Efficiency
Connectivity	Generosity	Freedom	Tradition
Progress	Love	Fun	Agility
Respect	Vision	Courage	

Values: Self-Actualization & Higher Expression (choose 1-3)			
Imagination	Creativity	Integrity	Stewardship
Prosperity	Selflessness	Expression	Truth
Empowerment			

In her book, *The Value of Core Values*, Lisa Huetteman writes: “Core means center, heart, nucleus, interior, foundation, mainstay, focal points and substance. Values are the principles, standards, morals, ethics, and ideals. Values always have worth, importance and significance.”

With these definitions in mind, your organization’s core values are the ideals and principles that are at the heartbeat of your company, and guide the decision-making, actions and behaviors of everything it does.

A solid value statement is unlikely to ever require change. While an organization's mission and vision statement might evolve over time, value statements should be concerned with long-term relevance. You can consult volunteers, employees, and stakeholders to ensure your core values remain faithful to your organization.



There are only so many values-related words, which is why so many Values lists look similar. To make your Core Values more meaningful, clarify what each one means to you below:

[illegible]



## Core Values Examples

### The National Council of Nonprofits

- Serving others by listening and leading.
- Getting things done, together.
- Earning trust in everything we do.
- Centering equity in all our work.
- Honoring the nonprofit workforce.

### The Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts, Brookfield, Wisconsin

- Excellence  
*We strive for excellence in artistic and enrichment programming through distinctive, multidisciplinary arts offerings to the public. We aspire to excellence in governance and will exceed our patrons' expectations because their loyalty is vital to our future.*
- Innovation  
*We celebrate ingenuity and insight that result in new connections and fresh perspectives through engagement with the arts on multiple levels. We encourage originality, flexibility, equity, diversity, inclusion, and seeing the world with new vision.*
- Passion  
*We are passionate about instilling a life-long love for the arts that will enrich the lives of everyone we serve.*
- Stewardship  
*We value the trust of our greater community—people, corporations, and foundations—that contribute time, talent, and treasure to our organization; we promise to use those resources with integrity.*
- Collaboration  
*We value the power of collaboration with other organizations through which arts programming is enriched and made accessible to the greater community.*

## You've Created Your Strategy—Now Use It!

### Practical tips to integrate theatre and its brand with your strategies

Once you've gone through the process of defining these concepts, you next decide how you want to utilize them to help guide your theatre's work—and future.

- Your Core Purpose might serve mainly as a guide for the people who founded your organization, or who are looking to rethink what is most appropriate for your theatre in the current environment.
- Your Vision Statement would most likely be shared and discussed only with your internal team.
- Your Mission Statement and Core Values, however, may be pieces that get placed on your website so that your team *and* community can get a clear understanding of what you do and how you do it.

Here are some additional ways to integrate your big-picture strategy into your theatre and its brand.

- As much as possible, get input and feedback on these statements from leadership and the wider team. While it's leadership's job to ensure everyone understands the brand's direction, the team itself needs to buy into it and uphold it on a daily basis. The more people believe they have a voice in that strategy, the more aligned they'll feel.
- Review all of the statements and values on a regular basis to make sure they still feel relevant and aligned with current business activities. This strategy should serve as a system of checks and balances to make sure the brand stays on track with its most important goals.
- When new projects and initiatives are proposed, test them against the big-picture strategy. It should always be clear how they help push the greater brand mission forward while staying in alignment with the values of the organization.
- When disagreements around direction come up, ground the discussion in your stated Mission and Values. Allow your agreed-upon strategy to serve as an impartial third party, as a way to fuel healthy, constructive debate.
- Use the brand's values as a way to recognize and reward individuals or work that exemplifies what the organization believes in. The more people see direct connections between their work and the stated organizational values, the more they'll continue to strive to uphold them.

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