

JOURNEY FOR TEAMS 3.0

THRIVE Transforming Workplace Dynamics

GUIDEBOOK Accelerating Racial Inclusivity

Exploring how systemic factors shape opportunity, and empowering teams to advance racial inclusivity, trust, and shared success in veterinary workplaces

WELCOME

This workbook was created as both a mirror and a guide. It shines a light on subtle and often overlooked cultural disruptors, behaviors, attitudes, and assumptions that influence the culture of a veterinary workplace. By presenting real-world scenarios and challenges, it encourages readers to pause, recognize, and name forces that undermine belonging and trust.

Each scenario and activity pairs awareness with practical approaches, offering tools that leaders and teams can immediately apply. The purpose is not to provide perfect answers but to model a process: noticing disruptions, examining their impact, and responding with strategies that strengthen collaboration, wellbeing, and respect. Think of this workbook as a working companion. Use it in team discussions, leadership development, onboarding, or self-reflection. Engage with it honestly, ask the hard questions it surfaces, and adapt the tools to fit your environment. When used intentionally, it can help teams move from identifying problems to building a culture where every member feels valued, supported, and empowered to contribute.

This unit explores how race and culture shape everyday experiences at work. We'll look at common patterns and workplace practices that influence how people interact, communicate, and experience belonging. By increasing awareness of how these dynamics show up day to day—and practicing concrete strategies to address them—veterinary teams can strengthen inclusion, build trust, and support more collaborative, connected workplaces.

By the end of this module, participants will be able to:

- Describe how racial bias differs from systemic racism and how these patterns appear in workplace decisions
- Recognize how culture, norms, and habits shape belonging and access across teams and roles
- Use care-filled communication to address racially harmful behaviors and build trust
- Implement actions that foster transparency, fairness, and psychological safety within a Culture of Care
- Co-create plans for ongoing reflection and shared accountability to sustain racial inclusivity

Disclaimers

- All examples and case study scenarios are based on real situations, but names (including hospitals) are pseudonyms.
- The inclusion of resources does not imply or constitute an endorsement by the American Veterinary Medical Association or the Veterinary Medical Association Executives.

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INSIGHTS & ACTIONS

3Rs

In order to strengthen veterinary workplace culture, teams can: **recognize** both the strengths and the dynamics that shape their environment and experiences; **reconsider** approaches or assumptions that may no longer serve them, while identifying opportunities to build on what works; and **re-evaluate** everyday decisions in ways that reinforce systems of collaboration, wellbeing, and respect.

- 1 Recognize**
Strengths and dynamics shaping culture
- 2 Reconsider**
Patterns and assumptions to build on what works
- 3 Re-evaluate**
Choices to reinforce collaboration and respect

RECOGNIZE

WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM?

Systemic racism refers to the policies, practices, and historical patterns that have shaped how opportunities, access, and resources are distributed over time. It helps us understand how long-standing systems can create uneven outcomes, even when the people working within those systems intend to be fair and inclusive.

WHAT IS RACIAL BIAS?

Racial bias refers to the assumptions or mental shortcuts people may make—often without realizing it—based on race or perceived race. Bias is part of human thinking. We all have mental shortcuts. The goal is to not judge these reactions but to become aware of them so we can choose responses that support trust, belonging, and strong teamwork.

Systemic racism is about structures and systems.

Racial bias is about thoughts and assumptions.

WHY THIS GUIDEBOOK FOCUSES ON SYSTEMIC RACISM (NOT RACIAL BIAS)

In this guidebook, we focus on systemic racism—not because racial bias is unimportant, but because system-level patterns create the conditions where bias is more likely to appear and influence behavior.

RECOGNIZE

WHY IT MATTERS IN THE WORKPLACE

Recognizing these dynamics helps teams focus on redesigning systems, not blaming individuals, to create fairer workplaces where everyone can thrive. When organizations explore how systemic racism shows up in daily practices, they open pathways for innovation, trust, and belonging—shifting difficult moments of disruption into collaborative problem-solving.

UNDERSTANDING SYSTEMIC RACISM IN THE VETERINARY WORKPLACE

Systemic racism is not about pointing fingers at individuals, it's about recognizing that our profession, like all others, operates within systems and processes that were not designed with equity in mind. The goal here is to shine a light on those operational defaults so veterinary teams can work together to rethink and redesign how work gets done.

RECONSIDER

THE SYSTEMS THAT SHAPE US

Accelerating racial inclusivity begins with understanding how history has shaped—and continues to shape—our society and our workplaces. Like every profession, veterinary medicine exists within a broader social context, and the patterns formed over time still influence who enters the field, who advances, and whose voices are most visible and heard today.

We can't change the past, but we can pay attention to how these patterns show up in our workplaces now. That starts with curiosity and reflection. Questions like:

- What helps people feel a sense of belonging here, and what might get in the way?
- Whose perspectives are most often heard and whose are missing?
- Who has access to mentorship, influence, and leadership opportunities, and who may have less access?

Simply asking these questions is often the first step toward meaningful, positive change.

Conversations about race can feel uncomfortable, especially when they surface inequities we didn't create, didn't notice before, or don't personally experience. That discomfort is a natural part of learning. It's not a sign of failure—it's often a sign that growth is happening.

What matters most is how we use this awareness. When veterinary teams stay engaged, curious, and willing to learn together, discomfort can become a catalyst for building more inclusive, trusting, and collaborative workplaces.

RECONSIDER

THE WORKPLACE STATUS QUO

Veterinary medicine is grounded in compassion, precision, and service. These core values are among the profession's greatest strengths. They guide how we care for animals and clients, and how we support and value every person within our professional community.

Like many fields, veterinary medicine has been shaped over time by systems and practices that influence who is seen, supported, and empowered. The makeup of today's workforce is not the result of intentional exclusion, but of long-standing habits and routines that once felt neutral or efficient. For decades, the profession has relied on familiar educational, social, and professional pathways for recruitment, advancement, and leadership.

Become actively anti-racist: These established patterns have limited diversity without intention. At the same time, they offer an opportunity. By examining and updating how we recruit, mentor, and promote, we can open the door to greater innovation, stronger connection, and a more resilient profession.

Moving beyond the status quo doesn't require abandoning our values—it calls us to live them more fully. Together, we can identify and reduce systemic barriers and build a profession where everyone has the opportunity to participate, lead, and succeed.

***Cultivate Connection** offers tools for veterinary workplaces to address race-neutrality and racism.*

RE-EVALUATE

10-MINUTE CASE STUDY



Read through the case study independently, or in pairs, and reflect on the discussion questions. Once all groups complete their review, discuss your thoughts and answers with the whole team.

Pikeview Bovine Health Services offers herd health, calving assistance and nutrition consulting for cattle operations in a large, rural tri-county area. Most of the clinic's long-term clients are large-scale, family-owned ranches. The clinic recently started to get referrals from smaller producers, some of which are Tribal and Black-owned cattle operations that are applying for USDA herd expansion programs.

Clinic site-visit scheduling is based largely on informal networks (word of mouth) at livestock auctions and ranch association meetings. Because these channels were historically homogenous, not all producers were in the same communication or service circles.

BREAKING POINT

During a respiratory disease outbreak in the region, several Tribal and Black-owned ranches did not receive early notification about vaccine availability and preventive treatment options. The assumption was that information would “reach everyone” through the usual conversation networks.

When cases worsened at one of the Tribal ranches, the producers expressed frustration, not about the disease, but about being the last to hear about preventive strategies that others in the region had known about for weeks.

SENSE MAKING

This situation illustrates how Tribal and Black-owned ranches were unintentionally left outside the clinic's standard communication pathways. The issue was not the result of individual intent or neglect, but of uneven access built into the clinic's existing communication structure.

By relying on informal, historically-narrow networks, important information did not reach all producers equally—especially during a time-sensitive public health event.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(5 minutes)

- What factors in the clinic's communication system perpetuated the exclusion of some ranchers from early sharing? How did this inequity in information access affect herd health outcomes?
- How do internal networks impact communication and collaboration in your own workplace or community?
- What is one system or process in your setting that could be more open, transparent, or inclusive, and what would be a meaningful first step to implementing that change?

RE-EVALUATE

10-MINUTE CASE STUDY



Read through the case study independently, or in pairs, and reflect on the discussion questions. Once all groups complete their review, discuss your thoughts and answers with the whole team.

SOLUTION & APPROACH

The clinic leadership analyzed how information was shared, who received it first, and whose voices shaped decision-making. Instead of placing responsibility on any one person, they re-designed the system by:

- Creating a central text and call notification list open to all producers, not just those already in the network
- Establishing advisory relationships with Tribal agricultural extension agents and other ranching associations
- Adding monthly on-ranch education visits based on producer-identified needs, not what the clinic assumed was needed

The goal was not cultural training, it was equitable access and shared participation in herd health planning.

RESULTS

Formalized, proactive communication channels enabled the relationship between the producers and veterinary health providers to grow. As the producers and clinic staff became more knowledgeable about each other's needs and offerings, they noticed other areas where producers could positively contribute to the success of the clinic and regional herd health. Two producers from historically excluded ranch operations joined the clinic's Herd Health Planning Committee, with equal voice in communication protocols and herd health planning.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The way we've always done things may exclude some people or populations, even if we don't mean to. Knowing this allows us to look closely at the processes we use, identify areas where we can reach more people, and create opportunities to collaborate with new clients and partners in a way that builds trust, communication, and client retention.

RE-EVALUATE**20-MINUTE
TEAM EXERCISE**

This exercise will help you practice interrupting biases and creating systemic change. It can be done individually, in pairs, or small groups. Be sure to share your findings with the whole team.

PART 1: Reflecting on Discomfort

Read the following scenario, and then complete the discussion questions.

The number of Spanish-speaking clients at Paws & Claws Veterinary Practice has doubled over the past three years. To better support existing clients and welcome new ones, practice leaders decide to expand their Spanish-language services. They begin a hiring process to identify an individual with strong communication skills and experience connecting with diverse client communities.

The hiring committee is preparing to interview their next candidate, Cole—a veterinarian known for community engagement and Spanish-language experience. Before the interview, a staff member comments, “We really need to hire someone who actually fits our new client base.”

Discussion Questions (8 minutes)

- What assumptions are embedded in the staff member’s statement about who “fits” the client base? How might this comment impact how people perceive Cole or the fairness of the hiring process?
- What impact might a comment like this have on the workplace environment and sense of belonging of others?
- If you were on the hiring committee, would you address the comment at that moment or later in private with the staff member? What factors would inform your decision?
- How can teams design hiring practices that recognize the full range of qualified talent and ensure every candidate is evaluated fairly?

RE-EVALUATE

20-MINUTE TEAM EXERCISE



This exercise will help you practice interrupting biases and creating systemic change. It can be done individually, in pairs, or small groups. Be sure to share your findings with the whole team.

Part 2: Creating a Framework for Change

As a team, create a framework to support each other when addressing future instances of racism at your workplace.

Note:

Aim to complete the activities below within the suggested time frame. This often helps build cohesion while moving the team forward, but keep in mind that it may take longer for some groups, depending on the dynamics and trust level. Each activity's purpose is noted to help you understand the intention.

1. Individual Reflection (2 minutes total)

Purpose: Accountability starts with self. Understanding your own triggers and reactions is how we respond with humility and empathy when someone else experiences harm.

Take a moment to quietly reflect on a time when someone pointed out something you said or did that may have caused harm:

- What emotions came up for you (e.g., surprise, embarrassment, defensiveness, gratitude)?
- What helped or would have helped you stay open and present in the conversation?
- What have you learned about how you prefer to receive feedback or repair trust?

2. Team Reflection (3 minutes)

Purpose: Healthy teams hold each other accountable because they care, not in spite of it. Accountability is part of how care shows up.

Invite the whole team to share their collective understanding of trust, accountability, and care.

- What does accountability look like on our team when done well?
- How do we want to balance honesty and compassion?
- What unwritten rules might make it challenging for us to call out harm directly (e.g., wanting to avoid conflict, believing good intent is enough)?
- What would it take for every person here to feel safe enough to call attention when something doesn't sit right?

RE-EVALUATE

20-MINUTE
TEAM EXERCISE

This exercise will help you practice interrupting biases and creating systemic change. It can be done individually, in pairs, or small groups. Be sure to share your findings with the whole team.

Part 2: Creating a Framework for Change *continued...*

3. Designing a Framework for Accountable Conversations (5 minutes)

Purpose: A framework isn't about having the perfect words in the moment. It's about creating a shared commitment to listen, learn, and repair together in real time.

Collaboratively develop a simple, shared structure for future conversations about harm or bias in the workplace. This framework might include:

- **Shared principles**
Agreed-upon values that guide how conversations are handled (e.g., “Assume good intent,” “Stay curious,” “Seek repair and authentic connection”)
- **Dialogue disagreements**
Established norms that support respectful, productive conversation (e.g., “Listen first,” “Speak from personal experience,” “Focus on impact rather than intent”)
- **Signals or scripts that show care and support**
Short, honest phrases that invite reflection and dialogue without blame, such as:
 - “Can we pause for a second? I’d like to revisit what you just said?”
 - “I know that probably wasn’t your intent, but the impact might land differently.”
 - “I think you were making a joke, but that can be really hurtful to people from that group.”
 - “Are you open to hearing how that phrase might come across?”

Emphasize that these phrases are starting points, not scripts to memorize. The goal is to support real-time learning and repair, not to “get it right” every time.

If time is limited, invite the group to reflect together on this question instead:
What does courage look like in our workplace when it’s guided by care?

RE-EVALUATE

6-MINUTE SELF-REFLECTION



The following questions will help illuminate your own thoughts and feelings, as well as the norms at your place of work. Sharing your answers as a team is welcome and entirely optional.

- 1** What is the WHY of your commitment to racial inclusivity as a person and as a veterinarian or veterinary professional? (This is your motivation, your “North Star.” Think about your values, experiences, role, etc., as they may inform your answer.)
- 2** What personal strengths, skills, tools, etc., might you build upon to aid you in being aware of and working to understand racial dynamics in your workplace? Tools may include a mentor or peer group, empathy, allyship behaviors, etc.
- 3** Who can be a thought partner or an accountability ally on your learning journey? This could be a peer, mentor, supervisor, etc., whose company helps you reflect and be intentional.
- 4** What small, ongoing actions can you take to stay mindful of racial inclusivity in your day-to-day work? For example, you might ask yourself: Who isn’t in the room? Whose perspectives are missing? Who else should be invited into the conversation or recognized for their contributions?

CPR

Building a healthy veterinary workplace culture takes intention, effort, and practice. This section will help you identify actionable ways you can strengthen collaboration and inclusion individually or as a team using these three steps:

1 Cultivate Connection

Practical ways to deepen trust, respect, and teamwork

2 Practice Care-Filled Responses

Proactive language and actions that encourage growth and mutual understanding

3 Reinforce What Matters

Tools and resources that sustain values, celebrate strengths, and support ongoing learning

CULTIVATE CONNECTION

FORGING AHEAD AS A TEAM

These actionable steps can help shift veterinary workplaces from a culture of tolerance to one of engagement and care. By doing so, we move closer to an environment that supports and strengthens the sense of value and connection across all members of the team.

- 1 Move forward together**
Build inclusive workplaces through shared commitment and ongoing practice. Dedicate time in regular team meetings to reflect on inclusivity wins, surface challenges, and identify collective goals.
- 2 Conduct structured equity reviews**
Review pay, promotion, and hiring practices using clear, agreed-upon criteria. Track patterns over time to notice gaps, assess progress, and guide meaningful adjustments.
- 3 Establish clear standards**
Create transparent expectations for communication, professionalism, and performance. Shared standards support consistency and help ensure all team members are evaluated fairly.
- 4 Create feedback loops**
Provide accessible ways for team members to share input, such as anonymous feedback or brief post-meeting check-ins. Review themes together and set short-term goals (30-, 60-, or 90-day) to support improvement.
- 5 Build empathy through practice**
Use real workplace scenarios to practice perspective-taking and problem-solving as a team. Talking through challenging situations together strengthens understanding, trust, and day-to-day decision-making.

CULTIVATE CONNECTION

MINDING YOUR LANGUAGE

Be conscious of how your words impact others in the workplace. Many words and phrases commonly used in casual and business communication can be hurtful or reveal ignorance of other meanings, biased stereotypes, and lived human experiences. Using non-inclusive words can lead to “othering” or an “us vs. them” mentality.

Some suggested words to watch are outlined below. Practice substituting words that “other” with words that connect. Be kind to yourself in the process. If in your quest for change you misspeak, apologize and move on. Don’t dwell on your mistake or expect absolution, accommodation, or forgiveness from others. This practical action can make a big difference in improving personal connections in the workplace.

WORDS THAT “OTHER” & WORDS THAT CONNECT

Consider replacing these common terms with the alternate *in italics*:

Black list/white list	<i>Block/allow</i>
Cakewalk	<i>Easy</i>
Grandfathered-in	<i>Exempt</i>
Guru	<i>Authority or virtuoso</i>
Gypped/Jipped	<i>Ripped off/cheated</i>
Master	<i>Primary or expert</i>
Minority	<i>Racialized, marginalized or underrepresented</i>
Ninja	<i>Expert</i>
Peanut gallery	<i>Heckler</i>
Powwow	<i>Meeting/discussion</i>
Sold down the river	<i>Betrayed</i>
Spirit animal	<i>Alter ego, guide, muse</i>
Tribe	<i>Friends</i>
Urban	<i>Metropolitan</i>

AVOIDABLE COMMENTS

These common micro-aggressions can be avoided altogether in the workplace:

- I don’t see color
- I’m not racist
- That food is so exotic
- Where are you *actually* from?
- You don’t look/sound *[insert identity]*
- You’re so articulate
- Your English is so good

PRACTICE CARE-FILLED RESPONSES

REALIGNING RESISTANCE

During the Thrive course you may feel resistance internally, encounter it from fellow team members, or both.

What kinds of objections or rejections, internal or external, might you anticipate? How might you respond? First, pause to listen with curiosity, then consider if a care-filled response is needed. The following information may help.

DEFENSIVE STATEMENT	CARE-FILLED RESPONSE
We do not discriminate—we just hire the best person for the job. There are just not enough qualified candidates of color out there.	I totally get that! We all want great people on our team. Sometimes, what we call “best” reflects who’s had the most access or visibility. Maybe we could take a look at where and how we recruit. There might be strong candidates we’re just not reaching yet.
Our company is a meritocracy. Everyone has the same opportunities to succeed if they work hard enough.	I love that we value hard work. It’s something everyone can get behind. The tricky part is that opportunity isn’t always distributed evenly. It’s worth checking whether certain groups consistently have fewer opportunities to high-visibility projects or access to mentoring, to be sure that our systems are as equitable as we intend.
Talking about race just creates division. We should focus on what we all have in common and treat everyone the same as individuals.	I hear you; no one wants to feel divided. Talking about race actually helps us see what’s getting in the way of fairness. The goal isn’t to separate people. It’s to make sure the system works equitably for everyone.

PRACTICE CARE-FILLED RESPONSES

DEFENSIVE STATEMENT	CARE-FILLED RESPONSE
<p>If there were an issue, people would have brought it up through HR/anonymous surveys. Since we do not have many formal complaints, the system must be fair.</p>	<p>It makes sense to think that. Formal complaints can be one sign that something's off. At the same time, silence doesn't always mean everything's fine. It can also mean people don't feel safe speaking up. We can learn a lot by looking at trends and patterns, like who's getting promoted, recognized, invited into key conversations, or given chances to take on new challenges; not just formal reports.</p>
<p>We have diversity training, an employee resource group, and a diversity and inclusion task force. We are doing all we can to address this.</p>	<p>Those programs are a great foundation to build from; they show that some important steps are already in motion. The next step is making sure equity shows up in our everyday decisions—how we hire, promote, or give feedback. It's less about adding more programs and more about rethinking how our systems operate and impact people day to day.</p>
<p>We need to lower the bar to meet diversity targets which will compromise the quality of our work/culture.</p>	<p>I hear you. High standards matter to all of us. That's what keeps our work at its best. The issue isn't the bar itself; it's where and how we're looking for talent. When we widen the lens, we create the opportunity to find new candidates and perspectives that add depth and strength to the team.</p>

REINFORCE WHAT MATTERS

CONTINUED LEARNING

These recommended resources are excellent tools for learning more.

PODCASTS

[Code Switch](#)

from National Public Radio

ONLINE ARTICLES

[Engaging in conversations about gender, race, and ethnicity in the workplace](#)

by Dnika J. Travis, Julie S. Nugent, and Courtney McCluney, for Catalyst

[Toward a Racially Just Workplace](#)

by Laura Morgan Roberts and Anthony J. Mayo, for the Harvard Business Review (hbr.org)

ONLINE EDUCATION

[How to Speak Up Against Racism at Work](#)

with Dana Brownless, from LinkedIn

[Subtle Acts of Exclusion: How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions](#)

by Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran, for Manifest Equity

Accelerating Racial Inclusivity

INSIGHTS & ACTIONS TO BUILD A CULTURE OF CARE

DISCOMFORT IS TEMPORARY WHEN MAKING ROOM FOR OTHERS

Discomfort is a normal part of learning, especially when listening to people whose perspectives haven't always been included. Rather than worrying about saying the wrong thing, consider what will happen if nothing is said at all. Speaking up can help build trust and support a more inclusive workplace.



MAKING CHANGE REQUIRES DEDICATION & CONSISTENCY

Building racial inclusivity means looking closely at policies, habits, and ways of working with persistence and care. Meaningful progress comes from consistent actions—learning, taking responsibility, and working together over time—which helps teams grow and succeed.



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY STRENGTHENS INNOVATION & RETENTION

When we assume everyone starts on equal footing, it can be surprising to discover certain rules or practices may advantage some groups more than others. Addressing these unfair patterns strengthens psychological safety for all. When people feel supported, they're more likely to share their ideas, and stay engaged, benefiting both wellbeing and performance.



TRANSPARENCY CREATES TRUST

Clear, transparent standards for pay and performance benefit everyone in the workplace. Regularly reviewing pay and promotional processes can help identify and address unfair differences. Setting shared expectations for teamwork and professionalism clarifies what's expected and creates more equitable opportunities to succeed.



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