

### Step 1: Explore Your Calling: An Interactive Guide

Welcome to JCOD’s Interactive Guide, your first step toward exploring the calling on your heart to serve your community.

We know that by the time people reach this stage—considering the journey of starting a nonprofit—there’s already a spark inside them. For many, it comes from witnessing the challenges their community faces every day. For others, it’s rooted in personal struggles and lived experiences that shaped a vision of what should exist for loved ones, neighbors, and the world at large. However it began for you, this calling is powerful—and worth honoring.

**At JCOD, we believe your “Why” is the foundation of everything you’ll build.** Connecting deeply with this purpose will fuel your resilience, guide your decisions, and shape the impact you create. This guide is here to support you in uncovering and clarifying that “Why.”

As you move through this interactive process, you will:

- Reflect on your passion and what drives you to serve.
- Identify the specific community need you feel called to address.
- Connect your personal story and lived experiences to your vision for change.
- Begin shaping the unique impact your nonprofit organization can make.

**This is where your journey begins**—discovering your purpose, anchoring your vision, and laying the groundwork for meaningful community impact.

### Reflect on Your Lived Experiences

#### ***What personal experiences shaped your desire to serve your community?***

Reflect on the challenges you have experienced and we hope you feel empowered. *Before you begin this exercise, we would like you to pause and note what this brings up for you and offer you a supportive resource should you like to reach out. If you feel the need, we invite you to please call: **JCOD support line.***

When you’re ready, we encourage you to reflect on **three key life experiences** that connect you to your motivation for wanting to make a difference:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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What **strengths or insights** did you gain from these experiences? Note three:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Reflect on **who was there** to support you. Consider **what resources/services that were helpful** to you and/or **would have been helpful** if only they existed. Share here:

Now that you have explored your lived experiences including your strengths and insights--- and reflected on your experience with resources and supportive services---let's go more in depth as you further delve into your 'Why?'

A powerful way to deepen your understanding of your 'Why' is by **clearly defining your mission to serve.**

**Use this space here and write your personal mission in a short paragraph (3–5 sentences):** *Tell your story, connect it to a community need, and how you would want to address that need.*

**Next, let's help you discover or refine your passion:** What issues make you feel most energized or emotionally moved?

Complete the sentence:

"I feel most passionate about helping (*name the specific group here---for example: youth, elders, the unhoused*) \_\_\_\_\_  
because \_\_\_\_\_"

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**Let’s go a little further, and complete the following exercise to focus your passion and respond to the following prompt:**

What kind of service work excites you most? (Check all that apply)

- Education/Mentoring youth
- Food security / food justice
- Advocacy and policy change
- The Arts/Self-expression
- Housing support
- Job readiness / workforce development
- Health/Mental Health/Wellness
- Other – please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Identify a Community Need**

Now that you have explored your passion, how would you say your passion connects with a community need?

**So here, identify a community need that connects to your passion.**

***What challenge or problem in your community do you want to help solve?***

*Example: “Middle school students in my community are struggling academically and socially.”*

**Let’s now get more specific:**

*Example: “There’s a lack of after-school programs for middle school students in my neighborhood.”*

List three service gaps you have seen firsthand within your community:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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**Next Step: What services and/or supportive resources currently exist in your community that may address these service gaps?**

Research three local organizations doing similar work addressing these issues.

- Organization 1: \_\_\_\_\_
- Organization 2: \_\_\_\_\_
- Organization 3: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you think **YOU** could do differently as compared to existing services? How could you enhance this particular service? What kind of program(s) do **YOU envision?**

### **Recognize Gaps in Existing Services**

What specific community (i.e. geographical area) do you aim to serve? Where do you see unmet needs in your chosen area? Be specific regarding the gaps and note your observations:

*Example: "There are no culturally relevant programs for immigrant youth families in my area."*

### **Connect with Your Goal of Serving**

Imagine you have created your nonprofit and it is now thriving and you are making an impact.

***What does the community look like?***

**Describe your future impact:**

*Example: "Youth feel empowered to attain their goals and be the best that they can be."*

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### Reflection Checklist:

- I know who I want to serve within my community.
- I've identified a specific service need or gap within my community.
- I feel personally connected to the issue.
- I'm clear on how I want to help resolve this issue and make a positive impact on my community.

### Wrap-Up: Step 1: Explore Your Calling

Use this to summarize your exploration:

- **Community Need:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Who You Want to Serve:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Your Story:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Your Vision:** \_\_\_\_\_
- **Next Step:** \_\_\_\_\_

*What do you believe are your next steps? What else would you like to know at this point?*

### Take Action and Schedule a Consultation

Book a 15-minute consultation with nonprofit/community-based advisor.

#### Goal for the consultation:

"I want clarity on \_\_\_\_\_  
and help with \_\_\_\_\_."