

Community Needs Assessment Worksheet

*A prayerful planning tool for churches, leaders, volunteers, and ministry teams
serving men, women, families, and neighbors in need*

This worksheet is designed to help you understand the real needs in your community before you begin or expand a compassion ministry. It can be used for many kinds of ministry, including food ministry, resource closets, recovery support, jail or prison reentry, mentoring, job readiness, education, senior adult care, homeless outreach, grief care, family support, foster care support, ESL, life skills, and other ministries of mercy and practical help.

The purpose is not to create a complicated research project. The purpose is to slow down long enough to pray, listen, observe, and make wise decisions. Strong compassion ministry begins with both a soft heart and a clear understanding of the need.

Scripture Foundation

“Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.” - Philippians 2:4

How to Use This Worksheet

Use this tool with a pastor, ministry team, advisory group, nonprofit board, or small group of people who share the same burden. Work through one section at a time. Write what you know, identify what you still need to learn, and use the final page to choose the most realistic first ministry focus.

1. Name the Burden

Begin by naming the concern God has placed on your heart. Try to write it clearly without deciding too quickly what the ministry should become.

What need or group of people has God placed on our hearts?

Examples: men in recovery, women rebuilding after crisis, families facing food insecurity, senior adults, people reentering from jail, single parents, students, immigrants, people experiencing homelessness, caregivers, grieving families.

Why does this need matter to us?

Consider what you have seen, heard, experienced, prayed about, or been burdened by.

What do we believe God may be asking us to do first?

Keep this simple. You are not writing the whole plan yet.

2. Identify the People You Hope to Serve

A clear ministry focus helps you serve people with dignity and wisdom. Check all groups that may be connected to the burden, then circle the one group you believe should be your first focus.

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|---|--|
| ☐ Men in need of support or mentoring | ☐ People experiencing homelessness or housing instability |
| ☐ Women in need of support or mentoring | ☐ People facing food insecurity |
| ☐ Families facing crisis or instability | ☐ People needing job readiness or education support |
| ☐ Children or youth needing support | ☐ People needing ESL, literacy, or digital skills |
| ☐ Senior adults or isolated adults | ☐ Caregivers, foster families, or kinship families |
| ☐ People in recovery from addiction | ☐ People grieving or walking through loss |
| ☐ People reentering after jail or prison | ☐ Other: _____ |

3. Listen to the Community

Before launching a ministry, listen to people who understand the need. This helps you avoid assumptions, duplication, or starting something that does not match the real barriers people face.

Who have we already talked with?

List pastors, school leaders, nonprofit leaders, social workers, law enforcement chaplains, recovery leaders, community members, or people with lived experience.

Who do we still need to listen to?

Consider people who work directly with the population you hope to serve.

What repeated needs or concerns are we hearing?

Look for patterns rather than one isolated story.

What might people be hesitant to tell us?

Consider shame, fear, distrust, literacy barriers, immigration concerns, trauma, pride, or past negative experiences with churches or agencies.

4. Existing Resources and Possible Partners

Compassion ministry is stronger when you know who is already serving. Some needs may call for partnership rather than a new program.

Organization or Church	What They Offer	Contact or Notes

5. Look for Gaps

A gap is an unmet need, an underserved group, or a barrier that keeps people from accessing help that technically exists.

What help already exists in our community?

Examples: food pantry, job center, GED/HiSET classes, recovery groups, shelters, counseling, transportation help, church benevolence, mentoring, senior care.

What gaps still remain?

What is missing, hard to access, not offered often enough, too far away, too expensive, or not known by the people who need it?

Who seems to be overlooked or underserved?

Think about people who may fall between services or who are difficult for existing programs to reach.

6. Identify Barriers

Many people do not fail to receive help because they do not care. Often, barriers stand in the way. Check the barriers that may affect the people you hope to serve.

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|---|--|
| ☐ Transportation | ☐ Addiction or recovery needs |
| ☐ Childcare | ☐ Legal issues |
| ☐ Work schedule | ☐ Lack of identification or paperwork |
| ☐ Lack of trust | ☐ Disability or health limitations |
| ☐ Fear or shame | ☐ Language barriers |
| ☐ Low literacy | ☐ Financial crisis |
| ☐ Limited digital skills | ☐ Family conflict |
| ☐ Unstable housing | ☐ Safety concerns |
| ☐ Food insecurity | ☐ Other: _____ |
| ☐ Mental health concerns | |

The top three barriers we need to consider are:

7. Consider Ministry Readiness

A need may be real, but your church or team may need time to prepare before responding. This section helps you think honestly about capacity, safety, leadership, and timing.

What strengths do we already have?

Examples: prayer support, volunteers, facility, experience, teaching skills, community relationships, financial support, compassion, leadership, church support.

What resources do we still need?

Examples: volunteers, training, policies, funding, curriculum, background checks, facility space, transportation plan, partner referrals.

What risks or safety concerns should we prepare for?

Examples: crisis situations, confidentiality, transportation, children, vulnerable adults, home visits, money requests, emergencies, conflict, burnout.

8. Choose a Realistic First Focus

Do not try to meet every need at once. Choose one first focus that matches the need, your calling, and your current capacity.

Possible Ministry Focus	Need It Addresses	Realistic Now?
Food or basic needs support		Yes / Not yet
Mentoring or encouragement		Yes / Not yet
Life skills or job readiness class		Yes / Not yet
Recovery or reentry support		Yes / Not yet
Prayer and care team		Yes / Not yet
Resource closet or care bags		Yes / Not yet
Other: _____		Yes / Not yet

9. Summary of What We Learned

The people we feel most called to serve first are:

The main need we believe we can address first is:

The barriers we must plan around are:

The partners or people we should contact are:

The first simple ministry step we should consider is:

10. Next Questions Before We Begin

- ☐ Have we prayed and sought wise counsel before moving forward?
- ☐ Have we listened to people who understand this need?
- ☐ Have we talked with church or ministry leadership?
- ☐ Do we know what we are able to offer and what we cannot offer?
- ☐ Do we need policies, background checks, forms, or safety procedures before beginning?
- ☐ Do we have a plan for referral when needs are beyond our role?
- ☐ Can we begin small without overpromising?

Remember

A compassion ministry does not have to begin with a large program. It can begin with one clear need, one faithful team, one safe place, and one step of obedience.

Closing Prayer

Lord, give us eyes to see our community clearly and hearts that are willing to serve humbly. Help us listen before we assume, learn before we launch, and plan with wisdom before we act. Show us the people You are calling us to serve, the partners we should walk with, and the first step we should take. May this ministry reflect Your compassion, truth, and love. Amen.