

Community Conversation

Discernment Guide for Communities Considering End Date Amendment Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

Step 1: Preparation

Discernment is not about decisions- it is fundamentally about listening and paying attention (both what we are feeling inside of us, and what we notice about the world around us). Ultimately, we must choose, but first we must pay attention. When discernment does reach decision-making, it is about choosing between competing goods. There are no perfectly right answers, though some may turn out to be better than others. The goal is to choose intentionally and out of a space of inner freedom, not randomly or out of a space of negativity/pressure/inauthenticity. If we didn't experience internal struggle, then we wouldn't experience the need for discernment. Conflicting spirits, or movements, positive and negative patterns are always present and we experience them very tangibly, though we might not always notice them. That's where paying attention is needed. Gather information about what might be good for you AND what might be good for the world around you. That means talking with others, both those who will be impacted by your actions and those who might be more objective and detached. What brings you consolation (which does not mean absence of difficulty)? What is best for you AND the world? Choose. Pay attention for confirmation.

Want to read more about discernment? <https://ignatianresources.com/discernment/>.

Step 2: Information Gathering

Information gathering is an important part of any discernment. This process outlines how you can access information held within yourself, information held within your agency where you serve, and a process to share that information with your community mates to get a full picture of Community Discernment. We have included some information you may need from JVC Northwest in making your decision in this packet. Many times in discernment, there is not a clear "good" and "bad" choice – if that were the case, discernment would be easy, but by now, you likely know that it often is not. Ignatian Spirituality describes this as the "two standards" – an invitation to make the most loving choice that brings you closer to who you most clearly are and which decision offers consolation and not desolation. Some frame consolation as the choice or path that brings comfort, harmony, alignment, and is moving towards a divine presence. This does not mean every consolation is not without pain. Often times even the most right/most loving/most divine choice comes with some sadness, grief, or saying goodbye to another possibility. This is sometimes referred to as painful consolation. Desolation, on the other hand can be characterized by doubt, dissonance, discomfort, a feeling of obligation vs. a feeling of joyous calling, or being led away from divine presence. Keep these two standards in mind as you engage in the information gathering stage. Pay attention to not solely what you think, but what you feel when you imagine realities playing out. Practice "living as if" the decision were already made for a few hours, an afternoon, or a day- how does that imagined reality sit in your body? Then repeat the practice with the opposite of that decision for a few hours, an afternoon, or a day- does that imagined reality feel different? In what way? Which decision felt like the most loving choice?

Information from Yourself: Individual Reflection Questions

You may choose to sit with one or more of these questions. Perhaps you process in the written form and could consider these writing prompts over a few days, maybe you want to take a few hours to consider these questions, maybe you need a thought partner (either a community mate, trusted friend, or family member). Maybe you have asked yourself these questions already, maybe one or more are new ideas to ponder. Consider the following personal reflection questions and add your own:

- What is my 100%? Serve until the end of the service term? Leave ASAP? Depart my locale earlier than the end of my service term but not yet?
- What brought you to this frame of mind? Who does it center?
 - What decision is best for my mental health?
 - What decision is best for my partner agency?
 - What decision is best for the health of the JV Community- both currently and the JV community coming in the next cohort?
 - What might be best for your particular JV community?
 - What decision is best for the communities I am a part of in my locale?
 - What needs does your family or community outside of JVC Northwest have of you?
 - Imagine your possibilities and options. Which ones might arise from your deepest desires? Which might be based on fear? Which options compel you forward? Which options call you to courage?
- What is my motivation? Why am I still here in this program?
- Do I wish to serve from elsewhere for the remainder of the year?
- How might my 100% be swayed by future employment/school/program opportunities?
- How might my 100% be swayed by how some of my community members may be leaning?
- Reflect on your answers above:
 - What is the greater good?
 - The good of the community, the good of the partner agencies?
 - The good of the constituents served by the work of your JV community?
- What information do you need from others? Who?
- What feedback from your self-reflection might you need to bring to a check in with your Site Supervisor?
- What feedback from your service site might you need to bring to your community conversation?

Information from your Service Site: Conversation with your Site Supervisor

After you have had a chance to identify where you are with your own discernment, you will want to engage in a conversation with your Site Supervisor and/or others at your Partner Agency. Recognizing that you do not yet know the full picture of your community's discernment, share the fruits of your self-reflection. Share your/your communities' reasons for doing so to the extent you know them.

Things to Consider:

- Consider how/when this conversation can take place:
 - If you have a set check in with your Site Supervisor, can it take place during that regular meeting time?
 - If you do not have a regular check in, how might you request a conversation? What technology might be used- phone? Video?
 - Who else at your partner agency should be involved in that conversation (i.e.- their Supervisor, a functional staff member you share tasks with, etc.)?
- Consider what you might want to share with your Site Supervisor prior to that conversation so they can be prepared to show up for you in that conversation.
- What tasks are you currently performing for your Partner Agency? If you were to depart early, who might assume those roles?
- If you are considering an early departure, when would all of your service tasks be wrapped up?
 - Would you need a few days, a few weeks, or a few months to complete essential tasks?
- What is the impact of your departure from service would have you the people you serve alongside – both clients/students/consumers/etc. and partner agency staff?

- Is it possible that you could serve outside of locale? What would that look like?
- If you are hoping to stay, how would your service look a week from now, a month from now, two months from now?
- If you are hoping to stay, are there additional tasks you could take on? Where might you need support?
- Ask about other considerations from your Site Supervisor from their perspective.
- What is your Site Supervisor's 100%? 70%? Where do you all differ? Where might you find common ground?
- Are there areas where you do not have full information to make a decision right now?
- What feedback from your service site might you need to bring to your community conversation?

Information from your Community Mates: Discernment Community Night

Identify a Date and Time to host a Community Discernment Night (details and suggested guide below).

Consider the following:

- When and where would be best to have this conversation? Do we have a standing Community Night time where this conversation could occur?
- If we have community mates out of locale, how will we include them? What technology do we all have available to be able to participate (i.e.- phone, video, etc.). What time zone is our community mate in- how can we make sure the time we agree upon works for them? If all community mates are out of locale, how will each member create intentional space for this conversation while not physically in the same place?
- What space in our house is best for this intentional conversation? Is it our dining room table? Or living room couches? The floor of our kitchen? Our porch?
- What time of day is best for this conversation? Morning? Midday? Evening?
- What timeline is reasonable to plan this conversation so all community members are able to have time for self-reflection and conversations with their Site Supervisor?
- What pre-work will we all agree to having completed before coming together?

Community Night: Discernment for an Amended End Date

Suggested Time: 90 minutes- 2 hours (*note: depending upon community size, plan for time to hear from everyone fully. If you have not reached a conclusion or consensus, plan to have a follow up meeting after folks have had some time to process what was shared in the conversation*)

Roles Needed: Facilitator (*note: ideally would be a community member offering to convene and keep the conversation moving forward, if your community feels they would need an external facilitator consider if a Support Person could serve in this role, if not, reach out to your PC to be connected to a facilitator*)

Supplies Needed: Community Member pre-work; Community Consensus Worksheet (included here); Writing Utensils; Paper/Journals; a calendar; Community Candle; chime, bell, or tone signal transitions between sections or ease into sharing from reflection time; Timepiece.

Opening (5-7 minutes):

Consider what opening rituals you use in your community and how you might want to offer these here. Should you light your community candle? Opening prayer, poem, or question for reflection? How do you practice community agreements and guidelines for respectful conversations?

Check In (2-3 minutes per community mate ~10-25 minutes total depending upon community size):

The Facilitator offers a check in question- could be a simple or silly question, something as broad as how are you coming, or a more specific question. Consider options to invite sharing: Mutual Invitation, Popcorn/Random, sharing in a circle, etc.

Temperature Taking (3-5 minutes per community mate, ~ 15-40 minutes total depending upon community size):

Each community member shares in one go-round the outcomes of their self-reflection and then in another go-round the outcomes of their service conversations. Consider options to invite sharing: Mutual Invitation, Popcorn/Random, sharing in a circle, etc. Recognize how you usually share and consider stretching- are you usually the first to share? How can you stretch into opening space for others/practicing comfort with silence and pauses? Are you usually the last to share (or choose not to share)? How can you stretch into sharing or sharing earlier in the conversation? Would it be helpful to have a timekeeper for sharing to give equitable space? Is it helpful to have a few minutes of quiet reflection before anyone shares? Is it helpful to have a few minutes after each questions to absorb responses?

- *Outcomes of Self-Reflection:*
 - What is each community mate's starting point? What brought them to that place?
 - Where does your community have commonality with individual motivations?
 - Where does your community have difference with individual motivations?
 - Where could we move towards consensus?
- *Outcomes of Service Conversations:*
 - How have we included our Agencies and Site Supervisors in our discernment process?
 - What are their positions?
 - How do their positions impact our discernment process?
 - Where does your community have commonality with individual motivations?
 - Where does your community have difference with individual motivations?
 - Where could we move towards consensus?

Consensus Building (~ 15- 20 minutes)

After all have had the opportunity to share their fruits of their information gathering within themselves and with their partner agencies, take some time to synthesize information. Is there a clear path? This

would be the opportunity for follow up with questions, clarifying questions, silent reflection, journaling, or otherwise absorbing and processing what was shared. The Facilitator offers the following questions to the group:

- Do we have consensus?
- Where do we differ?
- Can we proceed with this dissonance (for example - some individuals will seek an early exit but a critical mass of members will continue to stay/serve)?
- What questions do we have to further consider?

If your community has reached consensus, proceed to the Grief and Affirmation Activity (see below).

If your community has not reached consensus, consider what support is needed to reach consensus:

- Do you have questions that need to be answered?
 - Who can answer them? On what timeline?
- When can we revisit this conversation?
- What actions are needed from individuals or all community members to gather more information?
- What supports do we need and where can we request them? Of whom?

Grief & Affirmation (5-7 minutes of reflection, 3-5 minutes in dyad ~10-25 minutes total depending upon community size):

Pair Community Mates to share in a dyad. For smaller communities, you may choose to share in a whole group setting. Offer 5-7 minutes for reflection and writing on the following questions:

- *What am I grieving from this year?*
- *What must I say goodbye to with our community decision?*
- *What am I joyfully embracing in our community decisions?*
- *For what am I grateful?*
- *What has filled my cup this year?*
- *What self-knowledge have I gained?*
- *How will I enter this next phase with this knowledge?*
- *What is lighting my path?*
- *How am I supported?*
- *How has my dyad partner (or all of community) helped me to grow this year?*

Dyad pairs share with one another, if time allows, find a new partner and share. Larger community may choose for each community member to meet with each other community member during this process. Conclude with this poem (or one of your own choosing):

Yes- Rudy Francisco

And sometimes
it all arrives at once.

The anxiety, the fear,
the voices that scratch
your confidence like
a chalkboard and somehow
all the oxygen in the room
suddenly becomes water

and you begin to wonder if
you have what it takes
to grow gills. You wonder
if you can blend in with the fish.
you wonder if you
will ever breathe again.

And the answer is
not every building that shakes
will collapse.

The answer is
not everything that chips
will crumble.

The answer is
this is temporary
and yes, you will.

Conclusion & Next Steps:

- Do we have consensus (even if the decision is to continue service through the end of the service term)? What is unresolved? When will we revisit this conversation?
- Who needs to be notified of our decision?
 - Program Coordinator-
 - Who will notify?
 - Our Site Supervisors/Partner Agencies
 - What is the timeline by which we will share our community decision with our service sites?
 - Our Support People
 - Who will share? On what timeline? In what way?
 - Who else?
- How will we honor our decision? How can we all actively participate in this decision?
- What would we as a community need to take care of before departing? How will we share roles in this process? How can we hold one another lovingly accountable?

**Community Consensus Worksheet
TEMPLATE**

We, the _____ (community name),

- ☐ Have conducted our own Self-Reflection **AND**
- ☐ Have spoken to our Site Supervisors and have their approval; **AND**
- ☐ Have reached Community Consensus and choose to:
 - ☐ Complete the service term with our planned end date of (please check):
 - ☐ May 31st (10 month locale: Hays, MT)
 - ☐ June 30th (11 month locale or JVs in 11 month placements: Ashland, MT; Omak, WA; St. Xavier, MT; St. Charles School (Billings, MT))
 - ☐ July 31st (12 month locales: all remaining locales)
 - ☐ Amend our end date to _____ (please name a date no sooner than two weeks from the submission of this consensus decision). Please send us our Disorientation/Reorientation packet so we can prepare for our amended end date.

OR

- ☐ Were unable to reach consensus because community members have competing needs. Those needs are and are requesting the following support from JVC Northwest:

House Liaison or other community representative should return completed form to your Program Coordinator as soon as complete (no less than two weeks before proposed amended community departure date)

JV Program (Not so) Frequently Asked Questions

Along with what feels like the whole world, the Jesuit Volunteer program has shifted and stretched to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a non-exhaustive what the program can and cannot accommodate. If you have particular questions, speak with your Program Coordinator.

Community Viability:

- For on-going viability, a minimum of two JVs must remain in the community house OR opt to close to house and all serve remotely from elsewhere for the remainder of their service term.
Considerations:
 - Can all JVs desiring to remain in the program, regardless of location, effectively serve remotely?
 - If a single JV desires to remain in locale, what options are available to them outside the JV house? PCs can assist JVs in exploring options with support people, other community contacts. This would require additional approval and collaboration with JVC Northwest staff.
- As a part of remaining in the program and continuing service out of locale, JVs need to:
 - Make arrangements with their Site Supervisor about on-going service.
 - Will JVs use their own equipment to do so?
 - Will they borrow equipment and send it back? If so, how will that be accomplished?
 - Create a plan among themselves establishing how they plan to remain in community with each other and share it with their PC.
- JVs remaining in the program must continue to pay their housing fees and utilities, regardless of their location. In communities where all JVs are serving out of locale, JVC Northwest can assist them in maintaining lease and utility payments on behalf of the community and according to the community's budget.
- JVC Northwest is unable to change accounts where community and individual stipends are deposited and cannot change house budgets at this point in the year. That means:
 - Individual stipends will continue to be deposited into existing individual accounts. JVs remaining in the program need to maintain their existing personal account. If they are out of locale, they need to work with their bank for a process to close the account remotely when they complete the program.
 - Community funds will continue to be deposited in community accounts according to the community budget. This includes money that would normally be used for food by community mates who remain in the program out of locale.
 - JVs remaining at the end of the program year, including those out of locale, are responsible for divvying up any remaining funds at the end of year.
- JVs *may* combine communities to avoid community closure and if the JVs involved and the JV Program Team can agree that its reasonably feasible. Location and amount of community and individual deposits will not change. Similarly, JVs' housing fee and utilities obligations and contributions to food will not change. JVs considering this option should talk to their PC about:
 - Willingness of JVs involved. Are risk tolerances and respective JV activities in alignment?
 - Availability of room and bed space.
 - Transportation options and distance for travel.

- Impact(s) to service.
- Combined community budget.
- Financial or other barriers?

Travel:

- JVs who choose to serve remotely and depart locale will serve remotely for the remainder of the service year and will prepare the JV house for exit and remove all personal belongings.
- JVs who choose to exit locale but serve remotely will waive the travel home costs paid by their agency.
- JVs currently out of locale may not return to locale unless the travel meets the definition of ‘essential’ in both their current location and in their locale.
- JVs who are serving 10 hours/week or less AND are out of locale will exit the program.

For JVs Exiting the JV Program

- JVs wishing to exit the Program will communicate with their Program Coordinator and scheduling an exiting conversation with their PC and the JV Program Manager.
- Exiting JV/AmeriCorps members are not eligible for unemployment (federal law).