A STUDIO GROOVY RESOURCE

The Organizational Ikigai Guide

A worksheet for finding the revenue-generating idea that's genuinely yours — built on a centuries-old Japanese framework, with a case study up front and plenty of room to actually write.

LOVE

GOOD AT

NEEDED

PAID FOR

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WHY THIS MATTERS

What is organizational ikigai?

Ikigai (ee-key-guy) is a Japanese concept that roughly translates to “reason for being.” It's usually drawn as four overlapping questions — and the place where all four meet is your ikigai.

The same lens works for a team. Swap “you” for “we,” and it becomes a fast, honest way to spot your organization's next real revenue opportunity.

1 What We Love

The work our team leans into, even on a hard day.

2 What We're Good At

The skill or reputation people already come to us for.

3 What Our Community Needs

The gap we hear about, again and again.

4 What We Can Be Paid For

The version of this someone will actually fund.

ANDREW'S TAKE

Founder, Studio Groovy

I use ikigai constantly with leaders navigating a transition, weighing a side hustle, or feeling disconnected from their own sense of purpose. I've come to believe organizations can use the same lens — nonprofits, startups, and solopreneurs alike. For nonprofits, it can surface earned revenue ideas that still advance the mission, instead of chasing every grant that comes along. For startups, it's a fast way to right-size what the market actually wants, and will pay for. And as a solopreneur myself, several times over, it's the exercise I come back to whenever I need to reground in what I'm actually offering. Either way, it's a chance to slow down and pressure-test a “best bet” idea before you spend real time, money, and energy building it.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Who this is for, and why

WHY THIS REALLY MATTERS

NONPROFITS

Ikigai gives you a way to surface earned revenue ideas — the kind people actually pay for, not fund — that still genuinely advance your mission. The strongest, most sustainable nonprofits diversify how they bring in money; philanthropy is often part of that, but earned revenue opens up a different door, and a way off the treadmill of constantly chasing the next dollar. It's also a hedge against a familiar reality: contorting your work to fit funder and donor agendas, even your biggest champions, which is a lot to manage on its own and can quietly pull your mission off course. I hit a ceiling finding funders who would support our work, and I felt it every grant cycle — trying to fit what we wanted to build inside someone else's parameters. Developing an earned revenue model was what gave us real agency over our own direction again.

STARTUPS

This one comes down to basics: what makes you sticky and unique, and are you actually listening closely enough to your ideal customers to know? It's a fast way to cut through the noise and right-size what the market actually wants against what your team loves and is genuinely good at. And it's not a one-time check — as customer needs shift or as you grow and need to diversify your products, services, or tools, coming back to this practice is what clarifies the next opportunity. As a founder, I found earned revenue was what let us take a proof of concept and actually scale it — proof that what we'd built wasn't just good, but different enough from everyone else to stand on its own.

SOLOPRENEURS

It's hard out there — but being on your own doesn't mean you shouldn't operate like a real business or that you don't deserve the chance to mature your model and think critically about it. It's a flooded market, and markets shift: your services may need to change, and thinking through products, lead magnets, and your own pipeline is what moves you from living month to month toward something genuinely sustainable. I've had strong services and a clear read on my users, then watched appetites and budget lines shift under me — the market telling me it was time to pivot. Coming back to ikigai has helped me navigate those disorienting moments and find the next real opportunity.

> The four questions don't change. What changes is what you're solving for — mission, market, or momentum.

WHAT THIS CAN LOOK LIKE

oneTILT

A REAL WORLD EXAMPLE

This one is personal: oneTILT, the venture I founded and led for six-plus years, a leadership development company trying to find its lane in a field full of established names — StrengthsFinder, Deloitte, IDEO, The Management Center. Here's how the four questions played out as I figured out where we actually fit.

My edge wasn't diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training or practical skills training — it was refusing to pick one. Doing both, together, turned out to be the whole point.

WHAT I LOVED

Coaching busy managers in short, focused sessions — and watching one conversation change how someone leads.

WHAT I WAS GOOD AT

Running workshops that saw people as people — building trust and belonging, getting real about the conversations that don't happen enough at work — while staying practical enough that people left more confident, and able to lead differently the next day.

WHAT MY COMMUNITY NEEDED

This need showed up everywhere — nonprofits, startups, corporates, schools. It was especially acute for brand-new people managers and leadership teams that had never really prioritized good manager training in the first place.

WHAT I COULD BE PAID FOR

Corporate learning-and-development budgets, paid fellowships, 1:1 coaching add-ons, and ongoing engagements with HR and people teams — priced for genuinely customized work, not an off-the-shelf course.

MY IKIGAI, IN ONE SENTENCE

"Practical, human management training that builds inclusive workplaces — one leader, one team, at a time."

> Notice my sentence doesn't cram in all four answers word-for-word — it pulls the thread that runs through them. That's the move you're going for on the next few pages.

STEP 1 OF 3

Go deeper on each question

You're about to fill out your own organizational ikigai. Breaking each big question into smaller, sharper ones tends to surface a better answer than tackling it head-on. Some of these will resonate more depending on whether you're a nonprofit or a startup — use whichever fit.

WHAT WE LOVE

1. What are we particularly passionate about?
2. When does the work feel smoothest or most alive?
3. What lights up our team and keeps them energized?

WHAT OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

1. What are we hearing, again and again, from the people we serve?
2. What's the big problem we exist to address?
3. What challenges are we best positioned to solve or relieve?

ORGANIZATIONAL

IKIGAI

WHAT WE'RE GOOD AT

1. What are we known for, compared to others in our space?
2. Why do people come back to us?
3. What would others say is our secret sauce?

WHAT WE CAN BE PAID FOR

1. What are people already paying us for?
2. What would our clients or community put real dollars toward?
3. What is the market paying for that we could plug into?

STEP 2 OF 3

Fill in your ikigai

Answer each card in plain language — jot down what matters most.

It's helpful to pull out each component and reflect on them independently. As you reflect on one, you may naturally start to generate ideas for a different part of your ikigai — that's common, so don't worry about forcing connections. The next step will prompt you to reflect on where overlap exists.

WHAT WE LOVE

WHAT OUR COMMUNITY NEEDS

ORGANIZATIONAL IKIGAI

WHAT WE'RE GOOD AT

WHAT WE CAN BE PAID FOR

STEP 3 OF 3

Find the overlap

Find where your answers overlap, then synthesize what you find into one sentence.

First, look for where two or three of your answers genuinely overlap — that's usually where the real opportunity lives, even if it isn't the tidiest connection. Then, turn what you found into a sentence you could say out loud.

FIRST WHERE DO TWO OR MORE ANSWERS GENUINELY OVERLAP?

THEN YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL IKIGAI, IN ONE SENTENCE:

You've clarified a real opportunity. Now test it.

A clear organizational ikigai statement is the starting line, not the finish. Before you build anything, it's worth pressure-testing the idea against real demand.

SURFACE

- Read your one-sentence ikigai out loud — does it still feel true or did you talk yourself into it?
- Notice which answer surprised you most. That's usually where the real opportunity is hiding.

SHARE

- Bring it to a co-founder, your board, or your team — for a people manager, an upcoming 1:1 works too.
- Meet with three to five community members or clients and ask what's missing or what they'd add.

SHIP

- Pick one opportunity, sketch what making it real would look like, and test it within 30 days.
- Pair it with the Business Hypothesis Guide and turn it into a testable pitch.

Studio Groovy helps founders, leaders, and mission-driven teams turn stalled ideas into shipped, revenue-generating work — without burning out the people doing it. Together, we build the systems, culture, and revenue that let good work last.

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