

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a conversation methodology that seeks out the *'best of what'* to help ignite the collective imagination of *'what might be'*. It was initially developed by David Cooperrider of Case Western Reserve University. Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago has been instrumental in converting it to powerful community building conversation tool.

Appreciative Inquiry is a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, a community or an organisation. AI asks people to tell their stories about their connections with others when they have been at their best.

The basic idea is to build the future around what works, rather than trying to fix what does not. AI is a reaction to problem based and deficiency focused change methodologies. It is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organisations and their community. It involves systematic discovery of what has happened in the past, and what gives a person, an organisation or community *'life'* when most effective and capable.

AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilises inquiry through crafting *'unconditional positive questions'* that lead to sharing best practices, magic moments and life giving experiences.

In AI, such sharing leads to imagination and innovation. AI assumes that people, organisations and their communities have untapped, rich and inspiring accounts of the positive. When this *'positive change core'* is directly linked to change agenda, AI believes that changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilised. AI generates hope, optimism, collaboration and energy - powerful forces for change.

FIVE KEY STAGES OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY:

DEFINE	<i>Determine what to focus on</i>
DISCOVERY	<i>Appreciate what you have got</i>
DREAM	<i>Imagine what can be</i>
DESIGN	<i>Create what will be</i>
DELIVER	<i>Work on making it happen</i>

'Communities, individuals and organisations grow and change in the direction of what they focus on. AI is a quest to see the glass is half full and how we make it more full.'

(Peter Kenyon)

TYPICAL APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- *'What are the strengths and assets of our community?'*
- *'Share a time when you felt our community was at its best?'*
- *'What do you value most about our community?'*
- *'What is the essence of our community that makes it unique and strong?'*
- *What gives you most hope for the future of our community?*
- *What has happened in our community that gives our children a great start in life?*
- *'If you had 3 wishes for the future of our community, what would they be?'*

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY ASSUMPTIONS

- In every society, organisation or group, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality - communities grow from what they personally ask questions about.
- People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
- If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences.
- The language we use creates our reality.

KEY APPRECIATIVE PRACTICE PRINCIPLES

- Always work in the affirmative.
- Ask provocative questions. Probe for excitement and possibility.
- Focus on the positive. Look for the budding flower amid the gray backdrop!
- Generate interactive dialogue. Provide space for dialogue and questions.
- Respect the past, live the present and look to the future.
- Seek the root cause of success, not the root cause of failure.

KEY REFERENCES

- www.appreciative-inquiry.org
- www.imaginechicago.org
- *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* (Sue Annis Hammond)
- *Lessons From the Field* (Sue Annis Hammond and Cathy Royal)
- *Talking Up Our Strengths* (Innovative Resources and SNAICC)
- *Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church* (Susan Star Paddock)

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