



Appreciative Inquiry is a strategy for promoting positive change. As such it can be used in community development as well as organisational development and in other personal and group situations in order to encourage progress and development. It is a way of thinking, seeing and acting for powerful, positive change.

As a strategy it is:

- ⇒ Deliberate
- ⇒ Reflective
- ⇒ Future Focused
- ⇒ Appreciative
- ⇒ Inquiring
- ⇒ Inclusive
- ⇒ Innovative

## Deliberate

It is not just a way of seeing and doing which suits certain personalities or personal preferences in our approach to change. It is not just for naturally optimistic people or those who simply prefer to take a positive view of things. It is a deliberate strategy which chooses not to focus on deficiencies or weaknesses or problems but rather to identify and build on achievements and successes, no matter how small.

## Reflective and Future Focused

In this it is like the Sankofa bird – a symbol of reflection as a basis for progress and development.



Just as the Sankofa bird is always looking backwards and yet moving forwards, Appreciative Inquiry seeks to:

- ⇒ Look back and move forward
- ⇒ Reach back and gather the best of what our past has to teach us
- ⇒ Gather our full potential as we move forward

## Appreciative and Inquiring

It is a means of inquiring, consulting and researching in order to find the best of what has been in the past and use it as a basis for creating the best of what is possible in the future. It bases its inquiry on asking positive questions, valuing what have been positive experiences and using this as a platform for designing positive outcomes. It moves forward on the basis that positive questions bring out the best in people and inspire them to positive action. This creates a good springboard for planning positive futures.

## Inclusive and Innovative

The appreciative approach to inquiry and future planning seeks to engage and inspire people and to involve them in bringing about the sort of change in their community that will be valued and owned by them and have the greatest potential for success. It seeks to involve everyone in the conversation about what has worked in the past and what they might dream of for the future. It values the diversity of views and dreams that are expressed and designs a future which builds on these in a creative and positive way.

Appreciative Inquiry always shows an openness to understanding a community through the stories of the people who form it. It is always a collaborative and highly participative approach to identifying what works well and designing a future based on that.

## The Approach

### (1) Words create worlds

Questions we ask and answers given to those questions influence the way we move forward. Describing something makes it more 'real' and gives it meaning.

When we inquire into what gives 'life' to a community and people tell us what they think are the 'life-giving' experiences as they see them, their view of the community is altered by the inquiry. Inquiry is intervention. In asking the first

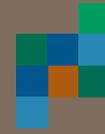
**'Appreciative questions always assume that the glass is half full. The good things we want to focus on are already there.'**  
**Diana Whitney**

question in a community consultation, we have already started to make a difference in that situation.

The questions we ask need to be designed to be sensitive and effective in producing positive responses out of which we can craft empowering, motivating and signposting images of the future. Words are important, they create meaning. Describing an experience for the first time, putting it into words for another person to understand, gives that experience significance and meaning which may not have been clear before. Communication creates meaning and reality. Words do matter, they bring things to life – words create worlds. Use them carefully and deliberately.

### (2) Having meaningful conversations

Appreciative Inquiry engages people in looking at their own successes, achievements and life-giving moments. It seeks to encourage them to identify what works in their community, what makes it work and what is valuable and meaningful about it. In practice, Appreciative Inquiry uses 'appreciative interviews' to inspire storytelling about the best of what is happening in communities as a way of giving meaning and direction to future



planning. These 'appreciative interviews' are conversations that matter. They are about what people value and find most significant. They involve grassroots community members in the inquiry, the dialogue, debate and discussion about the future. They bring things to life and make real the potential that is at the heart of a community. Community stories become the design templates for their futures.

**'Your conversations help create your world. Speak of delight, not dissatisfaction. Speak of hope, not despair. Let your words bind up wounds, not cause them.'**  
**William Martin – Interpreter of Tao TeChing**

**(3) Images inspire action**  
Telling our stories and imagining where we might be able to go in the future is an inspirational and visionary activity. Appreciative Inquiry encourages people to dream, to imagine what is 'the best that could be' in the future. These images of where we are going, which are encouraged by the process of inquiry and dreaming, guide and inspire plans for development.

## Problem Solving Model

*Development is a Problem to be Solved*



'Felt Need'  
Identification of a problem



Analysis of causes



Analysis of possible solutions



Action Planning

## AI – Action Research Model

*Development is an Opportunity to be Embraced*



Appreciating  
Valuing the best of what is



Envisioning  
what might be



Dialoguing  
what should be



Innovating  
what will be



## (4) Possibilities not problems

Appreciative Inquiry seeks to focus on the positives in any situation. Often development professionals use a problem solving model to explain and direct their interventions for change. This focuses on problems, gaps and deficiencies which need to be solved, filled, put right. There will always be plenty of these in any situation. However, problems breed problems and focusing on problems can be a very negative experience as we analyse failures and highlight mistakes.

There can sometimes be a superior attitude from problem solving consultants, that they can identify weaknesses and failure and come up with solutions where communities themselves have failed and cannot do so. This traditional approach to development through problem solving compares to the AI approach in the following models.

**'Imagination is more important than knowledge'**  
**Albert Einstein**

### The 4-D model

A model of the Appreciative Inquiry process which illustrates well the use of the approach and principles above sees it as a cycle with four phases. The four phases are those in the diagram above – valuing, envisioning, dialoguing and innovating.

- (1) Discovery – Appreciating the best of what is
- (2) Dreaming – Envisioning impact
- (3) Design – Co-constructing the future
- (4) Deliver – Sustaining the change

In using the approach, participants

should be involved throughout the cycle and experience each phase. Positive questioning is key throughout and should never stop as a means to involving, investigating, inspiring and initiating. Conversations matter and dreaming or envisioning should be encouraged because many people do not think their dreams will be taken seriously in planning.

The aim of the design stage is to turn our dreams of the future into an action plan which will make the possible into reality. It is important at this stage to be as participative and collaborative as possible in ensuring that all dreams have consideration and that the plan acknowledges as many as possible.

Learning and doing, word and image, idea and reality come together in Appreciative Inquiry. Try it and you will see it work.

### What can it achieve?

Appreciative Inquiry is designed to help bring about positive change. It believes that positive approaches, positive questions, appreciative conversations all contribute to and remain part of that change. The experience of positive change will involve:

Participation, ownership, empowerment, commitment, shared vision, creative plans, energy, effort and hope. Sounds like a mighty list but that is what Appreciative Inquiry aims to produce and what it focuses on throughout the process.

### Never stop questioning

Since questioning is so important, it is good to compile a question bank of positive questions which you could use in various situations. Here are a few you might use with community members.

What are the best things that have happened to you in your time living here/at X?

**'Nothing happens unless it is first a dream.'**  
**Carl Sandburg**

What specific things make it good to live here at X?

Tell me about some of the experiences that you specially remember as being highlights of your time living here at X?

What have been the high points of living in X for you?

Are there specific things that have encouraged you about work done, or issues dealt with, in the organisation/community?

What support have you most valued from neighbours or other residents while living here?

When you think about your time being here, what person/experience/time stands out in your memory?

What are the best things that are happening to develop and improve the community here?

What makes X a good place to live in?

What changes would you most like to see in X?

What is your picture of the X-community as you want to live in it?



What changes would you most like to see to help X be a better community for ... children/older folk /deprived families etc?

What do you imagine X might be like in three, five or 10 years time if people worked together to make it a better community?

What do you imagine might be an effective process to bring about these changes?

What do you imagine might be your role in making this happen?

Who would be the most helpful people to work together in making X into the way you want it to be?

Is there any support you would like in improving your community/your environment/quality of life etc?

What do you think your neighbours would value most about your contribution at X?

What do you consider to be the most valuable contribution you have made to the work of X?

What is the most challenging/worthwhile part of your work in this community?

**'You can tell whether a man is clever by his answers. You can tell whether a man is wise by his questions.'**  
**Naguib Mahfouz**  
**(Nobel Prize Winner)**

**'Be patient... and try to love the questions themselves. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.'**  
**Rainer Marie Rilke**