



## TOOL APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

### OVERVIEW

Originally proposed by David Cooperrider and Suresh Srivastva, Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based approach to organizational & community-level change. Appreciative Inquiry leads groups through a change process while learning, discovering, dreaming, and designing a new future. At its root, it is a strong process for learning and discovering what an organization does best and what are the qualities of a specific group when it is functioning at its best. This is an asset-based approach to getting a collective understanding of what is already working in the community.

### WHEN TO USE

Appreciative Inquiry is a powerful tool at the start of a change or strategic planning process. This method works best for formed groups who have worked together before and organizations that are not in their forming phase. Use this tool when groups are not seeing progress and are feeling stuck. This approach can break a group free from the “we are not doing enough” mindset and transform it to “this is how we have been successful.” This is a powerful shift in culture and collaboration.

### HOW TO USE

When seeking change or creating a strategic plan, a common narrative of “we need to change,” or, “we need something new because the current plan is not working” tends to emerge and captivate the process. This doesn’t show the full picture. This also is not inspiring, motivating, or affirming for groups.

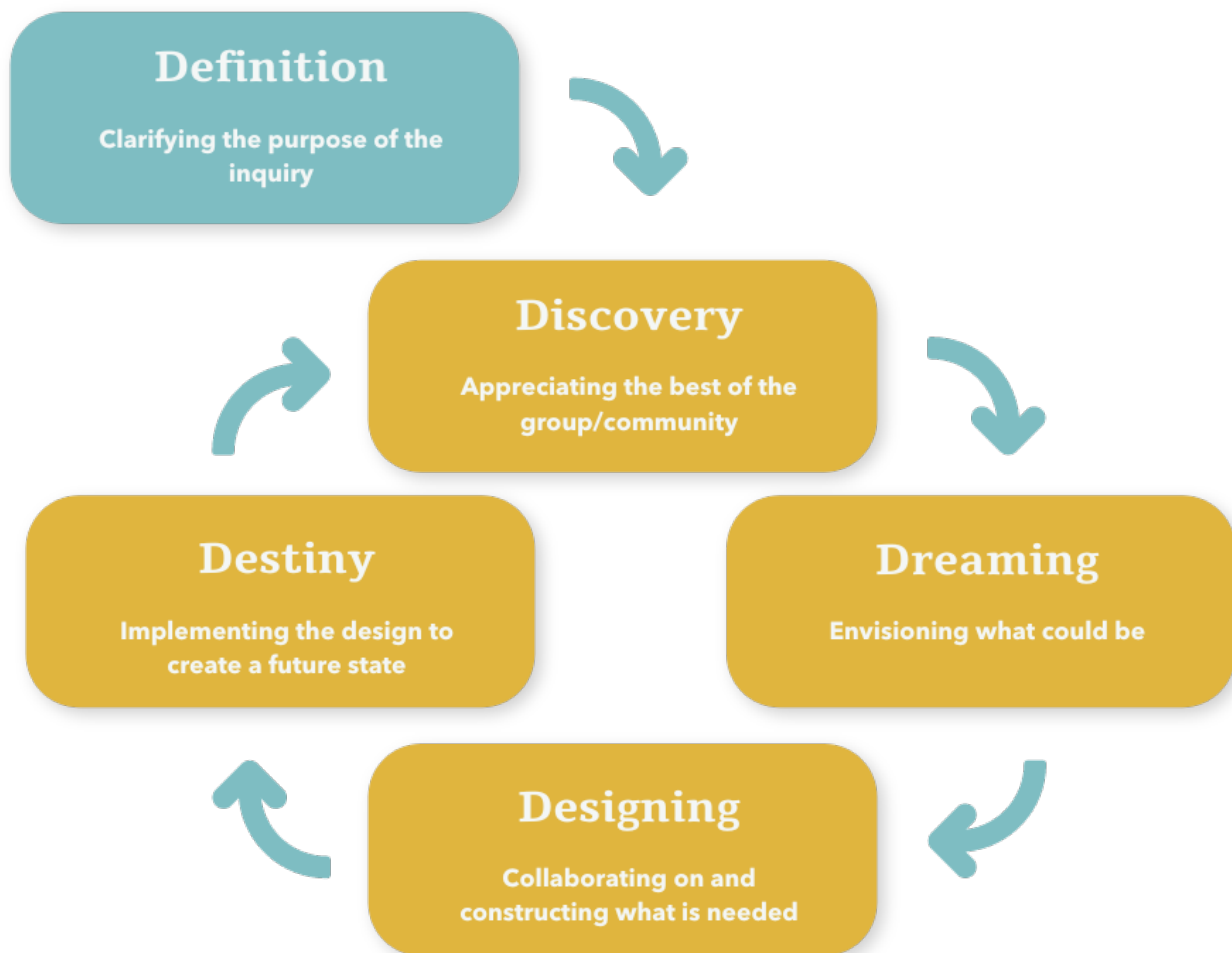


The heart of Appreciative Inquiry is to find the best in what is current so that it can be strengthened in the future. Appreciate Inquiry assumes that the current group has strengths,

and those strengths must be celebrated and accounted for to step into a change process. This tool also encourages thinking about the future and designing that future together. This allows communities and groups to learn what that future looks like to its members and encourages collective discovery.

Appreciative Inquiry works well when folded into a staff or board retreat. It can take 4-6 hours, spending at least one hour in each phase. Generally, there is ample room for creativity in each phase. Each phase below can be designed differently and uniquely to fit what works for the group.

Appreciative Inquiry has five main phases:



### Definition

This first step is out of the Appreciative Inquiry learning cycle, yet it is a crucial step in starting this process. This is the moment when a group or community identifies a need for the inquiry

and also identifies the key question that needs to be answered. Defining what needs to be examined will set a clear path for the learning cycle of this methodology.

Usually, this phase is the pre-work of the process and can be done via focus groups, surveys, team discussions, and anonymous questionnaires.

#### QUESTIONS TO ELEVATE IN THIS PHASE ARE:

- WHAT DO WE NEED TO EXAMINE?
- WHAT IS THE CURRENT PROBLEM WE ARE ELEVATING?
- WHAT QUESTIONS DO WE NEED TO ANSWER TOGETHER?
- WHAT NEEDS TO MAKE MORE SENSE?
- WHAT IS IT THAT WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT?

### *Discovery*

The inquiry starts with discovery. This is a dialogue designed to think about and express what is the best of this group or community. The questions asked in this phase create a shared pride among the members and allow the strengths of this group to come to the surface. The goal is to shift from a critique or a deficit mindset to thinking about values, beliefs, assets, structures, systems, and processes that allow this group to do its best work.

#### THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE IDEAL TO ASK IN THIS PHASE:

- WHAT ALLOWS THIS GROUP TO WORK WELL TOGETHER?
- WHAT ARE SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS/GOALS THIS GROUP HAS ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER?
- WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS OF THIS COMMUNITY?
- WHEN THIS GROUP OR COMMUNITY IS AT ITS BEST, WHAT IS HAPPENING? WHAT HAS THAT BEEN?

### *Dreaming*

This phase is about imagining the desired future state of a group, organization, or community. In this phase, participants incorporate the assets and strengths that they discovered in the previous phase to dream about what is next. This phase can be a dialogue. This phase can be more hands-on by asking participants to draw, write, paint, or create a future that they envision. This phase allows the group to learn about what their collective desired future is and where the overlaps are.

In this phase, individuals can be asked to draw a picture and then compare. The group can get creative in this phase to spark the inspiration to dream and imagine. The goal of this phase is to compare and reflect upon the dreams present. It is helpful to narrow in on a group dream that can take the essence of the individual dreams.

#### A PROMPT FOR THIS PHASE CAN BE:



- WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE IS THE NEXT STEP?
- WHAT DOES A SUCCESSFUL X LOOK LIKE?
- WHAT CAN THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE?
- WHAT DO YOU IMAGINE IS PRESENT IN A FUTURE STATE?
- HOW DO WE CO-CREATE THE FUTURE WITH THESE DREAMS IN MIND?
- WHAT IS NON-NEGOTIABLE FOR THE GROUP?
- WHAT RESULTS DO WE WANT TO SEE?

### Designing

This phase builds upon the previous two and takes the learning to a tangible reality. This phase is about constructing the future reality. This will require goal setting and strategic planning and designing the future based on the group's strengths and dreams. This is the planning part of the learning process.

This is the part where a group can design a process, create a map, layout tools needed to make the dreams come true.

#### THE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN THIS PHASE ARE:

- HOW DO WE BUILD OUT THE DREAM?
- WHAT ARE THE PHASES TO MAKE THE DREAM A REALITY?
- WHO WILL BE INVOLVED AND WHAT ARE THE ROLES?
- WHAT DO WE NEED IN PLACE? WHAT STRUCTURES WILL HELP MAKE THIS DREAM COME TRUE?
- HOW DO WE DESIGN TO KEEP OUR STRENGTHS?
- DO OUR STRENGTHS MATCH THE DESIGN?
- WHAT ARE OUR INDICATORS?

### Destiny

This phase is about living into the destiny and the design of the collective. This phase leads back to discovery because the learning is an ongoing process, and the group can decide when the design they have created and are living into is ready to be examined again.

#### THE QUESTIONS TO EXAMINE IN THIS PHASE ARE:

- WHAT RESULTS ARE WE SEEING?
- WHAT IS WORKING?
- WHAT NEEDS TO BE REASSESSED?
- WHAT STRENGTHS ARE SHOWING UP?
- WHAT IS DIFFICULT?

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry encourage improving upon strengths and making better what is already best of a group and a community. This learning approach can lead to collective innovation and transformation. This can be a one-time learning process, or it can



be a strategic learning cycle that the group initiates every six or 12 months. The destiny phase always leads to defining and so the cycle continues.

## COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

### *Learn*

Set goals and use measures to test the impact and quality of actions; learn from experiences and translate that information into more effective actions. Actors remain accountable to a shared vision and “return learning to the system” as a mutual contribution.

Appreciative Inquiry is a tool for the Learn phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit [civiccanopy.org/clm](http://civiccanopy.org/clm).

