

Appreciative Inquiry

What is Appreciative Inquiry, and how can it help you?

Appreciative Inquiry is a change management approach that engages teams and stakeholders to pursue new directions, goals, and actions based on current and/or past strengths and successes. Using guided questions, *Appreciative Inquiry* can help you, your team, and stakeholders to appreciate what is working well and take a positive approach to problem solving by overcoming negativity and building agreement and consensus.

Appreciative Inquiry:

- Manages change by building agreement and consensus
- Approaches challenges in a positive way by building on success stories to imagine what is possible
- Relies on stakeholder self-motivation for change rather than incentives or persuasion
- Helps develop skills in creating shared vision and influencing organizational culture

How to use this tool: *(refer to worksheets on pages 3-5)*

- 1. Convene** all stakeholders whose buy-in is critical to working on the specific challenge identified. Use the *Appreciative Inquiry Worksheet* to guide a discussion and record responses to the questions.
- 2. Define** the challenge (which may be currently framed as a problem) as an affirmative topic, which is a statement or question that defines the area you want to improve. By framing the challenge as an affirmative topic, the conversation is positive and aspirational, rather than negative by focusing on problems.
Example: A Title X grantee staff felt stymied by persistent challenges and bureaucratic obstacles to implementing their program. The group reframed the problem as an affirmative topic: optimally achieving their program goals with current resources.
- 3. Discover** what has worked in the past or is working well currently related to the affirmative topic. Participants break into pairs or small groups to interview one another using the Discover questions in the worksheet to share positive stories and examples of successes related to the affirmative topic.
Example: Team members shared success stories such as conducting innovative outreach and new approaches to service delivery.
- 4. Dream** about what could be possible with innovation. Building on what has worked well, generate creative ideas as a group that could help achieve breakthroughs and/or make dramatic progress on the affirmative topic.
Example: Team members shared their ideal future state. The team envisioned a very positive program review that reflects a breakthrough achievement for their program. The team discussed resources, partnerships, and connections that would help contribute to program success.
- 5. Design** changes to systems, processes, and strategies based on practicalities. As a group, identify and agree on what it would take to accomplish dreams from the previous step.
Example: The grantee team discussed in-depth what is required to mobilize FP nurse coordinators for monitoring and supporting service sites through site visits. Questions remained about whether the nurses will directly provide support or flag issues for Title X staff to address.

6. Deliver on the dreams by allowing participants to self-organize any actions required to make changes. Actions may include participants making individual and collective commitments to making changes that align with the design considerations. Plan action steps that will be needed in order to achieve the goal.

Example: Grantee team members were energized by applying their successes and strengths to make changes in their program. They feel they can confidently implement their action steps using existing resources and building on past successes. A specific action step was:

1. *Meet with FP nurse coordinators to review Title X requirements. Determine whether they have sufficient time and knowledge to address problems on-site or if Title X grantee staff need to follow up.*

What are the next steps?

After completing the *Appreciative Inquiry* process as a team, reflect on the results. As needed, periodically convene the team and stakeholders who participated in the *Appreciative Inquiry* process to ensure change is progressing toward the ideal future state. To implement specific action steps, participants can use a structured [quality improvement](#) approach such as the Model For Improvement and/or [Plan-Do-Study-Act \(PDSA\)](#) to test and implement changes.

References:

- Bushe, G.R. (2013). Kessler, E., ed. The Appreciative Inquiry Model. The Encyclopedia of Management Theory. Sage Publication.
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). Appreciative inquiry: a positive revolution in change. *Appreciative Inquiry*, ch 1. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412983464>
- Watkins, S., Dewar, B., & Kennedy, C. (2016). Appreciative Inquiry as an intervention to change nursing practice in in-patient settings: An integrative review. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 60, 179–190. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.IJNURSTU.2016.04.017>

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Appreciative Inquiry Worksheet



Step 1: DEFINE the affirmative topic.
Frame the original problem in a positive way. Identify an affirmative topic to work toward.

QUESTION	GROUP RESPONSE	NOTES
1. What is the original problem? 2. How can the problem be framed (or “flipped”) positively to become an affirmative topic?		

Step 2: DISCOVER what works.
Break into pairs or small groups to interview one another. Explore what has worked well in the past and what is working well now.

QUESTION	GROUP RESPONSE	NOTES
1. Tell a story related to the work on this affirmative topic that was compelling to you. 2. Describe a time when you felt proud about the work you have done related to this affirmative topic. 3. What approaches have you tried when working on this affirmative topic?		

Appreciative Inquiry Worksheet



Step 3: DREAM about what could be.

Discuss the ideal future state related to the affirmative topic. Suggest ideas freely in this step, regardless of their practicality.

QUESTION	GROUP RESPONSE	NOTES
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What is most important about having success around the affirmative topic?2. What do you wish you had to help achieve the affirmative topic? (Resources, partnerships, other connections, etc...)3. What innovative and “out-of-the-box” ideas will help accomplish this affirmative topic?4. What represents a breakthrough achievement for this affirmative topic?5. Is there a way to visually represent your common aspirations?		

Appreciative Inquiry Worksheet



Step 4: DESIGN around the practicalities. Consider the systems, processes, and strategies that will help achieve the dreams from the previous step.		
QUESTION	GROUP RESPONSE	NOTES
1. Imagine the dreams are achieved. What part do you see yourself/your agency playing in this scenario? 2. What systems, processes, and strategies will help achieve each of the dreams discussed? 3. What people or organizations would be needed to make this happen?		
Step 5: DELIVER your dreams. Plan action steps to ensure that the Dream and Design elements are implemented.		
QUESTION	GROUP RESPONSE	NOTES
1. What steps must be implemented to achieve this dream? Consider the changes to systems, processes, and strategies discussed above. 2. Who is responsible for making these changes?		