Appreciative Inquiry Overview

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Purpose of this Tool:

This document was created in 2021 by the NWRA, with help from the (B)JEDI Committee Members, for the purposes of equipping Early Childhood Professional Registries with resources and tools supporting their exploration of racial equity policy and procedural alignment, as well as identifying areas of interest or "readiness" for mobilizing to embed or operationalize equity in their work.
“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the World. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it's in everyone. As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Nelson Mandela
Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an organizational change philosophy, strategy and framework created by David Cooperrider and his team at Case Western University. Appreciative Inquiry has been used by corporations, nonprofits and global initiatives to improve outcomes\(^1\), stimulate creativity and efficiencies, and engage larger communities to bring about transformational impact.

Appreciative Inquiry is fundamentally tied to the positive psychology\(^2\) revolution and the brain science of neurogenesis, which has determined that your thoughts can actually rewire your brain.

Appreciative Inquiry joins two powerful words and concepts:

- **To appreciate**: to value, to esteem, to recognize the best in people or the world around us; to affirm past and present strengths, successes and potentials; and to perceive that those things give life, health, vitality, excellence to a living system. Appreciate also means to increase in value by recognizing, prizing and honoring the system or the focus of what you're looking at.

- **Inquire**: to have questions, and be curious about your world to explore, to discover, to reopen, to see new potential possibilities, to discover or search for new ways of thinking, doing and executing.

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Organizations are living systems

When we bring Appreciative Inquiry into organizational change we are asking questions or looking at systems through a lens of appreciation; whereby we are giving value and we're focusing on a specific part of the system.

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\(^1\)https://www.champlain.edu/ai-home/what-is-appreciative-inquiry/who-uses-appreciative-inquiry

\(^2\)https://positivepsychology.com/positive-psychology-ted-talks/
“We live in worlds that our questions create. Strengths, not only perform, but they transform.”

How we ask questions matters

AI is founded on the theory that we can change, recreate or reframe our system just by asking specific questions, crafted in a specific way.

Appreciative Inquiry, is a high engagement, fully affirmative process for positive organization and community change. It is appreciative with a positive bias.

The AI process begins with the study of what is working, when the organization or community is at its best. This leads to the profiling, lifting and examination of the positive core of the system. It is a gathering of information that highlights the features, situations and attributes that create greatness. Then we study what caused the success and how it can be leveraged to create something new and better.

Appreciative inquiry engages strategic partners and key allies in co-creating a collaborative plan for change.
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<tr>
<th>Categories of Stakeholders</th>
<th>Group, Department or Function</th>
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| **Information**: People or groups who have knowledge or information needed to make decisions. | • Practitioners  
• Researchers  
• Users |
| **Influence**: People or groups whose position, knowledge, or resources give them influence in the decision-making process. | • Executives  
• Policy makers  
• Board of directors |
| **Impact**: People or groups whose relationships and activities will be impacted by decisions and outcomes. | • Customers  
• User groups  
• Youth |
| **Investment**: People or groups whose investment of time, money, research, people, space, materials, and so on is needed for success. | • Suppliers  
• Shareholders  
• Foundations |
| **Interest**: People or groups who have an interest, emotionally or relationally, in the outcomes. | • Advocacy groups  
• Family members |
| **Innovation**: People or groups whose different ways of thinking and being and whose life experiences can bring novel ideas and ways of working to the process. | • Think tanks  
• Artists  
• Futurists  
• Youth  
• Elders |

Traditional organizational change, examines deficits and asks what is not working. AI flips the entire conversation and begins by asking What are we doing well? What are we most proud of?
Appreciative Inquiry follows a specific 5-D strategy: Define, Discover, Dream, Design that invites members of system and their allies and stakeholders to examine the positive, co-create a large vision, propose a solution and commit to co-delivering a project that builds the foundation for the near future.
5-D cycle: Each step of the cycle includes a guiding statement and specific questions that define and drive the process.

Define:
Identify an affirmative topic choice. “What are we trying to create together?”

Discover:
Examine the best of what is. What is going well? What created these conditions?

Dream:
Channel the vision and voice of the future. What will the next five years look like? What is the most expansive, grand, ideal vision we can conjure together?

Design:
Declare provocative propositions. Draw it (literally). What can we change immediately? What can we amplify and build upon?

Destiny:
Publicly own your commitments and “make it so”. Develop timelines, mobilize resources, define inputs and outcomes.

Appreciative Leadership:

“Appreciative Leadership is the relational capacity to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power- to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm and performance- to make a positive difference in the world.”

Appreciative Leadership, Diana Whitney, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, Kae Rader

Quotes and resources found in Appreciative Leadership (2010) Whitney, Trosten-Bloom, Rader
The Five Core Strategies of the Appreciative Leader:

Inquiry:
Allows people to know that you value them and their contributions. When you ask people to share their experiences of success or thoughts for the future and you sincerely listen to what they have to say, you are telling them “I value you and your thinking”

Illumination:
Helps people understand how they can best contribute. Through the practice of illumination you can help people learn about their strengths and the strengths of others. You give them confidence and encouragement to express themselves, take risks, and support others on working on their strengths.
Inclusion:

Gives people a sense of belonging. When you practice inclusion, you open the door for collaboration and co-creation. This, in turn, creates an environment in which people feel they are a part of something. When they feel part of something, they care for it.

Inspiration:

Inspiration activates systems, it draws people into the process of creating and sustains efforts through challenges. Inspiration is ignited through empathy and compassion and a desire to create a better world. Words and actions that are aligned is a powerful way to open hearts and minds.

Integrity⁴:

⁴https://static1.squarespace.com/static/57c32e32d482e921b76e77a4/t/5d81339629447844308dfa72/1568748440396/integrity_-_henry_cloud.pdf
Tools:

- The Appreciative Interview (for Workforce Registries)
- The Appreciative Tapestry

Resources

- Cloud (2006) Integrity: The courage to Meet the Demands of Reality