



## Exercise 1: Appreciative Inquiry (AI) A Team Building Process

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an approach to organization change developed by Dr. David Cooperrider and his colleagues at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western University. Find out more at:

Appreciative Inquiry Commons at: <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu>.

Time required: 2-3 hours

### 1. Appreciative Inquiry Core philosophy:

- Whatever you want more of already exists in a group or an organization.
- What is working well around here?

### 2. Appreciative Inquiry: Assumptions

- In every group or organization, something works.
- What we focus on becomes our reality. If we look for problems, we will find them (and make them bigger). Search for and amplify solutions that already exist.
- The act of asking questions influences the group in some way. The language we use creates our reality.
- Envisioning the future is more clear and possible when it is grounded in the reality of the past.
- If we carry forward parts of the past, they should be what is best about the past.
- It is important to value differences and to recognize that reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ADAPTED FROM: Open Source Leadership Strategies, Inc. [www.opensourceleadership.com](http://www.opensourceleadership.com)



### 3. Appreciative Inquiry interviews:

Appreciative interviews provide a forum for discovery, learning and relationship building. People like recalling stories of past successes and sharing hopes and aspirations for the future. Appreciative interviews are energizing, both for the person who is interviewed and the interviewer. Effective appreciative interviews are as much about the experience of storytelling and relationship making as they are about the data collected. This exercise requires a relaxed atmosphere and the willingness to listen and learn from the interviewee.<sup>2</sup>

Everyone on the team should conduct at least one interview with another team member.

Appreciative interviews vary in length, depending on the number of questions. In this case, the interview might last between 15-20 minutes plus an additional 10 minutes to complete the post-interview summary.

**Note: A complete interview guide is provided including the post-interview summary.**

### 4. Suggested questions for interviews:

- 1) Tell me what motivated you to become a trustee? What do you value most about being a member of this board and its larger mission?
- 2) Think back to your most significant leadership experience you have had in your career. A time when you felt really alive, engaged, and proud of yourself and your performance. Describe the experience. What **strengths** surrounded you? What **values** were at play? How has this experience influenced you in your role today?
- 3) Think back to a successful project or activity that was particularly satisfying in terms of teamwork or a collective achievement. A moment or period where you felt you made a real difference because of the **collaboration** among the group. Describe that time. What are the one or two reasons you felt **engaged**? What contributed to this being a peak experience? What made the team effective? What do you think was your own most valuable contribution to the team? What could this board do to promote these types of experiences?
- 4) If you could make three wishes come through in order for your board to evolve to its full potential as a team, what would they be?

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<sup>2</sup> Appreciative Team Building: Positive Questions to Bring Out the Best of Your team. Diana Whitney, Amanda Trosten-Bloom, Jay Cherney and Ron Fry, 2004



- 5) What single small change could we make that would have the biggest impact in improving our work as a board team right now?

## **5. Whole Group Data Sharing and Storytelling**

After all of your group's interviews are done, get together in a plenary session to share and make meaning out of what has been learned.

### **Plenary session questions:**

- 1) What did you find most surprising in your interviews?
- 2) What are the team's greatest strengths?
- 3) What are some of the key factors for a successful team?
- 4) What values do we have in common?
- 5) What are the group's aspirations for this team?

**Note key points on a flip chart. Identify emerging themes.**



## **6. Lessons learned and commitments**

Ask each team member to reflect individually on what has been learned and how it contributes to and is required for the team's success. Ask each team member to make a list of everything they will do more of, less of, and the same as on behalf of the team's success. (10-15 minutes)

Record those lists on separate flip chart sheets and post them all on the wall.

As a team, walk around the room and read everyone's commitments.

**What does the team wish to do more of, less of, and the same, as it moves forward into the future?**

Make a master list of all the individual and collective commitments.

## **7. Board Members' Guiding Principles**

Identify the most important three to five items and convert them into guiding principles.

Some of the areas around which you may want to craft principles include:

- Communication: full voice and listening to understand
- Diversity of opinions and views
- Meeting management: homework, timelines, etc.
- Decision-making
- Recognition
- Commitment
- Leadership (responsibility and accountability)
- Building Relationships: respect, integrity, inclusion
- Conflict of Interest
- Confidentiality



## **8. Code of Conduct**

A Code of Conduct serves to define acceptable behaviours, clarify the rules of civil engagement, promote high standards of practice, and provide a framework for professional conduct and responsibilities.

Through their codes of conduct or codes of ethics, school boards have enshrined values that guide ethical behaviour and norms for relationships among board members.

**Exercise:** If the board has a code of conduct or ethics – ask members to review and compare their guiding principles and their actual code of conduct. Does it have to be amended according to their collective commitments?

**SOURCE:** Adapted from The Center for Ethical Leadership.