Appreciative Inquiry
Broadway: Diversity in Progress

History of Program

Throughout the 1990s, as African Americans moved into a traditional Polish American neighborhood of 30,000 people in Cleveland, Ohio, racial tensions surfaced. African Americans had become one quarter of the population by 2000. The local community development corporation, Slavic Village Development, has a community organizing team that organizes area block clubs and civic associations, has a youth organizing program, leads a community organizing training program for residents, is involved in organizing issue campaigns in the Broadway Slavic Village neighborhood. In 2001, SVD applied for and received funding from the Association for the Study and Development of Community to develop a diversity project. After researching best practices and promising strategies, the group decided to adapt appreciative inquiry, an organizational change strategy developed by David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. The group was drawn to the asset-based approach and thought it would prevent typical resistance they had encountered when addressing racial tensions and lack of participation by African American residents.

Slavic Village Development, with assistance from Cleveland State University, worked during the next 15 months on a project to help the community inquiry into comfortable diverse relationships in the neighborhood. The SVD staff organizers, key institutional representatives, and resident leaders established the Broadway: Diversity in Progress (BDP) program. The essence of the AI process involves participants discovering their own positive experiences on a specific topic, developing a common vision around these experiences that builds on the community's positive core, and designing action and organizational change that embody the community at its best. Applying the process to a large working class neighborhood involved innovation of the AI model since participation was voluntary among residents who had limited time. They began by selecting as the positive topic "comfortable diverse relationships."

Program Overview

The BDP project developed three primary means for carrying out the work: 1) The monthly meetings of the BDP steering committee, 2) AI pairings of dissimilar groups through intentional guided encounters, and 3) a conflict intervention team for responding to racial incidents when they occurred.

BDP Steering Committee: The project first developed a diverse 30-member steering committee, made up of residents, neighborhood youth and institutional leaders. They hold a monthly meeting over a meal that includes one-on-one interviews and small group work to develop a new vision of the neighborhood. Residents of diverse ethnic traditions, ages, and genders discover past moments of cooperation they have experienced and explore their unique cultures. The goal is to join together to form a common language and identity that can serve as a basis for collectively engaging in constructive processes to overcome and prevent problems that arise in the neighborhood.

The BDP Steering Committee also creates action steps to carry out their vision. In 2002, they formed a Mural Committee that secured funding and contracted with a local artist to design and paint a mural on the side of a Broadway Avenue business in the heart of the neighborhood. Over 50 residents helped create a 30-foot mural that focuses on the neighborhood history and the strengths of living and working in a diverse community. The Steering Committee is also developing a Welcome Wagon through which residents personally greet and provide information packets to new residents moving into the neighborhood. In addition to the typical information, residents will learn of a "menu of opportunities" for

community residents to get involved, receive a vision statement about life in the community, and hear about neighborhood values and norms.

AI Pairings: the BDP steering committee developed a process they named AI Pairings in which two or more dissimilar groups come together for an appreciative encounter, often over a meal. The pairings always include one-on-one **interviews** across groups that discover experiences of comfortable diverse relationships. Following the interviews, those present begin to draw insights from the stories that point toward **promising principles**[1] and a vision of cooperation. Each pairing concludes with brainstorming and deciding on several **action steps** they can take that will further promote comfortable diverse relationships. The leaders of the paired groups work with the staff organizers to bring the two groups together for one evening, but then the resulting relationships take on a life of their own

BDP has held many pairings between diverse neighborhood groups that have built community and an increased understanding between them. A pairing between two African American and three white churches resulted in the formation of a Churches Alliance Project. The members of this alliance, a core-group from the initial pairing as well as pastors and lay people from other neighborhood churches, are now working together on neighborhood issues. The "Hands Across Turney Festival" was the result of a pairing between residents of two distinct areas separated by Turney Road—a mixed race, upper-middle income new subdivision and an adjacent mixed race, working class neighborhood. The initial pairing resulted in a decision to plan a public event between the two areas to build positive relationships across class boundaries. This one intensive and appreciative encounter spurred the development of a series of potluck dinners, a joint diversity celebration, and a planned summer festival called "Hands Across Turney." In other parts of the neighborhood, several pairings have involved senior citizens getting to know local youth, which were preceded by sensitivity training for each group before they came together. Youth learned the challenges of growing old; seniors became less fearful of youth as they learned to know them and their unfamiliar customs.

Conflict Intervention Teams: Broadway: Diversity in Progress created a new approach to intervening when racial incidents occur. The BDP Conflict Intervention Team is a diverse group of BDP members and community organizers that has conducted over 15 interventions in its two-year existence. When an incident occurs that might have racial overtones, a community organizer conducts an intake. Members of the team respond by meeting separately with the parties to learn their perspectives, educate those involved, and help resolve the problem. These are not formal mediations but informal gatherings in homes where the team listens to people's anger and fear, gathers information, offers stories of successful strategies, identifies local assets that can be drawn upon, and discusses alternatives. In exploring alternatives, African American team members often coach white residents in understanding and communicating with their black neighbors. These African Americans serve as a bridge by providing a positive and personal experience with another race. These interventions help resolve the incident and those involved experience support from their neighbors. Residents on the street connect to new resources in the neighborhood, develop strategies and contacts with other block clubs, and form connections to institutional support in the city. Rather than experts in mediation or race relations, the team members embody the ideal of comfortable diverse relationships. In addition to modeling these relationships, they reach out as a bridge to another culture and increased the social capital across race in the neighborhood. Recently, three Conflict Intervention Team members and two community organizers were trained in mediation.

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[1] In appreciative inquiry these principles are typically referred to as provocative propositions and often entail a longer statement of the group's ideal around a theme. Given the working class context of the neighborhood with some literacy problems, BDP has developed methods that are less dependent on written statements. Promising principles are therefore shorter and easy to remember.

The George Gund Foundation has provided two years of funding for ongoing support of the project and for the development of materials for training other neighborhoods in the process. More recently, the Community Organizing Department decided to reorganize their work to more fully reflect the appreciative approach, changing structures and incorporating community building at all levels. The work of BDP has contributed to building relationships, reducing tensions, increasing diverse participation, and changing the identity and vision of the changing neighborhood.

Principles of Practices

Facilitators/Third Party

The third party facilitates the appreciative inquiry process. They are partial insiders, either community organizers on staff with the community development corporation or a paid consultant. They guide the design process, such as adapting the AI model and creating an organization (e.g. the formation of the steering committee, pairings, and conflict intervention team).

Typical of community organizing, the staff facilitators coach neighborhood residents as leaders of the process. Residents serve as co-chairs of all committees and typically meet with an organizer prior to a meeting for coaching and to develop an agenda.

Third parties do not mediate but orient residents to inquire into life-giving experiences in their past. This includes coaching participants to do appreciative interviews and in analyzing interview data to develop promising principles.

Confidentiality and Neutrality

Neutrality is inconsistent with the philosophy of appreciative inquiry, which includes the notion that positive image creates positive action. Third parties, therefore, work at co-constructing a positive future, moving the group away from negative self-images and away from solving problems, which is seen as a negative and self-defeating approach.

Confidentiality is antithetical to changing the narrative of the community. The heart of the AI process is the one-on-one interview and participants are encouraged to tell the stories they heard from their partner. Even in conflict interventions, there is an assumption that information will be shared with neighbors and other potential resource people.

Process

Create a compelling focus that invites people into the process rather than challenging people's assumptions through prejudice reduction or anti-racism activities. Confronting people's prejudice creates defensiveness and drives people away from the process. Instead, a core-planning group of stakeholders examines the traditional identified problem (i.e. racial tensions) and then "flips" it to its positive counterpart (i.e. comfortable diverse relations). This becomes the topic for the appreciative inquiry.

Shift the focus away from racial conflict or prejudice to moments of cooperation. Even if comfortable diverse relationships occur only occasionally in the midst of racial tension, these positive experiences can provide insight into what works in this community. Through discovering and telling these stories we search for the root causes of success (not failure).

The 5-D process strategically discovers the best of what has been to create a shared vision of the future, from which action can be planned and implemented to increase life-giving experiences between races and to change organization and structures. This is done through pairing residents for interviews using the Appreciative Inquiry model. Relationships form as they together discover their own positive stories of comfortable diverse relationships in the neighborhood. These stories are then collectively analyzed by the group to create a set of principles that become the basis for constructing a new collective vision of the neighborhood. The participants then develop action steps to bring the vision into reality and ensure sustainable change within our community. For a more in-depth explanation of the 5-D process see Appendix 1.

Co-construct the future by envisioning a harmonious community based on actual experiences of cooperation across diversity. Unlike some visioning processes that start with the ideal or imagined, appreciative inquiry draws on the best of the past, and the root causes of those peak experiences, as the foundation for co-constructing a future. Appreciative inquiry addresses to basic questions: 1) what gives life? and 2) what more can we do to increase that which gives life? Participants are the designers of their future.

Engage the whole system in the process. Find ways to engage the diversity of voices and all levels of a community in the 5-D process. This includes residents, representatives from local business, institutions, and government. An innovation the Broadway: Diversity in Progress created was to go to existing groups through the pairing process, rather than making participants come to the BDP meetings.

Create positive and intimate experiences with those different from oneself to transform images and the perceived identity of "the other." Reduce social distance to create a sense of community and oneness.

Goals

1. Increase diverse participation in block clubs and other community involvement opportunities in the neighborhood.
2. Reduce racial tensions by discovering and promoting stories and principles of comfortable diverse relationships.
3. Change the narrative and identity of the neighborhood from one of racial tension to one of harmony and inclusion.

Content

Content is co-constructed by a diverse cross-section of the community. Data emerges from within the lived experiences of participants through storytelling. Participants in the process then analyze the stories and abstract themes and insights from them to create promising principles and a shared positive vision of the neighborhood.

Amidst known racial tensions are stories of cooperation, friendship and unity across racial lines. These stories need to be discovered, celebrated, and drawn upon to learn.

The outcome of the dream phase is a new theory of cooperative diverse relationships that emerges from analysis of the stories and guides the development of future action. Participants are co-inquirers and develop the content (theory and action) themselves.
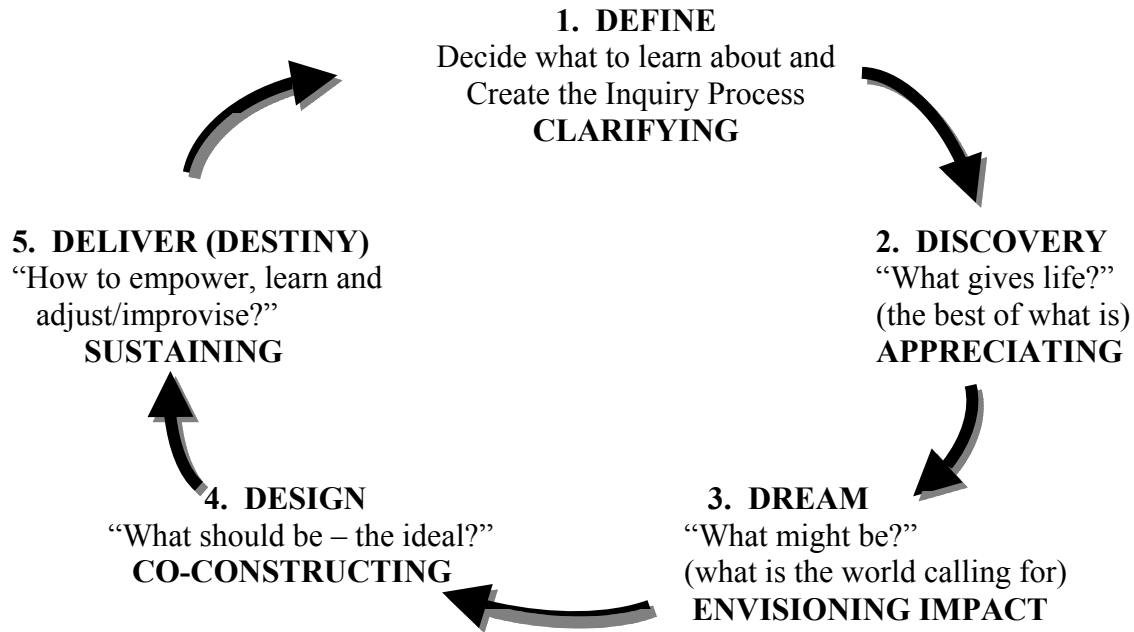
In addition to powerful stories, best practices from the community are highlighted as illustrative case studies. These can be businesses or organizations promoting diversity, a unique relationship, or a particular street block club where diverse residents engage each other.

For more on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry see Appendix 2.

Methodological Note

The research on Broadway: Diversity in progress began with the development of the project. In my professional capacity I served as a consultant to this project for the last 3 years. Appreciative inquiry is an action research process, through which community organizers and residents conducted interviews and analyzed the results to develop a set of principles on comfortable diverse relationships. Throughout this period I also conducted a separate set of interviews and focus groups as research for my dissertation. The grounded theory I developed focused on the pathways for building trust between African American and Polish American residents. The principles of practice listed in this report draw on the reflections of the community organizers and core members of the BDP steering committee. I also drew from past proposals and reports written by the project staff. Given my background in conflict transformation work, I drafted the principles in an effort to integrate AI principles of practice and the process concepts that emerged from the BDP project.

Appendix 1
THE 5-D CYCLE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

1. DEFINE
Decide what to learn about and
Create the Inquiry Process
CLARIFYING

5. DELIVER (DESTINY)
"How to empower, learn and
adjust/improvise?"
SUSTAINING

2. DISCOVERY
"What gives life?"
(the best of what is)
APPRECIATING

4. DESIGN
"What should be – the ideal?"
CO-CONSTRUCTING

3. DREAM
"What might be?"
(what is the world calling for)
ENVISIONING IMPACT

DEFINE: Decide what to learn about and create the Inquiry Process

DISCOVER: Conduct an inquiry into the topic and assemble the stories and key ideas that come out of the inquiry.

DREAM: Generalize those discoveries into an image of how the organization would function if what you have discovered were fully alive in the present.

DESIGN: Develop ideas about the organization's socio-technical architecture when infused with what has been discovered.

DELIVER/DESTINY: Innovate/align the organization's socio-technical architecture with the Dream and the Design phases, AND build AI learning competencies into system.

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DEFINE
(SET THE STAGE)
Choose the Positive as the Focus of Inquiry
Establish a Guidance Group
Affirmative Topic Choice
Create the Inquiry Process

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As a preparatory step, the Definition phase includes agreement on the positive as the focus of inquiry; identification of topics for the inquiry; and agreement on processes for the Appreciative Inquiry in a particular organization or community. Topics are those identified qualities that an organization chooses to guide the formulation of questions for the interview guide, which becomes the key process in the Discovery phase of the 5-D Cycle.

The topics may be bold hunches about what gives life to the organization or they may come from an area of concern for the organization e.g. Racism/Sexism, Safety, Innovation, Customer Service, Teamwork, etc. Most important, the topics (usually 3-5 areas for inquiry) represent what people really want to discover or learn more about, topics that will lead to conversations about what kind of future the people desire for their organization.

The topics that an organization chooses to inquire into are fateful since the seeds of change are implicit in the first questions that are asked. Human systems will grow in relationship to the topics they study or inquire into. The definition phase is complete when a planning group in an organization has a clear agreement on the topics that they want to see grow and flourish in their organization; a prepared interview guide to be used in exploring these topics; a clear decision about who will be interviewed and who will do the interviewing; and, a strategy for who will be involved in the Dream and Design phases.

DISCOVER
(VALUE THE BEST OF "WHAT IS")
Inquire Into "Life-Giving" Stories
Locate the Themes in the Stories

The core task in the discovery phase is to appreciate the best of "what is" by focusing on times of organizational excellence when people have experienced the organization as most alive and effective – with an emphasis around the focal topic. In order to understand the unique factors that made the high points in an organization possible, people deliberately let go of analysis of deficits and carefully inquire into and learn from even the smallest examples of high performance, success and satisfaction. They tell stories about all aspects of their organization – inspired leadership; generative relationships and partnerships; technologies that make work go more smoothly or facilitate better service; structures that support innovation and creativity; planning that encompasses new ideas and diverse people; opportunities to learn; and so on.

In the Discovery Phase people share stories of exceptional accomplishments, discuss the core life-giving factors of their organizations, and deliberate upon the aspects of their organization's history that they most value and want to bring to the future. Members come to know their organization's history as positive possibility rather than a static, problematic, eulogized, romanticized or forgotten set of events. Empowering and hopeful ideas almost always emerge from stories that are grounded in an organization at its best. Where appreciation is alive and stakeholders throughout a system are connected in discovery, hope grows and organizational capacity is enriched.

DREAM

(ENVISION "WHAT MIGHT BE")
Explore What the World is Calling for
Write Macro Provocative Propositions for the Organization as a Whole

The Dream Phase involves challenging the status quo by envisioning a preferred future for the organization. This is the time when the organization's stake holders engage in possibility conversations about the organization's position, its potential, its calling, and the unique contribution it can make to global well being. For many, this is the first time they have been invited to think great thoughts and create great possibilities for their organization. As the various stories of the organization's history are shared and illuminated, a new historical narrative emerges, one that engages those involved in re-creating the organization's positive history that, in turn, gives life to its positive future. Thus, the Dream Phase is both practical, in that it is grounded in the organization's history; and, generative, in that it seeks to expand the organization's potential.

It is this aspect that makes Appreciative Inquiry different from other visioning or planning methodologies. As images of the future emerge out of grounded examples from its positive past, compelling possibilities emerge precisely because they are based on extraordinary moments from the organization's history. These stories of unique and joyful moments are used like an artist's paints to create a vibrant image of the future.

By creating Provocative Propositions that make clear the shared visions for the organization's future, there is created a beacon, a set of unique statements that paint a picture of the group's vision of the organization's most desired future. It is this collection of Provocative Propositions that provide the clear direction for all of the organization's activities. Just as a stream always follows the call of the ocean, the organization will move toward its highest and most imaginative visions for the future.

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│                          DESIGN                             │
│                 (DIALOGE "WHAT SHOULD BE")                   │
│              Re-conceive Structures And Processes           │
│              Write Micro Provocative Propositions           │
│               Get Everyone Into The Conversation            │
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The Design Phase: (a) re-conceives the socio-technical architecture of the organization and, (b) it may also involve broadening of the conversation to stakeholders that have not yet been involved. This ensures that everything about the organization reflects and is responsive to the shared vision of the organization's future created in the Dream phase. Both the Dream Phase and the Design Phase involve the collective construction of positive images of the future. In practice the two often happen in conjunction.

The Design phase typically develops greater detail – such as in the move from an architects "two dimensional rendering on paper" of a new building, to the architects 3-dimensional model or even the blueprint of the new building. Of course in this case, the "architects" are the people who will inhabit the reconceived organization and the "redesign" of the organization is much more than just changes in the walls or the windows.

The "Socio or social system" components of the organizational architecture include: the set of roles, jobs, and relationships, the organizational structures and the management systems and policies and, the governing beliefs and assumptions that exist to support the core work of the organization. The "Technical System" components of the organizational architecture include the business processes that transform inputs into outputs, and the technology used in those processes. As stakeholders create the organization's social architecture they are defining the basic infrastructure. Constructing an organization requires careful consideration and widespread dialogue about what the structure and the processes of the organization will be. Possibilities for the organization are raised by the kinds of questions asked: What kind of leadership structure is needed and what is the preferred behavior of the leaders as they do their work? What is the organization's strategy and how does it get formulated and carried out? What are all of the structural elements needed?

Once there is agreement on the myriad possibilities for the new socio-technical architecture and an image of how they will function in relationship to the each other and to the organization as a whole, the task of the group is to articulate those decisions in Provocative Propositions. These statements make explicit the desired qualities and behaviors that will enable each part of the organization to function in a way that moves it toward the higher visions articulated in the Dream Phase.

The final phase creates ways to Deliver on the new images of the future, both the overall visions of the Dream Phase and the more specific Provocative Propositions of the Design Phase. It is a time of continuous learning, adjustment and improvisation, much like a jazz group, all in the service of shared ideals. The momentum and potential for innovation is extremely high by this stage of inquiry. Because of the shared positive images, everyone is included in co-creating the future.

The key to sustaining the momentum is to build an "appreciative eye" into all the organization's systems, procedures, and ways of working. For example, one organization transformed their department of evaluation studies, to valuation studies, dropping the "e", and with it the accumulated negative connotations that have attached themselves to the word "evaluation." Others have transformed strategy development processes, focus group methods, surveys, performance appraisal systems, leadership training programs, diversity initiatives, almost every possible function of an organization, into an appreciative process that inevitably creates higher levels of excitement, enthusiasm for the work and commitment from the people involved.

The Delivery/Destiny phase is on going. In the best case, it is full of continuing dialogue; revisited and updated possibility discussions and statements; additional interviewing sessions especially with new members of the organization; and, a high level of innovation and continued learning about what it means to create an organization that is socially constructed through poetic processes in a positive frame that makes full use of people's anticipatory images and of the realization that inquiry IS change!

Appendix 2
SIX PRINCIPLES OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

While the 5-D Cycle for applying Appreciative Inquiry is presented here as a systematic approach to organizational change, it is important to understand that variations on, or even alternatives to this model will inevitably emerge as each system takes the AI approach and makes it their own. Once grounded in the principles of AI, organizations inevitable become generative and creative, which leads to even more innovation in the use of AI itself.

The Six Principles

1. **Constructionist Principle:** What we believe to be real in the world is created through our social discourse, through the conversations we have with each other that lead to agreement about how we will see the world, how we will behave, what we will accept as reality. Knowledge about an organization and the destiny of that organization are interwoven. What we believe to be true about an organization, that is the way that we "know" it, will affect the way we act and the way that we approach change in that system. Thus, the way we know is fateful.

2. **Poetic Principle:** A valuing of story telling as a way of gathering holistic information that includes not only facts, but also the feelings and affect that a person experiences. There is a recognition that stories (like all good poetry) can be told about any aspect of an organization's existence. A community or organization's past, present, and future are an endless source of learning, inspiration, interpretation and possibility. A group's story is constantly being co-authored. We can inquire into anything and any living human organization.

3. **Principle of Simultaneity:** A realization that inquiry is change; that the first question we ask is fateful in that the organization will turn its energy in the direction of that first question, whether positive or negative; and, as a result, the seeds of change are embedded in it. Inquiry and change are not separate moments, but simultaneous.

4. **Anticipatory Principal:** The impact of anticipatory images; i.e., understanding that behavior and decisions about actions are based not only on what we were born with or learned from our environment, but also on what we anticipate, what we think or imagine will happen the future. Human systems are forever projecting ahead of themselves a horizon of expectation that brings the future powerfully into the present as a mobilizing agent.

5. **Positive Principle:** A belief that a positive approach to any issue is just as valid as a basis for learning and that it is just as contagious as a negative approach, which makes taking the positive stance an antidote to cynicism. The momentum for change requires large amounts of positive affect and social bonding; the more positive the questions to guide the group the more long lasting and effective the change.

6. **The Principle of Wholeness:** The whole system can have a voice in the future. The goal is to transform an entire organization at one time.