5. APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Basic format: Used in a variety of process settings, including workshops, dialogue, consensus-building and most kinds of group work.

Purpose: Focus on positive aspects of a situation, opportunities, strengths, proven capacities and skills and resources. Affirm, appreciate and build on existing strengths.

Uses: Problem solving, idea generation, policy development, planning, value and interest clarification, and community sustainability.

Duration: This will depend upon the process framework in which it is used.

Participants: Those who are part of a geographic or interest community, a group, an organization, a team or a family.

Key factors: In every organization, community and group setting some things work well — strengths, resources, skills, abilities. Identifying these key positive attributes and doing more of them can provide the means to successfully navigate change and transition.

Often in a workshop format, group members recall details of situations that they have handled well, that have been positive for the group or organization. They talk about why things went so well and how it felt “uncovering common themes of circumstances when the group performed well.”

After envisioning the future they would like to achieve, they develop strategies and actions based on their recognized and proven strengths.
Appreciative Inquiry asks members of a group to uncover and examine the basic underlying assumptions underlying the group’s espoused values and artifacts. This is difficult and requires what Chris Argyris has called “double-loop learning.”

The process should be led by a facilitator experienced in the use of dialogue and in assisting groups through collaborative change.
[Reference: Hammond, 1997]