



Frequently Asked Questions on Appreciative Evaluation

1. What is Appreciative Evaluation and what does it mean to incorporate it in my evaluation methodology?

Applying Appreciative Inquiry incorporates in your evaluation the systematic study of success.

It is just as serious and systematic as problem analysis and problem solving; and it is probably more difficult, because it requires continuous reframing of familiar problem focused language.

2. How exactly is Appreciative Inquiry applied to evaluation?

Appreciative Inquiry is applied to evaluation in several ways:

- § To focus an evaluation and develop the evaluation questions
- § To develop the logic model of a program
- § To develop hypotheses that will be tested during the evaluation
- § To collect qualitative data--to conduct individual and group interviews
- § To develop a survey (potentially not the best application, although it could be useful in some situations)
- § To develop an evaluation system

You can apply all four phases of Appreciative Inquiry or only one. There are tradeoffs in these choices, just as in the application of any other evaluation methods (cost, time, etc.) Once you understand the purpose, benefit, and contribution of each phase to your inquiry, you can make these choices to fit the needs of your particular evaluation.

3. What are the benefits of using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation?

An evaluator usually aims to contribute constructively to his or clients and beneficiaries by helping them learn and use that knowledge to make better decisions. For that evaluator, there are many benefits to using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation:

- § More honest data about a program's successes and challenges
- § Faster data collection, because it allows structured, large group participation
- § Fully participatory even compared to other participatory methods because of its dyad interview structure
- § Respectful of diversity by preserving everyone's language, even those who do not fit in the larger themes and agreements
- § Increased comfort and openness of participants
- § Rich contextual information through the storytelling
- § Highly empowering in having participants collect, analyze and make meaning of own data in real time
- § Motivating and energizing evaluation process that spurs action because of the focus on studying successes

4. Does Appreciative Inquiry create a positive bias in the evaluation methodology? Does Appreciative Inquiry veil problems and push people to see only what is good?

No. Appreciative Inquiry begins the study of a programs strengths and weaknesses from the study of its successful or peak experiences. These successful experiences could be the exception in a troubled program. As successes are studied, participants gain insight on what is happening in their system when things are working well. Through that, they begin to explore what would be needed to make these exceptional experiences their everyday work experience. So, they begin to identify problems or challenges that are inhibiting them from being at that higher level of performance. Identifying problems in the context of "what is preventing us from being successful all the time?" participants work on priority problems that are directly in the path to success. The evaluator captures alongside them all this useful information.

5. How do you talk about problems in Appreciative Inquiry?

You talk about problems in Appreciative Inquiry by exploring what is in the way of success. This discussion begins when participants respond to the "wishes" question. The "wishes" question allows participants not only to identify what is in the way of success, but also to apply their judgment in prioritizing these problems.

6. How is Appreciative Evaluation different from participatory and empowerment evaluation, and from the Most Significant Change approach?

Appreciative Evaluation is complementary to these approaches. It offers an excellent group process technology for full participation by all, for embracing diversity, and for individual respect. It also empowers and energizes the evaluation process.

7. When we say “*appreciative*” questions, do we mean “*positive*” questions?

Appreciative questions are those that direct respondents to study success, and provide their insights on a program or organization through that study. In other words, they “springboard” participants into an energized and appreciative study and analysis process. Positive questions are more passive and ask, “What do you like about a program? What are the strengths of a program?”

8. Does using Appreciative Inquiry push the evaluator to go beyond the boundaries of evaluation and into organizational development?

This is a challenge for an evaluator no matter what approach is being used. Especially in the case of international development, individual evaluators are mindful of the impact their presence and choice of methodology has on the system or program they are evaluating. So, the boundaries between evaluation and organizational development need to be drawn by each individual evaluator depending on personal philosophy, judgment and skill level.

9. How much training does an evaluator need in order to use Appreciative Inquiry in his or her evaluation work?

Evaluators (as trainers and facilitators) frequently try out new approaches and techniques. They incorporate Appreciative Inquiry fairly quickly in the types of questions they ask and in the processes they facilitate. By receiving some training and reading on Appreciative Inquiry, they can see benefits from using Appreciative Inquiry right away.

10. Is the method of dyad interviewing critical to the Appreciative Inquiry process, or can it be modified—e.g., used in a small group or in individual interviews?

The dyad method works best and offers maximum results. The dyad provides the best space for the interview, and the telling of your story by someone else is powerful. When that is not possible, adapt and modify to fit the needs of your evaluation.

11. Can you apply Appreciative Inquiry to part of an evaluation and use other methods for other components?

Some say it is an all or nothing. Most evaluation practioners know that things are almost never “all or nothing.” You constantly adapt. You may want to do random sampling, but if the floods prevent you from visiting Silet in Bangladesh, well, you visit where you can. So it is with Appreciative Inquiry. By all means, use the parts of it with which you are most comfortable, that enhance your effectiveness as an evaluator, and that get you better data and better utilization of results.