

**Appreciative Inquiry/Strategic Planning**

An approach to strategic planning that focus on the positive. It asks the question “What is working well in the organization?” It poses a series of questions designed to reveal the existing best practices and to carry forward what has been learned into the future. It has a highly structured process, moving through a series of steps sometimes called the Five “D” Cycle.

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| Define | Determine the area or topic of interest. |
| Discover | Conduct interviews using positive open-ended questions focusing on strengths and unique attributes.Identify patterns and themes from interview responses. |
| Dream | Create ideal possibilities. |
| Design | Decide what should be. |
| Deliver | Take and maintain action. |

**Core principles of Appreciative Inquiry**

1. In every group or organization something is working.
2. How you ask a question is important – language matters.
3. Asking questions influences groups in some way.
4. There are a variety of ways of seeing the same thing – it is important to value diversity.
5. Resistance to change is reduced when you carry forward stories or your success.

Questions to include:

* What was the best experience you ever had with this organization?
* What has the organization accomplished?
* What unique attributes does this organization bring to its program areas?
* What unique skills do staff member bring to their work?
* What positive benefits have you witnessed?
* Where has the organization made the most difference?

From there, identify common themes by grouping similar responses together. Next, document these key ideas and produce recommendations to the board.

Key ideas about organization strengths become the basis of the board’s second strategic planning session. The board focuses on replicating success stories within all areas of its operation. Organizational goals are framed in positive language and strategies are informed by what is already working.

This improves trust between stakeholders, and creates an increased sense of ‘ownership’ as people see their own feedback incorporated into the organization’s goals and objectives.