



An NGO Training Guide for
Peace Corps Volunteers

Module 2:
**Empowering People &
Strengthening
Organizations through
Asset-Based
Approaches**

MODULE 2

EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

Asset-based approaches, also known as strength-based approaches, encourage people to look at what they have rather than what they do not have; they empower individuals and groups to look at possibilities rather than problems. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is an asset-based approach that Peace Corps staff and Volunteers have found to be especially useful in working with organizations and communities over the last several years. After reading Module 2, “Empowering People and Strengthening Organizations Through Asset-Based Approaches,” you should have acquired the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to:

- Explain why asset-based approaches are more empowering than the traditional problem-based approach in development.
- Identify three uses for Appreciative Inquiry in working with an NGO.
- Demonstrate an ability to develop a set of questions and conduct an appreciative semi-structured interview. (If training participants interview each other, a suggested topic is, “The interviewee’s personal qualities and experiences that will be useful in empowering people and strengthening NGOs.” These interviews help soon-to-be Volunteers identify the personal assets they bring to their Peace Corps assignments.)

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

“Nothing is constant but change” describes the essence of a Volunteer’s life. Not only do Volunteers experience innumerable changes in their own lives, but also they work with people and organizations to make positive changes. Change takes people out of their “comfort zone.” It requires energy to overcome the inertia of the status quo. Here we investigate new and better ways of approaching change by looking first at an individual’s or group’s assets rather than their problems.

We are not suggesting ignoring problems. They exist. We are proposing that it is more energizing to start out by thinking of what an individual or group has (assets) rather than what they do not have. Individuals are encouraged to decide what is the ideal situation. Now that they know their assets and where they want to end up, they are in a better position to overcome the barriers (problems) to get where they want to be. Asset-based approaches put problems in perspective—problems need to be dealt with but they are not the biggest part of the picture.

When people use a problem-based approach, they often get “stuck.” Attention and energy are centered on solving various problems rather than making progress toward the chosen goal.

Consider the question, “Is the glass half full, or is it half empty?” What do you think? Will more be accomplished by worrying about the glass being half empty (the problem) or figuring out what can be done with the contents that half fill the glass (an asset)? Focusing on problems tends to sap people’s energy and lead to feelings of hopelessness. Positive approaches are empowering.

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A LEARNING MOMENT

Is there a part of your life you would like to change—physical fitness; relationships with family, friends, or a significant other; intellectual pursuits; hobbies; or other? Choose one thing in your life you would like to change for this “Learning Moment.”

First, think about your problem, what is lacking in your life, or what needs to be changed. Concentrate on what caused the problem, how might you have avoided the problem. Now consider possible solutions to your problem. How hard will it be to solve your problem?

Second, close your eyes and think of a time when you felt happy about the area of your life you now want to change. Take time to visualize a clear picture of where you were, who was with you, the colors, smells, and how you felt? Enjoy the picture. What made that time special? What were the elements that contributed to your sense of well-being? What actions might you take to incorporate some of the same elements into your life today? How might the lessons learned from reflecting on past success help you change the current situation?

Did these two approaches feel different? Which is more empowering? Which approach is more motivating?

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All organizations have problems; their proverbial glasses are not full. Organizations also have at least some past successes or they would not still be operating. New organizations have founders with past successes. The Peace Corps and many other development organizations have come to realize that organizational development results are greater and longer lasting when the individuals involved with the organization (stakeholders) become active participants in a positive change process.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and other asset-based approaches are at the cutting edge of thinking in change management. It is a new and decisive direction. These approaches change our language and theories of organizations—organizational development—by looking at what works in an organization and what a group has, rather than what it lacks.

Sharpening your skills in interviewing and listening will help you hear people's stories and find the language to use these methods more effectively. Appreciative Inquiry and other asset-based approaches are equally applicable in a Volunteer's work with individuals, organizations, and communities, as well as NGOs.

Train your Counterparts, co-workers, and community partners in these asset-based techniques. Training them has dual benefits:

1. Local capacity is built so the methodologies are available after you leave.
2. Your Counterparts' and co-workers' cross-cultural and language abilities enable them to better use the methodologies in the local community.

In the last 10 years, much has been written about AI and asset-based methods. If you are interested in exploring further, see the Resources section at the end of this module.

ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

Asset-based approaches, also called strength-based approaches, concentrate on what organizations have and how the organization can build on what it has. We spend a considerable amount of time in this module discussing one asset-based approach, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), where the major asset is the learnings generated from past peak experiences. AI illustrates the general concepts of asset-based approaches—positive attitude, active participation, and focusing on strengths rather than problems.

Asset-based approaches first determine an organization's assets:

- Hard assets—buildings, equipment, supplies;
- Personal assets—the skills, knowledge, and commitment of the board, staff, volunteers, and other stakeholders; and
- Intangible assets—the organization's respected name and networks of cooperating and partner organizations and institutions.

Next, ask the organizational development question, "How can the organization's assets best be used to build a stronger organization with the capacity to achieve its mission?"

Traditionally, organizational assessment identified needs and problems within an organization. The problem-based approach, sometimes called the deficit model or liability model, helps us develop strategies to solve problems but does not encourage expanding on possibilities. Thinking is limited by focusing on fixing what is broken, not building what could be in the future.

The problem-based approach is also fragmented in terms of obtaining resources. Resources that are acquired by the organization are directed at solving problems that resulted from past actions, not at building an ideal organization.

Identification of problems still has its place. Problems must be solved before the organization can move from where it is today to where it envisions itself in the future. For example: An NGO is about to lose the lease on its office space. This is a problem. If the board and staff focus only on the office lease problem rather than on achieving their vision for the NGO, they may end up with a new office that fits the “old organization” but not the “new organization.” Yes, they do need to solve the office lease problem, but in the context of their vision for the NGO.

An asset-based organizational development model has three simple principles:

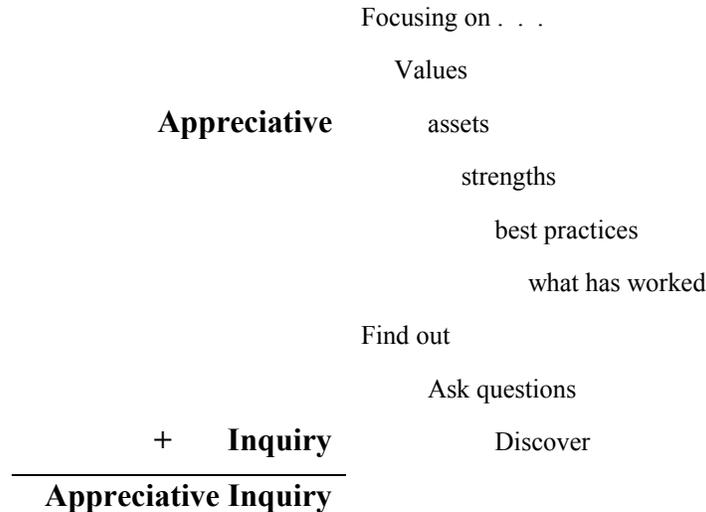
1. The first principle defines the process as “asset-based.” This strategy starts with what is present in the organization, the capacities of its board, staff, and volunteers, as well as hard assets and intangible assets. People become aware of the organization’s strengths, an empowering insight. This is differentiated from what is problematic, or what the organization needs, which encourages organizations to look outside the organization for advice, expertise, and someone to solve its problem, because the organization is lacking in resources.
2. Because the process is asset-based, the second principle is, by necessity, “internally focused.” This development strategy concentrates on the agenda-building and problem-solving capacities of those within the organization. The strong internal focus stresses the importance of decisions, creativity, hope, and control.
3. Because the process is asset-based and internally focused, the third principle then will be “relationship driven.” The central challenge for the asset-based approach is to constantly build and rebuild the relationships between and among stakeholders, other organizations, and local institutions.

In facilitating organizational development, concentrating on “assets” rather than “deficits” or “problems” may seem like an exercise in semantics. Where you start the thought process may appear insignificant, but the result is a very significant shift in the way people see the world, and how others think and behave. Appreciative asset-based thinking is positive and future focused and it encourages people to participate.

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

AI represents a paradigm shift, away from viewing organizations as stable, enduring, and logical, where we can fix anything, to viewing organizations as organic, products of the moment, open to continuous change and reconstruction. David Cooperrider and his colleagues at the Weatherhead School of Management, Case Western Reserve University, developed Appreciative Inquiry in the mid-1980s. AI suggests a different approach to change management and organizational development

The theory behind AI holds that our beliefs about social systems have a powerful effect on the nature of social “reality.” Not only do we see what we believe, but also the very act of believing creates it. From this point of view, new and evocative theories of groups, organizations, and societies are a powerful way to aid in change and development.



The old paradigm—the “problem-oriented” view of organizing and inquiring into an organization—suggests that groups and organizations not only have problems, but also are problems to be solved. The old approach reduces the possibility of new ideas and thoughts emerging. The new paradigm suggests a shift away from looking at organizations as problems to be solved to looking at them as miracles to be appreciated.

Drawing on research and writing from diverse fields such as organizational behavior, psychology, sociology, and education, as well as his own experience working with organizations, Cooperrider challenged the traditional change-management theories and created a new set of ideas that have been tested by organizational development practitioners throughout the world. The body of knowledge and experience with AI continues to grow, shaped by the contributions of many who, attracted by its potential, add their own ideas and

experiences to create an ever-expanding global learning forum. What follows is an introduction to the widely accepted parameters for AI.

Contrast Between Problem-Solving and AI Approaches

Problem-Solving Approach	Appreciative-Inquiry Approach
Felt Need: Identification of the Problem	Appreciating and Valuing: the Best of “What Is” (Discovery)
Analysis of Causes	Envisioning “What Might Be” (Dream)
Analysis of Possible Solutions	Dialoguing “What Should Be” (Design)
Action Planning (Treatment)	Innovating “What Will Be” (Delivery/Destiny)
Basic Assumption: An organization is a problem to be solved.	Basic Assumption: An organization is a mystery to be embraced.

(Reprinted with permission from Cooperrider, D. L., and Suresh Sirvastra, *Collaborating for Change: Appreciative Inquiry*. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco. 2000. p. 23.)

AI builds capacity. It begins by valuing the organization and the culture; by learning about the organization, its relationships, and its environment; and by identifying and building on existing strengths rather than examining problems and deficiencies in detail. AI attempts to generate a collective image of a new and better future by exploring the best of what is and has been. Appreciative Inquiry puts organizations back in touch with their “deepest living values.” AI is based on the premise that if those who are impacted participate in the change process their commitment to the organization is deepened. It can help an organization create its niche by identifying its collective hopes and dreams, and then designing a process for realizing them.

AI has several applications. It can be used to understand specific organizational issues such as gender, teamwork, project monitoring, leadership, or client service. Volunteers and the NGOs they work with use the AI approach to change a function of the NGO governance (personnel management, financial management, etc.). If the organization is small, an AI facilitator can work with the whole organization. How you use AI depends on at which stage of organizational development the NGO is, what stakeholders want to change, and how creative you are in applying this approach.

The AI process is broken down into four steps called the 4-Ds (discovery, dream, design, and delivery/destiny), which guide members of an organization,

group, or community through the AI process. Unfortunately, the 4-Ds do not often translate neatly into another language.

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A LEARNING MOMENT

Martin Luther King, in his famous “I have a dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial, did not say, “I have an action plan.”

Dreams inspire and motivate. Martin Luther King knew this, and so do those who use Appreciative Inquiry as a development tool.

Action plans are important, but they come in the design phase after an individual or group has clarity on their dreams and is committed to making their dreams come true.

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DISCOVERY

Through appreciative interviews, gather the stories that give life to the organization, find out about moments of excellence, core values, best practices, peak experiences, and what people appreciate most.

First, select a topic the group feels would benefit from an appreciative inquiry. This topic might involve all or a part of an organization. Frame the topic in an affirmative way—a simple positive statement. For example, “Create an inclusive team environment.” Because a topic can be emotionally charged or have a negative history, take extra care to focus on creating a positive statement.

Second, write a set of appreciative questions that inspire and encourage people to frame their organizational stories (e.g., “Can you tell of an experience you had with your team or group that made you particularly proud?”). Simply talking about one’s “peak” experience can easily degenerate into social banter and clichés. The creation of the right questions is a critical aspect of the process.

Third, conduct the interview. Collect the group’s stories through appreciative interviews. Remember the interviews are as important as the data collected. It is in having the conversations that the organization is changed, and the view of the future becomes more hopeful.

Limiting the process to a few topics or a smaller group (versus the whole organization) appears to make the process more manageable and understandable to others. Deciding how broad the scope should be depends on what the group wants to accomplish.

Having the group tell their stories helps create a sense of wonder. Hearing a good story fills you with delight. Stories get beyond the hard, quantifiable data

of organizational assessment to the group's most inspiring moments. The stories carry meaning and truths that elude even the most sophisticated information systems. From the stories, the group then extracts core values and best practices on which to build a vision of the future.

*"I've come to the conclusion
that getting the stories that people have
about the topic is what is most important.
Fresh images and insights come
from exploring the real stories
people have about themselves
and others at their best."*

— Bushe, Gervase,
Organizational Development Journal,
Fall 1995, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 14–22.

DREAM

Envision positive possibilities, results, what might be—conduct visualization.

The group then finds the best examples of satisfying and inspiring experiences with the organization, and, in detail, determines what possible circumstances made the best happen. The group takes the stories, envisions the future, and writes affirmative statements, dream statements, which describe the idealized future as if it were already happening. (Note: In some of the earlier AI work, dream statements were called “provocative propositions.”)

Criteria for affirmative dream statements. The dream statement is:

Grounded—it grows from the best of our experiences in the past.

Creative—it stretches and challenges us.

Desired—if it could be fully realized we would want it. Is it something we are willing to work to make happen?

Stated in affirmative and bold terms.

In the present tense—as if it were already happening.

The dream stage works best when it involves as many members of the organization or group as possible. The group uses the interview data as an artist uses a palette of colors—to create an image. The process of coming to agreement on a set of affirmative statements creates a compelling vision of the organization

at its best, and this in itself motivates new behavior. People take initiative and act differently because these statements align organizational visions with people's internal sense of what is important.

Grounding the group in historical tradition and facts distinguishes Appreciative Inquiry from other visioning methods in which dreams serve as the primary basis for the vision. Because the appreciative statements are reality-based, people connect to them and are inspired to do what works.

Dream statements will vary from group to group, but, if done with care, they will reflect the power, drama, and excitement of the group. Here are some examples of NGO dream statements:

- We provide an important service to the community.
- We know our service is appreciated by many, and it is our commitment to service that helps others.
- We are respected for our knowledge in the field and our willingness to share it.
- We devote time to learning more to keep our expertise current.

DESIGN

Create the structure, processes, and relationships that will support the dream—what should the ideal be? How can we create an organization that supports our ideal vision of the future?

The next step is to design the ideal organization or part of the organization so that it can support the dream statements. The essential question that focuses the work is this: "What would our organization look like if we realized our dreams for the future?" An NGO working with youth might have the dream statement, "Youth are included in all levels of decision making in this organization." An organization with this ideal would have youth representatives on the board of directors and as members of various committees.

DELIVERY/DESTINY

This stage of the process is evolving from the development of an implementation plan, or delivery, to a more free-form approach, destiny, which applies AI throughout the organization and lets the process take over, rather than a plan.

The delivery or destiny stage focuses on the momentum for change and keeping the AI process going throughout the organization. In this way, the process itself changes the organization into the type it envisions itself to be. The organization can sustain itself through the momentum of the process, bringing other stakeholders into the process and acting on the group's dream statements.

ACTIVITY 2:1

OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

The topic for our Appreciative Inquiry is: How do you create an effective team of Peace Corps Volunteers? Work with a group of three to five other training participants. Take turns conducting appreciative interviews and using the information to create an effective team of Volunteers.

DISCOVERY

Ask the interviewee, “What was the best team experience you ever had?” Ask the interviewee to use that experience to answer the following questions:

- What was truly exceptional?
- What went right?
- What were the elements that made it exceptional?
- How did you feel about being involved?
- What did you hear others saying?

Listen to the stories.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the interviews. What are some of the common themes of people’s peak team experiences? Write them in the space below or on a flip chart.

Common Themes of Peak Team Experiences

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Continued

Activity 2:1, continued

DREAM

Based on the common themes that emerged from the interviews with fellow trainees write three to five appreciative statements. Use the criteria for appreciative statements in the previous table to assess their strength. Note your dream statements below or on a flip chart.

Dream Statements

1. Our team _____
2. Our team _____
3. Our team _____

DESIGN

In the design phase, we brainstorm ideas and develop strategies. It is during this phase that we think about action. What can we do to move closer to our dreams? Consider the dream statements your team developed. What ideas or strategies could you implement to create an effective team of PCVs? Write them below or on a flip chart.

Ideas and Strategies

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Continued

Activity 2:1, continued

DELIVERY/DESTINY

In this step of the 4-D cycle, we develop a plan for how to proceed. It is important to make a plan that excites and energizes your team and makes use of the unique talents and interests represented by your team members. Write your action steps below or on a flip chart.

Action plan to deliver our dreams and achieve our destiny

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Imagination is more important than knowledge.

— Albert Einstein

As Peace Corps Volunteers, you may be interested in some of the underlying concepts of Appreciative Inquiry. The concepts are pulled from many different areas and have evolved into a powerful development methodology.

Image and action are linked. David Cooperrider's research shows this relationship quite clearly, with many examples from diverse fields such as medicine (the placebo effect) and education (Pygmalion effect or the halo effect). The behavior of human beings is influenced not only by the past and current environment, but also by our images of the future. Successful organizations have a widely shared, positive guiding image that galvanizes action. Therefore, in the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D process, a great deal of time is spent in creating a shared dream or vision for the organization.

Organizations move in the direction of the questions they ask. The seeds of change are sowed in the first questions asked. The kinds of questions you ask of each other determine what you find, and what you find determines the journey's direction. How you approach organizations or communities has tremendous implications. What is the starting point? Does one look for what is wrong or look at what works, where the innovations are, what excites people about the place, what they are most proud of, and their deeply held values? The first step in the 4-D cycle is to discover what works in an organization.

All organizations have something about their past to value. Organizations, no matter how conflicted at the moment, can find a best practice, a set of experiences, or a time in history when things worked well. Instead of spending all of the time searching for deficits, balance things out by spending time analyzing what has worked well in the past. This work provides a platform from which to spring toward the future. The stronger the focus on what worked in the past, the further out and more vibrant the dream of the future. Organizations are not fully aware of their own potential. By beginning the visioning process with an inquiry aimed at discovering moments of excellence, the stage is set to allow richer and more provocative possibilities to emerge.

Organizations are not fixed. So often organizations are maligned rather than appreciated and understood. They are seen as problems or, worse yet, as unavoidable evils that are needed to make things happen in the world. It is easy to start thinking about organizations as if they cannot be changed; yet human

beings created them. Virtually any pattern, system, or structure created by humans is open to alteration.

Building appreciative skills is a key leadership task. Appreciative leaders are those who notice and heighten positive potential within an organization and see radical possibilities beyond the boundaries of problems. Appreciation has a tremendous mobilizing affect. Effective leaders understand how to use this to bring people together around issues of mutual concern.

Appreciative leaders are able to engage organizational members in dialogue by asking the right questions. For example, “If we were able to do one thing tomorrow, and if we did it superbly well and consistently, would it have significant positive results in our work?” They ask questions that encourage people to recognize what is good and positive. These leaders engage in dialogues to learn, to be creative, to dream, to act.

Appreciative Inquiry works in different cultures. The experiences of many that have used this approach confirm that AI works well in different cultures. AI has been used in Kenya, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Egypt, Peru, Panama, India, Senegal, Uganda, and Russia. In some cultures storytelling, a valuing of the best of the past, and community-wide processes for consensus building are common.

What about “fatalistic cultures?” (A fatalistic culture tends toward accepting without question that something cannot be changed.) Those who have worked extensively in such cultures say that it is particularly important to stimulate hope where people are already overcome by the weight of fatalism. An unbalanced focus on problems and their structural causes can be overwhelming. It is precisely in cultures where fatalism is dominant that approaches centered on positive attitudes and values make the greatest contribution.

*To understand what is happening today
or what will happen in the future,
I look back.*

—Oliver Wendell Holmes

AN NGO'S STORY

A Peruvian NGO participated in the Global Excellence in Management (GEM)'s Organizational Excellence Program. As a part of its visioning work, it developed a provocative proposition about creating a network of NGOs in Peru and changing its own role from that of a provider of direct services to one of capacity-builder of other organizations. In a bold attempt to take action, it organized a workshop called Imagine Cono Norte that brought together NGO staff and grass-roots leaders of Cono Norte (Northern Cone region of Lima, with a population of about two million people) to identify assets of the region and create propositions for the future.

(From *Getting Comfortable with Appreciative Inquiry*; reprinted with permission by Claudia Leibler, director of Global Excellence in Management) Internet: www.geminitiative.org/getting.html

The power of AI is the “can-do” attitude it fosters. You are likely to have only a few opportunities to use the full-blown AI process. But there will be many opportunities in your Volunteer service to start a conversation by asking people about their peak experiences; to dream together about a future grounded in the reality of past successes; to design a project, program, and organizational structures that support people’s vision of what “should be.”

Appreciative Inquiry fosters positive attitudes for approaching change.

INTERVIEWING SKILLS

Asking the right questions is magic. Who answers the questions, when they are asked, how they are asked, how the answers are listened to, and how answers are collected, interpreted, and used makes a difference.

At the heart of all good appreciative and participatory approaches is sensitive interviewing—listening to others “generously.” Without it, no matter which methods and approaches we use, the conversations and discussions will yield poor information and limited understanding.

Strong interviewing skills largely depend on self-awareness, perceptive listening, and careful observation. These qualities take time to develop and refine.

Interviewing in a culture and/or language different from your own presents additional challenges. We suggest that you identify and train local individuals with good “people skills” who want to improve their interviewing skills. This

way you transfer skills and increase local capacity. Below is a set of interviewing tips you may want to share.

INTERVIEWING TIPS

The interviewing planning process should be a team effort.

- Identify the major topics/issues.
- Determine what the team thinks is important to understand more about.
- Decide who will be interviewed, where, when, and how.
- Plan how interviews will be conducted and information recorded.
- Assign roles and responsibilities and promote good group dynamics.
- Carefully formulate open-ended and nondirective questions, using:

Who . . . ?

Where . . . ?

When . . . ?

What . . . ?

Why . . . ?

How . . . ?

Raise awareness on the importance of setting, timing, body language, seating arrangements, biases. Encourage sensitive listening and an open attitude among all participants.

Develop an “opening statement” on who the information is for, why the information is being collected, how the information will be handled, and confidentiality. (One AI practitioner found that attributing quotes on appreciative dream statements substantially increased positive conversations throughout the organization.)

Sequence the questions to achieve a conversational rhythm. Start with descriptive questions about present behaviors, activities, and experience. Later, move to tougher questions about interpretations, opinions, or feelings about behaviors and activities described. Ask questions about knowledge and skills bearing on the issue at hand. Ask questions about past activities first, then about the present, then the future—do they see applications for the future?

Be quiet and let the person talk—do not be afraid of a bit of silence. If you ask a question that demands some thought, give your respondents a moment to collect their thoughts before answering. Ask questions one at a time; avoid double questions that require respondents to figure out your meaning before answering the question. Avoid asking “why” too often. Use questions that

are neutral (nonjudgmental). Consider asking people to respond via role-playing or ask simulation questions (e.g., “Suppose ...”).

Preface questions when required. Do so to focus people’s attention and to give them time to prepare to change the subject. Make transitions easy: Announce the beginning of the next section of an interview.

Summarize to bring closure to a section. Ask if the respondent has anything to add. You can also make a direct announcement: “What I’m going to ask next ...”

Ask probing and follow-up questions if required. Ask these kinds of questions to obtain additional detail, to fill in information that seems to be partial, and when you think the answer could use elaboration or clarification.

Support and recognize your interviewee’s responses. Make sure you give cross-culturally appropriate verbal and nonverbal support. Your interview has to be two-sided, not an interrogation.

Facilitate obtaining the information you need. Listen carefully to make sure the interview is working. Adjust your questions, your approach, your style, or your focus if you are not getting the information you need. This is distinct from the fact that data may simply not exist—make sure you know the difference. Give signals to encourage the respondents, redirect, and move on as required. As the interview winds down, let respondents know how long you think the interview will take. If it is taking much longer than anticipated, negotiate additional time or schedule an additional visit.

Record data. Before you begin, ask permission to record. Tape-record the interview and transcribe it; to do this you will need reliable recording equipment and a person who knows the issues well enough to faithfully transcribe. Or you can take notes during an interview (and, rarely, after the interview), which is a much more common way to record the data.

*“The important thing is not to stop questioning.
Curiosity has its own reason for existing.
One cannot help but be in awe when one
contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life,
of the marvelous structure of reality.”*

— Albert Einstein

ACTIVITY 2:2

TRY OUT YOUR QUESTIONING SKILLS

Work in groups of two or three to reword/rearrange the following “yes-no” questions to be affirmative and open-ended. What problems arise from each of the “yes-no” versions?

- Talking with a person who looks disappointed:
“So you didn’t like that, huh?”
- A pilot to a new copilot:
“Do you know how to fly this thing?”
- A nurse to a patient:
“Have you been taking your medication?”
- Parent to teen:
“Don’t you think it would be better if you did your homework first?”
- One colleague to another:
“Do you think that plan will work?”

Note: Sample answers are found at the end of the module.

Can you think of ways to use open-ended appreciative questions in your daily Volunteer life? How might the ability to ask open-ended appreciative questions affect your ability to work with NGO stakeholders?

EXAMPLES OF POWERFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Why do you feel this is important?
2. How does it feel when you achieve a personal goal?
3. How would you describe your success?
4. What can you do to replicate your success?
5. How would you describe the path to the future?
6. What do you see as your role in the future?
7. What has worked? Describe what you have learned.
8. Have you experienced anything like this before? What did you do?
9. What can you do yourself? With others?
10. What do you hope for?
11. If you could make one change, what would it be?
12. Imagine a successful point in the future. What does it look like?
13. What part would you want to play in the future?
14. What would you want to share?

Appreciative interviewing is not limited to the discovery phase of the AI process. Use these interview techniques anytime you need to gather information. As a Volunteer you are constantly asking questions to learn about the culture, how the local economy functions, how your host agency works, etc. Ask your questions appreciatively.

Over and over again Counterparts and host country NGO partners express their appreciation for PCVs' enthusiasm, optimism, and "can-do" attitude. AI and other asset-based approaches compliment these Volunteer strengths. Use your personal strengths and the asset approaches when building individual, organizational, and community capacity—they will serve you well.

One last thought as you use asset approaches. It is essential to consciously seek to involve those who are often ignored—the poor, women, minorities, the very young, and the very old. They too bring unique assets to the development process.

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KEY TERMS

Key terms are defined as they are used in the module. A space is provided to write the translation of the word or phrase into the local language. Work with your language teachers to find the right translations and build your technical vocabulary as you study this module.

Appreciate refers to the act of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, best practices, success, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems.

Appreciative Inquiry “refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective actions which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization or society as a whole.” (Cooperrider, D.L., and S. Sirvastra, *Collaborating for Change: Appreciative Inquiry*. Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco. 2000. p. 159)

Asset refers to something that has a future value. An NGO’s assets are not limited to money, buildings, and equipment; they include committed people, a respected organization, and the capacity to put ideas into action.

Inquire is the act of exploration and discovery: to ask questions, to be open, and to see new potentials and possibilities. Synonyms: discovery, search, systematic exploration, and study.

Stakeholders are those who work with, benefit from, and/or care about an organization.

Vision refers to a shared idea of the results to be achieved.

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RESOURCES

These resources are available through the Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange (ICE). The citations are presented as they appear in *The Whole Ice Catalog*.

The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry. Sue Annis Hammond. (Kodiak Consulting.) 1996. 61 pp. (ICE No. TR110)

Simple, practical explanation of “Appreciative Inquiry” and how to use it. Also includes useful information on project planning and nongovernmental organization development.

Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community’s Assets. John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight. (ACTA Publications.) 1993. 376 pp. (ICE No. CD051)

Guide to asset-based community development, summarizing lessons learned by studying successful community-building initiatives in hundreds of U.S. neighborhoods. Outlines what local communities can do to start their own asset-based development, including how to rediscover their local assets; how to combine and mobilize these strengths; and how “outsiders” in government can effectively contribute to the process of asset-based development.

Internet:

www.mapnp.org/library an Internet library source for many topics including AI.

www.mgeneral.com — source for innovative management concepts including AI.

www.idealists.org — a site with links and information to the world of NGOs and AI.

www.geminitiative.org – organization funded by USAID that works with the AI and asset-based approaches.

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ACTIVITY 2:2 Reference

SAMPLE ANSWERS

There are a number of possible answers. The open-ended questions need to lead to a more detailed answer than a yes or a no, and the affirming question needs to have a sense of the positive and possible.

Talking with a person who looks disappointed:

Closed: So you didn't like that, huh?

Open-ended: How do you feel about what happened?

Affirming: What did you learn from what happened?

A pilot to a new copilot:

Closed: Do you know how to fly this thing?

Open-ended: How did you learn how to fly?

Affirming: What is your most exciting flying story?

A nurse to a patient:

Closed: Have you been taking your medication?

Open-ended: Tell me about your medication?

Affirming: What improvements have you seen with your medication?

Parent to teen:

Closed: Don't you think it would be better if you did your homework first?

Open-ended: What is your plan for homework?

Affirming: What success have you found in completing your homework?

One colleague to another:

Closed: Do you think that plan will work?

Open-ended: How do you think the plan will work?

Affirming: What indicators of success do you feel the plan provides?

TRAINER'S NOTES

MODULE 2 EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND STRENGTHENING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH ASSET-BASED APPROACHES

Overview:

In this module participants learn about and practice methods using the asset-based approaches, including Appreciative Inquiry (AI), to empower people and strengthen NGOs. Interviewing skills are covered as a necessary component of the asset-based approach.

Time:

Reading	1 hour
Activities and debriefing activities	3 hours

Materials:

Flip charts, markers, and a map of training community or a typical community.

Preparation:

- Review the module and adapt readings and activities to fit the local circumstances.
- Asset-based approaches are about an attitude toward approaching change. This attitude is especially critical for Peace Corps Volunteers. The Volunteers are more likely to be accepted into the community as partners when they approach people at their sites in an appreciative way, looking for what is good rather than what is wrong. Find examples of the assets of local people, their organizations, communities, and culture to share with training participants.
- Visit some of the websites listed in the Resources section at the end of the module to access current information on AI and asset-based methods.
- Arrange for additional resource materials to be available for training participants.
- Design a training plan for the module that includes how materials will be copied and distributed to training participants and a training schedule. Make special arrangements for activities, if needed. Schedule activity debriefings, and schedule time with training participants to assess the extent to which the module's learning objectives have been achieved.
- Display the training schedule in a location accessible to training participants and staff.

TRAINER'S NOTES

ACTIVITY 2:1 OPPORTUNITY TO PRACTICE APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Overview:

To master a technique people need practice. This activity provides training participants with the opportunity to practice all four steps of the Appreciative Inquiry process and gain an appreciation of the power of appreciative thinking.

Time: 2 hours

Materials:

Flip chart and markers.

Procedure:

Ask each training participant to recall the best team experience they ever had. Each participant is then asked to tell the story of that experience while the rest of the group is encouraged to engage in dialogue with the speaker. The facilitator encourages members to set aside their clichés and preconceptions, get firmly grounded in their memory of the actual experience, and fully explore what about themselves, the situations, the task, and others made this a “peak” experience.

Using information from the discovery phase, training participants move through the three remaining phases of the AI process to realize their vision of an effective team of Peace Corps Volunteers.

Note: The topic of this activity can be changed to explore a local issue. An Appreciative Inquiry topic related to local youth could be interesting.

Debriefing the experience and processing the learnings:

The group is likely to get excited and charged as they discuss their experiences. When people are engaged in stories and positive experiences, they tend to “come alive” and share more of themselves and their insights. The group may find the dream statements a challenge to write. Once the group “breaks through” and comes to a consensus of what is meaningful, exciting, and important to them as a group, they will see and/or experience the power of a common vision and understanding of the future. Pulling from their own positive experiences and stories can help Volunteers in many situations throughout their Peace Corps service.

TRAINER'S NOTES

ACTIVITY 2:2 TRY OUT YOUR QUESTIONING SKILLS

Overview:

In this activity participants practice developing appreciative open-ended questions.

Time: 30 minutes

Materials:

Flip chart and markers.

Procedure:

In groups of two or three work through the questions below. Translate each of the “yes-no” questions into an “open-ended” question. Have the trainees discuss the problems that may arise with each of the “yes-no” versions. Ask them to make each of the questions affirmative. Note: Sample answers are found at the end of the module.

- Talking with a person who looks disappointed:
“So you didn’t like that, huh?”
- A pilot to a new co-pilot:
“Do you know how to fly this thing?”
- A nurse to a patient:
“Have you been taking your medication?”
- Parent to teen:
“Don’t you think it would be better if you did your homework first?”
- One colleague to another:
“Do you think that plan will work?”

Debriefing the experience and processing the learnings:

- Was it easy to convert each question into an open-ended question?
- Was it more difficult to make it an affirming question?
- Can you think of examples in your own life where you could use more affirming questioning skills?
- How might changing your questioning style help in your work with NGOs?

