Two Approaches to Solving Community Concerns
Problem Solving vs. Appreciative Inquiry

This activity is designed to showcase two distinct approaches for tackling community challenges. The first embraces the commonly employed "needs" approach, one that focuses on the identification and prioritizing of local problems. The second approach seeks to highlight the hopes and dreams of local residents, showcasing the talents and skills that individuals can offer in helping achieve their dreams.

How to use this activity:

1. Divide your workshop participants into approximately two equally sized groups. If you have a large number of individuals, create groups with about 7-10 people per group. It is important, however, that you have an even number of groups (i.e., two, four, six, etc.).

2. Have group 1 (and groups 3, 5, etc.) complete the "Problem Solving Process" exercise, while group 2 (and groups 4, 6, etc.) should complete the "Appreciative Inquiry Process" exercise. These activities should take 15-20 minutes to complete. Please make sure that groups 1, 3, 5, etc. are not aware of the activity that groups 2, 4, 6 etc. are completing (and vice versa).

3. Ask each group to select a member to record the key highlights of the group's discussion.

4. Have the recorder (or another member chosen by the group) share with the rest of the findings of the group's deliberations. Limit each group's presentation to 3-5 minutes.

5. Ask the entire group of participants to reflect on the two approaches to identifying community issues. Contrast the positive and negative features of each of the two approaches. Which one would the participants prefer to use in their communities? Why?

Problem-Solving Exercise:

1. Each Group Member: Identify the 3-5 major problems facing your community at present. Write these on a piece of paper. Do not discuss your list with anyone at this point.

2. Have each person in the group identify the list of problems on his/her list. Once everyone has shared their list, briefly discuss the various problems that were identified. This represents the "What Is" state of the needs assessment process.

3. As a group, come to an agreement on the most pressing problem facing your community from the list that was generated by your group.

4. From the standpoint of your group, "What Should Be" the situation with regard to the top problem that you have identified? That is, what is your group's realistic appraisal of what the ideal situation should be with regard to this problem?

5. Identify the causes of the problem.

6. Discuss possible solutions to the problem. Select 2-3 solutions that your group feels are most viable.

The Appreciative Inquiry Process:[1]

1. Discovery Phase: Identify the peak moments of excellence in your community -- times when people experienced the community in its most effective state. That is, discuss the "best of what is" in your community, even the small victories that your community has experienced.

2. What were the conditions that made these accomplishments possible?

3. Dream Phase: Envision what might be in your community. That is, what are the achievable dreams that you have for your community that can be built on the past or current accomplishments of your community?

4. Design Phase: Create a strategy to carry out the dreams that your group has identified in the earlier phase. What can be done to build on the current qualities of the community, and what aspects of the community need to be strengthened in order to achieve your group's vision and hope for the future?

5. Doing Phase: Identify the specific steps your group would like to take to put your dreams into action. That is, what innovations or experimentations will your group undertake to reach your shared vision or dreams?

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[1] Cooperrider, D.L., P.F. Sorensen Jr., D. Whitney. And T.F. Yeager (eds.). 2000. Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Towards a Positive Theory of Change. Champaign, IL: Stipes Publishing.

Group 1: The Community Problem-Solving Approach

1. Each Member of Your Group: Identify the 3-5 major problems facing your community at present. Write these on a piece of paper. Do not discuss your list with anyone at this point.

2. Have each person in the group identify the list of problems on his/her list. Once everyone has shared their list, briefly discuss the various problems that were identified. This represents the "What Is" state of the needs assessment process.

3. As a group, come to an agreement on the most pressing problem facing your community from the list that was generated by your group.

4. From the standpoint of your group, "What Should Be" the situation with regard to the top problem that you have identified? That is, what is your group's realistic appraisal of what the ideal situation should be with regard to this problem?

5. Identify as a group what you believe are the causes of the problem.

6. Discuss possible solutions to the problem. Select 2-3 solutions that your group feels are most viable.

Group 2: The Appreciative Inquiry Process[1]

1. <u>Discovery Phase</u>: Identify the peak moments of excellence in your community -- times when people experienced the community in its most effective state. That is, discuss the "best of what is" in your community, even the small victories that your community has experienced.

2. What were the conditions that made these accomplishments possible?

3. <u>Dream Phase</u>: Envision what might be in your community. That is, what are the achievable dreams that you have for your community that can be built on the past or current accomplishments of your community?

4. <u>Design Phase</u>: Create a strategy to carry out the dreams that your group has identified in the earlier phase. What can be done to build on the current qualities of the community, and what aspects of the community need to be strengthened in order to achieve your group's vision and hope for the future?

5. <u>Doing Phase</u>: Identify the specific steps your group would like to take to put your dreams into action. That is, what innovations or experimentations will your group undertake to reach your shared vision or dreams?

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