

What is Appreciative Inquiry?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is both a *perspective* and *process* for accomplishing any critical organizational task.

As a perspective, AI focuses on assets, strengths, and the most positive experiences rather than problems, challenges, and threats. Traditional change management theory looks at what is wrong or broken, makes a diagnosis, and tries a fix. AI, instead, looks at what is working and attempts to amplify it.

As a process, AI utilizes a variety of techniques, including structured personal interviews, facilitated small and large group conversations, consensus building activities, creative humor, brainstorming, and other interactive, engaging strategies to identify what a group or individual most wants and needs to do more of to accomplish important goals and tasks. At its heart, AI is a reflective process of group discernment.

Where did Appreciative Inquiry come from?

Cleveland, Ohio, actually. Dr. David Cooperrider and his associates at Case Western Reserve University discovered AI in the mid-1980's while conducting a traditional organizational assessment and change consultation with the Cleveland Clinic. Since then AI has gained increasingly widespread acceptance as a powerful organizational change approach within corporate, nonprofit, faith-based, and government settings. Today, AI remains a kind of "open source" process to which others have contributed, expanded upon, and fine-tuned for a variety of organizational tasks. However, throughout its evolution, AI has remained true to both the perspective and process described above.

What will happen in the Appreciative Inquiry?

You will be asked to participate in a series of facilitated conversations and activities. That's pretty much it.

You'll likely find the conversations interesting, if not fascinating. The activities are not physical but creative. What is required of you?

- **Be fully present** (e.g., unhook yourself for a little while from devices that tend to pull you away).
- **Be present from beginning to end.** A group AI is typically a day (6 to 8 hours). In some cases it can take as little as 3 hours and in others it can take days, depending on the size of the group. .

What will be the outcome(s) of the Appreciative Inquiry?

The outcomes are determined both by the topic or focus of the inquiry and in the dynamic of the inquiry as it happens. In this sense, AI is a process that honors emergence. In other words, the expected outcomes might be changed by the group in the process of the inquiry. However, **typical outcomes are often essential living, working documents** such as strategy plans, action plans, agreements, consensus statements, core principles and practices, vision and mission statements, values, branding strategies, marketing messages, and qualitative evaluations, etc., etc.

Appreciative Inquiry as a Process

There are five basic stages of an AI. The typical AI will move your group smoothly and seamlessly through them.

1. **Definition:** Defining the topic of the inquiry. Sometimes the group will do this and other times the topic of the inquiry will be defined by a planning group (e.g., organizational leaders, executive committee members, board of directors, or other designated work groups that collaborate with the AI facilitator to define the topic).
2. **Discover:** In the discovery stage your group will begin to inquire into the exceptionally positive moments of its work and look for themes in those moments.
3. **Dream:** In the dreaming stage your group will

Appreciative Inquiry Overview

begin to create its “preferred future” – that is, how it would like things to be or to work on a day to day basis.

4. **Design:** In the design stage your group will work together on how to make that future a reality. .
5. **Deliver:** The delivery stage often only gets started at the end of an AI as it involves putting into action the ideas, plans, tactics, or “next steps” that were identified in the previous stage. To “deliver” is to operationalize the “design.”

Appreciative Inquiry as a Perspective

There are eight assumptions that Appreciative Inquiry holds to be true for any organization and which inform its unique perspective.

1. Something is working well in every organization, system, and situation.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Language is powerful and the language we use creates our reality – and that of our organization.
4. Reality is created in the moment and there are multiple realities.
5. People have more confidence going into an unknown future when they carry forward parts of the known past.
6. If people and organizations carry parts of the past into the future, they should be the best parts of the past.
7. The very act of asking questions somehow influences the outcome.
8. It is important to value differences.

For More Information

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About Your Certified AI Facilitator



Tom Klaus, PhD is a Maryland-based nonprofit consultant, speaker, trainer, and writer. Through his consultancy, Tenacious Change, LLC, he strives to animate people, organizations and whole communities to lead change for the greater good. In addition to his consulting

practice, he is a Certified Appreciative Inquiry facilitator, a Thought Leader with Tamarack Institute, a Canadian social change organization, and an adjunct professor at Eastern University (Philadelphia) in the PhD in Organizational Leadership program.

Tom specializes in senior leadership, nonprofit board, program, and organizational development as well as research and evaluation. His clients include local, state-wide, regional, national, and international organizations. He has extensive experience with community engagement and mobilization, intractable controversy management, nonprofit board development and strategy planning, and the management of government funded health and human services grants and projects that are national in scope.

In 2016, working with Dr. Ed Saunders, a colleague at the University of Iowa, he finalized and introduced the Tenacious Change Approach (formerly known as the *Roots to Fruit of Sustainable Community Change* (R2F) model), published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Community Development*. The Tenacious Change Approach features a measurable approach to creating enduring community change on social issues through the integration of the collective impact framework with community development theory, principles, and practice. In September, 2016 Tom's work on the Tenacious Change Approach resulted in an invitation to the White House to meet with Promise Zone leaders from across the United States.

He is also the author, with Liz Weaver (Co-CEO of the Tamarack Institute), of the closing chapter in the 2019 book, **Using Collective Impact to Bring Community Change** from the *Community Development Society*. Tom and Liz' chapter, *Progress, Challenges and Next Steps in Collective Impact: Collective Impact as Disruptive Illumination*, focuses on emerging models for the use of collective impact in community development. The chapter highlights the [Tenacious Change Approach](#), which is being formally introduced in the United States through Tenacious Change, LLC. It has been introduced internationally in Canada at the Tamarack Institute's Collective Impact Summit and Community Change Institute and through the 17th Annual Global Conference of the International Leadership Association in Barcelona, Spain.

Tom has earned degrees from William Penn University and Drake University in Iowa, and his doctor of philosophy in (nonprofit) organizational leadership, from Eastern University in Philadelphia.