

Summary:

- Best practices in museum education take an asset-based approach, which can be leveraged naturally for DEAI work.
- Appreciative Inquiry is a specific framework for implementing an asset-based approach and lends itself to accomplishing DEAI goals.
- Appreciative Inquiry is a foundation for positive and productive organizational change in CCLI.

Asset-Based Approach to DEAI

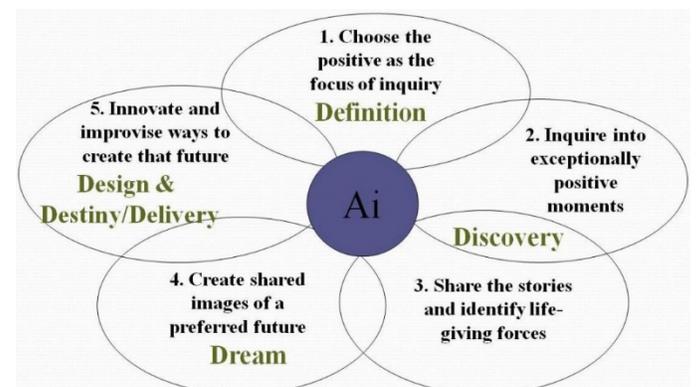
Issues of diversity, equity, access, and inclusion (DEAI) in organizational contexts have, until relatively recently, been shaped by major legislation and regulations, all of which are intended to prevent discrimination and marginalization. This orientation often places organizations in a defensive position when taking action on DEAI issues, with a focus on what actions to avoid or that are disallowed rather than best practice. Major movements across a number of sectors, spurred by globalization and changing demographics, converged in the late 20th century to reshape the “diversity dialogue” in organizational contexts from deficit and risk-mitigation approaches to opportunity and asset-based approaches.

The Appreciative Inquiry Method captures the essence of this change in orientation. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) thinkers and practitioners in organizational studies focus on increasing what an organization does well, rather than eliminating problems. Cooperrider’s definition of AI aligns it even more closely to the concepts of diversity and inclusion:

[Appreciative Inquiry] deliberately seeks to discover people’s exceptionality – their unique gifts, strengths, and qualities. It actively searches and recognizes people for their specialties – their essential contributions and achievements. And it is

based on principles of equality of voice – everyone is asked to speak about their vision of the true, the good, and the possible. Appreciative Inquiry builds momentum and success because it believes in people. It really is an invitation to a positive revolution. Its goal is to discover in all human beings the exceptional and the essential. Its goal is to create organizations that are in full voice!

The AI approach is defined by four core processes (the 4Ds): Definition; Discovery; Dream; and Design & Destiny. The 4 Ds of AI are further articulated in the figure below.



* Bernard J Mohr & Jane Magruder Watkins,
The Essentials of Appreciative Inquiry:
A Roadmap for Creating Positive Futures, p. 5

- In the **definition** process, the group identifies the focus of the work/inquiry to be pursued. The discussion may start from a gap or deficit perspective (what we want

less off/what is missing), but should seek to reframe the work positively (what we want more of).

- The **discovery** process is comprised of two sub-processes:
 - Engaging a wide group of stakeholders in sharing strengths at the individual, team, and/or organizational level that apply to the focus of the work; and
 - Identifying the common elements from the strengths shared by stakeholders and sharing those out.
- In the **dream** process, the group moves from inquiry into visioning what the ideal future might look like. Creativity is encouraged in this phase for envisioning a shared future, using processes such as shared vision boards, collages, etc. to move toward written definition.
- In the **design & destiny** process, team members begin to do the work via innovation and improvisation to move toward the shared future vision articulated in the dream process.

For an AI process to be successfully implemented, leadership must be prepared to support authentic and equitable participation throughout the entire cycle. This creates a clear path for using AI as a tool for creating a truly inclusive organizational culture.

Appreciative Inquiry and Strategic Diversity Management

When embarking on DEAI work, the potential scope of work can be so broad that it can be difficult to not only know where to begin, but also how to know where strategically to take action for sustainable change. Roosevelt Thomas' Strategic Diversity Management (SDM) model is a useful tool for navigating this ambiguity. The SDM model identifies four areas of action necessary for creating an organizational environment that is inclusive and leverages diversity:

- managing diverse talent;
- optimizing internal (content/services) and external (audiences/stakeholders) mixtures impacting the business;
- managing representation; and
- managing relationships appropriately.

Successful SDM practice results in individuals (especially leadership) and organizations effectively making decisions by taking into account the opportunities and challenges of a diverse, equitable, and inclusive environment.

Navigating all four areas is complex and requires skill-building. Applying the 4Ds of the AI approach to each of the SDM action areas is critical to effective SDM practice, not to avoid tension, but to allow individuals and groups to recognize the tension inherent in diversity and inclusion change efforts, and develop strategic approaches for leveraging strengths and increasing capacities to address all four SDM practice areas.

Reflections

- As a team, restate your initiative based on the 4D's of Appreciative Inquiry. How does this make you think about your initiative? How might you reframe "problems" as opportunities?
 - What are the pros and cons of taking an asset-based approach to DEAI work? How might you address these challenges with the strengths you've identified?
 - Which of the Strategic Diversity Management areas does your strategic initiative address now? How might your strategic initiative position your institution to address the remaining areas in the future?
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Select References

Cooperrider, D.L. et. al. (Eds.). (2001). *Lessons from the Field: Applying Appreciative Inquiry* (p.12). Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing.

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