

## EDITORS' NOTES

When people ask us why we are evaluators and why we do this work, a common response is our desire to assist organizations and programs to be more effective. We are always searching for ways to make evaluations more useful and meaningful to stakeholders. To this end, each of us has incorporated stakeholder, participatory, and learning-oriented approaches into our work. Nevertheless, we still struggle with stakeholders' negative perceptions of evaluation, the apathy often associated with problem-solving efforts, and stakeholders' difficulty in using the findings once the evaluators have finished their work. In the past few years, however, we have both experienced the excitement and creative energy that Appreciative Inquiry generates among our project stakeholders. As a result, we began to wonder if there was a place for Appreciative Inquiry in the evaluator's toolbox. After many conversations about the possibilities of using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation practice, we decided it was time to introduce it to the field of evaluation and to explore why, when, and how it might be used in evaluative inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry is a process that searches for what is best in people and organizations. It is a participative, collaborative, and systematic approach to inquiry that seeks what is right in an organization in order to create a desired future. Ultimately, it is a process and a method for asking questions designed to strengthen a system's capacity for organizational learning and creativity. Appreciative Inquiry's focus on identifying what is best and most successful as a means for moving forward made us think about how often evaluation is construed as a means for identifying concerns, issues, and problems in order to develop solutions. As such, the language of evaluation is often deficit based. Although evaluators certainly strive to find what is working well, they also focus heavily on searching for what is wrong and what is not working, often concluding their work with a list of recommendations to improve the evaluand. These problem-seeking intentions are not always evident in the evaluation's guiding questions, but they often are operationalized in survey and interview questions asked of participants. For example, evaluators might ask respondents to identify barriers or challenges to their work, discuss why things do not seem to be effective, or explain why a certain expected outcome was not achieved. Appreciative Inquiry, in contrast, shifts the language used to a more positive, affirmative stance. In doing this, participants and respondents identify what has been successful; from these successes, they can then create a future filled with more of these successes. As a result, problems and issues are still addressed as they are in conventional evaluation, but in a very different way.

As the chapters in this volume illustrate, Appreciative Inquiry offers evaluators an approach and method for discovering and building on the positive aspects of a program (or any evaluand). The chapters explore the following questions:

- What is the potential role of Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation?
- In what ways does Appreciative Inquiry constitute an overall approach to evaluation? In what ways is it better construed as a data collection method?
- What impact does using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation have on the use of evaluation processes and findings?
- What contextual factors or conditions make the use of Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation appropriate?
- What are the challenges in using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation?
- To what extent and how does Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation address program issues and problems if its focus is on what is working well?
- What are the areas or issues that need further research regarding the use of Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation work?

Chapter One, which we wrote with Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas, describes the philosophy, assumptions, and processes of Appreciative Inquiry and how it fits within the landscape of evaluation practice. It also provides the framework and language for Chapters Two through Five, which are case studies of situations in which Appreciative Inquiry was used to conduct various kinds of evaluation studies. Because the use of Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation poses a number of interesting questions and challenges, Patricia Rogers and Dugan Fraser (in Chapter Six) and Michael Quinn Patton (in Chapter Seven) critique the use of Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation.

We invited individuals to submit abstracts describing how they have used Appreciative Inquiry in their evaluation work, and from these we selected four cases based on certain criteria, including the author's knowledge of evaluation and Appreciative Inquiry, the questions raised about the opportunities and challenges related to integrating Appreciative Inquiry and evaluation, and the type of program and context represented. To ensure that the critical issues regarding Appreciative Inquiry and its use in evaluation were addressed, we asked each of the authors to cover the following issues when writing their case:

- Background to and a description of the evaluation, including what was evaluated, what the overall purpose of the evaluation was, and what the key evaluation questions were
- Evaluation design and data collection methods, including why Appreciative Inquiry was chosen for the evaluation and how it was used
- Evaluation findings and the benefits of using Appreciative Inquiry to obtain these findings

- Issues in using Appreciative Inquiry in evaluation, specifically how problems or program weaknesses were dealt with during the evaluation

The case study chapters represent various applications of Appreciative Inquiry in a wide range of contexts. An evaluation of an academic department in a private secondary school is the focus of Chapter Two. Sheila McNamee describes how she used all four Appreciative Inquiry phases to assess the department's curriculum with a staff that had assumed oppositional positions with regard to the school's curriculum. She describes in detail how using Appreciative Inquiry not only changed how the staff relate to one another, but also diminished the significance of their perceived differences. As a result, in addition to providing valuable and useful information, Appreciative Inquiry transformed the ways in which the staff members work together. Because the author's approach encompassed both evaluation and organizational development practices, it is an example of how the lines between evaluation and organizational development can become blurred when using Appreciative Inquiry. In Chapter Seven, Patton addresses the extent to which this is a problem and whether this is inevitable.

Chapter Three explores an evaluation of the African Women's Media Center in which Tessie Tzavaras Catsambas and Laverne Webb used Appreciative Inquiry processes to develop the evaluation's focus and key questions, as well as to design and implement several data collection methods. In addition to describing some of the findings from these methods, the authors discuss how using Appreciative Inquiry revealed specific controversial issues that the organization later resolved. They also explore some of the challenges they faced in conducting this and similar evaluations, including how they address problems when using Appreciative Inquiry, the limitations of Appreciative Inquiry, and the challenges of staying within an appreciative framework and the original scope of the evaluation.

The focus of Chapter Four is an evaluation of the program of the Family Rehabilitation Center, a nongovernmental, humanitarian, nonprofit service organization in Sri Lanka. The program's long-term objective is to reduce the practice of torture and meet the medical and psychological needs of victims of torture and trauma throughout the country. Mette Jacobsgaard describes how Appreciative Inquiry was chosen as an evaluation approach when it became clear that previous evaluations had left the staff fearful, angry, and disillusioned. She explains how using two of the Appreciative Inquiry phases helped the staff uncover examples and stories of how they were indeed meeting the funder's requirements and were achieving their short-term objectives, a finding that was not present in earlier evaluation studies.

In Chapter Five, Dawn Hanson Smart and Mariann Mann describe an evaluation of the Girl Scouts Beyond Bars program that incorporated appreciatively oriented questions in focus group interviews and a survey, which were used in conjunction with more conventional evaluation methods.

This case illustrates how evaluators may use only one phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process in order to obtain a better understanding of what is most meaningful about a program and to identify ways to build on the best there is.

In Chapter Six, Patricia Rogers and Dugan Fraser offer a critical look at Appreciative Inquiry, particularly in reference to the cases presented in the chapters. They write that Appreciative Inquiry can be a useful and valuable technique in certain situations, but express concerns about applying it for the wrong reasons and with evaluators who might not have the group process and facilitation skills Appreciative Inquiry requires. Although they believe the cases reported here are interesting and instructive of how Appreciative Inquiry can be applied within an evaluation context, they suggest that the cases could have provided more guidance for evaluators on how to implement Appreciative Inquiry and more cautions about the dangers of using Appreciative Inquiry inappropriately.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, Michael Quinn Patton reflects on the origins of Appreciative Inquiry and its relationship to various evaluation purposes and approaches. He discusses evaluation definitions, the power of language, the importance of using Appreciative Inquiry in the right situations, and how Appreciative Inquiry relates to utilization-focused evaluation. He suggests that Appreciative Inquiry offers evaluators a valuable approach to evaluative inquiry and that we should continue to study its uses and effects.

One of the reasons we wanted to put this volume together is that we knew we would learn a great deal from the chapter authors. We have not been disappointed. From hearing their stories, we have become increasingly confident that Appreciative Inquiry has a place in the evaluator's toolkit. At the same time, we remind readers that this volume on Appreciative Inquiry and evaluation is only the beginning of an exploration that we hope will be stimulating, provocative, and ultimately helpful to evaluation practitioners and researchers. We welcome any and all thoughts, reactions, and ideas to further this conversation and exploration.

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