

Appreciative Inquiry Practicum Report

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2. We attended the Charlotte AIFT Training October 24th – October 26th, 2012
3. We are representatives of the Community Engagement Division of the City of Charlotte. Our mission as a division is to improve quality of life in Charlotte communities through engaging community members as not just service recipients, but as partners in creating change. We worked with neighborhood based organizations and community partners. We focused on challenged and transitioning communities where engagement has been limited and perceived barriers often interfere with progress. These communities are often diverse racially, ethnically and economically which challenges them to find common ground.
4. As a part of our Core Group process, we conducted mock AI summits, which included robust role plays, simulating common issues our target communities face. This allowed us to make sure our content was clear, relevant and engaging. Included in our Core Group were:
 - City of Charlotte representatives
 - Neighborhood leaders
 - Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools representatives
 - Business Association representatives
 - Community volunteers
5. The positive topic identified was: “Engaging Communities in Planning for Positive Change”. To arrive at the positive topic, we focus on a reframing dialogue. In this dialogue, we discussed many of the common issues our communities face and the way in which they communicate and resolve these issues. We discussed the merits of deficits based approach versus a strength based approach in order to derive positive actions and community building. This resulted in a process called “Vision 2 Action”, where we facilitate a community driven process to assist neighborhood organizations and their partners in planning and prioritizing for their future through positive inquiry.

6. The modified interview guide, included in the attached workbook, asked the following questions:

- Tell me a story about a time you felt the most pride in the community we live in.
 - What made you feel that way?
 - Who was involved?
- What are the values that are deeply important:
 - To yourself?
 - To your family?
 - To our community?
- Close your eyes and imagine your ideal neighborhood. Open your eyes. If you were granted three wishes to make our neighborhood like the one you just envisioned, what would they be?
- What three steps could we take this year to get us closer to your vision?



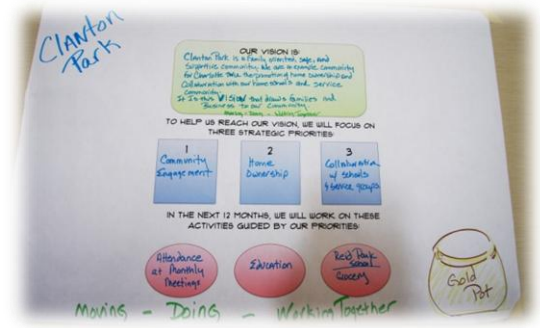
7. We utilized face to face interviews. We encouraged people to interview someone they did not know.

8. We worked with many different neighborhood groups through the Vision 2 Action process this year. Some of the Life Giving Forces they shared:

- Connections with neighbors
- Honoring past leadership
- Embracing diversity
- Common understanding
- Collective intelligence
- Supportive partnerships
- Building new relationships
- Celebrating expression
- Active participation
- Embracing all ages and abilities
- Increased sense place
- Shared values

9. Some of the Provocative Propositions developed were:

- “Clanton Park is a family oriented, safe and supportive community. We are an example community for Charlotte through promotion of homeownership, collaboration with our school and service communities.
- “Grove Park Neighborhood Association provides neighborhood and community leadership which encourages safety and inclusivity in a caring, creative, and interactive manner ensuring that Grove Park will continue to be a great place to live.”
- “Villa Heights is a safe place that embraces family, culture and diversity with open arms through building genuine community”
- “Selwyn Park is a highly engaged and invested community that serves each other and provides an attractive and sage place for all neighbors.”
- “Country Club Heights is striving to engage all neighbors in making a positive impact. Ensuring Country Club Heights is a viable, safe and vibrant community.”



10. The Strategic Intentions of our example groups are listed in the table below:

Neighborhood	Strategic Priorities	Desired Projects
Clanton Park	Community & School Collaboration, Community Engagement, Homeownership	Homeowner Education Workshop Series Membership Drive Mentorship Program w/ Reid Park Elementary
Grove Park	Communication, Partnerships, Community Caring	Define community protocol roles and procedures, Update email list, Reactivate website, Cross promote with CECP and East Establish GPNA subcommittee to develop initiative
Villa Heights	Inclusivity & Community Involvement, Neighborhood Beautification, Crime Reduction & Safety	Meet Our Neighbors Event, Neighborhood Signage, Neighborhood Watch/Block Captains
Selwyn Park	Increase Community Engagement, Neighborhood Entryway, Neighborhood Branding	Quarterly Social Events, Entrance Signs, Brand/Logo Development
Country Club Heights	Communication, Involvement, Social	Renter and special population outreach, Build community stage, Message board

11. Neighborhood based groups feel that this process has been extremely helpful in changing the way they work together and their ability to improve their community. This has enabled us as city staff to engage with the community in a more meaningful way. It has reshaped our conversations, from answering complaints to providing preemptive citizen service and engaging neighborhoods as partners. It has changed our interaction with neighborhood based groups; they are much more positive and see us a positive resource opposed to a policing entity. Appreciative Inquiry has fundamentally changed our platform of community engagement. Neighborhood groups have begun planning projects to address their strategic intentions; including applying for Neighborhood Matching Grants.



Coalition for Albemarle Road Elementary School: The Coalition for Albemarle Road Elementary School (C.A.R.E.S.) was developed to engage families whose children attend ARES through outreach efforts and learning opportunities. The effort was led by Hands On Charlotte, a volunteer engagement group. In addition to starting a Family Night initiative at the school, the group wanted to engage school staff, parents and neighborhood residents in a process where everyone could develop a shared vision. Our staff provided an Appreciative Inquiry summit at the school on April 14th, 2012. Forty-six participants were engaged in the summit and the group was comprised of parents, school staff, community partners and neighborhood residents. Interpreters were available for participants who spoke Spanish to ensure that everyone was able to fully participate.

After participating in the summit, the C.A.R.E.S. steering committee received an \$8,000 credit towards a Neighborhood Matching Grant project to implement one of the project ideas developed during the summit. The group submitted an application for Neighborhood Matching Grant and was awarded over \$13,000 to develop Family Nights at Albemarle Road Elementary School.

Hyde Park Community Association: Hyde Park is one of Charlotte's historical African American neighborhoods and was established by Dr. C.W. Williams in the 1960's. Twelve adult community leaders gathered at the home of the vice-president of the association and enjoyed refreshments and hospitality. Although the neighborhood requested the training to take advantage of \$1500 dollars in match credits towards an entrance sign project, residents were eager to find out what other ideas



and recognitions could arise from using the AI process. I began our 2 and ½ hour workshop with an overview of the AI process and goal of the training. We used the outline and questions as described in question #6 above. When creating images of the community's vision, residents used flip chart sketches and an original poem to describe their stories and vision for Hyde Park. Stories entailed neighbors helping and engaging in social activities as well as feeling proud to live in a historically recognized African community designed by renowned African American architects. The vice-president stated that the training using the AI process brought the neighbors even closer together and as a result all worked together to implement a Neighborhood Matching Grant new entrance sign project. The Hyde Park Community association looks forward to implementing other neighborhood priorities identified using the AI process such as a website, better lighting, and a program to assist the elderly and handicapped.

12. We created the Idea Development Plan (attached) to help communities consider and create responsibility for the essential questions in order to achieve their strategic intension plan. We developed a follow up process to check on the progress, provide additional support and resources. We also created a financial incentive for neighborhoods to pursue and complete pilot projects.



13. “My ultimate goal for this inquiry was for the participants to leave the session feeling empowered to act on behalf of their community. My wish was for the community to act upon the strengths and resources they mentioned in the Discovery phase independent of government entities. Ultimately, I would like to see the strengths play out in the Design, Destiny and Delivery over the next 12 months. As a facilitator, I learned that my enthusiasm or insight means nothing if the community doesn’t find the energy contagious. Although, as the facilitator, I was conscious to make sure my sphere of influence remained healthy and a tool for guidance and not forced direction of the community’s process. My personal best was hard to define immediately. I found that personal best in the follow up calls from members of the community that engaged in dialogue after the AI session. I knew that something happened, something was sparked within the community member that would continue on in completing the tasks at hand.”
- Cheryl K. Rance

"My goal for this inquiry was to help bridge the community surrounding Albemarle Road Elementary School. Appreciative Inquiry assisted us in effectively engaging various stakeholders surrounding the school. On the day of our inquiry, we had a diverse group of neighborhood residents, school staff and parents represented. It was incredible to watch each of the groups work together through each step of the AI process. Despite language and cultural barriers, the group developed a shared vision for their community.

I have learned a valuable skill in facilitating AI summits. Our pilot project for our Neighborhood School Partnership Initiative has been a success thus far because of the collective buy-in from community partners because of their involvement in our AI summits with schools. It is a humbling experience when you begin to realize the potential impact a shared vision can have on a community.

I believe my “personal best” experience has been related to conducting this AI summit was the reaction of those who participated feeling excited about the possibilities of creating a strong partnership between the community and the school to collaborate more effectively.” – [Liz Mitchell](#)

“The goal of the inquiry was to provide the neighborhood association with some tools and resources to assist them with becoming more involved with improving the quality of life in their neighborhood. In the process I wanted the residents to become more engaged, interact with one another and to take a vested interest in making their community a better place to stay.

From my facilitation, I learned that that people are more responsive and receptive to taking action in their neighborhood when it is seen through a positive lens. Although every community has its own set of issues, residents become enthused when you talk about positive changes. In prior experiences, a lot of attention was given to the things or activities that hindered the growth of a neighborhood which just sucked the life and energy out of the residents. With the new approach, I see residents laughing and having fun with each other rather than arguing and pointing fingers about whom or what the problem is. I also see residents becoming energized to worked together to move their communities forward.

My best experience related to facilitating the inquiry was having a residents and board members come up to me after the summit to say “thank you” and that it wouldn’t have been possible for them to develop a vision, priority projects and action plans without the session.” – [Arthdale Brown](#)

“I wished that community leaders would recall positive experiences that they had never thought about, while experiencing a sense of true expression and recognition. I learned from the inquiry that people enjoy expressing and remembering hope and victory regardless of the situation. My “personal best” experience related to facilitating AI was seeing relationships grow closer together and hearing others express and remember positive stories and victories that will put them in a “we can overcome or be successful at this” mentality.” - [Tracy P. Greene](#)

“When I came across Appreciative Inquiry as a facilitation process, I hoped that it would enable our staff to conduct more productive conversations with neighborhood based groups. My main concern with the previous platform of engagement utilized in our department was that it tended to focus on the negative and was often staff as opposed to resident driven. My wish for the Appreciative Inquiry process is that it would reframe this process, making it more resident driven, and as a result increase residents’ engagement and buy in. I learned that it is most important to meet people where they are and that often times it is best to allow people to arrive at the best solution organically, and when they are ready through their own thought process. My personal best is seeing the staff and the neighborhood based groups walk away from each summit with such a strong feeling of success and commitment. We have already begun to see projects completed that are improving quality of life in Charlotte communities, and I look forward to many more in the future.” – *Aisha Alexander*