CD1882

Facilitating Strategic Planning in Groups

Using an Asset-based Approach

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Groups, organizations and communities are often tasked with developing a strategic plan for the future. In doing so, a facilitator may be useful to help guide a strategic planning group process. A facilitator is usually neutral and does not direct the decision making or provide information. Their role is to develop an effective process to keep the focus on the group's task to accomplish the goal of planning.

The information in this publication will help facilitators prepare to work with a group in a planning or decision-making process.

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NDSU EXTENSION SERVICE

For more information on this and other topics, see www.ag.ndsu.edu

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Before the Meeting

The questions in this section are designed to help the facilitator put some structure to the initial discussions and whether to accept the contact person's request. The questions also are a guide to working with the group or organization. The facilitator does not have to ask all of the questions listed below, but they are available as a starting point to help the facilitator better understand the group and the context of the request.

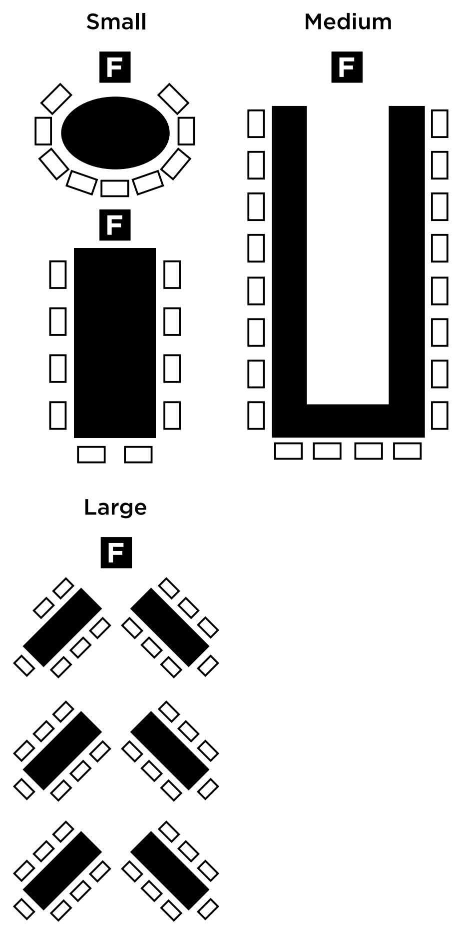
Initial Questions for the Contact Person

1. Why does your group/organization want this facilitated activity at this time?
2. What kind of changes are you hoping for?
3. Have you had other facilitators assist you with a strategic plan in the past? If so, when? Can I see the plan that was created?
4. Have you tried other approaches? (they may wonder what type of approaches – possibly surveys, needs assessments)
5. What types of reports/summaries are you planning to share with participants and others affected by the outcomes?
6. Who will be at the meeting? (Stress that the group who will be coming together should be representative of the organization, community, etc.)
7. In your judgement, does committing the time to this meeting have value for everyone involved?
8. How will you make changes that the participants decide on during this process?
9. How much time into the future do you want to focus on: for example three years, five years? (Suggest no more than five years.)
10. Will the power structure allow for open and honest dialogue with everyone attending?
11. What do I need to know about the situation, group members, etc.?
12. Will participants have the background knowledge and resources they need to make decisions?
13. What is the timeline for the work to be completed?
14. What technology is available or will be used in the room?
15. Where will the meeting be held?
16. Who will be the contact person?
17. Do you have a planning committee? If so, who will be on the committee?
18. Who will be responsible for contacting participants about the meeting, contacting the facility/room, recording the meeting discussion, contacting media (if applicable) and any follow-up with participants?

Also, share what your facilitation fee is with appropriate individual(s).

Room Arrangement Information

Thinking about how the room should be arranged for the meeting is important. If possible, look at the space ahead of time, or at the very least, arrive early to make sure the room is set up appropriately for its size, the group and the work that will be accomplished. The room setup should help create an atmosphere of openness and a space that encourages group involvement.



Contract Development

After agreeing to facilitate a group, setting up a basic contract or memorandum with the client group involved is a good idea. A sample contract can be found in the appendix.

During the Meeting

As the meeting facilitator, you've done your homework and are well prepared for your time spent face to face with the group who has requested your services.

Facilitation Tools

Whenever you are asked to facilitate a group meeting, you should bring some items that will help you be professional and gather as much input as possible from the group. These items include:

- Flip chart paper (3M sticky-backed paper works best)
- Markers (make sure they are for flip charts and do not bleed through the paper)
- Sticky notes to help gather feedback from the group
- Colored dots to help the group prioritize options
- Pens or pencils
- Nametags
- Scissors
- Masking tape
- 3- by 5-inch index cards
- Multiple copies of the Action Plan in appendix

Icebreakers

Icebreakers are a great way to start your meeting or training off with the right tone. An icebreaker helps get participants comfortable with you and each other. Keep the activity or question(s) low-risk and appropriate. Icebreaker options:

- Play a short video pertaining to the meeting subject matter: for example, a YouTube video on community successes.
- Use an appropriate quote to read to the group to get participants prepared for planning.
- During introductions, ask why they came to the meeting or for one wish they have for their community/organization/group.

Ground Rules

Group ground rules are basic or governing principles of conduct, and you, as the facilitator, should help the group set them up before moving on with the meeting. Ground rules help set the tone for the meeting that you and the participants are there for a purpose and your responsibility is to keep the group on task. A few simple ground rules that are easy to consider are:

- Stick to the issue.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Everyone's idea counts.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard.
- Respect each other's time and ideas.
- No one may criticize another.
- If you are offended, say so.
- Discussions are about positions, not personalities.
- Help keep the facilitator on task.

An Asset-based Approach to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a review and planning process that an organization undertakes to make thoughtful decisions about the group's future to ensure its success. The planning process often involves defining the organization's mission and vision, while the final plan reflects goals and strategies to fulfill the mission and move toward the vision.

Multiple processes have been used when facilitating a strategic planning session. A positive, asset-based approach is well-received with groups because it looks at the group or community's assets and strengths and builds the plan from there.

Groups do best when they take high points from the past and move them into the future. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is such an approach and it describes a way of thinking about the world around us. AI invites us to think about the things we appreciate, value and are positive about in the world.

AI is built on five principles:

- Our future is not pre-determined; we can create the future.
- When you ask questions, you begin to think differently.
- Storytelling is critical to understanding what you appreciate.
- We can anticipate a different future than we had in the past.
- When we think positively, we open our minds to different possibilities.

AI also invites us to ask questions about what we appreciate and value, and things we want to have more of in our lives. It is a philosophy of seeing the possibilities in life, of seeing the glass half full. AI is a hopeful place where change comes with wonder and encouragement for a better future. As we consider each word in the process, we better understand the positive, asset-based approach.

Appreciate: valuing; the art of recognizing the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes and potential; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems. Appreciate also describes an increase in value: for example, the economy has appreciated in value.

Inquiry: the act of exploration and discovery. To ask questions; to be open to seeing new potential and possibilities.

In other types of planning processes, we often look at our strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) and spend a lot of time trying to fix what is wrong instead of continuing to do what is working. As you work with clientele, describe these types of facilitation techniques (AI and SWOT) briefly to help them recognize that they will be involved in the asset-based approach of AI with their local efforts.

Conducting an AI Interview

- Two people pair up to do the AI interviews/inquiries. (If you have an odd number of participants, have three people team up to do an interview.)
- All participants should have the AI questions and paper for writing notes.
- Encourage participants to select an area where they can focus on the interview and won't be distracted.
- Allow enough time for the interviewee to answer all of the questions. The ideal is to have time to respond to every question listed.
- Throughout the interview, participants are encouraged to listen carefully so they can write down ideas and phrases heard during the interview. They may want to use direct quotes or phrases as they report back to the entire group with the summary of their interview.
- AI interviews should have a lot of energy and excitement. Encourage participants to engage in the excitement by asking appropriate follow-up questions to gain more of an understanding of the situation or story.
- As the interviews are completed with one person, the individuals should switch roles and begin the interview process from the beginning with the other person.
- Participants should understand they must be prepared to report what they heard to the large group when they are finished with this part of the AI interview process.
- The interview time can be very rewarding, so hopefully everyone will enjoy this process.

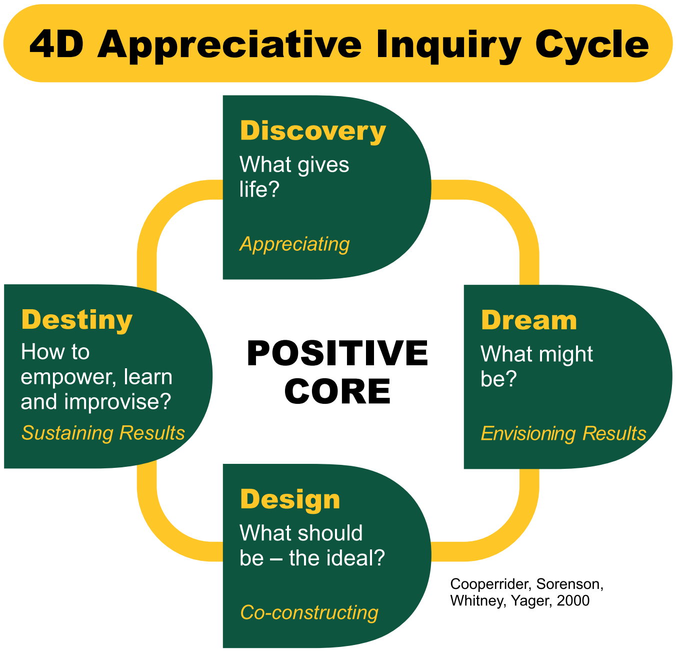
AI Phases

Appreciative inquiry has four phases that the facilitator can help lead the group through. These phases are discover, dream, design and destiny. Specific questions within each phase will change based on the group you are working with, as well as the issues the participants are trying to address.

Pairs will spend time on each phase as they interview each other and then report. Plan for 10-15 minutes for each interview during the discover and dream phases. Instruct the participants that they each will get 10-15 minutes to interview their partner. If your time is short, you may want to reduce the 10-15-minute-per-person interview to less time.

When the time has elapsed, each person will report on the partner's responses while the facilitator captures the highlights on poster paper hung on the wall. Ask for one item from each individual and move to the next pair. Move around the room asking for a response from each participant until all responses are listed on the poster paper.

Another option is to have the participants in the interview write down three to four main ideas from their interview on flip chart paper. Participants will share their information after the interview time has elapsed. Note: Ask participants to write Discover or Dream on the flip chart paper so the facilitator will know which phase the data is from.



The Discover Phase

During this phase, you will discover what you appreciate about your work, organization, community, etc. You will ask questions/statements about the "best of what is," what you appreciate about your organization, work, community, etc.

The following questions can be used for the **organization, group, community name** planning process in the discover phase:

- What do you believe are the strengths of your organization? Why?
- What do you appreciate and value most about your organization? Why?
- Describe a time when you felt proud to be a member of your organization. What were the circumstances, what was happening, what took place, why did you feel proud?

The Dream Phase

During this phase, you will look into the future and envision what could be. This phase allows us to dream about the future of our work, organization, community, etc.

The following questions can be used for the **organization, group, community name** planning process in the dream phase:

- List three wishes you have for your organization.
- What do you envision your organization to be like in the future?
- When you dream about your organization in the next three to five years, what do you see? What changes have taken place? What does it look like? What are people in the organization doing? How do they feel about the organization, group, community name?

The Design Phase

During this phase, you will construct the organization that you talked about in the discover and dream phases. You will take that information and start to create the parts that will create your organization of the future.

The following questions/statements can be used for your organization, group, community name planning process in the design phase:

- What should the ideal be for your organization? Elements you may want to consider in creating the ideal for your organization/group could include:
  - What will the organization's governance structure look like?
  - How will your organization make decisions?
  - How will your organization bring in new members, committee members and leaders?
  - How will your organization communicate?
  - What will the culture of your organization be like?
  - What will the relationship with customers be like for your organization?

The Destiny Phase

During this phase, you will create an action plan of how to transform your organization into the one you described in the discover and dream phases and created in the design phase.

The following questions/statements can be used for your organization, group, community planning process in the destiny (action planning) phase:

- What are the action items that we need to cover to create the organization of the future?
- Who will volunteer to work on an action item?
- How important are the various action items? Are some of them critical to work on first, second, etc.?
- How do we deal with sustainability of the plan, making sure we come back to it and keep working on it?

The design and destiny phases help the group develop a vision for the future. As these phases are discussed further, specific goals, strategies and activities will be determined to help get the group to its destiny or final vision.

An Action Planning worksheet is included in the appendix, and multiple copies should be brought to the facilitated activity for the group to use. Break the larger group into smaller groups so participants can develop goals and action details for their plan.

Group Prioritization Techniques

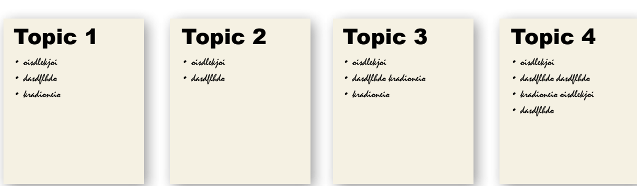
As ideas are gathered from the group, the following tools can help participants narrow down some of the suggestions and assess their commitment to proposed goals or issues. These tools can be used during the dream or design phases of the appreciative inquiry process to help narrow down the many ideas that will come up from the interviews.

Action Sandwich

- Supply everyone with a stack of 3- by 5-inch index cards (eight each). Cards should be prepared ahead of time and indicate ingredients they represent:
  - Card 1: Hope about what could happen
  - Card 2: Fear about what might happen
  - Card 3: Passion, feelings and opinions about what should happen
  - Card 4: Role, personal commitment
  - Card 5: Time
  - Card 6: Money
  - Card 7: Fact or statistics
  - Card 8: Reality
- Each person writes a specific hope for the issue on the top card and then places this card on bottom of the pile.
- Pass the entire pile of cards to the person on the left. Continue the process until all cards are complete.
- The group then makes a single sandwich, deciding on the best ingredients from ideas on all cards.

Carousel

- Write a topic, statement, or question to be explored on top of separate pieces of chart paper.
- Divide the participants into groups and assign each group a different colored marker at separate stations to record responses on chart paper. Assign starting points for each group.
- Give groups two minutes to discuss the topic/concept/question and record responses.
- After the time expires, rotate each group to the next position to review what was recorded, discuss and add new information.
- The process continues until all groups are back to the starting point. Review topics from each station.



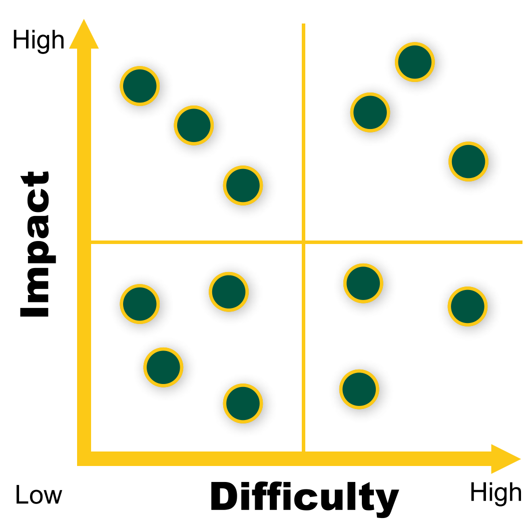
Criterion Grid

- Identify four or more criteria needed to make a decision.
- Make a grid on chart paper listing options on top and draw vertical columns below. Make a total row along the bottom of the grid. List the criteria down the left-hand side and create a horizontal row beside each.
- Take one option at a time and compare it to each criterion. If the criterion is met, make an "X" in the box where the columns meet. If the criterion is not met, leave the box blank. Repeat the process for the remaining criteria. The option with the most X's likely will be the best choice.
- Variation: "weight" criteria – Criteria can be weighted or ranked by assigning numerical values as to how well the option meets the criteria (for example, 0 = none, 1 = some, 2 = quite a bit, 3 = an extreme amount).

	Orlando	Hawaii	Seattle
Warm	x	x	
Easy to Reach	x		x
Cost-effective	x		
Family-friendly	x	x	x
Total X's	4	2	2

Difficulty/Impact Matrix

- Brainstorm a list of ideas appropriate to the situation using sticky notes. Write one idea on each sticky note.
- Design a grid with "Impact" on the vertical line with low on the bottom and high on top. List "Difficulty" on the horizontal line with low on the left and high on the right. Ask participants to place each sticky note in the appropriate quadrant of the difficulty/impact matrix.
- Discuss with participants the placement of each item to determine if they are in the appropriate quadrant. Make changes if necessary based on the suggestions of the group.



Fist to Five

Group members hold up:

- Five fingers for strong support and a willingness to lead the proposal forward
- Four fingers for strong support and a willingness to work on it
- Three fingers for minimal support but a willingness to work for it
- Two fingers for neutrality
- One finger for no support
- Fist for no support and active opposition

Paired Comparisons

- Start in pairs. Each pair discusses a list of options and is asked to agree on their top three priorities.
- Each pair then comes together with another to form a group of four. The two pairs compare their lists of top three priorities and agree on a joint top three.
- Each group of four comes together with another to form a group of eight. Again, each group takes its two lists of priorities and reduces them to an agreed top three.
- Repeat until the whole group has come back together.

Rank Voting

- Work in small groups.
- Write each problem on a card or sticky note.
- Set a time limit and ask the groups to rank the options from most to least important.

Show of Hands

- Run through the goals or issues and get a preliminary show of hands on how important each item is to the group.
- Options that have less support are good candidates for being eliminated.

Sticky Dot Voting

- Brainstorm possibilities on flip charts.
- Give each person in the group a limited number of self-stick dots or allow the participants to mark with pens.
- Participants place self-stick dots on top priorities or they can choose the same option with all the dots.

Thumbs Spectrum

- Thumbs up (majority), good idea; thumbs down (majority), not in favor; thumbs neutral, (majority) feeling ambivalent.

Zero to 10 Rating

- Next to each goal or issue, draw a continuum with numbers from 0 to 10.
- At the left end, label zero “NOT URGENT.” At the right end, label 10 as “URGENT/CRUCIAL.”
- Participants place a self-stick dot or sticker on each continuum according to their opinion of the importance of the item.
- This gives the group a clear visual representation of clusters of agreement. The facilitator can help the group focus on items receiving six to 10 votes.

Action Plans

After the group has worked through the AI design phase and done some prioritization, the participants can consider goals and specific actionable steps. Small-group work may be most productive as individuals select an issue they want to work on further.

An action plan can be developed with a specific goal, strategies to reach the goal, resources needed, who is responsible for each strategy and an evaluation plan. A sample action plan worksheet can be found in the appendix. Each small group should have one to two copies of this worksheet as the participants discuss their ideas for the future.

SMART Goals

Goals are an important part of any plan and should be written simply to define clearly what the group plans to do. **SMART** goals are:

- **Specific** – They have a much greater chance of being accomplished than a general goal. To get specific, think about who, what, when, where and why.
- **Measurable** – Set criteria to measure progress on the goals set. Ask questions such as, How many? How much? or How will I know when my goal is accomplished?
- **Achievable/Attainable** – Any goal can be attained if one works hard enough, but consider the time frame and resources needed and available.
- **Results-focused** – Goals must represent something on which you are willing and able to work.
- **Time-bound** – A goal should have a deadline for completion. Without a set time frame or deadline, you have no sense of urgency.

As goals and activities are developed, small groups can enter their information onto an action plan.

SMART
GOALS

Mission Statements

If a group is struggling, sometimes the participants have come up with too many goals or not enough. Asking if they have a mission statement is helpful for the facilitator. If they have a mission, what is it and does it reflect the organization?

If the answer is “no” to these statements, you may want to help them clarify who they are and what they do. Review what has come up from the strategic plan in the discover and dream phase to help them write a mission.

To assist a group in developing a mission, ask them to consider these questions:

- What do we do?
- For whom do we do it?
- Why do we serve our clients in the way that we do?
- How do we serve our clients in the way that we do?
- Why are we in this industry?
- Why did we start this organization/business?
- What image of our business do we want to convey?

When writing your mission statement, use vibrant, exciting words. Get clear about your passion and values. Create dynamic, visual images and inspire action. Describe your purpose using unusual, colorful verbs and adjectives to spice up your statements.

Sample mission statements:

- Nike: To bring inspiration and innovation to every athlete in the world
- Starbucks: To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time
- United Way: Improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around the world to advance the common good
- Amazon: To be the most customer-centric company in the world, where people can find and discover anything they want to buy online
- Homeward Animal Shelter: Rescue. Shelter. Protect. Rehome.

At the end of your strategic planning session

- Help group members make a clear statement of what was decided.
- Remind them to refer to their action plan and follow through with the steps they created. Don’t let them put it on a shelf.
- Encourage participants to bring their action plan to every meeting as a guide.
- Help create the next agenda, if asked.
- Clarify the follow-up process.

After the Meeting

Final Report

As part of the facilitation contract, you may have agreed to type the flip chart notes as well as the action plans the group developed. Many groups will appreciate this because they have not participated in a strategic planning process before and do not know how to begin a written document. A sample page from a final report can be found in the appendix.

Typing flip chart notes can be a challenge, so facilitation experts recommend you take a photo of each page while it is still hanging on the wall during the meeting. You will find the photos can help you when you are back in the office typing the information for the client.

Follow-up

Finally, evaluate the session. Do a follow-up phone call three to six months after the facilitated event to ask if the organization has implemented any of the goals in its plans or what has changed.

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Appendix

Contracted Services Agreement

Name of organization with whom consultant will be working

Name of consultant

Title of consultant

NDSU Extension Service

Date

Name and address of client:

Name and address of NDSU Extension consultant:

Services: The services the consultant agrees to provide are:

Effective date and duration of services:

Payment for services:

Action Plan

Developing Strategies to Reach Your Goals

Write a specific goal statement for the program/activity/event/idea:
(Goal statement should be SMART – specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, timely)

Strategies to reach the goal	Resources needed (people, funds, facilities, equipment, incentives, etc.)	Timeline to complete the step	Who will do this?

How will your group stay connected?

How will you know when the plan is complete?

Sample Final Document for Client

Office Support for City Commissioners

Goal: A funded position for help with marketing, social media, business development, grant management. 1.0 FTE to be hired by June 2018.
Who benefits if this goal is reached? Local city commissioners and other staff in the office.

Strategies to reach the goal	Resources needed (people, funds, facilities, equipment, incentives, etc.)	Timeline to complete the step	Who will do this?
Research history of this position – when the last person was hired, what happened to funding	Time	November 2017	Joe
Position description development	Time, ad hoc committee for infrastructure development	December 2017	Mary and Paul
Proposal to City Council to include funding sources, what they will support	Time	January 2018	Joe

How will your group stay connected?

- This committee will stay connected through email at checkpoints – October, November, December and January.
- All involved (Joe, Mary, Paul) will take leadership for this.

How will you know when the plan is complete?

- Completion noted when someone is hired.

City Intradepartmental Relationships

Goal: The City Council will host at least six activities during 2018 to increase opportunities for citywide staff (public works, city management, law enforcement, etc.) to interact.

Who benefits if this goal is reached? All city employees and city government

Strategies to support goals	Resources needed	Timeline	Who is Responsible?
Citywide picnic – softball or volleyball game	Funds for food, equipment for cooking and games	Fall 2017	Seth and Brian