

# Focusing the Evaluation Using Appreciative Inquiry 3

*You will never leave where you are, until you decide where you'd rather be.*

—Dexter Yager

One of the most useful and exciting applications of Appreciative Inquiry is in the Focusing Phase of an evaluation. In the Focusing Phase, the evaluator collects as much information about the program as possible, in order to develop an evaluation plan that will guide the evaluation's implementation. This chapter first describes eight essential components of an evaluation plan. It then discusses how Appreciative Inquiry can be used to facilitate a Focusing Meeting and provides a sample agenda that can be modified to a variety of evaluation purposes and circumstances. To illustrate how AI has been used to conduct a Focusing Meeting and to develop an evaluation plan, three case examples, each highlighting a different evaluation context, are included.

## Developing an Evaluation Plan

As explained in Chapter 2, evaluation is a planned and systematic process. Thus, an evaluation needs to be carefully designed to ensure that (a) it will collect credible and useful data, (b) the client's information needs will be met, and (c) the evaluation resources will be wisely used. Accordingly, most evaluators develop an evaluation plan that outlines in significant detail why, how, where, and when the evaluation will be implemented. The

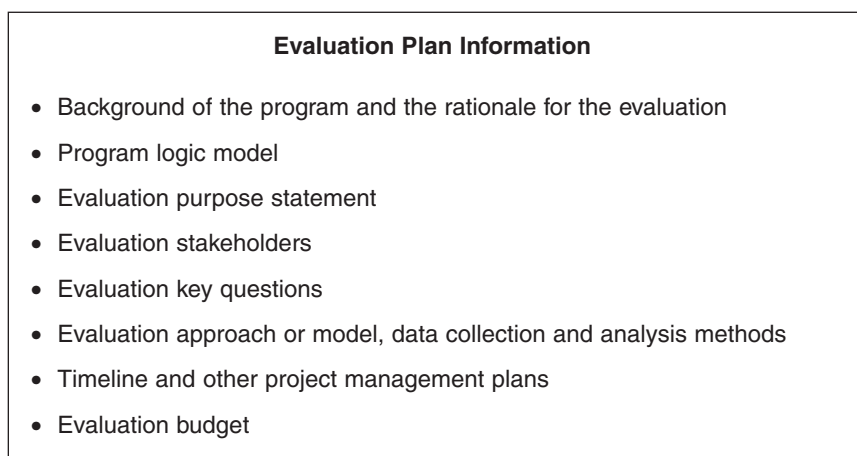
time spent developing the evaluation plan is often referred to as the *Focusing Phase*, which is then followed by the *Implementation Phase* of the evaluation. Ideally, the *Focusing Phase* should result in

- Agreement between the evaluator and the client concerning why the evaluation is being conducted,
- Agreement between the evaluator and the client regarding the expected deliverables from the evaluation (e.g., a verbal presentation, executive summary, comprehensive written report),
- The client's understanding of and commitment to using the evaluation's findings, and
- The client's commitment to support the evaluation actively.

For external evaluators in particular, an evaluation plan may also serve as the contractual agreement between the evaluator and the client. The most useful evaluation plans tend to include the following information (see Figure 3.1).

### *1. Background of the Program and Rationale for the Evaluation*

This section of an evaluation plan typically describes (a) the history of the program being evaluated, including how it came into being, (b) its funding sources, (c) the individuals or groups commissioning the evaluation, and (d) the factors that have led to the need for or interest in the evaluation. This information helps ground the need for the evaluation and clarifies the evaluation's purpose and key questions.



**Figure 3.1** Evaluation Plan Components

## 2. *A Program Logic Model*

A program logic model is a visual tool for describing how a program (or process, or system) is supposed to work based on its theory of action and desired outcomes. In developing the logic model, evaluators guide stakeholders through a process where they reflect on and identify (a) the underlying assumptions of the program, (b) the program's activities, (c) the resources needed to deliver and sustain the program, and (d) the program's short- and long-term objectives and outcomes. Some logic models also include possible outputs and impacts of the program. In effect, "the Logic Model is the basis for a convincing story of the program's expected performance" (McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999, p. 66). A logic model is extremely useful for helping stakeholders identify and discuss various elements of the program's purpose and expected outcomes. This process often articulates implicit goals, and surfaces competing assumptions, inaccurate information, and common understandings—all of which are vital for determining the focus, breadth, and scope of the evaluation.

## 3. *Evaluation Purpose Statement*

An evaluation purpose statement is a two- to four-sentence statement that succinctly describes the reason(s) for the evaluation and how the results will be used. It ensures that everyone involved in the evaluation is clear about why the evaluation is being conducted. For example, an evaluation's purpose might be "to make decisions about the program's improvement, continuance, expansion, or certification, or to monitor a program's implementation for compliance. Other purposes might include obtaining evidence of a program's success to build support for additional resources, or gaining a better understanding of the program's effects on different groups" (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001, p. 136). The purpose statement is derived from information gained about the program's background and the rationale for the evaluation.

## 4. *Evaluation Stakeholders*

In large part, evaluation is conducted to serve the interests and information needs of a wide range of stakeholders. By definition, a stakeholder is an individual or group who has a "stake" or vested interest in the process and outcome of the evaluation; stakeholders are also referred to as the "intended users of evaluation findings" (Patton, 1997). Not all stakeholders, however, have the same kinds of information needs. That is, different individuals and groups may wish to know more or less, or different things about the evaluation's progress and its results. Therefore, it is useful to

categorize stakeholders into three groups: primary, secondary, and tertiary. *Primary* stakeholders are often those who fund the program and/or are ultimately responsible for the program's implementation and continuation. This group might include program staff, managers, executives, and funders. *Secondary* stakeholders are typically more removed from the daily operations of the program, but still have an important interest in the program and the outcome of the evaluation. This group might include program administrators, students or participants, customers or clients, staff, parents, vendors, donors, and governing boards. *Tertiary* stakeholders are those who have some interest in the evaluation for future planning or decision making or have some general concern or right to know the evaluation's results. These stakeholders might include potential users or adopters, community members, legislators, future participants, and organizations that are interested in the program. There are no hard and fast rules that define whether a stakeholder is primary, secondary, or tertiary—it always depends on the context of the organization, community, and evaluation, and is best determined through negotiation with those commissioning the evaluation.

The following questions may help identify the evaluation's stakeholders:

- Who has a vested interest in the program and in the outcome of the evaluation?
- Whose position could be affected by the evaluation's findings and actions taken on the findings?
- Who cares about the program?
- How might the evaluation findings be used and by whom?
- What groups will be affected by the evaluation if recommendations are made and acted upon?
- Who are the clients or customers of the program and what stake might they have in the outcomes of the evaluation?
- Who has a "right to know" the results of the evaluation? (Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001, pp. 142–143)

As implied in these questions, it is expected that stakeholders will use the evaluation findings in some way. When evaluators talk about *use of evaluation findings*, they are usually referring to three kinds of use. The first is called *instrumental use* and occurs when stakeholders act on a recommendation or a result soon after an evaluation, and the action can be seen or heard. This type of use often happens in formative evaluations where the results are used to make refinements and improvements to the program. The second type of use, *conceptual use*, refers to a situation where the reader of the report, or listener to a verbal presentation, integrates the evaluation findings with other information he or she may have

gained from other sources and experiences, and consequently may come to a new understanding about some aspect of the program. While they may not make any immediate decisions, or take any actions based on the evaluation's findings, these stakeholders may apply what they learned from the evaluation in future decisions and actions, or the findings may simply change their perception or level of understanding about the program. *Symbolic* or *persuasive use* refers to the third type of evaluation use and occurs when evaluation findings are used to lobby for resources; persuade others of the need for program expansion, reduction, or elimination; or are used to merely report that the evaluation took place. It is likely that for any one evaluation, the findings will be used in multiple ways.

When an evaluation plan is being designed, efforts should be made to identify all of the possible stakeholders and to consider whether they are primary, secondary, or tertiary relative to their intended uses of the evaluation findings. The results of this conversation will provide insights into the evaluation key questions and the ways in which the findings may be communicated and reported during and after the evaluation.

### 5. Evaluation Key Questions

The evaluation's key questions are the broad, overarching questions that frame the evaluation and communicate the scope and boundaries of the inquiry. Key questions are generally open-ended and are used to determine which data collection methods will best address the client's information needs. In addition, the evaluation's key questions guide the development of data collection instruments such as surveys and interview guides.

### 6. Evaluation Approach or Model, Data Collection and Analysis Methods

In this section of an evaluation plan, the evaluation's overall approach and specific methods for collecting and analyzing data are described. For example, evaluators may choose to use a utilization-focused approach (Patton, 1997) combined with an organizational learning approach (Preskill & Torres, 1999) because they want to emphasize both using the evaluation findings and the desire to have those involved in the evaluation learn from the evaluation process and its outcomes. Or, an evaluator might use an objectives-oriented approach where the focus is on the extent to which a program has achieved its objectives. (For more information on various evaluation models and approaches, see Fitzpatrick, Sanders, & Worthen, 2003; Owen & Rogers, 1999; Posavac & Carey, 2003; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Russ-Eft & Preskill, 2001). The choice of which approach or model to use in conducting an evaluation influences the desired level

of stakeholder involvement, the evaluation's design, and the ways in which data will be collected. Commonly used data collection methods include

- Individual or focus group interviews (in-person or by phone or computer)
- Surveys (mailed, online, telephone)
- Observation (participant or non-participant; qualitative, quantitative; video, photographs)
- Document and record review (archival data)
- Tests (paper, computer-based)

As indicated earlier, the choice of which data collection methods to use should be based on the evaluation's key questions. That is, one should look at each question and determine which method(s) will most effectively address the questions in ways that are appropriate, feasible, and acceptable to the organization and its members. For each method chosen, the evaluation plan should include information on the population (data sources); the sample size and sampling procedures (if necessary); how, when, and where the data will be collected; how the data's validity will be ensured; and how the data will be analyzed. Evaluation plans may also include drafts of the data collection instruments (e.g., survey, interview guide, observation form, test).

### *7. Timeline and Other Project Management Plans*

Developing a variety of management plans helps keep the evaluation project on time and on track. Such plans might include

- A timeline for implementing the evaluation
- An outline of each evaluation task and who is responsible for implementing the task
- A matrix that matches the evaluation's key questions with the data collection methods and sources
- Suggested strategies for addressing challenges to the evaluation's implementation should they arise
- A communications plan that describes how each stakeholder group will be contacted and consulted during and/or after the evaluation (see Torres, Preskill, & Piontek, 2005, for a comprehensive treatment on strategies for communicating and reporting)

### 8. Evaluation Budget

Evaluation plans almost always include a budget for designing and implementing the evaluation. Evaluation budgets normally include costs for

- Personnel (evaluator, clerical support, subject matter experts, consultants)
- Materials, supplies, and equipment
- Communications (e.g., phone, postage)
- Technology (e.g., Internet and Intranet costs, software)
- Printing and copying
- Travel
- Facilities
- Overhead and/or general administration
- Miscellaneous or contingency costs

Once the evaluation plan has been developed and approved by the client, the *Implementation Phase* of the evaluation commences. This phase includes the development or completion of the data collection instruments, selecting the sample (if necessary), collecting and analyzing data, developing recommendations (if requested by the client), and designing communicating and reporting processes and products.

## The Focusing Meeting

To collect information for the evaluation plan, the evaluator usually meets one-on-one with the client, or possibly with a few of the program staff, for a couple of hours to discuss the program and their reasons for wanting to conduct the evaluation. While this meeting can result in greater clarity for the evaluator, it often falls short of providing the quantity and quality of information needed to write a comprehensive evaluation plan. Furthermore, such a meeting does not necessarily reflect an inclusive approach, in that the information provided is likely limited to the few people in the room. In our view, a more collaborative and effective approach is to ask the client to invite a group of 4–12 stakeholders to participate in a *Focusing Meeting*. In most cases, these individuals would have some responsibility and/or involvement with the program being evaluated. They may be program designers, managers, vendors, clients, parents, students, program staff, community members, and/or officials who have an interest in the program and its evaluation. The important point is to ensure a diversity of

perspectives and experiences relative to what is being evaluated. The resulting group may be called an Evaluation Task Force, Evaluation Advisory Committee, Evaluation Working Group, Evaluation Steering Committee, or Evaluation Team. The role of the group is to provide guidance, feedback, and support of the evaluation's design and implementation. In some cases, this group might also be asked to collect data and to assist in the data analysis. When inviting these individuals to participate, it is essential that they (a) understand the importance of their role, (b) understand that they may be asked to review evaluation related documents, and (c) attend a few meetings throughout the implementation of the evaluation (depending on how much their participation is desirable and possible).

Once the group has been invited, the next step is to schedule the *Focusing Meeting*. It is essential that an adequate amount of time be allocated for collecting the necessary information at this meeting. The length of the meeting generally depends on the complexity of the evaluation, the political nature of the program being evaluated, the number of people attending the meeting, and practical considerations regarding time and scheduling. The significance of this meeting cannot be overstated, since much of the evaluation's success will depend on the evaluator's understanding of the program's context, the purpose of the evaluation, and the stakeholders' intended use of the results. Involving stakeholders in this process may take more time, but doing so increases the likelihood that (a) participants will have a greater commitment to the evaluation, (b) participants will learn more about the program and evaluation practice, (c) more useful data will be collected, and (d) the evaluation resources will be well spent.

### *Using Appreciative Inquiry to Focus the Evaluation*

Evaluators may use any number of strategies to engage participants during a *Focusing Meeting*. For example, they may simply discuss each of the evaluation plan's components in an open dialogue. Or, they might use other group process approaches such as brainstorming (Eitington, 2001), nominal group technique (Harrington-Mackin, 1994), force field analysis (Bens, 2000), or Ideawriting (Moore, 1994). The chosen approach usually depends on the evaluator's personal style and level of facilitation skills, and on the cultural context and preferences of the organization and its members.

While the above mentioned approaches can be fairly effective in gathering information for the evaluation plan, using Appreciative Inquiry to focus an evaluation offers several important benefits. It

- Creates greater levels of participant understanding and commitment to the evaluation process
- Creates common understandings about the program



- Provides more in-depth information
- Increases participants' creativity and innovation in addressing the evaluation topic
- Increases the likelihood that the evaluation's findings will be used
- Can be more cost and time efficient

Using an AI approach may also counter some participants' negative perceptions of evaluation in that it establishes a different kind of atmosphere—one that is focused on successful experiences and on creating a more positive future. As a result, participants often feel less threatened and resistant to participating in and supporting the evaluation. Furthermore, appreciative questions invite participants to share useful information about the program's logic and theory, underlying values, and ideas for improvement. More detail on the nature of appreciative questions is presented in Chapter 4.

While useful information can be collected during a *Focusing Meeting* in as little as two hours, it is preferable to allocate between four and eight hours if at all possible. Asking people to devote a half or full day to this effort represents a considerable amount of time, and clients might bristle at this request. However, if the goals of the meeting are to ensure that everyone understands the program and its intended effects and outcomes, and to determine the evaluation's purpose, key questions, and intended use of findings, then a strong case can be made that such a meeting is actually more efficient (both in terms of time and costs) than other approaches for obtaining this information. Furthermore, if the evaluator decides to explain that an Appreciative Inquiry approach will be used, he or she can fully articulate the importance of allowing sufficient time for the paired interviews, sharing of stories, and visions that are likely to emerge from this meeting. It might help if the client understands that the meeting is actually a data collection activity that will not only help shape and guide the evaluation but that it is also a unique opportunity for stakeholders to get to know each other and the program better, and for them to have a voice in the future of the program.

### *The Focusing Meeting Agenda*

A *Focusing Meeting* can employ Appreciative Inquiry in a number of ways. Figure 3.2 shows a sample *Focusing Meeting* agenda that includes time estimates, activities, and required materials. Based on the client's particular expectations and requirements, time available, and the organization/evaluation context, the agenda can be easily adapted and modified.

The total time for implementing the agenda ranges from two hours (if the optional activities are excluded and the minimum amount of time is adhered to) to eight hours (if all of the activities are implemented at the upper range of the times noted). As can be seen in Figure 3.2, the meeting begins with an icebreaker activity, introductions, an explanation of the

<i>Minutes</i>	<i>Activity</i>	<i>Materials</i>
10–60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice breaker activity</li> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Purpose of the meeting</li> <li>• Meeting agenda</li> <li>• Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ice breaker materials</li> <li>• Handouts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Agenda</li> <li>○ Information on AI</li> <li>○ Slides (overview of AI)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
45–90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Inquire</i>—Best practices, examples of success</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Interview questions</li> <li>○ Notes page for interviewer</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Flip-chart paper and markers for each table</li> </ul>
30–60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Imagine</i>—Vision of the program's future—use of evaluation findings and recommendations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handout: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <i>Imagine</i> discussion question</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Flip-chart paper and markers for each table</li> </ul>
45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Innovate</i>—Develop provocative propositions (<i>useful for developing the program's logic model</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handouts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Elements of an organization's social architecture</li> <li>○ Guidelines for writing provocative propositions</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Sticky notes or 3 × 5 cards</li> <li>• Flip-chart paper on which sticky notes or cards can be posted</li> </ul>
60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop program logic model</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip-chart paper, markers</li> <li>• Sticky notes</li> </ul>
30–60	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop evaluation key questions (using data from the <i>Inquire</i> and <i>Imagine</i> phases)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sticky notes or 3 × 5 cards</li> <li>• Flip-chart paper</li> </ul>
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip-chart paper, markers</li> </ul>
30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss potential data collection methods (<i>optional</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flip-chart paper, markers</li> </ul>
5–15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summary and wrap up</li> <li>• Questions and answers</li> </ul>	

**Figure 3.2** Sample Focusing Meeting Agenda

meeting's purpose and agenda, and a brief introduction to Appreciative Inquiry. Based on the organization's experience with AI and how much time is available, the evaluator might choose to eliminate the overview of AI. If participants want to know more about Appreciative Inquiry, the evaluator/facilitator can provide this information at a later time.

Once introductions have been made and the purpose of the *Focusing Meeting* is made clear, participants are asked to pair off and to interview

each other for a number of minutes. This activity reflects the *Inquire* phase of AI and is extremely effective for illuminating participants' best practices, examples of success, the values they have about themselves and the program, and their wishes for achieving more instances of success. After the interviews and sharing of their stories in small groups, each group reports the themes of its stories to the larger group.

The next activity is to have groups of six or eight participate in a discussion about the program's future based on an *Imagine* question. This question asks group members to create a vision for the program's future that is grounded in their past successful or peak experiences. Once the groups have discussed these and have flip-charted their themes and shared them with the larger group, it is time for the *Innovate* phase. If time is short, there may not be time for this phase. If there is, participants are asked to develop provocative propositions that reflect the organization's social architecture and to write them on sticky notes. It is a good idea to provide a few examples and some guidelines for how to write these statements since this part of the AI process is often the most challenging for participants. Once participants have developed several provocative propositions, they are asked to place them on flip-chart paper affixed to the wall, next to others that reflect similar ideas. When everyone has posted his or her notes, several themes will have emerged. The evaluator/facilitator then asks the participants to label these themes, which he or she writes on the flip-chart paper. This phase of the process is particularly useful since participants develop provocative propositions that describe, in concrete terms, what the program is doing when its success has been achieved (a vision of an operationalized future). The resulting statements typically reflect the program's activities and resources as well as its short- and long-term goals, which is an excellent lead-in to developing the program's Logic Model if there is time available.

The data produced from the *Inquire* and *Imagine* phases are rich with insights about what the program looks like when it works well. This information can then be used to develop the evaluation's key questions. To do this, participants would be asked to do the following:

*Think about our earlier discussion of best experiences regarding this program and your wishes for making the exceptional high points the norm, as well as your visions for moving constructively into the future. Now consider the following questions:*

- *What questions should the evaluation address, so that you have the information needed to help you move toward your desired future?*
- *What do we (the evaluators) need to know so that you can experience more peak experiences and successes?*

*Write one question on each sticky note. Write succinctly and legibly. The questions can be broad or specific. Think about the ideas noted in your vision, and your wishes for having more peak experiences like those from your stories.*

After an appropriate amount of time, participants begin to post their questions on the flip-chart paper posted on the wall. The evaluator/facilitator might ask participants to group these, identify themes, and even prioritize which questions are most critical to address now versus later.

Again, if there is time, participants should be asked to identify the various stakeholders for the evaluation and how they might use the evaluation findings. They might also be asked a series of questions about the organization's experiences with various data collection methods, which methods might be most effective and well received, and what relevant and accessible data already exist within the organization.

A summary of what has been learned during the meeting is a good way to bring the meeting to a close. The evaluator could describe what will happen with the data participants generated, how the data will be used to develop the evaluation plan, and when a draft of the plan will be available for their review (depending on the evaluator's work guidelines).

While it may be tempting to acquiesce to clients who say they can only commit to an hour or 90 minutes for the *Focusing Meeting*, it is worth considering what is lost by not giving adequate time to the sharing of stories and participants' values and wishes. In these cases, it might be better to ask only one appreciative question and then have a more traditional open dialogue or brainstorming session. In other words, if the evaluator tries to implement the *Inquire* and *Imagine* phases too quickly, everyone might end up more frustrated and disillusioned with the process and outcomes, which might limit the usefulness of the resulting data and lead to an unfair perception of Appreciative Inquiry.

## Case Examples of Using Appreciative Inquiry to Focus an Evaluation

This section presents three case examples that illustrate how Appreciative Inquiry practices were used to focus an evaluation and develop an evaluation plan. Each demonstrates a variation of using AI based on the particular evaluation circumstances and organizational context. For example, in the case of the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs, only the *Inquire* phase of AI was used, whereas in the case of the Evergreen Cove Holistic Learning Center's evaluation, both the *Inquire* and *Imagine* phases were used to design the evaluation plan. The third case example illustrates how three appreciative questions from the *Inquire* phase can be used to frame an evaluation plan even when the interviewees are in different geographic locations.

### Case Study 3

#### **Evaluating the Training Provided by the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (CSAP)<sup>1</sup>**

To develop the evaluation's focus, the evaluators used only the *Inquire* phase of Appreciative Inquiry to generate information for the evaluation plan.

#### **Background**

The goal of the Coalition is to offer child sexual abuse and sexual violence prevention programs, and to advocate for safe communities throughout the state of New Mexico. The Sexual Violence Prevention Program focuses on providing training sessions to school personnel, parents, students, and service providers that address the following topics: (a) how to identify child sexual abuse, (b) the protocol for responding to child sexual abuse, (c) the use of the child sexual abuse prevention resources and activity manuals, and (d) State and Federal sex crime statutes. It is believed that through training and education, participants will become more aware of sexual violence issues, and with that knowledge, they will be empowered to make changes within the community response system. Another aspect of this program is to identify and train individuals as rural prevention specialists who are expected to build sexual violence prevention capacity in the community by providing ongoing training and education. The Director of Training had been the primary provider of the training sessions for the last several years. She was often contacted by a person in the community requesting her to conduct a training session (sometimes called a "workshop") for one of the four identified groups.

The training was expected to have the following short-term outcomes:

- Children, youth, and teens learn prevention techniques for avoiding sexual assault.
- Sexual assault victims learn how and where to report such incidents.
- Sexual assault myths and stereotypes diminish.
- Knowledge about appropriate response to, investigation of, medical/forensic examination of, prosecution of, and treatment of sexual assault victims among community response professionals increases.
- Public is sensitized to issues of sexual assault, abuse, and other forms of sexual violence.
- Public becomes more comfortable talking about issues related to sexual violence.

Although training in these communities had been provided for several years, little evaluation data had been collected. In response to the state's requirement that all of its contractors conduct evaluations of their funded programs, an evaluation was commissioned. The findings from the evaluation were to be used to determine future program planning efforts.

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### **The Evaluation Advisory Group**

In concert with the Coalition's desire for the evaluation to be collaborative, participatory, and learning-oriented, 15 people were personally invited by the executive director and trainer to participate as Advisory Group members. These individuals, who are Hispanic, Native American, and Anglo, were selected because of their involvement with a variety of the Coalition's initiatives and the belief that they would provide valuable insights into the evaluation plan's development.

### **Deciding to Use Appreciative Inquiry to Focus the Evaluation**

The evaluators learned that while Advisory Group members were familiar with the program, they did not know each other, and their experiences with the program varied significantly. As a result, the evaluators decided that engaging Advisory Group members in a dialogue about the program and asking them questions about effectiveness would not be terribly productive since they shared no common experience with the training program. Instead, the evaluators believed that using an Appreciative Inquiry approach would not only help people meet and connect with one another, but that it would be a way for them to highlight what they did know about the program and what their visions were for the program if it were successful. The evaluators and the Coalition's Executive Director and Director of Training invited the Advisory Group members to a one-day meeting to help focus the evaluation and to develop the evaluation plan.

### **The Focusing Meeting**

The meeting began at 10 a.m. and ended at 4 p.m. (box lunches were provided during a 40-minute lunch break). The following describes in detail how the meeting was facilitated.

#### *10:00–10:15 Welcome*

The Coalition's Executive Director made some introductions and thanked everyone for agreeing to be a member of the Evaluation Advisory Group. She explained why the evaluation was being conducted, how the results would be used, and why they were invited as Advisory Group members.

#### *10:15–10:35 Hello and Overview of the Day*

The evaluators introduced themselves and provided an overview of the meeting goal, which they had written on a piece of flip-chart paper:

To collect information from Advisory Group members that will be used to develop an evaluation plan of the New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs.

Recognizing that the Advisory Group members had little background in evaluation, the evaluators had developed a laminated poster that described the major components of an evaluation plan. They briefly described each of the components and explained that the participants would be involved in a process that would provide information for developing the evaluation plan.

*10:35–11:10 Advisory Group Introductions*

Most of the Advisory Group members did not know each other, so it was important to find out about each other and their roles relative to the Coalition's work. Participants were asked to introduce themselves by describing where they were from, their role with the Coalition, specifically as it relates to training on sexual assault prevention, and why they agreed to participate in the evaluation process.

*11:10–11:30 Appreciative Interviews (Inquire)*

Advisory Group members were asked to pair up and were then provided a hand-out with three interview questions. They were told that they should spend 10 minutes interviewing each other (20 minutes total) and that they were to take notes on their partner's story. They were asked to listen carefully to each other's words and not to interrupt unless it was to gain clarification or more information.

The New Mexico Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs is committed to providing education and training throughout New Mexico on treatment and advocacy specific to sexual violence issues. The goal of the project is to increase the number of victim services advocates throughout the state by providing training and various educational materials.

In pairs, interview another person using the following questions:

1. Take a moment to think about your work with Coalition over the last several months. Remember a particular moment or time when you knew that what you were doing on behalf of the Coalition was having a significant impact. You were excited by this realization and were proud of what you were doing. You had the intense feeling that you (Coalition) were making a difference in the lives of people with whom you interacted. Describe this peak experience. Where were you? What were you doing? Who else was there? What was the context? Why did you feel or think this way?
2. If the Coalition wanted to ensure that you had more of these positive, energizing experiences, what resources would be particularly important for making this happen?
3. Without being humble, what do you most value about yourself with regard to the work you do with the Coalition?

*11:30–11:50 Appreciative Interviews—Sharing Stories*

The pairs were then asked to join one or two other pairs and for each person to tell the highlights of their partner's story and values. The groups were asked to listen and note any themes they were hearing across the interviews and to write these on pieces of flip-chart paper.

*11:50–12:10 Large Group Debrief on Themes and Core Values*

Each group was asked to report out the themes they had noted on their flip-chart paper.

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*12:10–12:50 Lunch*

*12:50–1:30 Developing the Evaluation's Purpose Statement*

Based on their positive past experiences with Coalition, and specifically the training it provides rural communities, the evaluators asked the Advisory Group members to consider what the purpose of the evaluation should be. They were prompted to complete the following statement:

The purpose of the evaluation is to: \_\_\_\_\_.

The following are the purpose statements they created as a large group:

- Measure the quantity and quality of the impact of trainings on community providers.
- Measure the effects of the training on participants and community.
- Present information on how CSAP is having a positive impact on the community.
- Document the effectiveness of training and collaborative efforts.
- Determine the impact of rural child sexual abuse trainings.
- Identify sexual assault prevention program effectiveness.
- Determine the impact of training—tools to ensure training in remote/rural areas.
- Measure the impact of child sexual abuse training on criminal investigation and prosecution.

After some discussion and clarification about the training workshops, the following purpose statement was agreed upon:

The purpose of the evaluation is to explore the ways in which training has affected participants' ability to address sexual violence issues and services in two New Mexico communities.

*1:30–2:30 Developing Evaluation Key Questions*

Participants were asked the following question: "If you could ask three to five questions about the Coalition's effectiveness and impact, what would they be?" They were then asked to pair up again, and each pair was given five sticky notes on which they were asked to write one question on each. Once the questions were written, participants were asked to place them on pieces of flip-chart paper at the front of the room. They were told to group the questions on the sticky notes next to ones with similar content. This process generated approximately 51 questions. The evaluators read each question out loud, asked for clarifications, and then asked participants to identify a label for that question. The end result was eleven categories under which one to ten



questions were placed. The evaluators then facilitated a discussion about which categories (and questions) were most important for the evaluation. In other words, with limited resources, it would be impossible to answer each question. The results of this conversation led to the group agreeing to eliminate two of the categories. The group was also told that the evaluators would use their questions to develop the final evaluation key questions to be included in the evaluation plan.

#### *2:30–3:00 Wrap-Up*

The meeting concluded with the evaluators summarizing what had been accomplished and explaining that they (the evaluators) would soon be asked to review a draft of the evaluation plan that would include the evaluation's rationale, purpose, key questions, evaluation design, data collection methods, timeline, and budget.

#### **Next Steps**

The evaluators took all of the information generated on the flip-chart pages and sticky notes and developed a draft of the evaluation plan, which they later submitted to the Advisory Group members and the Coalition staff for their review. They incorporated the few suggested revisions into the final version of the evaluation plan.

#### **Value of Using Appreciative Inquiry in the Focusing Phase**

The Coalition staff and Advisory Group members believe that using AI to focus the evaluation had several following benefits. In particular, they thought AI

- Helped group members get to know each other quickly and respectfully in order to do the necessary work. Through the sharing of their stories, it valued individuals' cultural traditions and differences.
- Helped quieter individuals feel welcome and involved from the start.
- Created a common experience even though as individuals, they interact with the Coalition in very different ways. The use of Appreciative Inquiry helped them co-create another story about the wide range of effects the program may be having.
- Was an effective way to gain an understanding of the program's scope of service and the critical issues it faces.
- Was a cost effective way of gathering a great deal of data in a very short period of time. Had the evaluators attempted to individually interview Advisory Group members and Coalition staff, it would have been much more expensive, and it is likely that they would not have collected the quality and depth of information that resulted from using Appreciative Inquiry.

The Coalition staff found this process so productive and engaging that they have since presented this experience at professional conferences.

## Case Study 4

### Evaluating a Two-Year Appreciative Inquiry Initiative of an Alternative Health Center<sup>2</sup>

To focus the evaluation of the Evergreen Cove's change process, the evaluator used the *Inquire* and *Imagine* phases of AI. A complete description of the change management process using Appreciative Inquiry is described in the appendix.

#### Background

Evergreen Cove Holistic Learning Center (EC), founded by Sarah Sadler in 1993, provides alternative health solutions to its community members on Maryland's Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay. As Sadler prepared to retire in 2003, Evergreen Cove launched an Appreciative Inquiry to help initiate the next phase of its mission while preserving the uniqueness of its culture. In late 2004, as the impact of the Appreciative Inquiry continued to unfold throughout the community, Evergreen Cove launched an evaluation of its appreciative transformation process. An independent evaluator in collaboration with EnCompass LLC, Potomac, MD, conducted the evaluation. From this evaluation, the organization hoped to record, understand, and appreciate the impact of its transformation process.

#### The Focusing Meeting

Because AI was used to facilitate the change process, it made sense to also use Appreciative Inquiry for the evaluation. To launch the evaluation, a group of people met to focus the evaluation. This included the external evaluator and a leadership group comprised of Evergreen Cove founder Sadler, its current executive director, a member of the board, and the AI consultant who facilitated the two-year AI process. The purpose of the focusing meeting was to

- Reflect on exceptional changes and practices
- Conduct a stakeholder analysis
- Develop a vision
- Determine the evaluation's key questions

The leadership group had two concerns about the evaluation: (1) it did not want the evaluation to have a negative effect on the emerging citizens' initiatives sparked by the Appreciative Inquiry change process; and (2) it worried that using a more traditional quantitative evaluation approach would miss the depth and breadth of the Appreciative Inquiry's impact. The committee hoped that by embedding an appreciative approach into the evaluation, it would have a higher chance of capturing what had happened over the life of the change process and, as a result, would have more meaning for the community. In addition, taking an appreciative approach would be consistent with the values and philosophy of the change process.

The meeting began with appreciative interviews in response to the following interview questions:

1. Reflect for a moment on your involvement with Evergreen Cove since the Board and Provider Retreat in January 2003 and think of all the changes Evergreen Cove has gone through since that time. Remember a peak experience—a significant change that stands out for you, a change in which you felt most involved, most engaged, or most proud of your work or engagement with Evergreen Cove. Tell a story about that change.
  - a. What happened? Who was involved? What did you contribute to the experience? What were the key factors that made it possible? Tell your story describing the experience in detail.
2. What do you most value about the contribution of Evergreen Cove to the community and to the world?
3. If you had three wishes for the continued evolution of Evergreen Cove's work in the community and in the world to make more of these peak experiences possible, what would they be?

Participants responded to these questions with significant enthusiasm. They became aware of the broad and daring dimensions of the AI change initiative's goals. These goals included a wish to be assisted in their transition from the founding leadership to a new generation of leadership, a wish to broaden its sense of community, reaching new, diverse membership, and growth through collaboration with the community health system. They wanted to pursue these goals while preserving Evergreen Cove's identity and sense of values. Interestingly, the group quickly became aware of the magnitude of the transformation they had sought through the AI. They had already achieved an increased level of respect with the health system in the community, including new funding from the county health department, new relationships with underserved people in the community, and continued communication and sharing of Evergreen Cove's values with its growing membership. They were supporting and tracking the efforts of four "Healthy Communities Initiatives" that had resulted from the Appreciative Inquiry process.

The focusing session resulted in concrete goals for the evaluation. Specifically, Evergreen Cove wanted the evaluation to help them monitor (a) how well they were keeping the change initiative going, (b) how well they were maintaining their values throughout this process, (c) the extent to which they were gaining credibility with donors and community members, (d) how they could continue to build momentum and become a "showplace for the possible," (e) how well they were meeting the needs of clients and staff, and (f) how they might craft a future that is sustainable through fundraising and the exploration of "resilient communities."

From their appreciative interviews and dialogue, the leadership group identified the following key evaluation questions that were used to design and implement the evaluation:

- What are the core values of those involved in the Healthy Communities Initiative?

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- How well has Evergreen Cove been listening to its stakeholders regarding the changes it has been making?
- How successful has Evergreen Cove been in fundraising and diversifying its funding base with new donors?
- How successful has Evergreen Cove been in developing new partnerships? What format have these partnerships taken?
- How inclusive has Evergreen Cove been in its transformation process?

By the end of the focusing meeting, the leadership group members were excited about the evaluation and the information it would produce.

### **Reflections on the Use of Appreciative Inquiry**

The evaluation succeeded in documenting a transformation that had occurred within the Evergreen Cove organization, the community, and its stakeholders. The findings that were summarized in a final report have enabled Evergreen Cove to see itself in a new light. So many changes had been going on that it had been difficult for anyone to know all of them and to appreciate the extent of everyone's efforts. One of the most significant contributions of the evaluation was the logic model that the evaluator developed, which explicitly linked the goals, strategies, and activities of the change initiative. Using the appreciative questions at the focusing meeting helped the leadership group members reflect on the ambitiousness and complexity of the Healthy Communities Initiative. In so doing, they were able to develop a clear sense of purpose and direction for the evaluation. Even though the leadership group initially questioned whether an evaluation would be able capture the richness of the changes and the magnitude of their accomplishments, they discovered that the evaluation process actually helped clarify the internal logic of their endeavor, and that led to an evaluation report that included a much stronger narrative and more useful information for the organization.

## **Case Study 5**

### **Evaluating Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building in Education for the World Bank<sup>3</sup>**

This case study illustrates how the use of Appreciative Inquiry was adapted to accommodate the logistical constraints of a team of participants who were geographically dispersed and on different travel schedules.

#### **Background**

In 2002, the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) funded a three-year research, analysis, and dissemination activity to help countries

participate in the knowledge economy. The overall goal of the studies was to provide tools and knowledge to enable developing countries to make informed policy choices for reforming post-basic education and to strengthen training systems to meet the challenges of lifelong learning. The World Bank was selected to implement the studies with DFID funds that were placed into a Trust Fund. In three years, the Trust Fund sponsored 21 studies, which tackled a range of topics including distance education in South Asia, guidance and counseling in Eastern Europe, and teacher skills assessment in sub-Saharan Africa. An additional goal of the DFID–World Bank collaboration was to share knowledge between the two donors in order to inform their international education funding programs.

At the end of Year 2, the Trust Fund commissioned two evaluations: one to synthesize the findings of the 21 studies and assess the degree to which these studies produced innovation in post-basic education; and the second, to determine (a) the impact and extent to which the donor organizations were sharing their knowledge, (b) the impact of DFID and the World Bank's collaborative relationship with regard to the research being conducted, and (c) the impact of the research studies on education policy reform in the countries where they were conducted. This case example describes the second evaluation that focused on the collaboration and knowledge sharing between the two donors.

### Planning the Focusing Process

To focus the evaluation, a “planning group” of stakeholders was defined. The planning group included four managers: two *current* managers (one at DFID and one at the World Bank) and two managers who had established and managed the Trust Fund for its *initial* start-up period, but were no longer working with the Trust Fund. The initial managers had had more extensive involvement with the work of the Trust Fund, while the new current managers were in charge of managing the third year of the project, which was devoted to disseminating the results of the research studies. These four managers were identified as the stakeholders who should be involved in focusing the evaluation since the initial managers had important background information and history with the project, and the current managers would ultimately be responsible for using the evaluation results.

While it is almost always preferable to bring together a group of stakeholders who can collaboratively plan the evaluation, it is sometimes the case that bringing people together in one location is not feasible, as was true in this situation. Due to their heavy travel schedules, it was not possible to bring the four managers together for a *Focusing Meeting*. Thus, in order to obtain the information needed to develop the evaluation plan, the evaluator conducted individual interviews with the four managers—two face-to-face (the two World Bank managers in Washington, DC) and two by telephone (the DFID managers in London).

### Deciding to Use Appreciative Inquiry

The evaluator decided to incorporate AI into the *Focusing* phase of the evaluation because she believed it would illuminate important benefits of the project, and

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because the evaluation's goals included identifying ways in which the outcomes of the project could be effectively disseminated and shared in the third and final year of the research program.

The interview guide that was developed to focus the evaluation included questions that concerned the managers' understanding of the goals and scope of the DFID–World Bank collaboration, the two institutions' perspectives regarding the purpose of the evaluation, and the issues and concerns of each manager regarding the evaluation. Since the managers had little to no experience with Appreciative Inquiry, and the evaluator thought it was important to include appreciatively oriented questions, she developed an interview guide that included both AI questions and non-AI questions. (For more information on designing interview guides, see Chapter 4.) The interview guide was structured in the following way:

- General questions on person and institutional perspectives (Questions 1–3)
- Specific questions regarding the accomplishments of the studies related to collaboration, knowledge sharing, and capacity building (Questions 4–6)
- Appreciative Inquiry questions (peak experience, wishes, vision) (Questions 7–9)

The interview guide included the following questions:

1. What, in your view, has been the greatest achievement of the Trust Fund (TF)?
2. What has been the role of DFID in the Trust Fund, beyond providing funding?
3. What is the unique contribution of the Trust Fund to education research?
4. What products (knowledge and tools) have come out of this project? How have they been disseminated?
5. What partnerships with other agencies have been built through this collaboration?
6. What has surprised participants the most over the course of this collaboration?
7. Think back on your experience managing the Trust Fund, and tell me a moment when you felt more excited and proud to have been part of the Trust Fund. What was going on? What was happening at headquarters, in the field, and with the partner donor agency?
8. Based on your best experiences with the TF, what are some wishes you have for how the TF might have more exceptional experiences?
9. In your eyes, what would it look like “to have achieved the objectives of the collaboration”?

The resulting interview data highlighted the wide range of familiarity the managers had with the research studies conducted by the Trust Fund. The managers' responses pointed out that the emphasis of the first two years was in setting up the TF, collaborating with regional scientists to solicit proposals for studies, and administering these studies. Consequently, the resulting evaluation plan was designed to learn as much as

possible about collaboration, knowledge sharing and capacity building from each of the studies, and effective ways to disseminate the research findings in Year 3.

Because of the structure of the Trust Fund and its natural evolution, each of the four managers interviewed had very different types and levels of involvement in the Trust Fund operations. Asking the appreciative questions enabled even the least involved managers to describe an aspect of the Trust Fund's collaboration with the World Bank where they experienced success that was energizing to them, and the questions helped them suggest ways in which the Trust Fund could build on its current successes for the future (in its third year). In fact, despite very different experiences with the Trust Fund, the managers' views converged in terms of their wishes for the future. These centered on knowledge sharing and the dissemination of findings and reflection with a wider audience. The appreciative questions also provided an opportunity for everyone to express their hopes in terms of the desired outcomes of the third year.

#### **Reflecting on the Use of Appreciative Inquiry**

Although the data from the interviews were meaningful and useful for developing the evaluation plan, it is true that conducting individual rather than paired or group appreciative interviews prevented the managers from hearing each other's stories. During the individual interviews, the evaluator tried to convey some of the key points and enthusiasm of each person interviewed to the others. This still did not have the same impact as having participants engage in paired interviews, as is usually done when implementing an Appreciative Inquiry process. Using the appreciative questions did, however, help the managers provide a direction for the evaluation that was more constructive than it might have been had another process been used. Since all four managers were inclined to discuss their deficiencies and what they did not do, it would have been difficult for the evaluator to discover the wide range of accomplishments of the Trust Fund without the appreciative questions.

## Summary

This chapter has highlighted the use of Appreciative Inquiry for focusing an evaluation and for developing an evaluation plan. Used in this context, AI helps illuminate participants' peak experiences and successes, which ultimately provides insights into the evaluation's purpose, key questions, design, and implementation. Since Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative and participatory process, participants learn more about themselves, each other, the program's explicit and implicit goals and logic, the organization, and, ultimately, about evaluation practice, right from the beginning of the inquiry. Referred to as "process use" (Patton, 1997), this kind of learning from the evaluation process is immensely valuable for supporting current and future evaluation studies. Another critical outcome is that participants



often develop a sense of ownership of the evaluation—and responsibility for its success. Using Appreciative Inquiry to focus an evaluation also builds confidence that the evaluation can, indeed, be a constructive process that moves the program in the direction of a desired future. After participating in a *Focusing Meeting*, stakeholders are better able to see how evaluation is closely linked to strategic planning, learning, and effective decision making.

## Notes

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1. The evaluation was conducted by PRISM Evaluation Consulting Services, Albuquerque, NM. Reprinted with permission.
2. The evaluation was conducted by EnCompass LLC, Potomac, MD. Reprinted with permission.
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