

**Vega Associates**

**The Voice of the Learner  
Community Consultation  
Barnet**

**TRAINER TOOLKIT**

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 About “The Voice of the Learner”

“The Voice of the Learner” is a consultation project managed by Vega Associates in support of the London Borough of Barnet’s Adult Learning Plan. The purpose of the project is:

- To provide the Local Learning Partnership with strategic advice for the 2003/4 adult learning plan
- To develop a model of consultation that enables “the voice of the learner” to inform the decision making process
- To establish a bottom-up approach to understanding the views of Barnet residents on Lifelong learning provision in the Borough
- To develop a strategy for sustaining the work

The focus of the consultation will be six wards within the Borough of Barnet:

- Burnt Oak
- Colindale
- West Hendon
- East Finchley
- Dollis Hill
- Child’s Hill

This project is all about asking people within the community what they want. We would like to find out **what** the people of Barnet would most like to learn, **how** and **where** they would like to learn and **why** they want to learn these things. We want to know about people’s **past experience** of learning, especially good experiences. We want to understand how people from **different cultures** view and value learning. Most of all, we would like to hear everyone’s ideas on **how to make Barnet the best place for adult learning**.

### 1.2 How you can help

One of the priorities of the consultation is to listen to the views of people already involved with learning. As a trainer, you are already working with this group of people, so you are in the best position to hear their views. The team from Vega Associates will be carrying out surveys with members of the community throughout the project. However, we would like as wide a consultation as possible, and so we would like to enlist the help of those already working with the community.

One of the main methods we will be using in this consultation is **Appreciative Inquiry**. This is a simple technique with a complex background. It has been used successfully all over the world to **consult** with people and learn from their experiences, to **involve** a whole community in change and development and to **build a vision** for the future that everyone can share and help put into practice. More details about Appreciative Inquiry can be found later in this section.

Appreciative Inquiry is a technique that can easily be learned and adapted for a range of situations. We believe that as well as being a good surveying method, it can also be of benefit in a community training session. It is an approach that **involves and engages** people. It encourages **listening and communication** skills and above all it **empowers** individuals and demonstrates **respect** for their views.

This toolkit provides help and resources for trainers to be able to run Appreciative Inquiry exercises as part of a training programme. These exercises will provide data and feedback that will contribute to the consultation process and allow the voice of the learner to be heard and taken into account. They will also provide valuable experiences for the learners involved and, we hope, will be enjoyable.

### **1.3 Why your help is important**

One of the underlying principles of Appreciative Inquiry is that any community contains within it the information and resource to renew itself. This is very different from standard practice which usually relies on outside “experts” to come in, impose a solution and then leave. Within this project we are committed to:

- Involving as many people from the community as possible
- Listening to the views of those in the community and those working closely with the community
- Empowering as many people as possible to take part in the development process
- Giving away ownership, skills and techniques to people in the community and those working closely with the community, to ensure sustainability of the project

Your help is an important way by which we can meet these aims.

## 2 About Appreciative Inquiry

### 2.1 Background

Appreciative Inquiry is a methodology developed by Professor David Cooperrider and his colleagues at Case Western Reserve University. Since its development in the 1980s, the approach has been used throughout the world for organisational change (in companies such as BP, Macdonalds and British Airways) and for community consultation and development.

The following explanation of Appreciative Inquiry is taken from the Imagine Chicago initiative. This initiative has brought renewal to the city of Chicago and is being replicated across the world - from Sydney to Peckham!

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#### APPRECIATION:

**1. You discover** and value those factors that give life to the community; for example, what do you value most about yourself, your neighbours, the community organisations of which you are a part? What in your view is making a positive difference to the quality of life in your community? What contribution are you making that you are especially proud of?

**2. You envision what might be.** When the best of what is has been identified and is valued, the mind begins to search beyond, to imagine new possibilities. Imagining involves "passionate thinking", allowing yourself to be inspired by what you see. It means creating a positive image of a desired future. e.g. what small outreach project would make a big difference on your block?

**3. You engage in dialogue,** discussing and sharing discoveries and possibilities. Through dialogue, individual vision becomes shared vision.

**4. You create the future through innovation and action.** Because ideals are grounded in realities, there is confidence to make things happen.

#### INQUIRY:

**1. Inquiry into what is possible should begin with appreciation.** The primary task is to describe and explain those exceptional moments which give energy to the community and activate members' competencies and energies.

**2. Inquiry into what's possible should be applicable.** Study should lead to the creation of knowledge that can be used, applied, and validated in action.

**3. Inquiry into what is possible should be provocative.** A community is capable of becoming more than it is at any given moment, and learning how to determine its own future.

**4. Inquiry into the human potential in the community should be collaborative.** This assumes an inseparable relationship between the process of inquiry and its content.

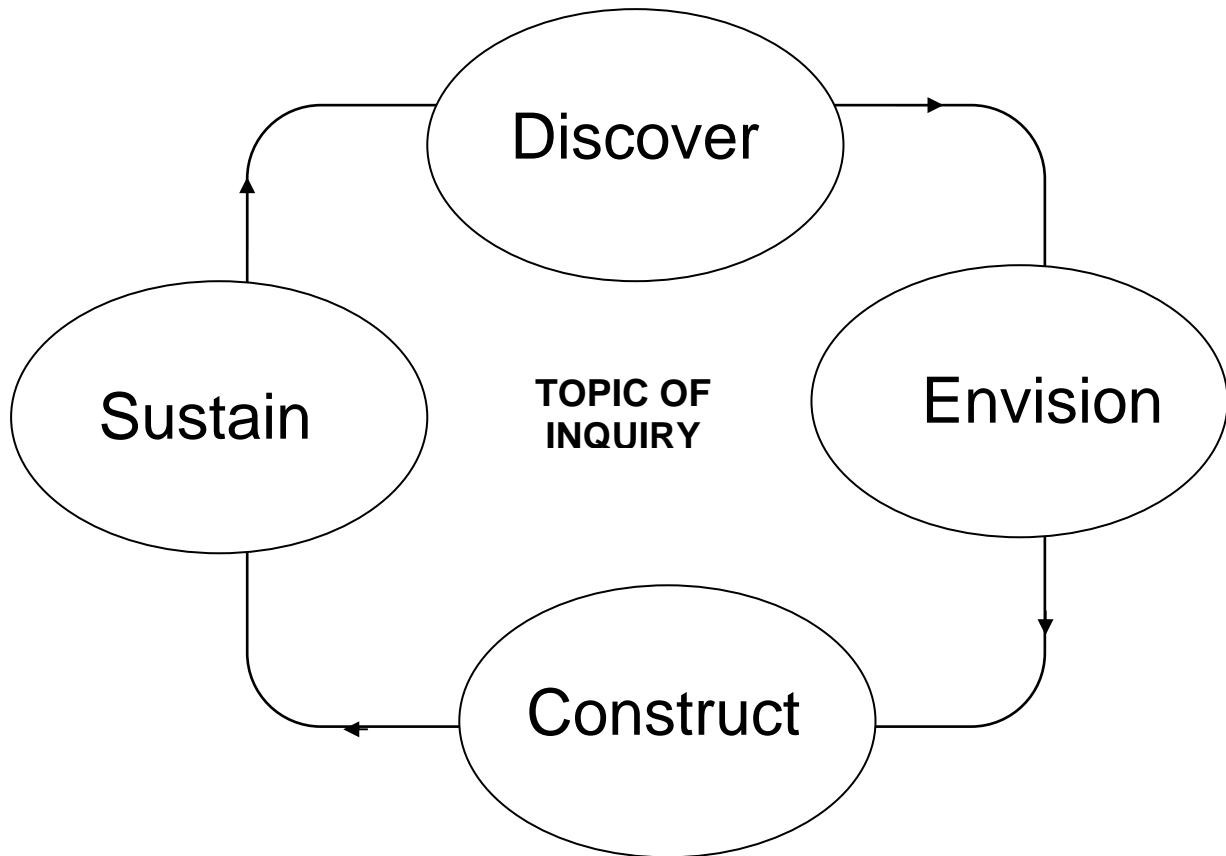
Source: Imagine Chicago short summary of Appreciative Inquiry.

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This approach is very much in line with recent thinking about community-based regeneration. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister states in its recent guidance paper that a community strategy must:

- "allow local communities to articulate their aspirations, needs and priorities"
- "have a long-term vision for the area focusing on the outcomes that are to be achieved"
- "have a shared commitment to implement the action plan"

## 2.2 The Four Stages



The technique of Appreciative Inquiry has four stages that form a cycle – Discover, Envision, Construct and Sustain. These are sometimes known as Discover, Dream, Design and Destiny - the 4-D cycle.

### **Discover**

This stage is about finding out **what has worked in the past**. It seeks to find out people's best experiences – experiences they are enthusiastic about and proud of. So as well as collecting information, this stage is also about involving people and building on their natural enthusiasm. The main approach for this stage is conducting **appreciative interviews**.

*Example: As part of the Imagine Chicago initiative, fifty at-risk young people, accompanied by adult mentors, interviewed 140 business, civic, and cultural leaders. The leaders shared high points of their lives as citizens, their hopes for the city's future, and effective processes for getting people in the city working together. The program culminated in a day-long imagination celebration at Preston Bradley Hall which involved both the interviewers and their interviewees to distill the learning and rally people's commitments.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, please see the Imagine Chicago website <http://imaginechicago.org>

## **Envision**

This stage is about moving from the past to the future. Having discovered best practice examples from the past and identified what made them work, we now look to the future - how we can recreate these good experiences and build on them? What would we like to see for the future? How do we want things to be?

*Example: The New Economics Foundation carried out an “Imagine Thanet” project using Appreciative Inquiry. One lady was very upset about the dumping of rubbish in front of her flat days before the rubbish collection was due. When asked some more about this, she recalled a time when residents used to remind one another about collection day, and would help less able residents to carry their rubbish out. This became her vision for the future within her tower block.*

## **Construct**

This stage is about the present. How can we move from where we are now to this vision of the future that we have created? How can we put the ideas into practice? Who will be involved?

*Example: The International Institute for Sustainable Development worked with Skownan First Nation (Canada) on a consultation to integrate aboriginal values into strategies for land use and resource management. After carrying out a series of appreciative interviews, the team staged six data analysis workshops and six community workshops, open to all members of the community, to prioritise the results and to develop a community strategy and action plan. They also held two focus group meetings to communicate the results to key decision makers in the public and private sectors.<sup>2</sup>*

## **Sustain**

This stage is about putting it into practice and allowing the ideas to flourish and develop. Traditional project planning and management tools might be used, but above all there must be a willingness to allow for change. There is also an emphasis on empowering and encouraging people to take forward their own ideas. This is very close to traditional ideas of capacity building.

*Example: In the US telecommunications firm GTE, an Appreciative Inquiry initiative eventually led to a Statement of Partnership between the company and the unions stating, “The company and the unions realize that traditional adversarial labor-management relations must change to adapt to the new global telecommunications marketplace ... the company and the unions have agreed to move in a new direction emphasizing partnership.” This was even more significant because the unions had tried at first to close the initiative down.*

This toolkit will concentrate mainly on the initial stage of Appreciative Inquiry, the Discover stage. This involves three steps:

- (i) Choosing the topic of inquiry
- (ii) Designing questions
- (iii) Carrying out interviews

This list might make it seem as if Appreciative Inquiry is, after all, something that an outside agent imposes on an organisation or a community – but in fact this is not the case. Members of the community can and should be involved in any or all of these three stages. This is particularly the case for stage (iii). Time and again it has been found that if members of a community carry out the appreciative interviews then the results are far more powerful than if the interviews are carried out “survey style” by outsiders.

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<sup>2</sup> More information about this project can be found in the case study in Section 2, and at the IISD website <http://www.iisd.org/ai/waterhen.htm>

## 2.3 Topic Choice

For the purposes of this project, the topic of inquiry has already been selected –

### ***Best experiences of learning among the people of Barnet***

(A more detailed breakdown of what we hope to find out can be found in Section 2.)

Again, this is following a precedent – most communities' first contact with Appreciative Inquiry involves a project that initially comes in from the outside and for which a topic is already selected. However, many communities then go on to formulate their own projects for which they select the topics.

The selection of a topic is very important to the whole process because it directly influences the questions that are designed and asked. Compare the topic stated above with, for example:

### ***The barriers that prevent people from learning in Barnet***

Why is this an important distinction? Because the type of questions that are designed and asked will directly influence the sort of answers that are given in response. If I ask you questions about the barriers to learning, this will focus your mind on the negative things that prevent you from learning. If on the other hand I ask you questions about good learning experiences, you will be remembering a time when you thought positively about learning. And, after all, one of the purposes of this project is to encourage people to think positively about learning and its benefits, not to discourage them by reminding them of all the potential barriers!

## 2.4 Designing questions

Typically, appreciative interviews involve an interlinked series of three different types of question:

***Initial questions*** which ask about past or current experience

***Follow-on questions*** which look for further information in and around the subject

***Future questions*** which look for future solutions based on past experience

### ***Initial questions***

The main rule for asking initial questions is that you should ask the person you are interviewing to recount a real story from their past or present, something of which they had first hand experience. Initial questions set up the whole interview dialogue, and so should be as directly related to the topic as possible.

*Example: What has been your best experience of learning something?*

As well as asking these initial questions, the first part of the interview can be used to set up the dialogue in positive ways by removing any misconceptions that might affect the answers you get. For example, before asking the question above you could talk about learning in a very broad way, making it clear that it is not just classroom learning you want to know about.

*Example: Learning doesn't just have to be something we do at school or college. We learn things all our life – from our family and friends, from the TV or the radio. What has been your best... etc.*



In a training situation, this aspect could be handled by having a group discussion about the different ways in which we learn before going on to Appreciative Inquiry exercises.

### **Follow-on questions**

An experienced interviewer will not need to spend much time thinking up follow-on questions in advance, as these will arise spontaneously from the interview at the time. However, a less experienced interviewer or someone completely new to the technique might wish to spend some time thinking about how to follow up the first stage of the interview with some further questions.

The main purpose of these questions is to find out:

- As much information as possible about the positive experience
- What was good about it
- What were the factors that made it possible

These last two are extremely important. They involve encouraging people to move from their **specific** case and to **generalise** about it.

*Examples: Why do you think you learned so much at that time? What was it about that particular teacher that made learning enjoyable? What made it possible for you to go back to learning?*

### **Future questions**

These questions are all about the future – in particular about how these positive factors could be repeated in the future to create more positive conditions for everyone. More than this, you are asking the person to start to imagine the best possible future but in a way that is grounded in their past experience.

*Example: If you could recreate the experiences you described in Barnet, what would it be like, how might we do it, who would be involved?*

This line of questioning naturally leads to concrete ideas about the future. Some of these may simply be impossible, but many have genuine potential and the interview can be developed into a mini-brainstorm about how the idea could be carried out. For example, the book “Appreciative Inquiry” (David Cooperrider & Diana Whitney) reports the following conversation between one of the authors and the president of a consulting partnership working with a Fortune 500 client. The client has contacted the consultancy for help with a problem of sexual harassment in the workplace.

DAVID: We have an important question. What is it *you* want to learn about and achieve?

RITA: We want to dramatically cut the incidence of sexual harassment. We want to solve this huge problem, or at least make a significant dent in it.

DAVID: Is that all?

RITA: You mean what do I *really* want? (Long pause ... then she blurts out) *What we really want is to develop the new-century organization—a model of high-quality cross-gender relationships in the workplace!*

DAVID: What if we invited people in pairs to nominate themselves to share their stories of creating and sustaining high-quality cross-gender workplace relationships.

This opened the way for a pioneering project which was copied by other companies, one of which won the 1997 Catalyst award for the best place in the country for women to work.

## 2.5 Asking Questions

Appreciative Inquiry is an interactive process that positively encourages everyone to become involved. This means that in a group situation everyone can and should ask questions, and be asked them in turn. However, it is not only important for people to understand and discuss what questions they are going to ask, but to have some basic understanding of interview process, particularly listening skills. Section 2 of this book includes a handout/resource on active listening skills.

In addition to listening skills, there are a number of additional skills involved in conducting an appreciative interview. The following have been suggested by AI practitioners as good practice points:

- Keep a completely open mind about the person you are interviewing and their potential contribution.
- Use positive questions containing positive words.
- Present questions as an invitation. Use positive, experiential language.
- Ask about direct personal experience, avoid rumour and speculation.
- Phrase questions conversationally
- Listen attentively
- Always ask open questions. Ask additional questions to prompt further response. Try to avoid leading questions.
- Make sure the person you interview knows that you value their opinion and experience – always say thank you!

Although AI involves asking questions about people's personal experiences, it should be emphasised that the person being asked the question has full control over what they disclose. This is something that can be made clear within a training environment as part of developing the group as a safe place for individual participants to develop their confidence.

## 2.6 Envisioning the future

Just as important as asking the questions and listening to people's stories is the next stage – consolidating these positive experiences into a vision of an ideal future. The practice of asking "Future Questions" leads naturally towards this stage.

The purpose of this stage is to get down to **what people really want**. As in the cross-gender relations example above, it can sometimes take a little time and questioning to find out what people would really like, either because they feel that it is unrealistic or because they don't feel able to state their real wishes.

This stage can include, for example, groups agreeing on "three wishes" they would like to make about the future, or a brainstorming exercise, or each individual contributing a statement about the future that they would like to see. More examples of how to run exercises and sessions for this stage can be found in Section 2.

It is important in preparing for this stage to give all participants permission to make genuine statements about the future they would like, regardless of how realistic they think these statements are. You should also be prepared for the discussion to wander away from the original topic. Unless the group is in danger of becoming sidetracked on an issue that is a

long way off topic or stuck on a particular issue (particularly a negative one) this doesn't matter. The important thing is that these views and statements should be **grounded** in the stories of best experiences from the past.

For the purposes of The Voice of the Learner consultation, we are interested in learners' views about any aspect of learning. This may include:

- ideal learning environment
- what they would most like to learn
- ideal mode of teaching or training
- innovative ideas on how to involve more people in learning
- innovative ideas about approaches to training and community involvement
- factors that would make learning easier

### **3 Using Appreciative Inquiry in Training**

AI can be used in training as an ice-breaker, communication and listening exercise and as a starting point for discussion. This section talks about how AI can be used to provide a useful and positive learning experience as well as helping the Voice of the Learner project to collect information about learners' views of learning.

#### **3.1 Benefits**

Some of the benefits of using AI have already been mentioned. In summary, the use of AI exercises as part of a training session opens up channels of communication, generally creates an open and relaxed atmosphere and engages the group. It can help to build the confidence of the participants and can be used as a basis for developing interview skills.

The use of AI as part of The Voice of the Learner consultation project also allows participants to discuss issues around learning, and helps to reaffirm their decision to become involved in learning. It allows them to make their views heard, and to take these views to decision-makers and funding bodies to help shape the future of adult learning in Barnet.

#### **3.2 Organising an AI session**

This section sets out a number of scenarios for organising a training session using AI and links to tools and resources in Section 2

##### ***Ice-breaker***

A short, half hour AI session can be used to break the ice with a new group. However, depending on the background and past experiences of the members of the group, it may be more useful to leave this exercise until the group members have the confidence to start to communicate with each other. An ice-breaker session would typically involve the members of the group asking each other questions (in pairs or small groups) about "peak experiences" and listening to the replies. This is usually followed by a debrief and discussion of the stories. Some ice-breaker exercises and resources can be found in Section 2.

##### ***Interviewing techniques***

AI can be used as a focus for developing a well-rounded understanding of interview techniques both from the point of view of interviewer and interviewee. An interview techniques session would one to two hours and might include:

- Discussion about question type and asking questions
- Exercises in listening techniques
- Retelling of each others' stories
- Feedback and debrief

##### ***Inquiry***

A full inquiry session would last between two and six hours and would include most of the techniques described in the previous sections. Taking "learning" as the topic, this would include:

- An exploration of what learning is (and possibly challenging of preconceived notions)
- Discussion about question types and asking questions
- Exercise on creating questions

- Exercise on interview techniques and listening techniques
- Pair or small group interviews
- Feed back to main group or small groups
- Retelling of stories
- Identifying main themes and ideas
- Prioritising ideas
- Devising a vision of the future – provocative propositions and “three wishes”

This session could include an explanation of the theoretical background of Appreciative Inquiry, depending on the group, but this is not necessary in order to carry out the exercises.

Resources for all these sessions and exercises are in Section 2.

### **3.3 Gathering the data**

The purpose of The Voice of The Learner is to gather data about attitudes towards learning. Therefore it is important that any information gathered during these sessions is fed back to the project team – with the permission of the participants and anonymously if necessary. We would like to make this as easy a process as possible and so have designed the exercises in order to collect the right sort of information automatically. Information we would be interested in includes:

- Basic information about the group session, composition etc. (see form in Section 2)
- Stories or summaries of stories from participants – possibly written up by themselves or another group member
- Completed forms or exercises
- Flipchart summaries of discussions
- List of themes, propositions and wishes
- Anecdotes about the session
- Creative ideas about learning

We would also be interested to hear from members of the community who would like to become further involved in the project.

### **3.4 What happens next?**

Everyone participating in the project will be able to join an email discussion list and talk through any aspect of their experience with other participants and the project team. We encourage this to be an informal discussion and for people to share their experiences freely and ask questions.

Those participating in the project will be invited bring back their initial findings to a short workshop to discuss progress, share results and brainstorm on how to develop the work. These workshops can be used to ensure a broad coverage of research. They can also be used to look at ways to develop any ideas that are emerging from the research in terms of joining-up of services, greater participation of the community in shaping the learning offer.

Once all the results have been received, a first analysis will be carried out by the project consultants in collaboration with the project team. The results will be summarised into overall themes, with the ideas, aspirations and views of the community within each theme.

This will be followed by a planning event in which community representatives and public service managers will be invited to help prioritise the findings and create an overall vision for the future. Initial ideas about how to achieve the vision will be discussed.

Finally, the overall results will be conveyed to the project steering group, consisting of senior decision-makers in Barnet. We plan that members of the community will play a leading role in this meeting.

### **3.5 More about Appreciative Inquiry**

Appreciative Inquiry can be used in any group, community, organisation or business. Over the last 15 years it has been used to develop and refocus businesses, consult with the community, develop new and innovative projects, promote best practice and give a voice to those who are normally not heard. It has been a catalyst for transforming organisations and communities because of its positive focus and the fact that it encourages everyone to make their opinions heard.

Almost any subject can be used as a basis for inquiry. For example:

1. AI was used to facilitate the Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commission strategic plan.

Outcome: a plan which reflects all staff's perspectives on working towards a discrimination free community.

A staff member's comment: "it's amazing to see all our stories represented in what we're all working towards now"

2. AI was used to merge 6 different academic groups with different customs and practices to form one new faculty which reflects the best of all the contributing cultures.

One academic's comment: "For the first time we've had a process to support the changes we're making and the process has helped bond and energise us to come up with something new and exciting"

3. AI was used to give local people a voice in decisions made about the management of their traditional lands.

(See Skownan First Nation case study in Section 2)

You can find out more about appreciative inquiry from the following websites:

#### ***Appreciative Inquiry Commons***

A free online resource with articles, examples and contacts.

<http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/>

#### ***Melish and Associates***

Articles and tools for using Appreciative Inquiry.

<http://www.melish.com.au/resources.htm>

#### ***Imagine Chicago***

An ongoing city-wide Appreciative Inquiry project with lots of case studies and examples.

<http://www.imaginechicago.org/>

#### ***Skownan First Nation Community Values Project – Case Study***

An example of how all the techniques were used in a grass-roots community consultation.

<http://www.iisd.org/ai/waterhen.htm>

## **Section 2**

### **Trainer Tools**

This section contains a resource of tools and exercises that can be used to create Appreciative Inquiry sessions for use in all kinds of training environments. The forms are also available on disk in Microsoft Word format.

#### **Contents of this section:**

- Sample Agendas with annotations
- Session Form
- Developing Questions (handout)
- Asking Questions (trainer resource; handout)
- Example Questions (trainer resource)
- Interview Sheet 1 – Notes (trainer resource)
- Interview Sheet 1 (handout)
- Interview Sheet 2 – Notes (trainer resource)
- Interview Sheet 2 (handout)
- Interview Sheet 3 – Notes (trainer resource)
- Interview Sheet 3 (trainer resource; handout)
- Blank interview sheet (handout)
- Survey Form
- Listening skills (trainer resource; handout)

## **Sample Agenda (with annotations)**

### **Full day session**

(this may be split over two half days, or even longer)

#### **Session 1: All about learning (Group discussion)**

Group discussion around one or more of the following themes:

- How do we learn?
- Who do we learn from?
- What are the different situations in which we learn?
- What is the difference between learning in a classroom and learning in other situations – e.g. from family, from reading, from work, from raising children?
- What are the most useful things I/we have ever learned?
- What would I/we like to learn for the future?

#### **Session 2: Icebreaker exercise (Exercise)**

In pairs or small groups, participants carry out a mini-interview, taking it in turns to ask each other about their best experiences of learning. Interview Sheet 1 on page 24 can be used for this. Each person should spend up to five minutes as the interviewer and then swap with the interviewee.

#### **Notes**

This exercise is just a taster, so can be very informal. It is not necessary for the participants to have had any experience of interviewing, nor for them to understand anything about the Appreciative Inquiry process.

Interviews can take place in English, or in another language as long as one member of the pair or group is prepared to feed back in English.

It is not essential for the interviewer to take notes.

Some participants may feel unable or unwilling to carry out this exercise, in which case they could observe an interview and take notes.

#### **Session 3: Feedback (Group discussion)**

A debriefing on the interviewing exercise. Members of the group can be asked to feed back on and discuss:

- General feelings about carrying out the exercise
- Retelling of stories from the interviews
- Identification of themes from the stories (e.g. by writing them up on a flip chart)
- More general discussion about the themes that have arisen



#### **Session 4: Asking Questions (Training/Exercise)**

A focus on designing and asking different kinds of questions to get different responses. This can lead on from the previous session.

An important difference between the Appreciative Inquiry approach and other interviewing/surveying protocols is the positive focus.

This can be summarised as:

<b>If I ask you...</b>	<b>You'll be thinking about...</b>
Tell me the barriers that prevent you from getting involved with further learning.	The barriers!
What could we do (as a college/as a community) to enable more people to get involved with learning?	Creative solutions.

Resources on question types and developing questions can be found later in this section.

An exercise on developing positive questions can be done in small groups in preparation for further interviews. The handout sheet on page 20 gives a framework for this exercise, which involves deciding on a specific topic (within the general topic of Learning) and designing open, appreciative questions to inquire about the topic. This can be a free choice of topics within the whole area of Learning, or could concentrate on a specific area – see Example Questions on page 22.

Participants should be encouraged to discuss and formulate follow-on and future questions as these will be used from Session 6 onwards.

#### **Session 5: Interview Techniques (Training/Discussion)**

If the training group contains job-seekers, a session could be inserted here on general interview techniques.

#### **Session 6: Interviews (Exercise)**

A longer session of interviews between pairs or within small groups, using the questions that have been designed in Session 4. The blank interview sheet on page 30 can be used by interviewers to make notes.

Future questions especially will provide material for Session 7 onwards.

#### **Session 7: Themes (Exercise)**

Each interviewer/interviewee pair should be encouraged to report back on their interview to the main group, with the trainer or another group member recording the main points.

*Examples: A training course with an attached crèche allowed me to go back to learning  
My favourite teacher at school was one who took time to explain things to me*

**These can then be grouped into themes, for example teachers/trainers, subjects, environment.**

It is not unusual for some of the comments to be related to different subjects such as housing, health, location and so on. If these issues are important to the group they can form their own themes.

Once the main themes have been identified, members of the group can add additional points within those themes.

### **Session 8 – Prioritising (Exercise)**

Members of the group or the trainer should write the themes along with each of the statements in that theme on sheets of flip-chart paper.

For this exercise you will need to give every member of the group five small “spot” stickers.

Each person in the group should look at all the points that have been raised and put a sticker next to the five that he/she considers to be the most important. (If the group is smaller or the number of points that have been raised are small, three stickers can be used instead.)

**This exercise will give an immediate picture of the points and ideas that are most important to the group.**

### **Session 9: Wishes for the future (Group discussion or Exercise)**

This session moves the group from talking about their actual experiences to talking about the future. Some statements about the future may already have come out from the interviews.

These can be built on through general discussion with members of the group making suggestions, **or** through a three wishes exercise.

For the three wishes exercise, participants should split into smaller groups and within their group come up with three wishes for the future. The wishes should relate to the overall theme of learning in Barnet, and could be personal, focused on the immediate community/neighbourhood or on the Borough of Barnet as a whole.

### **Session 10: What we want! (Group discussion)**

If the participants of the group could make one statement about how they would like to see the future of education/training/learning in Barnet, what would it be?

Statements should be positive, strong statements about the future – however impossible they sound.

For example:

- We want training courses with an attached crèche in every community centre in Barnet
- We want family learning and cultural learning to be valued and supported

All statements made by the participants will be brought forward to the project Steering Group at an end of project presentation, and will appear in the project final report.

## Shorter Agendas

Shorter agendas can be built up by selecting sessions from above.

A shorter session could be made up by moving straight from the ice-breaker exercise to drawing out themes. So this would include, from above,

Session 1 – All about learning  
Session 2 – Icebreaker exercise  
Session 3 – Feedback  
Session 7 – Themes  
Session 8 – Prioritising  
Session 9 – Wishes for the future  
Session 10 – What we want

Alternatively, a half-day could focus just on the first part of the process and include sessions 1-6 only.

An even shorter agenda could be made by running sessions 4-6 only, with a brief explanation of the process at the beginning.

### Other scenarios

The tools and techniques can also be used in other ways. For example, some people in the training session may be keen to carry out interviews in their community or family. This can be encouraged, and anyone who would like to be more involved will be welcome to join the email discussion group (if they have email) and attend focus groups and other meetings.

## Session Form

**Date of session:**

**Venue:**

**Name of trainer:**

**Number of participants (overall):**

### Breakdown of participants

Please enter the number of participants in each category in the relevant box below.

#### **Gender**

Male  Female

#### **Age**

Under 16  16-49  50-64  65+

#### **Ethnicity**

White-British  White-Irish  White-Other

Mixed white and black Caribbean  Mixed white and black African  Mixed white and Asian

Mixed other  Indian  Pakistani

Bangladeshi  Asian – Other  Black – Caribbean

Black – African  Black – Other  Chinese

Other  Not known/  
prefer not to say

#### **Disability**

No disability  Have a disability  Prefer not to say

## Developing Questions

Appreciative Inquiry is about asking positive questions.

It is about asking people about their **best** experiences in order to find out **what works**.

An important part of this is asking the right questions.

We are trying to find out about learning – what sort of training is best, how people like to learn, where they like to learn.

What sort of things could you find out about people's past experience of learning?

*Example: Where people have learned things – because this might include more places than just schools and colleges.*

What positive questions could you ask?

*Example: Where were you when you learned the most useful thing you've ever learned?*

## Asking Questions

### Initial questions

You are looking for past examples of good practice that the person you are interviewing is enthusiastic about.

- it must be a real story
- it must be something they want to share with you

#### Examples:

What is the most valuable thing you have ever learned?  
What has been your best experience of learning something?

### Follow-on questions

You are asking the person you are interviewing to give more of their story. You want them to identify what was so good about the experience *and why*.

#### Examples:

What was so good about it?  
Why did you enjoy it?  
Why do you think you learned so much at that time?  
What support mechanisms were in place?

### Future questions

You are asking the person to imagine what the future would be like if they could take these good things from the past and apply them to the future. But first you need to convince them not to be restricted in their thinking.

#### Examples:

IF the conditions you have just outlined could be created...  
IF you could have anything you wanted...  
IF money/childcare/lack of previous qualifications was no object...

...what would you most like to learn?  
...what sort of learning environment would you want for yourself/your community?  
...what sort of facilities would you have as part of a learning centre?  
...what could be done to enable more people to be able to learn?

Use the words and examples that the person has given to you to encourage them to talk about the future. For example:

“You talked about the time when you were in a mother and toddlers group that put on cookery classes. How do you think we could do something like that in Golders Green? ... What sort of group might organise it? ... How could the college help?”

## Example Questions

The following gives an overview of the breadth of information we would like to collect as part of this project. It also gives a selection of example questions – but is by no means exhaustive. Please feel free to be creative!

### General

- What has been your best experience of learning?
- Have you ever really enjoyed learning something? Tell me about it, and what was good about it.

### The learning environment

- Where was the best place you ever learned anything?
- What has been your favourite learning environment?
- If you could design the ideal learning environment what would it be like?

### Teaching and training methods

- Can you remember a teacher or trainer that you thought was really good? Tell me about them? What did you learn from them? What was good about their way of teaching?
- Have you ever been to a school/college or course that you really enjoyed? How were you taught? What was good about it?

### Learning in the cultural context

- Have you ever had a good experience of learning something from a family member? From someone in your community? How did it compare with formal school or college? What was good about it?
- Have you learned a lot about your own culture? Did you enjoy learning it? What was the value of learning these things? What else would you have liked to learn?

### Ways to make learning more accessible

- Has there been a time in your life when learning was made easier for you or others? What happened? What was done to make learning easier?

### Type of learning and subjects most wanted

- If you could learn anything you wanted – anything at all – what would it be?
- What's the one thing you could learn that you think would make the most difference in your life?

### Reasons for wanting to learn

- What has been the most useful thing you've ever learned? Why was it useful?
- What is the reason that you returned to learning? What would you like to achieve in the long term?
- What are your overall goals in life? What could you learn that would help you?

## **Interview Sheet 1 Notes**

This is a very simple interview sheet with pre-prepared questions. It can be used for a ice-breaker exercise with little preparation.



## Interview Sheet 1

### Instructions

You are going to interview each other in pairs.

One person will be the interviewer and one person the interviewee. You should change around after 5 minutes.

The person who is interviewing should:

- listen carefully without interrupting
- encourage the other person to talk and tell more of their story
- make notes

The person being interviewed should:

- answer the question as fully as they can

---

**Name of interviewer**

**Name of interviewee**

**Date**

---

Question:

Tell me about your best ever experience of learning something.

## **Interview Sheet 2 Notes**

This is a slightly more detailed interview sheet to be used in a longer exercise. Participants can be encouraged to rephrase the questions in their own words, and improvise new questions in the second and third sections.

Designing additional questions can form an exercise in its own right.

This sheet doesn't have so many instructions on as Sheet 1 as these can be discussed beforehand.

## Interview Sheet 2

**Name of interviewer**

**Name of interviewee**

**Date**

---

*I'd like to ask you a few questions about your experiences of learning. This could be learning you've done at school or college, or in your family, through work or from reading or television.*

What has been your best experience of learning something?

What made it so good?  
Who was involved?  
What did you learn?

What could we do in Barnet to provide learning experiences like that?

### Interview Sheet 3 Notes

This is the most comprehensive interview/survey sheet. It can be used as part of an extended group exercise or as part of a survey – either carried out by members of the community or by those working in public services.

The sheet should be used as a prompt for the interviewer, **not** given to the interviewee to fill in. This kind of surveying works best when there is a dialogue between the two people. However, a questionnaire version of this sheet can be found later in this section for situations in which it is impossible to carry out a face to face interview.

This sheet relies on interviewers thinking out their own questions in advance. It also assumes some basic experience of interviewing. This could be experience gained through group work in a training situation.

The interviewer can use all sections of the form or just some, depending on the situation.

In each section, the interviewer should ask an initial question and follow on questions. Future questions are optional – they can be asked in each section or altogether at the end.

When asking questions about the **future**, the interviewer should encourage the interviewee to refer to comments already made about the **past**.



***Section 2: Questions about the present***

**5. Why are you interested in coming back to learning? (if applicable)**

**6. What do you most want to learn and why?**

***Section 3: Questions about the future***

**7. Ideal learning environment**

**8. Services that would encourage more people to take part in learning**

***Section 4: Planning for the future***

**9. If you could do one thing that would improve learning in Barnet, what would it be?**

**10. Any other comments you would like to add?**

## Blank Interview Sheet

### Instructions

You are going to interview each other in pairs.

One person will be the interviewer and one person the interviewee.

The person who is interviewing should:

- listen carefully without interrupting
- encourage the other person to talk and tell more of their story
- make notes

The person being interviewed should:

- answer the question as fully as they can

---

**Name of interviewer**

**Name of interviewee**

**Date**

---

**Question(s):**

**Notes:**

## Survey Form

The purpose of this form is to find out more about your experiences and views of learning. We will use this information to help enhance adult learning provision in Barnet by finding out more about how and where people want to learn, what sort of things they want to learn and why they would like to gain more skills, education and qualifications.

The questions on this form will ask you about:

- Your previous experiences of learning. These could be at school, college, work, from a family member, from books or television or skills you have taught yourself.
- How we could improve adult learning provision in the area for you, your community and family.

### **Section 1 : About you**

<b>Name</b> .....			
<b>Address</b> .....			
..... <b>Postcode</b> .....			
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Age</b>			
Under 16	<input type="checkbox"/>	16-49	<input type="checkbox"/>
		50-64	<input type="checkbox"/>
			<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Ethnicity</b>			
White-British	<input type="checkbox"/>	White-Irish	<input type="checkbox"/>
		White-Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed white and black Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>	Mixed white and black African	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Mixed white and Asian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mixed other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Indian	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Pakistani	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bangladeshi	<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian – Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Black – Caribbean	<input type="checkbox"/>
Black – African	<input type="checkbox"/>	Black – Other	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Chinese	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Disability</b>			
No disability	<input type="checkbox"/>	Have a disability	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Prefer not to say	<input type="checkbox"/>

.../cont



*How did you hear about this survey?*

.....

**Section 2 : Your past experiences**

**1. What has been your best or most memorable experience of learning something new? What was good about it?**

**2. What is the most useful thing you have ever learned?**

**3. Describe the best environment in which you have learned something (e.g. a school, a college, your own home etc.)**

**4. Think about the best teacher or trainer you have ever had. What was good about the way they taught? What made them such a good teacher/trainer?**

*.../cont*

**Section 3 : The future**

When filling in this section, think about your answers to Section 2 and your memories of good learning experiences from the past.

**5. Why are you interested in coming back to learning? (if applicable)**

**6. If you could learn anything in the world, what would it be and why?**

**7. If you could design a perfect learning environment for adults, what would it be like? What facilities would it have? How would it be run?**

**8. If you wanted to encourage more people from your community to improve their skills and qualifications, how would you do this? What facilities would you provide?**

**9. If you could do one thing to improve adult learning opportunities in Barnet, what would it be?**

*.../cont*

**10. Any other comments you would like to add?**

Thank you for filling in this form. If you would like any further information about the project, please get in touch with the person who gave or sent you this form. All the data that we gather throughout this consultation will help to shape adult learning strategies for Barnet in the future.

## Tips for improving listening skills

The best listeners are those who listen actively rather than passively. The following list of simple active listening techniques can make a huge difference to your interactions with team members, partner organisations and clients.

- Give your full attention to the other person. Eliminate any outside distractions as far as possible and switch your attention away from other matters. If you are not able to give the other person your full attention, for example if you need to meet an urgent deadline, then suggest that you reschedule for another time – and set a definite date and time.
- Use your body language to show that you are paying attention. In British culture, the best position for listening is at an angle to the other person (rather than face to face or side by side) and reasonably close together but with several feet of space between you, maintaining an open and relaxed posture. This allows you to maintain eye contact without seeming threatening, appear relaxed and to create a slight closeness without intruding on personal space. However, bear in mind that other cultures may have different attitudes towards personal space and formality. If in doubt, take your cue from the other person and try to find some way in which you are both comfortable.
- Allow the other person as much time as they need to get their point across and don't – **ever** – interrupt.
- Encourage the person to carry on talking by making positive but non-committal comments such as “yes...” or “Uh-huh...” This shows that you are still paying attention.
- From time to time, reflect back in summary what you think the other person has said and ask for clarification.
- Ignore as far as possible any distracting factors such as accent, speech impediments, lapses of grammar or other non-essentials. If you find it difficult to hear the other person, ask them if they could speak up a little. Ask them to repeat anything you didn't hear.
- Focus on what is meant as well as what is said. Look for underlying emotions and any cues about areas that the other person seems to have difficulty expressing. Reflect back emotion using a neutral tone, for example: “you seem to be quite angry about that” or “so would I be right in thinking that you feel very motivated about this area of your work?”
- Use the technique of reframing – repeating back what has been said in a different way. This is especially useful if the other person is angry or upset as you can restate the problem or issues in a less emotional way. However, always seek the other person's agreement.
- Ask open rather than closed questions, for example “what sort of staff development would really help you in your job?” rather than “would you like to go on a course?”
- Take your cue on ending the conversation from the other person where possible. Summarise the conversation once more and ask if they are happy with any conclusions or decisions reached.