



Using Appreciative Inquiry to Help Communities Envision a Sustainable Future

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Sustainable Urbanism held at Texas A&M
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Today's objectives

Learn how AI can be used to:

- ◆ Access collective wisdom about what gives life to organizational systems
- ◆ Inspire people to imagine possibilities for a sustainable future
- ◆ Engage stakeholder commitment and strategic alignment for implementing change

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Agenda

- ◆ Project catalysts
- ◆ Appreciative Inquiry process
- ◆ La Plata Vision 2030 project
- ◆ Lessons learned
- ◆ Visioning YOUR future (t.b.d.)
- ◆ Q&A (later)

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A small taste of AI

What do YOU
love/value/appreciate
about
where YOU live?

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Catalyst #1

Believing that it was
important to have a
vision of our future to
guide decisions and
inspire action

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Catalyst #2: Being disappointed with lack of diversity at City visioning exercise



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Catalyst #3: Bringing Gunter Pauli & ZERI training to Durango



- ◆ Homo non sapiens
- ◆ Zero waste (like nature)
- ◆ Uncompromising
- ◆ Systems thinking
- ◆ 5 kingdoms of nature
- ◆ Value added
- ◆ Education via fables
- ◆ Global network research
- ◆ Project implementation

Local officials identified issues needing “out-of-the-box” thinking (at ZERI roundtable)

1. How can we cope with the dissipation in our **SENSE OF COMMUNITY**?
2. How can we keep **WATER** here, use it wisely, and deal with other water claims?
3. How should we deal with **AIR QUALITY** and quality of life issues?
4. How should we balance our long/short term **ENERGY** issues, especially considering the impact on our tax base?
5. How can we maintain our community mix (and provide **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**) as we grow and prosper?
6. How can we develop the most constructive initiatives, given **DIVERSE NEEDS** and opinions?
7. How should we plan now for future **TRANSPORTATION** and growth needs?
8. How should we manage **GROWTH** in the future, especially given its interconnectedness with other issues?

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Catalyst #4

Seeing the opportunity
to walk my own talk
regarding Sustainability

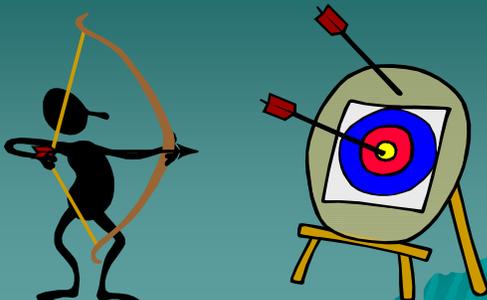
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Typical change process

1. Analyze situation (i.e., single problem)
2. Define ideal state
3. Develop a plan to close the gap
4. Implement the plan
5. Deal with resistance
6. Monitor and evaluate progress

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How many times have change
efforts failed or missed their mark?



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What makes
AI
different?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is
“a collaborative search to identify and understand the organization’s strengths, its potentials, the greatest opportunities, and people’s hopes for the future”
--AI Commons

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People move in the direction they focus on



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Deficit focus



- ◆ Fragments relationships
- ◆ Relies on experts
- ◆ Looks backward
- ◆ Exhausts people
- ◆ Fosters dependence on hierarchy
- ◆ Generates few new images of possibility
- ◆ Produces slow change

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Strength focus

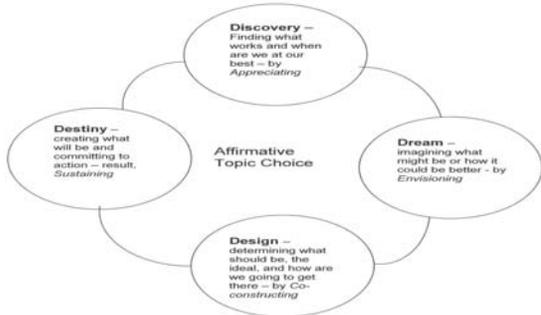


- ◆ Enhances relationships
- ◆ Respects the community and its members
- ◆ Looks at the whole picture
- ◆ Engages individuals
- ◆ Aligns participants
- ◆ Encourages breakthroughs and new possibilities
- ◆ Produces quick, enduring changes

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Positive Images
lead to
Positive Action

Using AI to involve community in
Grassroots Vision Project



Discovery – Finding what works and when are we at our best – by *Appreciating*

Dream – imagining what might be or how it could be better - by *Envisioning*

Design – determining what should be, the ideal, and how are we going to get there – by *Co-constructing*

Destiny – creating what will be and committing to action – result, *Sustaining*

Affirmative Topic Choice

Interview protocol

1. What do you like most about living here? What brought you here? Why do you stay?
2. What has been a highpoint experience that made you proud to live here? How did others contribute to that experience? What do you value about your participation in that experience?
3. What do you see as the strengths of our community? What has contributed to your quality of life in being here?
4. How have the communities of La Plata County benefited from your well being (e.g., your financial stability, personal knowledge, faith or willingness to contribute to the community)?
5. Tell me about a time when you noticed and appreciated a community's commitment to the environment. The community may have been the one you live in or it may have been another city that does an even better job than we do here. A) What was the situation? What issues did the community face? A) What actions were taken? What were the results?
6. Think of a time in your personal life when you were confronted with growth either in your family or in your workplace or in your neighborhood. A) Describe that experience. B) What changes occurred to accommodate this growth successfully? How was growth supported to minimize stress, and make the change more comfortable?
7. How has your community (or another community that you know) done with the following impacts of growth in a way that reinforced your values and fit how you would want a community to respond?
 - a. Housing developments: diverse and affordable housing options.
 - b. Increased traffic: diversified transportation choices.
 - c. Economic vitality (e.g., rural livelihoods, locally-owned businesses, local job options).
 - d. Preserving the downtown area and historical districts.
 - e. Other (What else was important? For example, how did a community handle healthcare, education, or other services impacted by growth?)
8. Reflecting on all that you have thought of from the previous questions...
 - a. What do you most appreciate about the community you live in today?
 - b. In what ways do city/county government services support these qualities you most appreciate?
 - c. How can city/county government do more of what you most appreciate?
9. It is now 2030. La Plata County is everything you ever wanted it to be.
 - a. What is the environment like?
 - b. What housing options are available?
 - c. What types of businesses are there?
 - d. What kinds of jobs are available?
 - e. What diversity is there in our community? How do we treat each other?
10. In 2030, how is the quality of life better than it was in 2007?
11. If you could imagine our community 100 years in the future, what would make this a great place for future generations? What do you want them to inherit from us? What kind of legacy will we leave?
12. It has been said that most great things begin with a single step. What one small step might you take to help create the community of the image of your dreams?

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Hillsboro 2020 as one model

Award-winning approach



Creating "third places"

Leveraging Lead Partners



Translating everything into Spanish




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Surveys & Discover Summit: Appreciating what works

- ◆ Built website for people to share ideas and resources
- ◆ Identified 32 stakeholder groups for outreach
- ◆ Trained 30 interviewers in AI
- ◆ Translated questions into Spanish
- ◆ Developed online survey
- ◆ Created mini-version for high school students and transit riders to complete
- ◆ Invited all school districts to participate
- ◆ Inserted provocative Q&As in *Durango Herald*
- ◆ Involved Fort Lewis marketing class in analyzing results
- ◆ Presented results at community summit

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Needham 5th grade vision quilt



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Analyzing themes in the data



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Discovering what people value

- ◆ Natural beauty, outdoor recreation, river, open spaces
- ◆ Vibrant small town – historic, rural feel
- ◆ Sense of community – friendly, caring
- ◆ Government officials who welcome and respond to citizen involvement
- ◆ People who get involved – interested in preserving quality of life
- ◆ Cultural events – life long learning program
- ◆ Great place to raise a family

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Value statements began evolving



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Identifying our "Positive Core"



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Healthy Community: We flourish as a community by caring about everyone's needs and supporting efforts to reach our full potential.



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Environmental Stewardship: We honor and respect our natural environment, realizing that our lives are interdependent with the Earth's well-being.



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Economic Vitality: Our community experiences economic prosperity through diversification, self-reliance, interdependence and adaptability.



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Sustainable Systems: We design human solutions that promote the long-term health and preservation of complex natural and cultural systems.



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Dream summit: Imagining our community in 2030

- ◆ Preserve small town, rural/agriculture quality of life
- ◆ Protect river, clean water, clean air, wildlife
- ◆ Offer diverse and **affordable housing options**
- ◆ Support a mixture of local and larger businesses
- ◆ Offer better, **higher paying jobs**
- ◆ Maintain racial, cultural, social and ethnic diversity
- ◆ Provide better **transportation** options in county
- ◆ Improve **health care**
- ◆ More activities and places for **youth**

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Vision evolved through 3 all-day summits & 4 vision workouts

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La Plata County: A Colorado Community for All Ages...

In 2030, we celebrate our cultural and intergenerational diversity. Our community's wellness and life-long learning enables everyone to reach their full potential. We use local resources derived from sustainable systems to meet as many needs as possible. We act responsibly as stewards of our ecosystems, evolving in harmony with the natural world.

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Vision will continue evolving

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Design Summit: 23 strategies & 81 action steps... so far

SAMPLE

VISIONARY VALUE: Healthy Community					
VALUE STATEMENT: We flourish as a community by caring about everyone's needs and supporting efforts to reach our full potential.					
VISION STATEMENT: In 2030, we celebrate our cultural and intergenerational diversity. Our community's wellness and life-long learning enables everyone to reach their full potential. We use local resources derived from sustainable systems to meet as many needs as possible. We act responsibly as stewards of our ecosystems, evolving in harmony with the natural world.					
BACKSTORY - Grassroots Vision Survey: The 2006 Grassroots Vision Survey revealed that people appreciate the real sense of community here, where people experience a sense of belonging. We value our friends, neighbors, and family who participate as volunteers in various organizations and activities. We value our past and present participation about getting involved and preserving their quality of life. We value our community's history and want to ensure that it is preserved and passed on to future generations. We value our local options for recreation, including local restaurants and the arts. We value our local alternative health providers. We hope for increased city/county collaboration and cooperation along with the adoption of guiding principles.					
Guiding Principle 1: We believe that everyone is related and interdependent – everyone matters!					
Guiding Principle 2: We respect individual rights, yet we are guided by our concern for the common good.					
Guiding Principle 9: We leverage our collective knowledge and ingenuity to anticipate and respond to emerging needs.					
Guiding Principle 10: We develop community wisdom and share knowledge central to our success.					
STRATEGY 5: Create new public spaces (i.e., "third places") for people to come together in new ways.					
5.1					
	Action:	Lead Role:	Potential Partners:	Indicators:	Timeline:
Research	Assess existing and potential open civic spaces. (NOTE: Consider both indoor meeting and outdoor gathering places)	Durango Planning (Greg Hoch) & Durango General Services (contact Roy Peterson)	Durango Community Planning Dept.	Knowledge of existing and potential open civic spaces.	to be determined
5.2					
	Action:	Lead Role:	Potential Partners:	Indicators:	Timeline:
Civic spaces	Develop more civic spaces for celebrations, art and food/farmers market fun. Create a citizen task force to explore options, including funding the purchase of existing commercial space to convert to civic areas. Work with County on plan for reuse.	Durango (contact Greg Caton & Bob Kusler), La Plata (contact Joanne Spive)	Business community; OHK; Parks & Rec Dept; Convention Center Committee; Fairgrounds; 4-Corners Back Country Horsemen	Task Force created with City and County endorsement.	to be determined

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Original Strategies: Healthy Community

- ◆ Increase public involvement in policy-making.
- ◆ Strengthen intergovernmental relationships.
- ◆ Improve health and vitality for all ages.
- ◆ Expand life education opportunities.
- ◆ Create new public spaces (i.e., "third places") for people to come together in new ways.
- ◆ Provide social/family support to help families deal with local economic challenges.
- ◆ Promote positive youth development.
- ◆ Enhance local cultural activities and the development of the arts.

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Original Strategies: Environmental Stewardship



- ◆ Restore and protect our natural environment.
- ◆ Protect watersheds and conserve water.
- ◆ Develop climate action plan to address region's impact on climate change.

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Original Strategies: Economic Vitality



- ◆ Establish capacity to support local economic initiatives.
- ◆ Seek local resources first, then regional; use external resources only as necessary.
- ◆ Support local workers with livable wages and affordable housing.
- ◆ Make the most efficient possible use of all local resources.

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Original Strategies: Sustainable Systems



- ◆ Develop regional approach to sustainability strategy.
- ◆ Develop large scale education campaign and achieve community buy-in for sustainability efforts.
- ◆ Implement mass transit system using alternative energy sources.
- ◆ Implement alternative energy production systems with goal of becoming a net exporter of renewable energy.
- ◆ Develop local agriculture.
- ◆ Develop local forest products industry.
- ◆ Adopt zero waste philosophy.
- ◆ Develop information exchange locally and regionally/globally to share ideas and best practices.

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10 guiding principles

1. **We believe that everyone is related and interdependent – everyone matters.**
2. We respect individual rights, yet we are guided by our concern for the common good.
3. We strive to minimize our ecological footprint.
4. We recognize the vital importance of protecting the water that allows us to live here.
5. We conserve our natural resources, while protecting our lands, wildlife, and air quality.
6. We flourish with sustainable use of our abundant solar energy, agricultural land, and forests.
7. We model human systems on the beauty, efficiency and resilience of natural systems.
8. We shop and invest in our community to create jobs and local prosperity.
9. **We leverage our collective knowledge and ingenuity to anticipate and respond to emerging needs.**
10. **We develop community wisdom and share knowledge central to our success.**

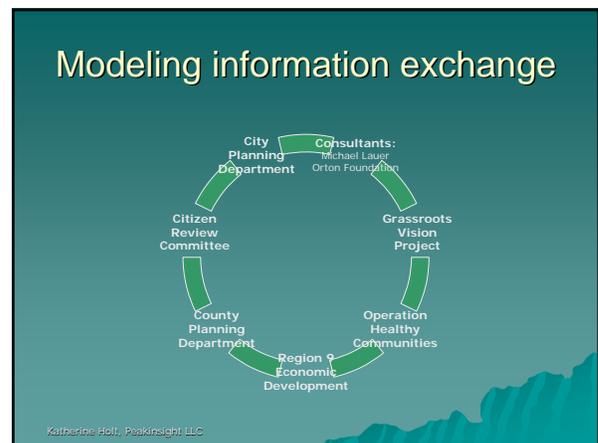
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Encouraging civic engagement

- ◆ 324 online surveys
- ◆ 83 interviews & mailed surveys
- ◆ 33 youth surveys
- ◆ 350+ at interviewer trainings, summits, vision workouts, etc.
- ◆ 70+ on Vision Teams

TOTAL: 800+ participants so far

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Linking to "Operation Healthy Community Summit" to create projects

- ◆ Community healthcare
- ◆ Positive youth development
- ◆ County-wide transit
- ◆ Affordable housing
- ◆ Living wages

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Project timeline

- ◆ Initial kick-off meeting on December 15, 2005
- ◆ Steering committee was formed
- ◆ Website was created to support project
- ◆ Appreciative Inquiry training from Dec 20-Jan 26
- ◆ Interviews & online surveys from Dec 20-Mar 10
- ◆ AI "Discover" Summit on January 21
- ◆ AI "Dream" Summit on February 18
- ◆ Vision workouts on Feb 23, Feb 28, Mar 9, Mar 16
- ◆ AI "Design" Summit on March 18
- ◆ Hillsboro 2020 visit in April
- ◆ Additional working sessions plus reports in April - May
- ◆ Operation Healthy Community Summit on May 12
- ◆ Community Vision Teams began revising strategies in Sept
- ◆ Steering committee was expanded from 5 to 12+
- ◆ Durango adopted Comp Plan on March 6, 2007

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Durango's new vision

Durango is an authentic and diverse community living in harmony with its natural environment, pursuing economic, environmental and social sustainability.

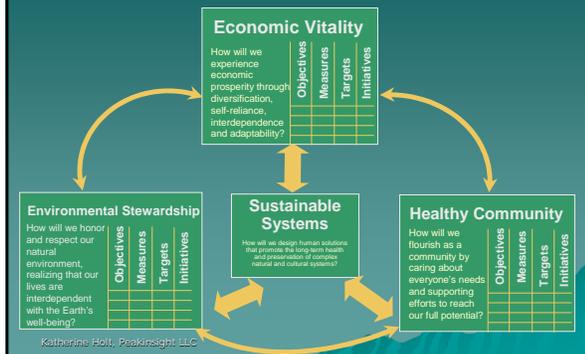
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Next steps underway

- ◆ Vision Teams are completing revision of strategies & action steps.
- ◆ Comprehensive package will be presented to County Commissioners by fall.
- ◆ Strategies will (hopefully) be incorporated into County's planning efforts.
- ◆ Lead Partners and others will begin and/or continue implementation.
- ◆ Periodic vision fairs and community celebrations will be held.
- ◆ Project may be scaled up to engage other communities throughout the Four Corners region.

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Maybe Vision 2030 Scorecard?



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"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

- Margaret Mead

What have we learned so far?

1. Civic engagement takes commitment & persistence.
2. Sustainability advocates showed up more than others, and their voices influenced the process.
3. Youth involvement gave more meaning to our effort.
4. If at first you don't succeed, try & try again to engage important stakeholders.
5. Unity can come from identifying positive core.
6. Positive intent stimulates collaborative engagement with other groups.
7. Interchange between community groups influences thinking/action elsewhere – unconscious ripples.
8. Asking "what step could YOU take?" prompts action.
9. Devil's advocates are enormously helpful.
10. AI + Systems Thinking is a powerful combination for helping communities envision a sustainable future.

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Mini-AI for dialogue or reflection

- ◆ What is the positive core in your own community?
- ◆ Imagine your community in 2030. What do you see?
- ◆ What role could you play in the change?
- ◆ What is your first step?

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AI origins & linkages

- ◆ David Cooperrider & Suresh Srivastva at Case Western Reserve
- ◆ AI Commons
<http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu>
- ◆ Business as an Agent for World Benefit
- ◆ Positive Organizational Scholarship
<http://www.bus.umich.edu/Positive/>
- ◆ Corporation for Positive Change (Diana Whitney & others)

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AI Resources

- ◆ Cooperrider, D.L., Sorensen Jr., P.F., Whitney, D. & Yaeger, T.F., Editors (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: Rethinking human organization toward a positive theory of change*. Champaign, IL: Stipes.
- ◆ Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
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- ◆ Ludema, J.D., Whitney, D., Mohr, B.J. & Griffin, T.J. (2003). *The appreciative inquiry summit: A practitioner's guide for leading large-group change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- ◆ Whitney, D. & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2003). *The power of appreciative inquiry: A practical guide to positive change*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.

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Peakinsight LLC fosters catalytic connections between people, organizations, and the environment to impact how business will operate profitably and evolve sustainably in the future.

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