

APPRECIATIVE ADVOCACY:

ENERGIZING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

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THINK ABOUT A HIGH POINT WHEN YOU FELT YOUR MEMBERS WERE ACTIVELY ENGAGED WITH THE PUBLIC AND THE LEGISLATORS WHO IMPACT YOUR ORGANIZATION. CREATING AN ACTIVE AND ENGAGED MEMBER ADVOCATE CAN TAKE RESEARCH, TRAINING AND DOZENS OF INTERACTIONS. YOU CAN FILL YOUR MEMBERS' HEADS WITH EXPERT TESTIMONY AND COMPELLING FACTS. ULTIMATELY, THOUGH, EXPERT OPINIONS AND FACTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO CHANGE OPINIONS. PUBLIC AND PUBLIC POLICY DECISIONS MOST OFTEN ARE MADE BASED ON PHILOSOPHY AND VALUES — NOT FACTS. LEGISLATORS ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE. THEY LOVE STORIES. CRAFTING YOUR MEMBERS' OWN STORIES, FRAMING HOW THEY ARE TALKED ABOUT AND DEFINED, WILL IMPROVE YOUR SUCCESS.

With the current economic crisis, organizations of all types will face greater scrutiny with lawmakers scurrying to legislate greater accountability. We already have seen the impact of the economy on giving, and the potential impact for public funding. How can you improve the odds that your members' public contacts are effective and that your members are communicating your initiatives to make them relevant to legislators or your public? The answer may be Appreciative Inquiry.

ENGAGING THROUGH AI

Appreciative Inquiry is a creative methodology that focuses on an organization's core values and strengths, with the intention of moving that organization forward in a better direction. By using AI interview techniques, association leaders can gather new information about what already is working well and contribute to the success of a given initiative. AI interviews can raise members' enthusiasm by valuing their own personal experiences and

contributions, making them more inclined to get involved.

Interviews can be conducted on the phone or in person, and the work can be spread among a team of interviewers. You can actively engage people at all levels of your organization as interviewers. To assist the interview team, a written set of guidelines and interview questions is developed, known as the interview guide. The interview guide keeps the interviews focused,

ensures best use of people's time, and maximizes the value of the data gathered for your strategic plan.

An interview guide has three basic parts: introduction, interview questions and interview summary sheet.

THE INTRODUCTION

The introduction should include a thank you for participating, state the purpose of the interview, and set the ground rules of time and confidentiality. For example:

Thank you very much for participating in this information-gathering process. Over the years, our association has proven effective and resourceful in meeting challenges and serving the needs of our community. We have had a high degree of success on both preparedness and responsiveness. There must be core factors that contributed to this success. What were they? What were the moments when the organization was at its best? To this end, we are gathering specialized input from as many stakeholders as possible including the board of directors, senior management, members, volunteers, strategic partners, and supporters.

All information gathered will be analyzed and summarized for common themes. Only themes that are relevant to the strategic plan will be shared. Individual comments will be kept confidential unless you give specific permission to share them. The interview will take approximately 20 minutes.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interviewer needs to establish common ground and trust while gathering information. Opening questions that focus on the individual's personal perceptions work well. For example:

1. To start, I'd like to learn about why you came to (work for/volunteer for/join/contribute to) our organization. What attracted you? What keeps you interested and engaged? What sets

our organization apart from other similar organizations and makes a difference for you?

2. Let's talk about the things you value most. What is it about the nature of our organization that you value the most? What is most interesting and meaningful?

3. Next, I'd like to explore what the future might look like. Change is a constant. Associations must continually change to survive. Tell me about a time when you were involved in a significant community change effort or a time when you positively influenced results of a change. What was exciting about the change? What did you or others do to make it effective? Who was involved?

4. Organizations that have passion and energy distinguish themselves in the community and attract resources. Great associations know how to "preserve the core" of their passion for what they do best and let go of things that are no longer needed. In looking ahead to the future for our organization, what are three things (values, strengths, or services) you want to see preserved and leveraged into the future?

THE INTERVIEW SUMMARY SHEET

Collecting data from stakeholders requires that the information be recorded consistently, themed and summarized appropriately. The interview guide needs to include the method for recording the data. The summary sheet is designed to help the interviewer be an attentive listener. For example, the summary sheet might say:

As you're listening, try to record:

- What was the most quotable comment that came out of the interview?
- What was the most compelling story that came out in the interview?
- Overall, what was your sense of what was most important to this individual?
- What three positive themes stood out most for you during the interview related to the following:

- Effective partnerships
- Effective change initiatives/results that made a difference
- Innovation or adaptation to changing environment
- Strengths that carry us forward
- Most significant achievements to build on
- Aspirations for the future

FINAL TIPS

The interview guide is simply that — a guide. The interviewer may not use all of the questions. Some people may not want to or cannot answer all the questions. That's OK. Some people may need time to interpret the questions as they apply to their context in the organization or to their personal situation. The interviewer needs to be prepared to listen and to ask clarifying questions if needed. For example:

- Can you tell me more?
- Why was that important to you?
- How did that affect the organization?
- How did the organization support you?

During Appreciative Inquiry interviews, let the interviewee tell the story. The interviewer should take notes; specifically listening for great quotes and stories that may indicate new insights or advocacy approach for your organization.

By focusing on the unique values and strengths of your association, Appreciative Inquiry techniques uncover and define what gives life and meaning to your organization. Applying AI language to the advocacy process highlights the positive accomplishments of your organization while engaging and inspiring internal and community stakeholders. Appreciative Inquiry will help your members take ownership of advocating for your organizational initiatives. 

For more information: visit www.appreciative-inquiry.org

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