



using RESOURCES

Using Resources is a series published by the Center for Congregations designed to help congregations make effective use of specific kinds of resources. It is our hope that you will find them useful in your work as a congregation.

Using Group Processes that Facilitate Positive Change

Emphasize the positive. Use affirming language. Look for the life-giving moments. Congregations are finding pathways to positive change through a variety of group processes that encourage supportive and uplifting actions involving the whole community of faith. Processes such as Asset Mapping, Appreciative Inquiry, World Café, and Open Space Technology are gaining momentum as congregations look for ways to emphasize and utilize their strengths to meet their challenges.

What is a positive change process?

- A group process that facilitates positive change is one that encourages an organization to view itself not as a problem to be solved but as a mystery to be embraced. These group processes encourage positive and affirming language and actions, finding the positive core, uncovering skills and talents already within the organization, and sharing stories, knowledge and creativity. These processes involve the whole community, which is part of what makes them so successful.

What are some of the most powerful group processes?

- *Appreciative Inquiry* (AI) is the process of studying what gives life and meaning to an organization when it functions at its best. This development process engages individuals within the organization in its renewal, change and focused performance. Developed by Dr. David Cooperrider, AI encourages a particular way of asking questions and envisioning the future that fosters positive relationships and builds on the basic goodness in a person, a situation, or an organization. In so doing, it enhances a system's capacity for collaboration and change. Using the four-step process of Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny, AI is based on the belief that people tend to move in the direction of what they study.
- *Asset Mapping* is the process of identifying assets (skills, talents, strengths) already in an organization and connecting them to each other in creative and innovative ways. Assets studied include physical, individual, institutional and economic.
- *Open Space Technology* is an organic way to conduct a conference, retreat or meeting where attendees generate the agenda and participate by leading small group break-out sessions during the meeting time. Open Space Technology is a unique way of shaping the direction of an organization from within.

- *World Café* is an energetic, easy-to-use process to foster dialogue, share knowledge and discover new opportunities. Based on living systems thinking, the Café creates networks of conversations that matter. Café is based on the concept that people already have within them the knowledge and creativity to address challenges – get them together to share this knowledge, and positive changes can happen.

When would we use these processes?

- Appreciative Inquiry is a great tool to engage a large group with specific ministry planning, comprehensive planning, evaluating programs, and team building.
- Asset Mapping is a good preliminary step to visioning. This is a creative way of bolstering a congregation's strengths.
- Open Space Technology is also good for large groups. This process works best if a congregation is open to risk-taking and new possibilities, without a preconceived agenda.
- World Café helps a congregation address a particular challenge or issue or answer a question, such as "how can we as a congregation respond to our changing neighborhood?" World Café works well when a large portion of the congregation is engaged – this allows a variety of insights and views to help shape the direction of the identified challenge.



Appreciative Inquiry

What are some things to think about before we get started?

- **Let's hear it for the team.** Appoint a team to plan and coordinate the event. More hands will make easier work when it comes to gathering supplies, setting up the meeting space and presenting the process. Appoint someone from your congregation to be the group facilitator who will lead the process.
- **Give it some time.** Planning a large group process can take a while. Allow yourself plenty of time to prepare, plan and collect supplies. Also think about the amount of time needed to take participants (especially a large group) through the process. Most of these processes work well





with a minimum of 25 persons and as many as 100. It may be unreasonable to allow only 15 minutes during a business meeting – you may need a couple hours or a whole day or more. Research into the process will give you an idea of how much time is needed.

- **Let's go shopping.** Have an ample amount of supplies ready for the event. Most of these group processes utilize easels, chart paper, sticky notes, markers, worksheets, and more. The resources about the processes often provide lists of needed supplies.
- **Making space.** Think about the type of space needed to take your group through the process. Most of these programs require wall space for posting ideas and room for individuals to move about the area. Also take into consideration the number of folks who will participate – many of these programs encourage whole community involvement.
- **Get it together.** Think about how you will organize the gathering space. Will you need microphones or a podium? World Café works well with a comfortable ambiance, bistro tables and tablecloths, while Asset Mapping requires lots of wall space and large tables.

- **Information to transformation.** Think about what you are going to do with the information that arises from the event. How will you use this information? Who will usher the information forward and keep it moving?

World Café



Learn More

***Appreciative Inquiry in the Catholic Church* by Susan Star Paddock. Plano, TX: Thin Book Publishing Co., 2003.**

The author explains that Appreciative Inquiry is a new way of looking at the world that turns problem solving upside down by searching within our heartfelt memories for the undiscovered solutions that already exist.

***Memories, Hopes, and Conversations – Appreciative Inquiry and Congregational Change* by Mark Lau Branson. Herndon, VA: the Alban Institute, 2004.**

This book is about narrative leadership and the first book to apply the principles of Appreciative Inquiry to the lives of congregations.

***Open Space Technology: A User's Guide* by Harrison Owen. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1997.**

This book is a hands-on, detailed description of facilitating Open Space Technology. Written by the originator of the method - an effective, economical, fast, and easy-to-repeat strategy for organizing meetings of between 5 and 1,000 participants - this is the first book to document the rationale, procedures, and requirements of Open Space Technology.

Open Space Technology website
<http://www.openspaceworld.org/>

The Open Space website offers resources, weblog, stories, comments, podcasts, photo album, bookstore, training and more.

***The Power of Asset Mapping* by Luther Snow. Herndon, VA: the Alban Institute, 2004.**

This book includes step-by-step directions along with insights and experiences by the author for conducting an asset mapping process in the congregation.

***The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry* by Susan Annis Hammond. Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing Co., 1998**

This book provides a brief overview of Appreciative Inquiry.

***The World Café* by Juanita Brown. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2005.**

The World Café is a flexible, easy-to-use process for fostering collaborative dialogue, sharing mutual knowledge, and discovering new opportunities for actions.

The World Café website
<http://www.theworldcafe.com/>

This website provides stories, resources, a newsletter, products and services, and lots of downloadable files.