

AI Certification Report

1. *Please include your name, title, email address, phone number and agency that you work for.*
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2. *Please include the AIFT Dates and location that you received your training.*
AIFT Training received- November, 2011 in Charlotte, NC

3. *Brief description of the organization, group, or community you worked with.*
Approximately 30 Cooperative Extension Agents and Sea Grant employees who registered for a training workshop I was providing with a colleague called “Engaging citizens in watershed management.” The list of professionals registered included many people from across the U.S. with significant public outreach experience in the water resources outreach field. While some attended with colleagues from their organization, the rest were from various organizations.

4. *List the names and/or category of stakeholders you included in the Core Group, the cross-section of people that helped you identify the topic and modify the Interview Guide.*
My colleague and co-trainer and myself.

5. *What was the positive topic that the Core Group identified for inquiry? What method did you use to help them identify the topic?*

The topic was “successfully engaging citizens in watershed management”. Developing the topic and workshop agenda involved sharing my learnings about Appreciative Inquiry with my co-trainer, and finding ways to focus our training workshop in ways to draw on the positive aspects of the participants’ experience. Since participants came from different universities, county Extension, and state Sea Grant programs, the goals of this AI process were more focused on professional development than organizational development. The goals were to introduce participants to AI, to provide them with experience participating in an AI process, and to use AI as a process to help them improve their public participation practice at work.

This is an important step for us, as much of our background and experience is grounded in conflict resolution theory. It has been a learning process to move away from the focus on the “conflict”, and to help participants of programs and trainings to focus on their positive experiences of working together. During the training, we provided background info on public participation principle and sources of conflict, and then I moved from a discussion conflict to an introduction of Appreciative Inquiry as a way to refocus energy into a more productive path forward. Throughout the workshop starting at the beginning, they were engaged in AI processes.

6. *Attach or include the modified Interview Guide they used, i.e., the Generic Interview Guide slightly modified for the positive topic of the inquiry.*

Interview questions included:

- Tell me about an experience in public participation that energized you, describe what happened.
- What about it energized you?

7. *What method of interviews did people use to inquire into exceptionally positive moments, face to face paired interviews, or some other way?*

Participants were asked to partner with somebody they did not know for face to face paired interviews.

8. *Attach or include a list of the Life-Giving Forces (what they MOST wanted to create MORE of) that the group identified in the stories they shared.*

Participants broke into small groups to share what they heard in the stories, and to identify the energizing themes, and to record the themes on flipchart paper. The small groups then reported out the themes that emerged to the larger group, which were summarized by the facilitator as follows.

- Education
- Broad participation
- Synergy
- Creativity
- Learning among participants
- Pairing/collaborating with diverse partners
- Finding practical solutions
- Humor
- Fun
- Personal connection

9. *Attach or include the Provocative Proposition(s) the group or organization created from the LGFs.*

As the workshop was only 3 hours long, we were not able to create provocative propositions during the workshop time. I explained the entire AI process to participants, and invited them to continue the process on their own or online with us. The rest of the process was modified and conducted online. A follow-up survey on the website Survey Monkey was sent to all participants shortly following the workshop with questions designed to provide an opportunity for statements by individual respondents. They were offered the opportunity to write a statement about how they could incorporate some of the themes to successfully engage the public. The following were statements provided by respondents who gave permission to share them:

- In my research watershed in Idaho, I plan to use the themes discussed in the workshop to engage the public in water protection and citizen science efforts.
- In my next program, I would like to better collaborate with diverse partners.
- The public can be successfully engaged when the topic of education is presented by a person or persons that have a personal connection and that are able to do so in a way that is fun and creative yet practical for the attendees.
- Put more effort in the initial stages of public involvement into recruiting the broadest participation possible, this requires building community and trust before working on the more substantive issues.
- I would like to incorporate fun and humor in getting things done, so that way everyone feels comfortable and guards are let down.
- There are two or three basic things that must happen - personal connection, finding practical solutions, synergy. Once you have those (and that can be done through humor, fun, creativity) then the others almost always fall into place.
- I am a strong believer in developing effective partnerships in order to maximize each agency's limited resources.

10. *Attach or include the Strategic Intentions the group or organization developed to realize the Provocative Proposition(s) they created.*

Participants were invited to offer how they will apply what they learned. Those who chose to respond provided the following:

- I will use some of the information as I help establish working groups for economic and environmental integrity in watersheds.
- I have already shared some of what I found to be the more interesting topics with local partners who did not attend the conference. We are planning a public relations campaign about watershed protection, one of the greatest threats to our drinking water supply.
- In my programming, I will employ the lessons I learned from my colleagues.
- Try to increase breadth of participation in future public involvement processes.
- Break out into smaller groups, and have people speak in front of the whole group.

11. Impact or Results: What organizational, group or community **attitude**, **process** or **structure** changes have people made as they move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? What progress have people made toward their Strategic Intentions or Initiatives or Pilot Projects? What stories of success can you share?

Based on feedback received in the survey, I believe it helped refresh some participants' views of public participation, and energized them to inject their practice with some of the energizing forces identified in the interviews. This illustrates attitude changes, possibly process changes with the way they approach their practice. I'm not aware of structure changes. As this was a workshop focusing on professional development, I would expect that that changes at first would be more personal in nature rather than organizational. However, when answering a question in our survey about what they liked about the workshop, a participant commented that the people in charge of Extension, in Washington, D.C. and elsewhere, should be made aware of these topics (which included public participation, appreciative inquiry, and conflict resolution) and support it in the organization's practice.

12. What will you do to ensure that people continue to move toward realizing the Provocative Proposition(s)? How will you help them gather stories of success? How will you help them celebrate? How will you, as the AI Facilitator, support their ongoing success?

I will send a follow-up email to participants to ask about stories of success, and share those with the list of participants if they give permission.

13. What did you wish for in the inquiry? What did you learn from the inquiry about yourself and your facilitation? What was your "personal best" experience related to facilitating the Inquiry?

I hoped for participants to think about their positive experiences in public participation, to feel energized about moving forward, and to consider an appreciative inquiry approach to their public participation practice. So often I hear of frustrations my colleagues in Extension and Sea Grant have in trying to engage the public in natural resource protection. It was quite nice to introduce them to ways to help mine the good that they are experiencing, and to feel the energy in the room as participants shared these energizing stories and themes. My personal best experience related to this inquiry occurred when a participant approached me afterwards and said she really got a lot from the workshop, and liked my "caring way" of working with participants. I imagine part of that came from my own personal style, and part of it was the positive Appreciative Inquiry concepts and exercise I was introducing and facilitating. Asking people to speak about energizing and positive experiences fosters such a different tone than one gets when asking them to identify problems or needs.

14. Have you received permission from the "client" or "clients" to tell us their story? In other words, does Company of Experts.net have permission to share this story with others?

Yes.