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Using Appreciative Inquiry to Identify Strengths in Refugee and Immigrant Families: Implication for Family and Community Assessment

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Using Appreciative Inquiry to Identify Strengths in Refugee and Immigrant Families: Implication for Family and Community Assessment

In 2011, to address an influx of immigrants and refugees from various nations, the City of Houston's Office of International Communities (OIC) asked researchers to form an Engagement Working Group (EWG). The researchers who also served as co-chairs (the authors of this article) utilized focus groups to develop an understanding of what was happening within various international communities including individuals' and families' knowledge of services and resources provided by the city, and to what extent these groups utilized those services. After discussions and review of the charge, the researchers recommended utilizing an Appreciative Inquiry (AI) methodology with the goal of collecting information about international families, utilizing that information to inform service providers from multiple non-profit organizations that provide resettlement services and recommend appropriate changes to city policy. The EWG implemented the AI method as it proceeds from a strengths based perspective encouraging dialogue about what is working within those communities and what services are being utilized and how the city can further improve upon interactions within those communities.

AI is a specific form of participatory action research (PAR) and is a suitable methodology for community-based research to accomplish the following: buy-in from community members, involve multiple stakeholders, take into account potential consequences to a whole community system, and develop a sense of empowerment among participants, etc. (Boyd & Bright, 2007). The practice of AI is a methodology that aims to create organizational change through a focus on elevating strengths and extending communities (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Luedema, Mohr, & Griffin, 2003).

Appreciative Inquiry Methodology
Appreciative inquiry is also a methodology that focuses on strengths based research. Onyett (2009) states that appreciative inquiry allows for service improvement approaches that focus specifically on appreciating the positive traits and resources individuals bring to contexts related to children and family services, such as: religious and cultural traditions, resourcefulness, entrepreneurial skills, broad kinship networks, and resource sharing.

Building off of Koestler's (1967) conception of "holons" to describe the nested nature of systems and the tensions within systems, Edward (2005) described the way holons sit upon each other and similar to the different layers of an onion, such "holons" or "layers" can help us better represent the inter-connected complex systems wherein families connect with work, education, and the wider community (Oynett, 2009).

According to Boyd and Bright (2007), most communities in the United States function in an ordinary way. Any urban community though can contain elements of high crime, public transportation problems, and other issues that arise in high density urban areas such as Houston. In many of the communities in which refugee and immigrant families reside there are issues of safety, public transportation, and lack of resources. However, most communities have a basic level of security, people at least tolerate one another, structures are in place to prevent people from harming the community, and a basic level of participation ensures at least some connection between people and the government. Yet other communities, perhaps for infrequent or rare periods, build exceptional thriving communities. People interact regularly and frequently with their neighbors and are highly engaged in community governance. They work together to build extraordinary resources that are attractive to outsiders (2007). This typically occurs when those communities allow for an extension and evaluation of community strengths. Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987) proposed that organizations or communities in this case, are best viewed as socially constructed realities. Any form of inquiry which focuses on the conflicts and problems within an organization or community may inadvertently create more of them. By contrast, Appreciative Inquiry allows for social innovation and change. Taking stock of what strengths exist within a community can create a dialogue that generates positive ideas about an ideal future, one with fewer tensions.

AI is an opportunity centric methodology with four primary components to the 4D model: Discover, Dream, Design, Deliver (see Exhibit 1 below).

1). **Discovery**: During this stage participants reflect on and discuss the best of *what is* concerning the object of inquiry. For example, if the inquiry is about improving customer service, participants might discuss their best experiences as a customer. (Carter and Johnson, 1999)

2). **Dream**: During this stage participants are asked to imagine their group, organization, or community at its best and an attempt is made to identify the common aspirations of system members and to symbolize this in some way.

3). **Design**: With a common dream in place, participants are asked to develop concrete proposals or ideas for the new organizational state. Often, participants self-select into small groups to develop specific change proposals. (Mohr, McLean &Silbert, 2003; Watkins &Mohr, 2001)

4). **Delivery** (sometimes referred to as Destiny): Is when consensus on the design statement is sought, an event is organized where individual participants can make self-chosen, personal commitments to action, and everyone is empowered to take those actions which they believe will bring the design to fruition (Bushe, 2009) (in Bushe, 2011).

The primary difference between the AI model and problem-centric models is that AI focuses on positive dialogue that presents opportunity for transformative organizational and community change. On the micro-level it also is utilized in client/service provider conversations. "The appreciative conversations that take place one to one, in small groups, and in even larger circles, serve to build trust and strengthen relationships allowing for disruptions in old patterns of thinking. This opens a pathway for new insights, new hope, and therefore new possibilities when we are mindful of the successes we have had and of the strengths in our system" (Feingold, Holland & Lingham, 2002, p. 251). The appreciative conversations that take place one to one, in small groups, and in even larger circles, serve to build trust and strengthen relationships allowing for disruptions in old patterns of thinking. This opens a pathway for new insights, new hope, and therefore new possibilities when we are mindful of the successes we have had and of the strengths in our system.
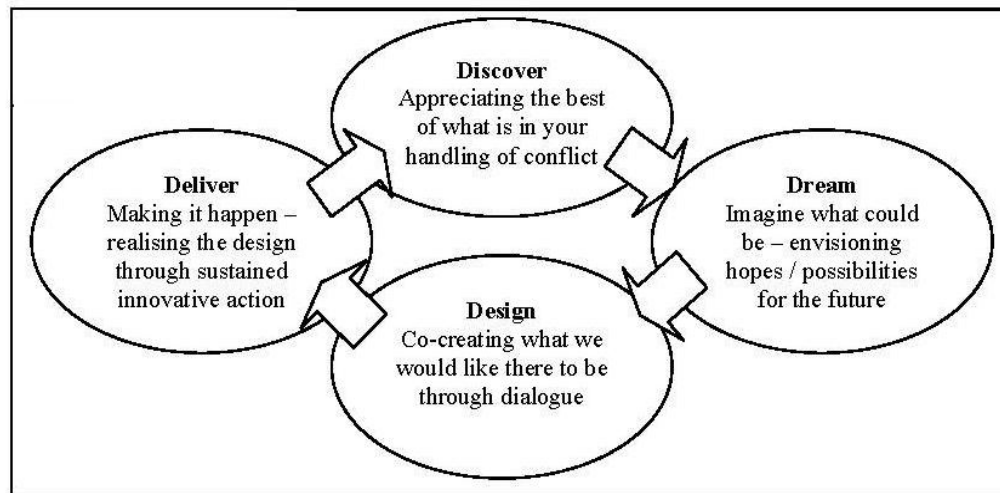

Exhibit 1. 4D Model of AI

The Engagement Working Group found Hammond's (1998) work useful to frame the strengths of the refugee and immigrant communities

and build on these strengths to inform city services and policies rather than focusing on barriers to effective community integration. Communities often operate at the basic level of functionality. The theoretical assumptions are based on a social Reconstructionist perspective.
According to Hammond (1998) the assumptions of AI are:

1. In every society, organization, or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organization or groups influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

All components of Hammond's assumptions of AI can assist in a shift towards a focus on strengths based solutions to community issues. The language that is used in the focus groups creates a reality/realities that affirm a new visioning. This allows for a diverse way of experiencing reality and communication plays a major role in the framing of the vision or culmination in a Dream of a new future. "AI can be generative in a number of ways. It is the quest for new ideas, images…that liberate our collective aspirations, alter the social construction of reality and, in the process, make available decisions and actions that were not viable…to us before. When successful, AI generates…organizational action toward a better future" (Bushe, 2007, p. 30).

Scope of the Study
In the fall of 2011, members of the Mayor's Advisory Committee for Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (MACIRA) for the City of Houston (COH) were asked to facilitate a study with members of the international communities around the city focusing on rapidly increasing or large representations of immigrant and refugee populations. The intent was to create a dialogue between the COH and members of these communities that focused on the strengths and resources present in the refugee and immigrant communities and identify the extent to which these communities could revision their future by focusing on what is working. An

Engagement Working Group was formed from the larger MACIRA Committee that was comprised of community and non-profit and other institutional leaders that had an interest in, or high level of interaction with, immigrant and refugee populations. The purpose of the Engagement Working Group (EWG) was to identify key opportunities, desires and interests of these immigrant and refugee groups and the families they comprise and identify ways to further strengthen the City of Houston services provided for these groups through the Office of International Communities (OIC). The EWG goals were the same tasked from the OIC. The Engagement Working Group was comprised of a core group including the Senior Director of Community Engagement of Neighborhood Centers, Inc., the Assistant Dean of the University of Houston-Downtown, the Regional Director of National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), the Executive Director of Boat People SOS (BPSOS), and the Manager of the Mayor's Office of Education Initiatives.

The Mayor's Office was attempting to reorganize MACIRA into a committee that had a broader purpose. The goal of the EWG was to begin a dialogue that connected the city more closely with the international communities and informed City leadership of the story of these groups, the aspirations for their families and how city policy may be affecting their lives. The information gathered in the study became part of a coordinated effort to a strong community-based recommendation on how to move forward with existing City of Houston services and resources. It behooved City leadership to listen to these diverse voices considering the strong economic, social, cultural, and political influence of these groups.

Houston is one of the most diverse cities in the United States, in part because of its many academic institutions and strong biomedical, energy, manufacturing, and aerospace industries. According to the U.S. Census (2000; Exhibit 2) the racial makeup of the city was 49.3% Caucasian, 25.3% African American, 5.3% Asian, Native American 5.3%, 16.5 % other and 37% Hispanic. Hence, Houston is a minority-majority city.

Houston is a diverse and international city, and is also the largest intake city in the state of Texas for refugees. Last year, for the first time since at least 2000, more refugees - 5,623 of them, or 10% of the national total - were settled in Texas than in any other state, something, perhaps, to celebrate as this most-diverse of American cities. They come from virtually every corner of the globe, but the vast majority of refugees to the United States are now coming from Burma, Bhutan, and Iraq - a demographic echoed by the people arriving in Houston.

Reviewing 24 years of the Houston Area Survey conducted by Rice University's Stephen Klineberg in Almond (2005) reveals that Houstonians are becoming more comfortable with diversity. The report also examines the nature of the ongoing immigration that is transforming this region and the nation. Unlike previous immigrant flows to America, the current streams are both non-European and strikingly diverse in their educational and income backgrounds. The report explores the extent of "Americanization" and of upward mobility experienced by three generations of Latino immigrants in Houston, and it assesses the changing quality of intergroup relationships in the region as a whole. There are so many immigrant and refugee populations utilizing police, fire, transportation, sewer and water services, and seeking additional supports from other entities, such as city parks, that the city needed to develop a process to better understand what was working within those international groups and what could be built upon to create positive experiences between city services and these groups.

Exhibit 2: Houston, Texas, US Census Numbers

	2000 Census	2010 Census	2000-2010 Change			
	Percentages	Counts	Counts	Percentages	Change	Percentages
Total Population	100%	2,099,451	1,953,631	100%	145,820	7.46%
Population by Race						
American Indian and Alaska native alone	0.71%	14,997	8,568	0.44%	6,429	75.04%
Asian alone	6.02%	126,378	103,694	5.31%	22,684	21.88%
Black or African American alone	23.74%	498,466	494,496	25.31%	3,970	0.80%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native alone	0.05%	1,153	1,182	0.06%	-29	-2.45%
Some other race alone	15.69%	329,436	321,603	16.46%	7,833	2.44%
Two or more races	3.26%	68,530	61,478	3.15%	7,052	11.47%
White alone	50.51%	1,060,491	962,610	49.27%	97,881	10.17%
Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin (of any race)						
Persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin	43.81%	919,668	6,669,666	341.40%	-5,749,998	-86.21%
Persons Not of Hispanic or Latino Origin	56.19%	1,179,783	14,182,154	725.94%	-13,002,371	-91.68%

Timeline of Study

In the Fall, 2011 the EWG and the leadership of the OIC for the City of Houston began meeting to develop a process to engage the international communities in a dialogue about their understanding and expectations of city service providers and also to identify positive resources and strengths within those communities.

In November and December of 2011, the EWG identified trusted members of the international communities and leadership in non-profits that had a strong relationship working within those same communities. These gatekeepers assisted the EWG, and later the facilitators, to gain access to the chosen populations for the study. Gatekeepers were identified through MACIRA committee members who were primarily working with communities and non-profit outreach organizations, resettlement agencies and cultural organizations. Some gatekeepers became facilitators or identified other members within the populations to act as facilitators and/or translators. They also assisted in organizing the outreach meetings and focus groups.

During January and February of 2012 members of the EWG trained facilitators at a Neighborhood Centers, Inc. location. Facilitator packets (Appendix A), nametags, and flip charts were disseminated. Facilitator packets included the protocol for the focus groups including scripted pieces and questioning strategies based on the AI method to assist in leading discussions for the focus groups.

During the months of February and March in 2012, focus groups consisting of 120 minute session across six locations at differing times were conducted. The purpose of the focus groups was to establish an ongoing dialogue between COH and members of these communities, gather information about the positive resources in those communities and how familiar individuals and families were with city services and strengthen and increase positive experiences. During April and May the facilitators compiled data and summarized strengths identified during the focus groups. In May, 2012 stakeholders representing organizations along with city officials met to discuss the essential findings from the focus groups sessions. During the summer of 2012, a working paper with formal recommendations was submitted to the Director of the OIC and the Mayor.

Participants of Study

There were 163 participants in six groups of approximately 25 community members each, and included representatives of either the largest number present of that population in the city or one of the fastest growing new immigrant/refugee populations. There was one focus group session for

each of the demographic groups. To determine which populations would be identified for focus groups the EWG examined data from the Kinder Houston Area Survey (Almond, 2005), US Census data (2010), NALEO Educational Fund Demographic Report (2010) and reports on human trafficking. After analyzing demographic data, six resident focus groups were carefully selected to participate in the study. These groups reflected a variety of perspectives from newly arrived refugees to more well-rooted and engaged immigrant communities.

The criteria were met by international groups comprised of Vietnamese, Central American, Mexican, Somali, Burmese, and Asian Indian. At a later period three additional groups consisting of Nigerians, Chinese and Iraqis were conducted. The additional groups were not organized early enough to be a part of the first phase of six focus groups but were identified initially as having either the largest presence in the city or a fast increasing number in the population. All were adults between the ages of 18-76 and most had families of their own. A language proficiency criterion for participation was not implemented as translators were available at all focus groups. The translators were friendly members of the communities or translators that worked with resettlement agencies. The concerns of the EWG were that some translators were not trained in AI and would reframe some of the questioning in a way that did not align with the   method.

Discover and Dream Phase. The focus group protocol was developed by the EWG members. The values that were embedded in the protocol reflected focusing on positive resources, interactions and strengths within the community, as well as asking the focus group participants to recall positive experiences within the COH or its service providers and envision the possibilities of a future that included more of the positive. The hope was that this would bring a sense of being heard to these groups where some felt disenfranchised and powerless.

Facilitators for the focus group sessions were identified by the MACIRA Committee members and their affiliated organizations, either as a volunteer or employee. The facilitators received preliminary training through a two-hour workshop in appreciative inquiry methods from the researchers. This consisted of explaining the model and underlying assumptions of AI.

The facilitator's primary roles were to:

- Ask the group questions.
- Facilitate discussion.
- Transcribe notes identifying strengths or positive comments onto flip charts.

A facilitator's script guided the discussions. The facilitator's were instructed to introduce themselves to the groups and explain the purpose of the study.

> "This morning we will be talking about the City of Houston and how to further strengthen their work with families and individuals in the immigrant and refugee community through the Office of International Communities. We would like to thank you for your participation in this focus group as it will be an important part of the strategies that the Office of International Communities will integrate in its service of the immigrant and refugee community. We will be engaging in a process of interviews and activities today designed to focus on the strengths and opportunities that exist within our community which includes the cultural diversity of the people in Houston. Please feel free to ask questions and we encourage you to be actively involved today" (Facilitator Guide, 2012).

The facilitator was then instructed to clarify what services the City provides as some participants were confused as to what services were directly under city jurisdiction. For example, the schools are governed by school boards but many in the focus groups assumed the Mayor had oversight of the Independent School Districts.

After the introduction and informative phase the next phase involved hearing the participant's stories.

> "Now, we would really like to get to know your story around the City of Houston so that we can support services for immigrants and refugees. This morning we will be discussing the importance of the City to every part of the community, primarily you and your family. We will begin by first acknowledging that every one of us participates in city services. We are going to do an activity where we break into pairs and interview each other and then share what we have

learned in these interviews with our table groups. To get started, please choose a partner from you table and take turns asking each other the following. Take a moment and reflect on the questions below then share them with your partner, you will have 10 minutes each and then you will share what you learned with the rest of your table group" (Facilitator Guide, Appendix A).

The participants were then paired with each other and asked to introduce themselves and describe a time that qualified as a best experience interacting with City employees (e.g., an agency or service provider such as METRO or law enforcement). The experience was to be one that exceeded all expectations both in terms of the interaction and the information or services you received. "What happened? What made this experience so outstanding? (If you cannot think of an interaction with a government office, you can share outstanding experiences with community-based organizations, stores, etc.). What City services or offices do you value most? Why? (If no services are regularly used, the facilitator then asks what services or offices would you value having)" (Facilitator Guide, Appendix A).

The questions are crafted to embrace the philosophy of positive capacity, "In pairs people interview one another as they seek to explore their strengths, assets, peak experiences, and successes and to understand the unique conditions that made their moments of excellence possible. The point of the appreciative protocol is not to dismiss problems but to offer a broader lens through which people can cast an appreciative eye on their system" (Finegold, et. al., 2002, p. 239). Elliot (2000) states the interviews forge new and strengthened connections and begin to locate the sources of energy for change. This is the Discover Phase of the AI process (see Exhibit 1).

If the group has negative intensity and stays problem focused it is prudent to allow venting but the facilitator needs to reframe towards affirming a positive vision or the Dream Phase of the AI process based on strengths.

Design Phase
In the final phase of the focus group there is a comparing of notes and the facilitator moves the group toward a shared vision of the future. AI is a philosophy as well as a qualitative methodology and the theory and principles inform the design of organization and community change efforts (Finegold, et. al, 2002). The Design part of AI's intended purpose is the

creation of a sustained communication between the participants and the current structure or system in which they reside. As the participants find their voice, a dialogue begins that informs and promotes positive structural changes. The participants envision a future based on hope and possibility. What makes this part of the process powerful is that the participants own statements are utilized to inform structures or current systems.

Another instance of application or Design Phase of the AI Process was with the Somali group (which prior to the AI focus group had some difficulty resettling in the City and the US) who identified the strength of increased income through small business and/or micro-enterprise for some members and also expressed a desire to increase their cultural competency and familial stability. Many had gone into the taxi business and those efforts were further developed through working with Neighborhood Centers, Inc. on grants that will increase the group's opportunities to build on these strengths.

A Somali family head of household stated that he appreciated it when the COH police department tried to understand him because many did not speak his language.

A Burmese elder stated that their group utilized the small park next to the school but would like a facility in the community they could use free of charge to hold water festivals so they can keep the integrity of their traditions and pass them down to the younger generation. Many children were learning English and adapting to the American culture faster than the older generation leading to a feeling of disconnect between the generations.

The key findings that were consistent across the groups of the study can be defined along three broad dimensions;

- **Communication and language**

The most salient issue especially affecting the newly arrived immigrant and refugee groups is a limited ability to communicate in English and feelings of disconnect. Through the AI process the groups reported feeling increased connections to service providers and the city services. The city does publish in various languages but may not have resources for the newer arrivals. For example, the Somali refugee group, newer to the community, relied on unofficial community leaders and mobile networks as their primary information resource, and not the city website and mainstream newspaper.

- **Access to city services, including public benefits and employment**

The city boasts a topnotch medical center, however lack of insurance, language competency, and reliable transportation systems were assets that needed further expansion. Specifically within the same Somali group, these factors affected access to critical available services such as ESL and entrepreneurial support services, critical to their aspirations of owning small businesses.

- **Safety and legal services**

Cultural competence, because while the Hispanic groups felt well represented and communicated with by law enforcement, the perception of other groups cited a need to develop similar cultural competence and increased protection and safety in the communities, in which they resided.

Deliver(y) Phase

Based on the premise that perception influenced reality, the Deliver and final phase of AI builds momentum from the previous phases to create new images and possibilities. It is a recursive process, whereby the participants are encouraged by successful experiences and new networks, and continue to search for new ways to build on what works and to bring that experience to others.

The greater implications of the project are the new connections formed between previously disenfranchised groups, the City, and the stakeholders involved in the project. Creating a new language of engagement that is based on the intentional valuation of the best characteristics and capacities of its population has supported increased integration and success.

The Retreat

A key aspect of AI is identifying common themes and sharing finding with participants and the community.

The May retreat was a significant part of this process and gathered stakeholders, gatekeepers and some of the participants with the purpose to condense the themes heard from the paired interviews and focus groups and build momentum towards a shared vision of success. Some of the stakeholders were from organizations such as: Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, Alliance for Multicultural Services, AFL-CIO, Raindrop Foundation, Council on American Islamic Relations (CAIR), among others and all were on MACIRA's board.

The study produced eight themes: (language and communication, education, health, community centers, transportation, safety, employment, and legal services) from 163 voices from members of Houston's

international community. The retreat chorused the voices of representatives of 30 stakeholders across the city of Houston.

The retreat engaged a facilitator who led the group through a dynamic conversation about the project, the Appreciate process and the methodology that was used. Following a review of key findings and discoveries, the group then divided into smaller groups of 6-8 according to the working group findings, categories and according to personal interest. The subgroups were tasked to review summaries of participant responses and identify recurrent themes or patterns in order to prioritize responses and begin the process of designing a new vision for City services.

In many ways this represented the Deliver(y) phase of the process as this larger representation of organization members identified areas of recommendation to the City of Houston Office of International Communities and the Mayor.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

The greatest limitation of the study was the lack of accounting for cultural and linguistic barriers in implementing a methodology based on dialogue and individual responses in a group setting. Translators assisted in the focus groups phase but the researchers had not accounted for dialect differences for non-English speaking members within a group. Another limitation of the study was cultural differences among certain groups, such as the Burmese. This is a collectivist culture that is hierarchical and with a deeply rooted belief in respect for elders. This led in some instances to younger members of a family group (even if they were adults to not sharing their views out of concern that an elder family member may not approve. With some coaxing from leaders within those communities, more individuals began to find their voice.

The fact that more members of the group maybe for the first time began to participate in the open dialogue worked into a future strength for the community as more people's ideas were considered.

Another strength of the study was that the Engagement Working Group went to the geographic locations where large segments of the populations live and this led to increased participation as many were constrained to those regions due to lack of transportation.

Conclusions

The Office of International Communities tasked the members of the Engagement Working Group with the creation of a vehicle that allows both immigrant and refugee family's voices to reach the ears of the agencies

that work collaboratively with the City and with city service providers. The Engagement Working Group identified AI as the methodology and philosophy of choice as it provides for a more positive and robust opportunity for data collection than other methods.

Ami (2008) used AI to examine the relationship between the harmony in the household and the appreciation of the efforts of the members in the household having any impact in increasing the income of the household. The findings showed, "the higher level of harmony, appreciation of the household members then the higher the income at the household level…Furthermore, the study also proved that the household that are not harmonious do not appreciate the efforts of their household members hence they have lower incomes" (Ami, 2008, p. 39). "Appreciative inquiry also respects a philosophy of empowerment. It requires a participative environment for all stakeholders; therefore, it helps to empower those who do not typically have voice in organizations" (Rappaport, 1987; Boyd & Bright, 2007). "In addition, groups, organizations, and community systems can attain various degrees of empowerment (Boyd and Bright, 2007, p. 1033). The study produced eight themes: (language and communication, education, health, community centers, transportation, safety, employment, and legal services) from 163 voices from members of Houston's international community. The retreat chorused the voices of representatives of 30 stakeholders across the city of Houston. Results of this meeting were shared with other stakeholders and members of City leadership. The essential findings informed formal recommendations in a working report submitted to the Mayor's Office (Bezette & Lazarre, 2012).

> Appreciative inquiry also respects a philosophy of empowerment. It requires a participative environment of all stakeholders; therefore, it helps to empower those who do not typically have a voice in organizations (Rappaport, 1987). In addition, groups, organizations, and community systems can attain various degrees of empowerment. When individuals and groups participate in deficit-focused interventions, they may unconsciously develop states of learned helplessness that reduce their ability to envision a greater future (Seligman, 1992). In this way, an opportunity-focused process allows participants to achieve greater levels of control than traditional participatory action research by avoiding pitfalls of problem-focused methods (Boyd & Bright, 2007).

One instance of application for the Deliver Phase of AI was the formal adoption of a Language Access Plan for the City, which requires that all emergency services provided by the City of Houston be accessible to the top-five language groups in Houston and that city entities that provide service to the public appoint a Language Access Coordinator. This Executive Order was enacted as a direct result of the AI Process and became a new reality through the formal recommendations made to the Mayor's Office as a result of the focus groups dialogue (Executive Order, Appendix B).

The Engagement Working Groups primary recommendation to the city was to utilize the AI process on a bi-annual basis so that the process of inquiry remains and moves toward continued sustained positive dialogue with all international groups in the future.

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Appendix A.
FACILITATOR GUIDE

Agenda for International Focus Groups-Engagement Working Group

Goal: The goal of this focus group will be to identify key opportunities, desires and interests in Houston to further strengthen the existing City of Houston services for immigrants and refugee families through the Office of International Communities.

Timeline: Nine, approximately 120-minute session held across multiple locations (9) at various times during the February and March.
Note: The schedule below is for 9-11 am, please adjust accordingly.

Participants: Nine groups of approximately 20 community members including representatives of either the largest number present in the population and the fastest growing groups in the COH, including the countries of: Mexico, Central America, Vietnam, India, China, Burma, Somalia, Nigeria and Iraq.

Facilitator: To lead the session as outlined in the agenda below.

One Note-taker: Note-taker to transcribe notes on a flipchart in front of the group, and take photographs or video if possible.

Set-Up: The group should be sitting in table groups of 6-10 each, or be able to comfortably face each other and the facilitator, with name tags.

Supplies: Agenda, Flip Charts, Markers, Name Tags

Time/ Presenter	AGENDA
9:00/ Facilitator 10 minutes	**Welcome** • Introduction of Facilitator and Note taker, "Hello my name is …" • Participant Introductions -Name, Neighborhood, Country of Origin • Introduction and Overview of Process **Overview** Today we will be talking about the City of Houston and how to further strengthen their work with the immigrant and refugee families and their community through the Office of International Communities. We would like to thank you for participating in this focus group as it will be an important part of the strategies that the Office of International Communities will integrate in its service of the immigrant and refugee community. We will be engaging in process of interviews and activities today designed to focus on the strengths and opportunities that exist within our community which includes the cultural diversity of the people in Houston. Please feel free to ask questions and we encourage you to be actively involved today. We will be discussing:
	1. Overview of the City of Houston, Office of International Communities and Services Offered. 2. Best of the City (Paired Interviews) 3. Best of What Could Be? (Group Visioning) 4. Action Steps (Personal Commitments) The objective of this exercise is to initiate a process that explores the aspirations of our international communities and their families and engage them through a research based inquiry process that identifies strengths to inform city policy. This will be presented to City of Houston committee to consider how they can work within existing structures to improve services and opportunities for Immigrant and Refugee families and the communities in which they reside.

9:10 10 minutes	Getting to Know The City The City of Houston offers services that range from Administration and Regulatory Services, the City Council, Emergency Assistance through the Houston Fire Department, Energy Awareness Programs, Housing Programs, Special Needs Housing, WIC Program Centers, Childcare Programs, Information Technology, Libraries, Court Services, Neighborhood Services, College and Career Resources, Resources for Immigrants and Refugees, Civic Engagement through Super Neighborhoods, Parks and Recreation, After School Programs, Emergency Assistance through the Police Department, Waste Removal Services and Recycling Services to name a few. These services span age ranges from early childhood to seniors and families. As we ask the questions below please consider what services you or your family has utilized. Note: Refer to the handout titled What does the City do? Getting to Know City Services and Departments. Note: Refer to the handout titled Understanding the DON, OIC and MACIRA and Restructuring the OIC. The Houston City Council created the Department of Neighborhoods (DON) in August 2011 to improve the quality of life in Houston's neighborhoods through expanded outreach, stronger community partnerships and improved government responsiveness. In an effort to improve the access of immigrant communities to services offered by the City of Houston (COH), MOIRA was integrated as a division of DON. Renamed the Office of International Communities (OIC) OIC brings together Houston's international community by promoting their well-being and connectedness and facilitating their successful civic, economic, and cultural integration in Houston. The OIC works to encourage good citizenship and facilitate integration of Houston's international communities and attempts to provide information to the
	public about immigration policies and acts as a liaison between immigrant communities and city government so they can participate in the city's political, economic, social and cultural life.

| 9:20 20 minutes | My Story About the City of Houston (In Pairs, 10 minutes per person)

Now, we would really like to get to know your story around the City of Houston so that we can support services for immigrants and refugees. This morning we will be discussing the importance of the City to every part of the community, primarily you and your family. We will begin by first acknowledging that every one of us participates in city services. We are going to do an activity where we break into pairs and interview each other and then share what we have learned in these interviews with our table groups. To get started, please choose a partner from you table and take turns asking each other the following. Take a moment and reflect on the questions below then share them with your partner, you will have 10 minutes each and then you will share what you learned with the rest of your table group:

Introduce yourself. Share with you partner your best experience interacting with a City or government office… a time that exceeded all of your expectations both in terms of the interaction and the information or services you received. What happened? What made this experience so outstanding? (if you cannot think of an interaction with a government office, you can share outstanding experiences with community-based organizations, stores, etc.)
        What City services or offices do you value most? Why? (If no services are regularly used, then ask what services or offices <u>would</u> you value having)

Note:
What do you do if there are negatives?

Listen: If the focus group has some real intensity about problems, let him or her express it. If it is the major focus of the person's energy, you are not going to get any positive data until she or he vents these emotions. Be careful not to get drawn into the negativity yourself and be sure to keep a caring and affirmative spirit.

Redirect: If the person is adamant about dealing with the negative or if you have listened sufficiently to understand the negative issues being raised, find a way to guide the person back to the positive: "I think I understand a little bit about some of the problems you see (paraphrase a few of the ones you've heard), and now I would like to guide us back to looking at what is happening when things are working at their best. Can you think of a time, even the smallest moment, when you saw |

	innovation (for example) at its best?" If the person says it never happened in the community, find out if the person has had the experience of something working well in any other context.
9:40 20 minutes	Table Group Work After the interviews are completed each participant will share what they learned with their table group. Facilitator– Assure that each person who wants to speak is heard within time available. Keeps group on track to finish on time. Keep group aware of time left. Note Taker– Writes group's output on flip charts, using speaker's words. Captures long ideas briefly. 1) Allow everyone turns introducing your partner and share one compelling story that came out of your interview (1-3 minutes each). 2) As stories are being shared, listen for strengths and root causes of success (what makes for outstanding experiences with a government office and what services are valued most) – take notes. 3) After each story, share the root causes of success that you each heard and write them on the flipchart. Add any additional root causes to your list that come up in conversation. Note: After the participants share what they have learned in their table group do a quick report of highlights from each table group. Note taker place on flip charts to observe and capture main themes.
10:00 20 minutes	Visioning the City Now that we have captured the experiences people have had with government or civic offices and shared them with one another, we have an idea of what a great experience or strengths the City has. As we move into our next activity to vision what we would like the City of Houston Office of International Communities recall the strengths that you discussed in your table groups. Imagine that it is the year 2015 and the City of Houston has created new Office of International Communities to support the advancement of immigrants in our region. This office, and what it offers the community, is valued as the most important resource to both new and established

	immigrants in our City (regardless of legal status). Imagine you are visiting this office for the first time – what does it feel like when you walk through its doors? How are people interacting with each other? What services or support does it offer? How does the community know it is there? What is one small thing you could do to make your vision for the Office of International Communities become reality? 1. Take a moment and imagine your vision for the Office of International Communities. Each participant share that vision with your table groups (facilitator takes notes of primary themes.) 2. As a group be creative and draw or create a collage what the Office of International Communities will look like in 2015 when it is working at its best. <u>Write down words that express your vision.</u> Select a presenter to present on behalf of your group.
10:20 20 minutes	Report Out The facilitator will manage the discussion, data, time and reports. Facilitator– Assure that each group is heard within time available. Keeps group on track to finish on time. Keep group aware of time left. Note Taker– Writes group's output on flip charts, using speaker's words. Captures long ideas briefly. 1) Allow every group an opportunity to share their image, drawing and collage. (5 minutes each). 2) As stories are being shared, listen for key elements of success – take notes. Note: Note-taker observes and captures main themes that are expressed in the presentations.
10:40 10 minutes	Putting it All Together and Questions We will be reporting this out to a larger committee who makes recommendations for City of Houston services Improvements. Final Reflections. Questions?
10:50	Adjourn

Note: After the session
The facilitator and note taker will do an electronic write-up of the key responses (this may take longer if translating) See the envelope with materials provided if you would like to write it out.
Please also collect the surveys, visions and participant packers. Thanks.

Focus Group Summary
Immediately following each Focus Group held, please complete the following:

Location/ Group:	
Date/ Time:	
Total Attendees:	
Facilitator/ Note Taker:	
What were some of the primary questions that community members had?	
What were some strengths shared during Activity 1, My Story About the City of Houston?	
What did community members seem most interested in when they shared there vision?	
General comments/reflections shared:	
Additional information requested:	

THE INFORMATION COLLECTED BY THE ORGANIZERS WILL REMAIN CONFIDENTIAL AND IS ONLY USED FOR INTERNAL PURPOSES.
LA INFORMACIÓN RECOPILADA POR LOS ORGANIZADORES SE TRATARÁ COMO CONFIDENCIAL Y SE UTILIZARÁ PARA PROPÓSITOS INTERNOS SOLAMENTE.

NAME / NOMBRE	ADDRESS/ DIRECCIÓN PHONE AND/OR E-MAIL/TELÉFONO Y/O CORREO ELECTRÓNICO	ASSOCIATION/ GROUP? ¿ASOCIACIÓN O GRUPO?
1.	ADDRESS: E-MAIL/TEL:	
2.	ADDRESS: E-MAIL/TEL:	
3.	ADDRESS: E-MAIL/TEL:	
4.	ADDRESS: E-MAIL/TEL:	
5.	ADDRESS: E-MAIL/TEL:	
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APPENDIX B

CITY OF HOUSTON

Executive Order

E.O. No:

1-17

Subject: **Language Access**

Effective Date:
         July 31, 2013

1. AUTHORITY

1.1   Article VI, Section 7a, City Charter of the City of Houston.

2. PURPOSE

2.1   Establish policies for providing information about City services, programs and activities to residents and visitors with limited English language proficiency (LEP).

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1   Houston is an international city of commerce, culture, trade, travel, and tourism. Over 100 different languages are spoken in Houston's neighborhoods. All Houston residents and visitors, regardless of their proficiency level in English, should have access to essential public information about City programs, services and activities.

3.2   While continuous efforts shall be maintained by implementing and expounding on a department's language access protocols, it is understood that this multiphase process shall be enacted and improved upon over an extended period of time.

4. SCOPE

4.1   This policy applies to all City departments.

5. DEFINITIONS:

Essential Public Information - Any information developed or used by the department and deemed vital for purposes of public safety, public health and economic development.

6. RESPONSIBILITIES

6.1   All City departments that provide services directly to the public shall designate a Language Access Coordinator (Coordinator) within 60-days of this Executive Order to effect the creation and execution of the department's Language Access policy and implementation plan. The Coordinators will serve as their department's liaison, and they will work regularly with the Mayor's language access designee.

Approved: Date Approved:

                                                                07/31/2013

6.2 The Mayor's Office Language Access Designee shall be the Office of International Communities, which shall assist in the provision of language services to the public and will provide technical assistance to City departments in providing such services

7. POLICY

7.1 When feasible, the City shall begin implementing essential public information for a minimum of the top 5 commonly-used languages utilized by the City's culturally diverse population. The City will depend on a variety of relevant sources (example: US Census) to determine the commonly-used languages. The information will be available via effective communications channels, including but not limited to the City's website at http://www.houstontx.gov/.

7.2 All City departments that provide services directly to the public shall provide information about LEP services by developing and implementing department or agency-specific language access plans shall be submitted to the Mayor's Office within six months of the issuance of this Executive Order.

7.3 Each department will receive, from the Mayor's language access designee, technical assistance and resources to assist in the development and implementation of their language access plan.

7.4 City employees who routinely have direct, substantive interaction with the public (front-line employees) shall be trained in language access policies and procedures that shall include protocols for assisting LEP populations. Training shall be provided by the Mayor's designee.

7.5 Reporting

7.5.1 All Coordinators shall report plan progress, assessments and recommendations periodically to department heads and the Mayor's designee.

7.5.2 The Mayor's Designee will establish a reporting format, report submission interval and technical assistance to departments. Reporting logistics should be established within 6 months of this Executive Order.

7.5.3 The Mayor's Designee will work with the Coordinators to develop protocols used to measure the progress by the department, as well as by feedback from the public constituencies with limited English proficiency served by the City department.