**Discovering the Strengths
of Our Community
and Our Leaders**

**A Pilot Project of the United Way of Cass County
and the United Way of Porter County, Indiana,
with support from the Indiana Association of United Ways**

**January 2004
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Introduction

There are a wide range of mental maps that get applied to assessing communities. In recent years, asset based community development and other strength-based approaches have been gaining favor**.** But most public discourse is still problem and deficit oriented with communities and agencies competing for funding on the basis of having the most needs. The United Way has been relied upon in many communities to do needs assessment, identifying gaps in service and prioritizing needs and perceived deficits. But there are limitations to this approach. Needs based assessment sees what the community is rather than what it can be. The paradigm which frames community assessment in problem talk creates expertise and focus on what communities don't want and what doesn't work and can be overwhelming. Community identity gets built around needs and needy people. To regenerate communities, and inspire volunteer investment of time and money, may require shifting focus instead to what communities value most, to what works and what matters instead of what's wrong. How can those shifts happen in a way that improves health and human services and opens up possibilities (and energy) for community renewal and participation?

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) may provide an answer. AI is an organizing methodology that selectively seeks to locate, highlight, and illuminate the life-giving forces of an organization or community. It seeks out the best of what is to ignite the collective imagination of what might be. Originally developed in the 1980's as an effective approach to corporate organizational development by David Cooperrider and colleagues at Case Western Reserve University, AI is now in widespread use across many sectors, including community development. Extensive case studies documenting the practice and its outcomes can be found at appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu. An early and well known application of AI to community work is Imagine Chicago (IC), a project developed by Bliss Browne in 1992 to cultivate hope and creative civic engagement www.imaginechicago.org.

AI begins with *discovery* -- asking open-ended, asset-based and value-oriented questions about what is life-giving, what is working, what is generative, what is important. Positive questions around affirmative topics encourage sharing of best practices, articulation of fundamental values, and reveal the positive foundation on which greater possibilities can be built. Out of *dialogue* emerges expanded imagination about possibilities for action, which are then *designed* into concrete activities that lead to practical outcomes. The momentum of positive images and relationships encourage more people to contribute to bringing the desired visions to life.

In January 2003, the Indiana Association of United Ways initiated a Community Capacity Assessment pilot to see how using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) might reframe the traditional UW community needs assessment to a more strength-based approach. Needs assessment is often done as a survey focused primarily on existing donors and agency beneficiaries. This focus caters to the most vital existing partners, but limits the development of potential new donors and partners and can under represent the broader community's priorities. (As one person put it, "People in nice houses gets asked about needs of nameless faceless people.") The IAUW was interested in exploring how appreciative inquiry might shift community assessment to a more

positive, community impact and solutions-focused process with greater community involvement and ownership. How might the UW create an information campaign to recognize and leverage community value and identify opportunities for community investment? How might issues and strategic investment opportunities be identified and linked to results rather than needs?

IAUW invited Indiana United Way organizations interested in designing and leading an AI community assessment pilot to apply for a technical assistance grant. The grant provided for consulting support from Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago to serve as a strategic design partner, resource consultant on existing community building models, and trainer and facilitator for running a community summit. Many UW organizations expressed interest and two were selected – Porter County and Cass County --based on their commitment to provide the necessary leadership and support.

In February 2003, IAUW provided a 2-day training to interested United Way teams from across Indiana. It also introduced the AI methodology at the March 2003 Indiana State Leaders conference. From March-December 2003, the United Ways of Porter County and of Cass County developed AI protocols and engaged large segments of the local population in reflecting on community strengths and ways to build community capacity. Thousands of interviews were conducted, evaluated and summarized, with each process culminating in a community summit. The pilots developed new partnerships, provided important new models for civic conversation about community priorities, and enhanced the reputation of United Way as a community building organization. This toolkit describes the pilots and their outcomes. We hope it will be of value to other communities and United Way organizations interested in the application of AI to community assessment.

Inside this toolkit you will find:

- An overview of Appreciative Inquiry
- Two working models of applying AI to do an assessment of community strengths including
    - Executive summaries
    - Interview protocols
    - Training and facilitation protocols
    - Talking points and presentation protocols
    - Agendas for community summits
- Lessons learned (process and content)
- Recommendations for interested communities

The Foundations of Appreciative Inquiry

Communities are human systems constructed out of the choices (including choices of language) their members make. People want and need to think constructively; appreciative questions around affirmative topics minimize threatening and defensive behaviors and responses. People feel confident and energized to move into the future when they bring with them the best of the past, experience that is known and trusted, in areas that are of high value and impact. When inquiry helps communities identify and name strengths, skills, hopes, values, assets and visions, a positive image and community identity grows which inspires higher participation and investments of time and money.   Hope expands.

Sharing stories among community members not typically connected to one another (because of differences of age, race, culture or economic circumstances) builds positive relationships and can give participants a constructive experience of difference that helps overcome isolation, suspicion and stereotyping. Uncommon partnerships often produce the most innovative outcomes since they help to shift perspectives. Positive experiences of difference (e.g. constructive conversations and joint action among unlikely partners) enlarge the possibilities for cooperative action and mutual accountability. Collectively owned visions of community futures (a ***united*** way forward) can only emerge out of open-ended, generative dialogue where every voice counts.   Successful community building therefore requires pathways to participation that include everyone.

We can create only what we can imagine. To regenerate communities, communities need occasions and forums within which to articulate their own images of what they want and are willing to work for – forums where they can develop affirmative competence, creative agency and collective dreaming. Focusing on individual and collective preferred futures (goals worth aiming at) helps the focus on present abilities, skills and actions needed to get there. People will move toward a future they have imagined and created together, if there are structures that support personal investment and action on behalf of their visions.

In summary, AI reconnects individuals and communities to what has meaning, value and purpose and builds positive relationships through positive communications. Three dimensions are especially noteworthy**.** First is the power of ***positive framing***. Human beings of any age are full of potential, rich in strengths and talents, with energy and vitality to dream and create. Even complaints mask a deep desire for change. Challenging communities to state affirmatively what they value, what they hope, what they want, enables them and their partners, to understand and act on behalf of their vision. Reframing negative talk into positive desires provides a way out of traps and into possibilities.

Second, dialogue is invigorated by the power of **inspiring questions**. It is possible to investigate anything — unemployment and illiteracy or job creation and volunteer engagement, causes for despair or reservoirs of hope. The questions we ask set the agenda and determine what we find. Honest, open questions, asked in a spirit of genuine interest, enrich and deepen dialogue and open up new images and understandings. Finally, **active listening** is necessary and generative; something new happens in the "in-between" space that listening and dialogue create. When people listen deeply to one another, they honor each other and cultivate the trust and relationships so crucial for community.

Why we wanted to be an AI pilot

In January 2003 Cass County stakeholders participated in Vision 2003, a process first begun in 1996 to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses and establish goals for our community. A community vision conference was carried out in 2000 to set direction for community planning on a broad spectrum. Of the ten critical components of community life that were identified, diversity was number one.   Cass County has become more recognizably multicultural over the past six years with the highest percentage of Hispanic population growth in Indiana during the last decade, a rate of more than 1,400%.

Three of the goals of the visioning process were to form a diversity task force, complete cultural diversity training, and implement a community program. Over a period of one year, stakeholders worked to identify a champion for the diversity task force. It was decided that the champion should be someone that is a Cass County native who is in touch with all sectors of the community. Being known as a community building organization, United Way of Cass County (UWCC) became the logical choice. The UW Executive Director convinced the board that through her relationships with all sectors of the community, she could lead this charge with positive outcomes and that it was something the UW should embrace as part of its mission "…to care for one another…"

Appreciative inquiry seemed a perfect tool. The major assumption of appreciative inquiry is that in every community something works, that change can be managed through the identification of what works. The focus is on how to do more of what works. Focusing on what works as opposed to what problems the community is having differentiates AI from traditional problem solving approaches which look for the problem, do a diagnosis, and then work to find a solution; the traditional approach causes us to emphasize and even amplify problems. In contrast, AI looks at what works in a community, stirring up memories of energizing moments of success. This process creates a new energy that is positive and synergistic; the AI approach emphasizes aspirations. Once we appreciate and value the best of "what is," we can envision "what might be," dialogue "what should be," and innovate "what will be." This is the appreciative inquiry philosophy and the focus of the C.A.R.E. Campaign.

The Appreciative Community Capacity Assessment was a perfect next step for our community to complete its visioning process. We expected to greatly benefit from the constructive direction and make our visions become realities. Stakeholders had already made a commitment and were ready to move on this.

What did we hope to accomplish through the C.A.R.E. Campaign?

The goals of our campaign were as follows:

- To begin to understand how Cass County's image can be one that is seen and felt as a community that cares.
- To develop ways to magnify Cass County's impact through creative connections with other organizations and individuals you see as vital to a healthy future for Cass County.
- To strengthen Cass County's image as an inviting and reputable community to ensure Cass County not only is, but also remains a community recognized for its positive accomplishments, opportunities, and hospitality.
- To increase and expand the unified participation within Cass County as a whole, connecting gifts and needs for mutual benefit.
- To ensure our Cass County community is on that "leads by example" in not only encouraging, but also providing our youth opportunities to be active members.

United Way goals:

- To help align the board and the campaign to develop strategies.
- To measure at the community level, addressing the most pressing issues, and putting our resources against it. Be more of a strategic funder.
- To engage the entire county, possibly targeting neighborhoods or communities of people.
- To give the board measures to use to revisit our mission and vision.
- To present a positive image for UW ED in everything she does. To practice AI at all times and thereby establish more meaningful relationships with children, friends, and colleagues.

Overall Project Design and timetable

The C.A.R.E. Campaign design team worked to develop an assessment tool that incorporates the use of Appreciative Inquiry, which reframes community assessment as a values-based community building process rather than a deficit-oriented data gathering campaign. This state-of-the-art process incorporates a more future-oriented, solutions-oriented focus with richer dialogue and ownership into the design. The C.A.R.E. Campaign was designed to draw attention to strengths upon which our community can build, the opportunities and community visions there are to realize, and energize and engage community ownership.

Our design team was fortunate in being able to work hand in hand with Bliss Browne, creator of Imagine Chicago **(www.imaginechicago.org),** throughout this process. Bliss assisted our team in goal refinement, evaluation strategies, and interview and focus protocols all in an effort to make this campaign as effective and successful as possible. Bliss returned to Cass County for our community summit which magnified and shared ideas gathered through our interviews with a larger audience, and brought the community together to deepen our community's commitment to living out the process of appreciative inquiry and bringing our community together for the common good.   The process sequence was as follows:

1.   Planning Committee sets structure of process (Feb-March)

2.   Board Meeting—introduce concept of AI and Community Assessment (March)

3.   Select and Recruit Design Team (March-April)

4.   Design Team meetings: (April-June)

        a)   Decides topics
        b)   Designs questions
        c)   Determines format
        d)   Decides target sites for broadest community engagement
        e)   Assigns roles and responsibilities for implementation

5.   Design team leads focus groups throughout the community (August-October)

6.   Community Summit to create vision for future & develop action plans (November)

7.   Report to the Community (in multiple formats) – January 2004

8.   United Way follow through with and/or facilitate implementation of action plans – ongoing

9.   Presentation of findings to State leaders conference March 2004

Design Team Meetings
A broad based design team was engaged to lead the process, with people selected on the basis of their likely interest and their willingness to engage constituencies with which they had connections and see that they could be a part of making something happen in the community. The design team was critical to the project's success. It was important to get the right people on it. Interested United Way board members were crucial. Other community leaders were also critical so it became a community owned process. Regular meetings (monthly then weekly toward the end) were held. Team members took responsibility for identifying interview sites, leading interview processes, data collection, and publicity. The CARE Campaign was designed to reach a broad audience, with Design Team members key to reaching as many people as possible through the recruiting and training of other interviewers. The focus throughout was on giving many people a chance to talk and be heard.

Regular, unequivocally enthusiastic communication with the design team set a tone of active participation. Attention at each meeting was also put on publicity targeted at the broader community with the intent of reaching a wide audience. The intent of the promotions was to inform the community of the CARE Campaign (launch the campaign), to invite them to be interviewed or do interviewing, and to encourage and invite participation in the summit. Information about the C.A.R.E. Campaign and/or Appreciative Inquiry was also made available on the United Way of Cass County's website at www.unitedway.cqc.com

Interview Findings
During September and October of 2003, United Way of Cass County's C.A.R.E. Campaign volunteers conducted nearly 2,000 individual interviews of various residents and workers in Cass County. Although the interviews were dialogues on life in Cass County and as such represented very personal subjective thoughts, the steering committee attempted to draw a number of

generalizations from the interviews as a whole. A representative 500 interviews were spread across age groups from teen to 65+ and included both Caucasian and Latino individuals. General themes emerged from the interviews as important to the quality of life in Cass County and as reasons for moving here and living here. In rank order they are:

1. The importance and closeness of family ties;
2. The abundance and variety of activities for youth;
3. The general small town atmosphere and friends for support;
4. The quality of the school systems; the comfort level of having been born and raised here;
5. The desire to find a job here or work in this environment;
6. The feeling of safety and security perceived in this environment;
7. The overall friendliness of the people; and finally
8. The importance of church and church related activities on family life.

Also mentioned, but not as frequently, were the variety of community events, the importance of 4-H and YMCA programs for youth, and the quality of the parks for family recreation.

The six most frequently mentioned community advantages were consistent across all age levels, with the importance and closeness of family ties ranking number 1 overall and with each of the Caucasian subgroups. Number 1 for Latinos was the desire for more and better jobs. With that exception, overall responses for the top six were consistent, although priorities varied slightly.

The quantity and variety of youth activities provided by the schools, 4-H, the "Y", scouting, and church youth groups were cited over and over again as a strength throughout the county.

Personal and individual friendships also ranked high in determining the comfort level of respondents, and this combined with the small town atmosphere and the accompanying feelings of safety were ongoing themes throughout the interviews.

Finally, the quality of the schools was mentioned repeatedly as an important factor by all age levels and was ranked second in importance by Hispanics.

The most frequently mentioned images by Caucasians were the fire at the Galveston Methodist Church and how it brought people together, farmers helping farmers in times of family crisis, the Cole Hardwood fire and how it brought people together, and finally, the Carousel as a positive family oriented community image. There were no consistent images named by Latino respondents, who have typically arrived in Cass County quite recently.

When asked what areas of the community might be strengthened, the responses were fairly consistent and ranked in this order;
1. The need for additional activities for teenagers
2. Additional and varied attractions for all ages
3. More and better jobs, (top ranked by Latinos.)
4. Increased retail shopping opportunities and dine-in restaurants and
5. A greater emphasis on improving the aesthetics of the community .

Four other areas cited to strengthen the community are worth mentioning.

1. Some type of welcoming events or organization to help newcomers become acclimated into the community.
2. A variety of avenues to help youth become involved in the community – volunteerism, community service projects, caring enough to give something back instead of always being a consumer.
3. Despite a general feeling of safety in the community, a need for better and/or more efficient law enforcement, and finally,
4. A desire to see efforts made to strengthen cultural connections and understanding (expressed by both Caucasian and Latino respondents.) Latinos also expressed a need for more and better daycare and the need for additional activities for young adults (those past their teen years).

Seven issues stood out in the area of community collaboration. The dominant one was the theme of people coming together to help others. This was illustrated by various stories of people helping others in times of crises (this summer's flooding, the Cole Hardwood and Galveston Methodist Church fires, deaths or serious illnesses in families, severe snow storms, etc) or people in general working to help the needy with food and clothing drives. The community outpouring of support and patriotism following the 9/11 attacks also formed a consistent story. There were also times of joy and happiness that brought people together such as athletic championships, various volunteer projects, and the county fair.

Only one separate theme repeated itself solely in the area of youth participation, and that was the skate park. Most of the youth participation was included in other areas with a strong emphasis on the importance of school sports and activities; church youth group activities, 4-H, YMCA, and scouting activities. These were all considered great strengths, but even so, a number of respondents seemed unaware of the many opportunities that are available, expressing the need for greater communication of the possibilities that are here. From the Hispanic respondents there was an emphasis on the need for youth clubs, perhaps reflective of something present in their cultural experiences nor currently available in Cass County.

When asked who should attend the Community Summit, individuals uniformly answered it would be more meaningful for them if their family and friends attended with them. This was consistent across all age levels and cultural groups.

In answer to the question of what would make the Community Summit worthwhile, the desire to make a difference and benefit the community dominated the responses. The expectation of seeing definite results was also important and was ranked number 1 by the two younger age categories and by Latinos. Many also expressed the need to connect with others of similar interests and to explore the idea of community involvement. A few saw participation as a way to benefit themselves or their family, and still others simply thought it might be fun.

Community summit
A community summit was held on November 15, having been rescheduled from September to accommodate the large numbers of people who had asked to participate in the interview process. The summit was designed to bring alive the stories and themes which had surfaced in the inquiry process, and to represent in multiple media what people had shared. The executive summary was

discussed and visually represented in charts and graphs; positive images of Cass County were represented in student videos and art montages. The summit meeting room was surrounded by powerful quotations taken for the interview transcripts and maps of the county. The space deeply honored the scope of work that had been done, and the range of perspectives that had been brought to consciousness as a result. The range of participants was also noteworthy – young and old, Caucasian and Latino, curious mall walkers and dedicated service providers, in short, not just the usual suspects. The room was a hope map of what was possible and what had already been created.

Lessons learned

- *A project like this changes the perception of many in the community that the role of the United Way is to be just a fundraiser.* This helped the community recognize United Way as a vital piece to the larger community puzzle that is engaged in building community capacities.

- *The process develops new relationships.*
New relationships with Faith-Based organizations were initiated through the involvement of the Catholic priest that served on the design team. The UW earned his respect as a community building organization and will be a point of contact in the faith-based community to help bring human service organizations and faith-based organizations together to improve the quality of life and overall wellness of the people of the community. This will be an especially strong relationship because the conclusions cited above of what makes our community strong all come down to the values that people have within them, their families, and their friends. Many times a potential donor will not give to the United Way because they give to their church. We have a lot of work to do to help the churches understand how we can help the community together.

- *Many factors contributed to the pilot's success.* These included strong existing relationships; and the credibility and trust the community has for the United Way. The UWCC has developed initiatives over the past 5 years that have brought various community leaders and organizations together to assess and address issues. This project benefited from and extended that trust and reputation.

- *It is too early in the process to determine how the pilot will change the application of resources* To date, this has not been discussed in regard to our traditional funding of member agencies. However, there has been discussion in regard to the possibility of offering stipends for start up funds to address identified issues. In addition, there will be discussion in regard to leveraging funds through grants and foundations with the use of the assessment.

- *Action needs to follow soon* since community expectations are currently high. We have inquired with the community and come to some conclusions through those inquiries of what the community wants; some ideas have been shared both through the interviews and the summit. The hope should be to strengthen the partner organizations, using the information to write grants, to solicit volunteers, to collaborate with other organizations.

Why would we tell another United Way who wants to undertake this project? That this process is effective

- To inquire what the community wants and is
- To realize what the community wants and is
- To build new or strengthen current relationships
- To do community visioning
- To form collaborations
- To gather current information for use in writing grants, making grants, recruiting business, recruiting professionals
- To focus on the best things about your community, build on them, and emphasize and amplify them.
- To expand the identity of the United Way
- To identify new things to do and new ways to do them

You can do this! And if you want to do this, we can help!

This is time consuming and develops a mind of its own. Have to be aware of that and be flexible.

How much time do we suggest for a complete and thorough process?
10 hours a week for the executive director or staff member. Approximately 5 hours a week for a volunteer. 12 months from start to finish. UWCC ED put in approx. 400 hours total.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- Don't have expectations. If there are then you will guide the process and influence the findings.

- Picking the right people from the beginning for the design team is important!

- You can catch more with honey than vinegar. Positive mindset and determination are important! Expect people to have a difficult time understanding the non-traditional ways of thinking!

- When people concentrate on the positive, it creates energy and a feeling you don't get from needs analysis. And it gets new people involved.

IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY Executive Summary January 22, 2004

PROJECT GOALS

    A. Generate wider community involvement, ownership and partnership with United Way of Porter County.

    B. Build civic identity about and commitment to Porter County as a whole.

    C. Enhance the communications practices of United Way of Porter County.

    D. Strengthen the infrastructure for volunteerism in Porter County.

    E. Identify common values and opportunities for community investment.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE
January 2003 – UW board buy-in and application for funding to IAUW
February 2003 – Determine project scope and timetable with consultant
March, 2003—Select and recruit DESIGN TEAM; name project

Our Design Team was comprised of twenty individuals, who represented all segments of the community: business, industry, media, government, judicial, education, retirees, nonprofits, workforce development, labor, community volunteers, our community foundation, and United Way Board and staff. We also had a social work intern from Valparaiso University as part of the team. We entitled the project Imagine Porter County.

April, May, June, 2003—PLANNING AND DESIGN

The Design Team met every 2-3 weeks during the months of April to June. They developed interview protocols, selected topics, designed and tested questions, determined the interviewing format, and identified target groups. They decided that we would use a group format with a trained facilitator. We would approach existing groups and ask for time on their agenda to administer the IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY (IPC) questionnaire. While that would be the primary method of collecting data, we would also conduct individual interviews, mail surveys, and on-line website surveys.
Our goal was to interview groups of all ages (from adolescents to seniors) and from all sectors (geographic, cultural, social, and economic). We added a demographic section to the survey to track this information. A Spanish language version was developed as well as a questionnaire for youth.

July through November, 2003—INTERVIEWING
We sent out news releases about IPC, had a news feature about the project, and highlighted IPC on our website. We interviewed during the month of July through November, with the majority of the groups being facilitated in September and October. IPC was conducted with 28 groups, with approximately 500 participants.

September 26, 2003—**IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY COMMUNITY SUMMIT**

> We held a community leadership summit on September 26, 2003, with about 65 people in attendance. At the summit we reviewed the information we had collected to date from IPC participants. We also had a presentation from youth leaders, who talked about their experience, and what they had learned from their involvement with IPC. Over 70% of the summit attendees gave the highest marks to the youth presentation on the evaluations.

> We highlighted individual stories and developed a collective vision for the future. Finally, we asked the summit participants not only to envision their future hopes but also to explore what elements would be necessary to bring their ideas to life.

October, 2003—**REVIEW**

> The Design Team met to review the evaluations and summary information from the summit. All the participants felt that IPC was a valuable process. The Team discussed their reactions to the entire IPC process.

January, 2004—FINAL REPORT

LESSONS LEARNED

♦ We learned that people truly care about their community and the families who live here. They value what Porter County has to offer. They want to preserve this heritage but also want to make Porter County an even better place for their children and grandchildren.

♦ Hopes for the Future:

1. Economic Development and Jobs—This is not surprising in an area of high unemployment due to steel bankruptcies and downsizing.

2. Activities which Strengthen Families—These include intergenerational volunteer opportunities and recreational activities.

3. Acceptance of Diversity—In a county that is 96% white, more diversity and acceptance of diversity was the # 3 hope for the future.

4. Public Transportation and Affordable Housing—These were areas to be developed.

♦ IPC allowed for a variety of approaches to interviewing: groups, individual, mail, or on-line. The ideal situation is one that allows for conversation between two or more people, but all information learned was valuable.

♦ The process generates enthusiasm, and one group often leads to another, as people become excited about the process.

♦ People appreciate being asked to share their experiences.

♦ The process worked with every group, but no two groups were the same. The facilitators need to be flexible and creative.   We also needed to adapt the questionnaire for youth and Spanish-speaking individuals.

♦ We did not have enough facilitators. We had trained several individuals who were free during the summer months, but the groups did not start gaining momentum until September. United Way staff and our intern did most of the facilitation.

♦ Timing is crucial. Interviewing should be done in the spring and early summer, not campaign time. There was not enough staff time to devote to contacting groups, and some people became confused and thought we wanted to do campaign presentations.

♦ IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY gave UW credibility as a "listening and open" organization.

♦ Look for "sparklers" for your team, those who are positive and enthusiastic and are strongly supportive of the project. They should also have the ability and inclination to spread the word about your project throughout the community.   Some individuals had a hard time accepting appreciative inquiry as a valid assessment tool for United Way because it was not concrete enough. We lost some people along the way. A suggestion would be to have a smaller team in the planning stages and expand it during the implementation stage.

♦ Access to leadership was sometimes problematic. It was difficult to convince employers to free-up enough employee time to conduct the interviews.

♦ At this point it is too soon to tell how or if IPC will affect the allocations process. The Planning Committee of the Board will be reviewing the results of IPC, as well as our previous needs assessment documents. I believe that the next step will be the formation of Vision Councils, who will study the issues and topics raised by IPC and then make recommendations to the United Way of Porter County Board of Directors.

FINAL THOUGHTS
　　　IMAGINE PORTER COUNTY is a civic conversation model, and the information learned forms a foundation for future planning processes. The next stage is to move beyond dialogue into action. United Way of Porter County will take a leadership role in this community-building process, but it will take multiple partners to make the shared visions a reality. We believe that we have accomplished the following:

♦ We created a shared vision for the future of Porter County with inspiring content.

♦ We created a process for working together that expands our partnerships and deepens engagement.

♦ We modeled an appreciative and inclusive way of thinking that is open to possibilities and creates hope for the future.

<center>Consultant's (Bliss Browne) summary observations:</center>

The AI pilot was originally envisioned as a method for exploring how appreciative inquiry might shift community assessment to a more positive, community impact and solutions-focused process with greater community involvement and ownership. Could the UW create an information campaign to recognize and leverage community value and identify opportunities for community investment? How might issues and strategic investment opportunities be identified and linked to results rather than needs? The question was never really addressed about whether a community engagement process should be a replacement for needs assessment, supplant it, or influence a shift in its design. AI represented a significant shift from the prevailing needs-based mindset of the allocations process. There was not enough time in the pilot to work through the implications of the pilot for redoing the allocations process. So those implications have yet to be discussed.

Having said that, each of the pilots did a simply amazing job of engaging a broad cross section of the local community in an appreciative interview process in a very short period of time. One reason may be that AI is consistent with the United Way's approach and skill in volunteer engagement. The United Way staff, and the design teams they recruited, were singularly committed to making the process work, and learning together how to do so, even though AI was a new and open-ended way of working. Many people worked really hard. Throughout, they *modeled the practices and goals of the process* – to recognize and leverage existing community assets, and identify opportunities for community investment and expanded volunteer engagement.

Somewhat different approaches were used by the two counties; the larger county (Porter) operated on more of a leadership-driven model with the community summit being a leadership summit. The smaller county (Cass) worked at more grass roots inclusive community visioning, conducting many more interviews with a much wider range of participants. Their summit was more story-based, less formal, consistent with the themes of providing hospitality to everyone.

That said, there were many common success factors including
- **Resources** in place that could be leveraged including
  - Earlier community processes which created a readiness for this process (for example, earlier vision activities in both PC and CC)
  - A committed United Way staff and board, who were energetic, experienced and highly skilled organizers and facilitators
  - Local interns interested in helping with the pilot
  - The established credibility of the United Way in each community
  - High community goodwill that could be organized
  - Venues available for meetings and openness of the community to participate in them
  - Many committed volunteers who stayed involved throughout a long process and brought their networks and skills to bear on the process
  - Support from the IAUW for technical assistance and basic training in AI
  - An established community of practice using Appreciative Inquiry in communities that could serve as a reference point for this process
  - An experienced consultant available throughout the process for mentoring

- An active interest and willingness, between the two pilot sites, to learn from one another and share ideas and resources
- Time, though there was not enough of it to do more than begin to discover how this approach might change the local culture of the United Way, its approach to allocations, and the civic conversation practices in the local community.

The availability of these resources made possible certain key **Activities**, namely a locally owned and designed process (led by a broad based design team with modest input from outside) which implemented large scale interviewing and community forums focused on building relationships, expanding civic participation and gathering data. The strength and commitment of each design team was critical as was the ongoing commitment of United Way staff to take fullest advantage of the involvement of these volunteers. While the design teams struggled early on to know exactly what to do and how to do it, they each created a process that was constructive and grounded in what really mattered to local residents. They talked through and thought through how this new thing could work. They listened to one another. Different people took the lead at different stages. Their connections to local organizations (schools, businesses, etc) resulted in a helpful leveraging and connecting of local networks into a single large-scale process. Each UW created a much larger project scope than originally envisioned. In the case of Cass County, the demand to participate in the interview process was so great from community members that the summit had to be pushed back two months to meet the demand.

The **Outputs** were many – strong interview protocols based on affirmative topics of interest to the community, positive publicity about the campaigns, many community gatherings in which topics of interest and importance were discussed, community summits, much data gathered and organized, in multiple media, about what matters to community members and ways the community could be strengthened, and some specific visions for moving forward. Quite important was the creation of an enhanced and positive communications environment within which meetings and interviews were conducted, processes designed and outcomes discussed.

The **Outcomes** were consistent with some of the originally stated project goals, namely
- To become familiar with AI and its value as positive community organizing and mobilizing tool
- To model an appreciative and inclusive way of thinking and embed it in the hearts and minds and practices of community leaders and local citizens
- To generate wider community involvement and partnership with the United Way,
- To generate vital topics and questions for local communities with inspiring content
- To build civic identity and commitment,
- To enhance communications practices,
- To engage youth, and
- To strengthen the infrastructure for volunteerism.

It is too early to determine anything but short term **Impacts** but the following seem especially significant based on participant feedback:
- New way of talking in community that is appreciative and strength-based
- New and stronger civic identity developed through constructive stories and visions
- Youth being viewed differently in the community, as resources to civic processes

Enhanced communication environment. New way to talk in public which attracted interest and enthusiasm and built momentum.
- "People enjoyed participating. It was a positive connection to public life. Not push but inviting participation."
- "We learned how to build on and leverage existing networks, especially with organizations that cross boundaries "
- "Every group we did lead to the next group. A gentleman on the allocation panel loved process; so he set up meeting with Kiwanis. The ED group led to client groups (e.g. Hebron center, Hilltop house with neighborhood assn)"
- Through dialogue, interesting cross connections were generated… for example, thinking of incorporating newcomers into the community by offering them ways to volunteer, shifting the focus on newcomers from clients for services to community resources seeking to belong and contribute
- "Having an outside moderator was helpful who was familiar with AI and UW. Eliminates baggage people carry with them in smaller communities. You need to have phone number of someone who understands the process, and who allows the community to struggle on its own terms"

Process built affirmative competence by inviting people to think about and share "positive things and what we have to offer."
- "I learned more as a newcomer to community in last few months than I would have even more as guide. Have become better ambassador. Lot of positive came down to people..people, being ambassadors.positve feeling for community.
- People are now talking—developing positive competence; it starts changing how we story our time here, people's positive outlook, commitment to family,youth, connects to voluntarism. Power of summits was that it was story based, around positive stories.
- "Now I think about ways to turn things around. How can we make it better?"
- "I'm using the approach at work. Employees are so much more receptive if you do things in a positive way! I'm saying thank you more.
- "Human beings have a tendency to focus on what they can't do instead of what they can. Concentrating on what's possible helps people focus on what's next."

Process started ongoing process of looking ahead, **developed a longer range view**.
- "If you give someone an apple, and they are only used to eating apples, they will eat the apple. We need to look at an apple and see the seeds for growing an orchard...we're not used to looking ahead."
- **We have a whole new set of questions….**Whole process was about asking questions. One leads to another. Not just how are you questions. More than just an exercise..
- "Envisioning is a hard and important process; we're more used to being implementers"

Involving young people as leaders was important…gave community vision of them as current resources not just beneficiaries of services. Interns were essential to staffing. Students got enthusiastically involved in producing videos, doing interviews, making summit presentations. They shone and gave a glimpse of how much more their involvement could make possible.

- "Students got wound up in the process. This created opportunity for straightforward communication in family that didn't always happen. The y worked beyond the minimum requirements that were set out. Interview went further than it need to. It created dialogue.

For United Way
- Impact on board; they understand that we're more than fundraiser; we are community
- Challenges us to rethink our role and ways of working. High point experience people cited was usually hands on—UW doesn't do "hands-on". How can it? Can we develop high touch process?
- Need to build listening into more processes. New model for public dialogue.
- Expanded identity for UW and credible one.
- Campaign had been going down year after year. Now uw looked on as good thing.
- Could work with community foundation or chamber to offer, start these programs. Come up with programs and funding. Helpline, welcome wagon.
- Can make a difference to doing new things we haven't done, change allocations. Helped us identify what some of those things might be. Consistency of data extraordinary.
- New people signing up through this process. Not only the usual suspects. Highlighted expanded connections needed (e.g. tie-in to schools for UW (including commercials)
- We need to concentrate on positives. Meeting and process works better.
- Shows new approaches to research and data gathering. **Stories take time.** UW is deficit data driven culture. Struggle was valuable. Data showed commonalities and patterns.. Data showed stories that had authority in the collective imagination. Data organization honored voices of people involved. Identified patterns of caring.
- Highlighted impact areas important to the PC community —economic development (job growth), welcome and involves people (volunteer), affordable housing, youth, etc…these will get more consideration now. We can form groups around core issues—vision councils that can look at funding patterns, set affirmative topics for visioning that can lead to action

Challenges - how process could be strengthened

- **People have to experience it**!! When people didn't have time to experience the process, it was harder for people to understand. The approach initially was hard to grasp—default mode is 'here is the problem, let's solve it. The pilots lost people along the way who didn't have confidence this was 'hard'enough, and could lead to concrete outcomes. "Sitting around talking is waste of time". "Found out how negative and problem oriented we are". It was necessary to be vigilant in calling people back, deal with how to keep on positive track. Caring spirit and attitude and respect carry this process forward.

- It was a (worthwhile) struggle to design appreciative questions…a new way of thinking, an art that required practice. Parts of interview format termed out to be redundant. Asked too many things from too many directions instead of a few. **With more time, a pilot within the pilot to fine tune the questions might have been helpful.**

- **People need encouragement to tell a STORY**. People not used to telling their stories. They are self-discounting. Short term interview hard to come up with story. Many people didn't have one. Maybe should have trained interviewers to probe

- Existing processes like allocations not tied in to this pilot strategically so running in parallel universes. There is consensus that this is much broader process than old needs assessment, and much more engaging. But there was **no easy way to incorporate this into established UW processes** – board meetings, allocations committee, existing program areas (many of which are problem focused). Pointed out the need to institutionalize this process across all areas.

- We discovered an **ongoing and built in tension between data-drivenness and relationship building** (was AI a positive survey to get info or conversation to create connection?) In person interviews were most effective but took most time. The debriefing process of interviews should probably have been more formalized so it was clear we were gathering stories not just data. Stories lost their narrative depth and got distilled into data. It would have benefited from a better established system for debriefing and collating information.

- **Time was a serious constraint** Interviews often required more time than people had available. Longer term process needed to imbed this is way that could move from dialogue to action planning and action. Limits on staff and board **time** precluded doing both a full blown community assessment and the community building pilot in 2003. Scheduling limitations often meant uw staff needed to facilitate process. This was good for Sharon and UWPC (though demanding) because strengthened personal connections. Need to reflect on ways to expand facilitation pool available on design team and beyond and what the ideal timeframe is for this process. It should have been scheduled at a time other than campaign time.

- Building a broad participation base required attention to **language issues** ; the questionnaire was translated into Spanish, Vietnamese, youth-friendly language.

- **Participants came to appreciate that AI is a Mindset, a way of life, not just a methodology** – it can be applied everywhere, takes practice, and is countercultural

We hope this toolkit encourages other communities to become familiar with AI and its value as positive community organizing and mobilizing tool.

Here are a few questions to consider as you begin your own process:

+ Why are you doing this?
+ What do you hope to accomplish?
+ Why do you see AI as a valuable tool for accomplishing your objectives?
+ Who are the right people to involve? Who is on the bus already In what seat? Where is bus going?

Selection of Design Team
❖ Who should be on design team? Think broadly.
❖ What connections do the design team members bring into the process – and what do they want/plan to contribute to making it work?
❖ What should it be constituted to accomplish by way of tasks? – for example
    o deciding topics and questions,
    o deciding rollout of the process, including who is involved and where
    o planning summit,
    o conducting focus groups

❖ What is the Framework within which the design team needs to work?
❖ What elements of the process are "fixed", what do you want to create and why and what might make it work? (Fundamental frame components probably include **1) Content: e.g.** Reframing community assessment and expanding community participation;**2) Process:** Using Appreciative Inquiry as a tool;**3) Timetable:** By (date) to have completed design, implementation, summit meeting, and preliminary evaluation of pilot

Process design
+ What do you want to understand about your community and why?

+ What questions, ways of working would encourage everyone's participation? What language and other cultural inclusion issues do you need to keep in mind?

+ How will you make the process visible to the broader community?

+ What resources will help you do your job? Who has the resources?

+ What's in it for community?

+ What it's going to cost?

+ How much time will it take?

+ What staffing and outside facilitation or other support do you need to move forward?

+ How will you organize and use the information you get back to make decisions and move forward?