

From insight to action with Appreciative Inquiry: Participant guide

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Problem Statement

User research indicates that some GVSU students who need or prefer low-sensory environments find it difficult to find a space that meets their needs in the Mary Idema Pew Library. In particular, visual and auditory distractions make it challenging for some of these students to concentrate in many of our open study spaces.

Step 1: Connect to purpose

About this step: This step encourages participants to think about the value and potential impact that solving this problem might have for users. This can help participants gain a birds-eye view of the issue before diving into the details. Connecting people to this broader purpose can also motivate them to want to help solve the problem.

Instructions for today: *Take a minute or two to write your responses to the following questions.*

- 1) **Why is it important for us to explore the topic of low-sensory environments today?**

- 2) **How could exploring this topic benefit students and student learning?**

Step 2: Frame it and flip it

About this step: Focusing on the problem does not always help people discover solutions. This part of the process encourages people to focus on *the desired state* rather than focusing on what's lacking. The desired state is generative and promotes possibility.

Instructions for today: *Discuss the following questions at your table:*

Frame the problem:

- 1) **What is the problem we are trying to solve?** (Reiterate the problem statement above so you know that everyone is on the same page. Discuss the problem statement and then restate it below.)

Flip the problem:

- 2) **What does this problem tell you about *what we desire* for students in our library? Finish the following sentence:**
We want students to be able to _____.

3) Turn this into a question for the group to explore that focuses on *what you desire for students*:

How might we _____?

Step 3: Dream of the ideal future

About this step: Before generating ideas to answer the question you wrote above, encourage your group to think about what an ideal solution (or an ideal “future”) will be like. This step can help your group develop a shared understanding about what a successful outcome will include, and this shared understanding will be important as you narrow down ideas in the ideation phase. This step can also help inspire the group before moving to ideation.

Instructions for today: *Take a minute or two to respond to the prompts below on your own. Next, discuss the prompts as a group. Your group is encouraged to jot down notes or simple sketches on the flipchart based on your discussion of the ideal future.*

What words or phrases describe an ideal future as it relates to this topic?

How would success look and feel?

Step 4: Ideate

About this step: The purpose of ideation is to generate an abundance of ideas and then narrow them down to 1-3 ideas to prototype. Facilitating ideation techniques, rather than using traditional brainstorming, can help the group break out of familiar modes of thinking, ensure that everyone in the group participates, minimize the likelihood that any one person will dominate the conversation, and generate ideas in a way that energizes rather than disheartens participants.

Instructions for today: *Pretend that your group went through an ideation session using the ideation technique Brainwriting.¹ Your group generated many ideas and have come to consensus that you would like to move forward with one idea that you think is feasible, would be desirable to users, and aligns with the library’s mission and values.*

The idea is to purchase a variety of sensory-friendly tools that students will be able to check out and use to help modify the library environment to meet their needs. Examples of tools you might want to purchase are noise-canceling headphones, mobile tabletop partitions, and weighted lap pads (used for calming and comfort).

¹ This is one of Kristin’s favorite ideation techniques, and you can find it described in Gray, D., Brown, S., & Macanujo, J. (2010). *Gamestorming: a playbook for innovators, rulebreakers, and changemakers*. Farnham: OReilly. Pgs. 82-83.

Step 5: Prototype internally

About this step: Taking time to get feedback from your colleagues (internal stakeholders) who haven't yet been involved in the process can help you build early buy-in for your idea. The trick here is to ask generative questions. Consider asking the following: 1) What do you like about this idea? 2) How can we improve this idea?

Instructions for today: *Take time as a group to flesh out the idea listed in Step 4. Using the flipchart paper, create a visual representation of the idea that you will use for some internal prototyping.*

Step 6: Prototype with users

About this step: Next, you will want to prototype your idea with actual users. You can do this by creating a visual representation of your newly improved idea, explaining it to users, and observing how they interact with it or asking them questions about the idea.

Closing reflection

Instructions for today: *Reflect on the following questions.*

- 1) **What did you like about the process we used today?**
- 2) **How does this process complement other methods or techniques you have used?**
- 3) **What elements do you imagine incorporating into your future work?**
- 4) **What would you change about the process we used today if you were working with a group to move from insight to action?**

Acknowledgements

Some of today's activities were inspired by activities designed by Jackie Stavros and Maureen (Mo) McKenna who led Kristin's Appreciative Inquiry facilitation training.

To learn more about Appreciative Inquiry:

Start by exploring the resources from the David L. Cooperrider Center for Appreciative Inquiry, Stiller School of Business, Champlain College: <https://www.champlain.edu/appreciativeinquiry>

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