

focus on practice

IMAGINE PROJECT FOUNDATIONS

24 Hours to Launch Imagine Scotland

Margaret Wright, key visionary behind Imagine Scotland, responded with her usual great enthusiasm to the invitation from the **Scotland Civic Forum (SCF)** to set up, on very short notice, a 24-hour event to share the Imagine Scotland vision and process with a wider group. Working with Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago, they decided on invitees, agenda and hoped-for outcomes. They shared a common hope that this event would expand civic participation by opening a space for people to consider the future of Scotland, and deepen their interest and commitment to designing and creating this future.

The event began with a buffet lunch and exploration of exhibits on Appreciative Inquiry, Open Space Technology, Imagine Scotland, and other Imagine projects around the world. This **informal opening** enabled people to greet old friends, make new ones, and get comfortably settled and oriented.

Maieutic (ma-yoo'-tik) adj. Bringing latent ideas into clear consciousness, like a midwife.

"Imagine" work is maieutic, facilitating the birth of both ideas and communities. This involves:

- Opening a space for 'what's possible' to be discussed (which involves renouncing cynicism)
- Asking clarifying questions and listening with active interest
- Paying attention to local culture – symbols, practices, meaning making, language, and questions being asked at this time
- Looking for 'green shoots' – signs of new possibilities breaking in
- Identifying and connecting people who can support each other around emerging interests
- Weaving the experience/values/hopes of individuals (wool) with the physical milieu (warp) into a fabric of community commitment and storytelling

The 'formal' meeting began after lunch in a large room with plenty of empty wall space. Over 175 people filled the room and sat in circles of eight. Maps of Scotland had been placed on their chairs. A graphic artist was present to draw cartoons of the proceedings, and a young volunteer videographer was standing by to record the event on film.

The SCF opened the event with brief introductions and some background on the Scottish Civic Charter, which participants had been sent in advance. Margaret gave an enthusiastic welcome including why this day was a dream come true. Bliss then invited people to introduce themselves to their circle of eight, by sharing their name and a hope that had brought them there (and to write this on a Post-It Note). The

gathering was about imagining Scotland's future; asking for a hope brought to consciousness a pull from that future. Within 10 minutes, these now comfortable groups of eight had generated an extensive 'hope map', which was posted on the room's back wall.

Bliss then invited people to move around the room and become a living map of Scotland. "Imagine that where I am standing is the far north – the Shetland Islands, with Dumfries and Galloway on the southern edge of the room, Aberdeen on the eastern wall, and the Hebrides to the far west."

Before the event, organizers should consider together:

- What outcomes are we hoping for?
- Who has been invited? Who is coming?
- How does the conference support the mission(s) of participating organizational partners?
- What physical space is available? (Meet in advance with site director)
- What materials/exhibits might help frame a context for our common reflection?
- What interactive activities will set a tone of hope and active participation?

*Take the time to do relationship building among the principal organizers.
Negotiate a draft agenda as a starting point and frame of reference.*

practice tips

She then asked people to think about the place in Scotland they most loved, and go stand there. It became clear that all of Scotland had advocates in the room. Bliss asked several people who had difficulty deciding where to stand, to share their decision-process with the larger group. Their stories revealed that individuals have understanding of and loyalty to multiple places, a perspective to bear in mind in thinking about the whole.

The 'localized groups' then had time to introduce themselves to one another, and determine together one important thing about their place that they wanted the whole group to understand better. For example, Aberdeen said that, despite the oil wealth there, most of them were not rich and were struggling like everyone else. Those from the Orkney Islands explained that the islands are under populated but have a well-built infrastructure.

It was important for people to define themselves and their community to the larger group, instead of being stereotyped by myths about their place. They also discovered an affinity with a second mini-community within the larger group - those who shared their love of a particular place.

Still gathered in plenary, participants were asked to name public goods vital to Scotland's future, which require everyone's active participation to make possible. An exploration of the 'commonwealth' began. Out of the inquiry emerged affirmative topics directly related to the values, interests and experiences of the participants., linking 'public' and 'participation' to common good. As each topic was named (like 'Treasure our Children', or 'Care for the Earth'), the creator of it was asked to write it on a poster board, 'Once



20 or so topics had been named, individuals self-organized into affinity groups around the topic of their greatest interest. Bliss then said: "The questions we ask determine what we find. What key questions, around your chosen topic, could open the way forward for Scotland? What questions might lead to new

insights? Resist discussing answers just yet... Create your best questions and then place them around your poster board on the back wall."

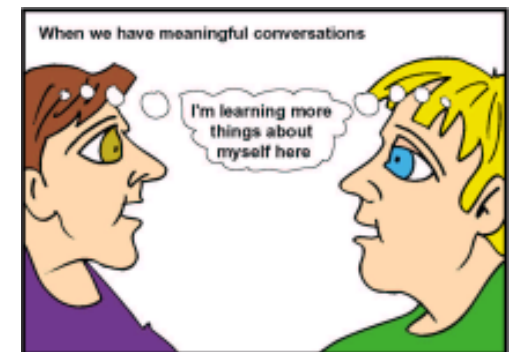
By the time the opening two-hour session finished, each person had interacted directly with 30 or more people, in varying size groups, around a shared positive intention. They had become a multi-dimensional map of Scotland as a whole — and seen themselves as people who loved Scotland, cherished hopes, shared values, and struggled with questions. By the time of the 30-minute tea break, the room was buzzing. Interested volunteers arranged the Post-It Notes of the hopes into thematic clusters and linked them to the poster board topics on public goods. The graphic recorder created vivid images of these which served as powerful visual organizers.

A short core training in Appreciative Inquiry followed after the tea break. Using examples drawn from the opening session made the concepts readily accessible and linked to participants' recent experience. A formal Appreciative Inquiry protocol was then used, with pairs interviewing each other, for the

Whom will you invite?

Think about a diverse cross-section of "sparklers" in the community who might not normally come together:

- youth (check out local youth organizations, community centers, schools and colleges, 'hang-out' spots)
- artists (visit galleries, studios, etc)
- civic leaders (prominent and interesting organizations, movements, efforts)
- farmers and craftspeople
- local media representatives (print, TV, film, radio, web)
- business community
- philanthropists
- government officials
- traditionalists, innovators, and managers
- and who else? **practice tips**



next hour, on high point stories of civic engagement, and effective ways and hopes for increasing civic participation.

Following the inquiry, participants re-organized into small mixed groups (their fourth of the day), and distilled key elements of a civic participation charter for Scotland. They illustrated their ideas using paper, balloons, decorative items, and posted their creative exhibits on tables and walls.

Appreciative Inquiry "Headlines"

Words create worlds. Language is a moral issue.

Every voice is important.

The questions you ask determine what you find.

Positive images lead to positive actions.

Sharing stories expands possibilities.

Sharing commitments increases accountability.



facilitators had time to summarize their groups' discussions and record them on transparencies. They shared these briefly in plenary with a focus on action steps. Everyone heard the range of topics discussed along with some concrete commitments and action plans.

practice tips

Overnight, or in between session blocks, consider:

- Re-organizing the physical space: chairs, wall space, etc. Form informs function.
- Synthesizing notes, ideas, creations, and photocopying them for distribution to all.
- Restocking materials.
- Getting informal feedback

The afternoon ended with free time to nap, enjoy the daffodils, or continue conversations. Dinnertime offered the opportunity to create Imagination centerpieces (out of flowers, pipe cleaners, etc.), view a Sikh community mural, and share poetry, music and possibility stories on an open mike, which went on well into the night.

Participants began the following morning with a warm-up breathing exercise, led by a volunteer, and some

Following the presentations, people reflected individually on, and recorded, the learnings that emerged out of the time together and the next steps they would take. These summary sheets were affixed as building blocks onto a form in the center of the room, visibly representing the foundation for moving forward.

Reflection and Action Planning Sheets

ask for:

- ♦ conference highlights
- ♦ what was most useful
- ♦ three things essential for your ongoing participation
- ♦ commitments to do
- ♦ name and other contact details

tips

moments of fun (voting by lining up behind which dinner centerpiece represented exceptional imagination, and rewarding the group with a bottle of champagne!). A brief introduction to Open Space Technology then launched people into 90 minute self-organizing groups to discuss ways to move their issues forward.

During the morning tea break, copies of the opening day's proceedings were distributed and

Open Space Report Highlights

focus on:

- Key discoveries?
- So what?
- Recommendations for moving forward?
- Next immediate steps?
- Help you need from others here?

3 minutes to make each report.

Name and contact information of each person for follow up.

practice

tips

A microphone was passed around the closing circle, and each of the 175 people seated shared something helpful about the event, and how they would use it. Many expressed appreciation and inspiration, and every voice was heard (in itself, powerful). Over lunch, organizing conversations continued...

Total time of the event:
24 hours.
"Work" time: 12 hours.

After it's over...

Review participant feedback sheets.

Gather stories from participants.

Get an Imagine website up and running.

Constitute expanded design team out of most interested participants.

Share the tasks and ownership of the Imagine vision with this significantly expanded group.

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Provide multiple ways for participation to expand.

What We Launched Into...

Appreciative Inquiry Masterclass

On January 28, 2004, the Communities Scotland Centre for Community Regeneration sponsored a Master class on applying Appreciative Inquiry (AI) to community regeneration, led by Bliss Browne of Imagine Chicago and Margaret Wright of Imagine Scotland. The Centre for Community Regeneration felt that a Masterclass on Appreciative Inquiry led by Bliss and Margaret would be valuable in exposing local policy makers and practitioners to an approach that is proving effective in community regeneration all across

the world. As a follow up to the class, three community pilots were launched in Pollok, Inverclyde and Leith.



Opening Introductions - The Buy / Sell Way

Participants introduce themselves to someone they don't already know by sharing why they have come and a special talent or skill they have. In mixed groups of 8, invite them to introduce themselves to one another by identifying some items on their personal buy/sell list — the 'sell' side comprised of talents, skills, interests, or values they bring to any group situation, and the 'buy' side comprised of skills or qualities they want to learn or develop this year. Groups often discover surprising 'matches' between their buy/sell lists. This encourages everyone to identify themselves as joint participants in an already present learning community. A short plenary debriefing can raise awareness of the range of both skills and learning priorities within the group, and the ready availability of learning partners.

Learning Workshop with the Greater Pollok Development Company

Over 80 community people attended a workshop on ways to expand and improve the annual Pollok community festival of learning. The event was highly participative and focused on expanding the imagination about learning, to lead to new ideas and practices for the festival of learning to be held later in the year.

A number of questions about learning were explored over the course of the three-hour workshop: What and how can we learn from one another? What different spaces, times, interests, styles, intelligences, relationships, are important to our individual learning? What have been our experiences with how we learn in our life and work? How can we make learning fun for

Look into Your Crystal Ball - 15 minutes

Reconstitute the group as small brainstorming/design teams. Ask them to imagine themselves in the future, a year hence, just after the unparalleled success of their event, with the numbers, intensity and energy of their dreams. Have each team 'remember' all the factors that contributed to its being such an unqualified success – to describe and explain in detail what had happened at the event and in the organizing of the event that accounted for high participation and community involvement. Ask them to produce an extensive list of 'what worked'. Place the lists so they can be viewed by everyone. Use these as the starting point for planning next steps.

Imagination in Prison - 30 minutes

Sometimes conversations default into highlighting challenges and problems and questioning the power of the Imagine approach in a community with a negative self-image and history of disinvestments. Spend time exploring how/why local imagination is being "held in prison" by the weight of many real and perceived constraints. Split participants into small groups, and ask them to use paper to depict what bars are locking imagination in prison, and how thick these bars are. Have them work together to name and describe the forces genuinely powerful enough to liberate imagination, and explore what they might to access and expand these forces.

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communities? How can we nurture the creation of learning spaces in community? How can the Pollok learning festival attract even more participation this year?

These questions were addressed through a series of fun, participative activities, like the buy/sell introduction, the storytelling game and the crystal ball exercise (see side), which allowed everyone in the room to engage and get to know each other. The event ended with a closing circle in which a sparkle ball was passed around as a talking stick, having noted that every community's success depends on the presence of sparklers like those who had come today. People freely volunteered what had made them sparkle in the course of the morning - and their ideas for the way ahead as Pollok continues its learning journey.

Imagine Inverclyde Workshop with the Phoenix Community Health Project

The Phoenix staff and management committee wanted some support and encouragement in how to use AI more effectively, especially when encountering negative mindsets, and how to create an effective Imagine Inverclyde process and community event. Following an effective process to liberate their imaginations from prison (see side), the group explored how to use positive qualities (residents' love for their place, children's potential, good friends, inspirational literature) for dealing with difficult situations, and how these could be brought out in planning an 'Imagine Inverclyde' event later in the year. Participants began to see that Imagine Inverclyde needed to appeal not only to innovators, but also to traditionalists and bureaucrats, to encourage the meaningful contributions of all, in order to build an effective change process.

A Celebration of Leith

Imagine Leith, an informal network of people active in the community, hosted this meeting.

12 people from diverse backgrounds attended including two city councillors, the convenor of the Local Development Committee, the Marketing Managers of two retail outlets (Ocean Terminal and Leith Mills), a local minister, a representative from a local housing association, the manager of a sheltered housing complex for the elderly who also sits on the Leith Community Safety Panel, the manager of a local guest house, a local artist who is also a member of Leith Initiative for Tourism, a representative from Bonnington Community Council and the Co-ordinator of a Communities that Care project working with the 30 strong board from the local community on strategies to support the young people growing up in the area.