



*Imagine Memphis*TM is an organic approach that engages the participants in a range of creative, positive and constructive discussions about their communities. Similar to the *Imagine Chicago* process used successfully in the early 1990's, *Imagine Memphis* involves high school youth interviewing adult community/neighborhood leaders with questions that capture the values and strengths of Memphis. The active involvement of the youth gives them a first-hand experience with the personal history of Memphis and invites them to take an active role in the shaping of the future of Memphis. Subsequently, by engaging members of our organizations, individuals, businesses, associations, neighborhoods and schools in a positive dialog about what is working in Memphis, all participants, young and old, are inspired to renewed commitment and enthusiasm. The foundation of these efforts lies in what already exists and is working. The output of these dialogs, communicated broadly throughout the community, results in renewed support for existing efforts, and perhaps a redirection of some resources to address what Memphians need and value most. Simply put, *Imagine Memphis* identifies what is working on all levels, shares this information with those involved and others, and suggests creative ways to combine these assets for greater success and change.



Imagine Memphis is intended to look deeply into this city's soul and search out the core values from which all our strengths originate; to find the good that is the foundational bedrock of who we are as a community. By rediscovering who we are and what we care about, we contend the hearts and minds of individuals can be elevated and we can create a more positive atmosphere, a more determined citizenry, and the innovative solutions to make Memphis a better place for all to live.

Approach

The dialogs are based on a process known as "Appreciative Inquiry", a proven process based on leading research across multi-cultural and economic strata. By applying this format, the youth-led interviews create a positive and life-generating experience; one that engages the imagination; energizes and motivates all; and creates hope and optimism. Rather than focusing on problems, which by their very nature are negative and de-energizing, this powerful approach identifies opportunities in an uplifting way, identifying and building upon existing strengths. Problems are dwarfed by the rising awareness of power that already resides within the community.

Successful change depends on a focus on solution and positive action. Many groups and individuals fighting against the problems already exist in Memphis. These are valuable assets that unfortunately lose time and energy struggling in their own silos of problem-centered activities. We need to fully engage the combined energy and talent of all of our citizens and the groups they form.



History and Plan

In the spring of 2007, members of several organizations within our community met to reflect on the future of Memphis. In the process, representatives from Midtown Development Corporation, Christian Brothers University, Leadership Memphis, Downtown Neighborhood Association, and the Carson Greil Group, LLC. united to define and sponsor the initiative called *Imagine Memphis*.

A Design Team was formed to give oversight to the process, provide guidance for customizing the approach for Memphis, be the voice for the diversity within the Memphis community, engage as champions to diffuse this effort throughout the community, inform and disseminate communications, and ensures the results from this effort are acted upon in meaningful ways. The Design Team consists of a diverse cross-section of Memphis, including seven high school junior/seniors, spanning five ethnic cultures. The Team has also attracted representatives from the following organizations: National Civil Rights Museum, Community Development Centers, United Way of the Mid-South, Youth Congress, Bridges USA, New Direction Christian Church, MPACT, Mid-South Reads, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare and Uptown Partnership.

In addition, the original sponsors of this effort have formed a Resource Team that continues to be the guiding sponsor for this effort and is responsible for addressing the resource needs of the Design Team.



The plan involves the deployment of 6-month phases. Each phase is comprised of an interview process by high school youths of citizens and leaders (influencers), followed by a summit to synthesize the results into themes, focusing the city and connecting organizations to resources. Participants in the interviews will be asked to collectively participate in the summit. In Phase I, the discovery interviews will primarily be focusing on influencers who are residents of the Midtown and Downtown areas.