Fears and Hopes Protocol

Purpose: This protocol is designed to provide a safe approach for expressing concerns about the subject matter to be discussed or work to be addressed by a group of participants. It provides the opportunity for a group to establish collective ownership of each member's individual expectations and concerns.

Intended Audience: All members of a learning community.

Time Needed: 25 minutes.

Materials: Chart paper, sticky notes, markers, tape or push pins to post chart paper, if necessary.

Review of Key Concepts: There are both individual and collective benefits to sharing fears and hopes prior to initiating collaborative work. From an individual perspective, the opportunity to voice both your concerns and your aspirations provides validation of your personal view of the work at hand. This validation can lead to a deeper level of commitment to the work at hand. The collective fears and hopes provide a common starting point for a group to begin delving into complex problems. Facilitators should recognize that creating an opportunity for groups to voice their concerns simply reveals what already exists. Individual and collective that are made visible through this process become much easier to mitigate and resolve than fears that are not shared.

DIRECTIONS FOR FACILITATING THE FEARS AND HOPES PROTOCOL

Note: Manage the protocol using table teams for groups with more than 12 participants.

1 Introduction. Facilitator explains the purpose and process of the protocol before asking participants to think about and write down their greatest fear for the meeting (workshop, project, school year). Prompt: “What is the worst that could happen or not happen during or as a result of this meeting/conference?” Allow time for participants to jot down responses. Next, the facilitator asks participants to think about and write down their greatest hope for the work. Prompt: “What is the best thing that could happen during or as a result of this meeting/conference?”

2 Pair-share. Participants share their hopes and fears with a partner (or table team if the group is large).

3 Listing. Participants call out fears and hopes as facilitator lists them on separate sheets of chart paper. As an alternative to listing, have participants record their hopes and fears on sticky notes and post to designated charts after calling out a few from each partner group or table team. Members can group and sort ideas into categories or themes.

4 Debriefing. Facilitator prompts discussion of both context and process: “What patterns could be identified from the fears and/or hopes that were shared?” “Did you notice anything surprising or interesting while completing this activity?” “What was the impact of perceived negative responses?” “What observations do you have about the group interactions during this process?”