

Facilitation Difficulty:



 30 min.



Can be used with
groups of any size



No preconference

Purpose – To surface expectations and concerns about a given topic or plan in order to begin building community, safety, and trust in any ongoing classes or meetings. To recognize that others share our fears and hopes around particularly stressful topics (upcoming SATs, new initiatives), and once they are spoken, the fears will be addressed. In ongoing meetings, this protocol should be used during the first or second time a group meets, revisited after a few meetings, and possibly revised again when new members join the group. It can be used anytime a group of adults or students are facing an immediate challenge or stress.

Group size – Any size group

Preparation – Use projector and technology or set up two sheets of chart paper with two colored markers. Ensure all participants have writing materials. If desired, prepare copies of this activity for participants. Plan to keep the chart paper or electronic copies of the finished lists so they may be reviewed later.

Facilitation tips – This activity is generally done early in the process of exploring a topic or plan, but not too early, as participants will need to have enough interaction around the topic to really know what they fear and hope. Be sure to chart all fears and hopes, as expressed, without comment or any indication of judgment. Do not be fearful of having participants express their worst fears because the expression of these concerns will ultimately make the group work together more effectively. Avoid taking any of their fears personally because fears likely arise out of past experiences or perceptions that may have nothing to do with you. This activity segues very well into the [Setting Agreements Activity](#). Also see modification on page 2.

Steps:

1. **Introduce** – *“Certainly, everyone has feelings about being here today based on the reason we’re here, your previous experiences, and your imaginings about what lies ahead. Think about your experience with other similar groups or experiences, how things sometimes didn’t go as well as you’d liked, and maybe went very badly. Let’s get your concerns about _____ out onto the table. We’ll also share our hopes for how our work around this topic can have positive effects.”* (3 min.)
2. **List** – Ask everyone to reflect and write a list of their fears or concerns, and their greatest hopes around the topic or reason for meeting. (3-4 min.)
3. **Share fears** – Ask for volunteers to share out one of their fears, charting them for the group as they’re read. If people want to reinforce a fear that’s already been written, add “+1” beside that item. (7 min.)
4. **Share hopes** – After the group has shared out all their fears, use a different colored marker and a second sheet of chart paper on a separate easel (or a separate screen), and ask the group to voice their hopes. Again, chart their words verbatim if possible. Once the flow slows down, invite people who haven’t spoken to express a hope. (7 min.)
5. **Next steps** – *“Now that we have created our list of hopes and fears, it is important that we review it a few meetings (class sessions) from now. At that time, we’ll see what fears we have addressed and those that no longer feel relevant. We will also check to see if we are actualizing our hopes. At that time, we may want to add new hopes and fears to our list. This is a living document that will change over time, much like the agreements we will set. And, like agreements, we will revisit it periodically to ensure we continue to build a healthy culture of safety and productivity.”* (1 min.)

6. **Debrief and reflect** — After asking the questions below, invite participants to write down some personal notes and reflections about this activity. (5-8 min.)

- *Did you notice anything surprising/interesting while doing this activity?*
- *Why did we do this activity now?*
- *What is the impact of openly expressing negative thoughts? What about positive thoughts?*
- *Why did we list fears first? What could happen if we listed hopes first?*
- *Why do you think we asked everyone to do this activity? What might it accomplish?*
- *Would you use this activity in other groups you attend?*

Modification — If stakes are high or you sense your group needs more support to honestly share their hopes and fears, you may want to insert a pair share between Step 2 and Step 3. This will give participants a chance to articulate and share their thoughts before sharing them with the larger group.