NCCEP/GEAR UP
CAPACITY-BUILDING WORKSHOP

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community
matters

CASE STUDY: CREATIVITY & CONFLICT ON A TEAM

The GEAR UP team at Gotham City University, which serves multiple city high schools and is partnered with several respected community agencies, is trying to do some new things, and experiencing some conflict.

In a planning session at the start of the summer, the team developed two key goals for the year: 1) to develop a more intentional support system for all incoming GCU freshmen; and 2) to improve coordination with GEAR UP teams in the high schools. Out of a sense of urgency, and thinking that he had the backing of the team based on these planning decisions, the Director created a subcommittee to pursue the work: the Director, the Project Evaluator, and a site coordinator. In a burst of creative energy, these fired-up subcommittee members used the summer to collect data on the experiences of incoming first-year college students, prepared a proposal for how to proceed, and submitted all this to the full Team before an October meeting, asking that action be taken at the meeting to implement the proposal.   While they did not formally keep the GU team posted on their work, they did have conversations with some individual members of the team, to get help as needed.

At the October meeting, the Project Evaluator presented the subcommittee's work, proud of how much they have moved things forward. But when she asked people to respond and act on the proposal, ideally today, there was a long silence.

Finally, a high school Principal explained that she was uncomfortable. While she was glad that new work had been done and she could tell that the subcommittee members were excited, she had to acknowledge how blind-sided she felt by the process.   Another team member suggested that the team needs better ground rules for communication. Several others looked uncomfortable, but stayed silent.

In frustration, the Director pointed out that the group had agreed on this focus, and stressed his sense of urgency – which he knows others share – to help out the students who are struggling in their first year of college.   The Project Evaluator suggested they "hit the pause button" long enough to hear more about what is troubling other members of the team.   Several others support this idea. There is some tension in the room, but the Team agrees to the Project Evaluator's suggestion to unpack and consider this set of concerns.

Questions:
- What kinds of learning – or potential for learning – do you see going on here?
- What choices or decisions – by any players or the Team – have created this situation?
- Who is speaking up? Or not speaking up? Who's listening? Who is being heard?
- What things might the team do, together, to increase their ability to aim high for students, while also ensuring ownership and transparency?
- What, if anything, from your own work, resonates with this story?