A CHECKLIST OF PROMISING IDEAS
FOR REQUESTED BUT POTENTIALLY CONTENTIOUS CAMPUS MEETINGS

DISTRIBUTE KEY FACTS AHEAD of the meeting so that everyone understands the parameters within which decisions will be made instead of their arriving at the meeting with prepared demands that are impossible to meet. Consider an FAQ document. Identify whom the interested persons trust (e.g., advisors, mentors, faith leaders) and make the information available to those persons as well.

DISCUSS MEETING PLANS with those leading the group requesting the meeting. As you consider these questions, reach for potential alignment toward a shared purpose.
- What are their goals and yours for the meeting?
- What could happen at the meeting that might pose challenges in achieving these goals?
- What can be done to help reach the goals and overcome challenges through:
    - timing, place, publicity about the meeting,
    - involvement of the media,
    - making certain that people with key information will attend,
    - arrangement of virtual or physical space (e.g., to communicate collaboration over hierarchy, chairs in circle? avoid podium?),
    - ground rules (e.g., order for calling on people, time limits for comments, subjects, such as discussions of individual by name, that will be deemed off limits),
    - or other plans?

DECIDE WHETHER TO USE A MEETING FACILITATOR. Consider for example, your own experience facilitating similar meetings, whether you want to focus on your participation rather than facilitating, the likely reaction of participants to a facilitator, and whether you can engage a facilitator who is familiar with the context and issues. The facilitator might help as well with the discussion of meeting plans. Let the group members know in advance who you have selected and why.

PREPARE FOR WORST CASE SCENARIOS. Suppose a group interested in media coverage, perhaps even for a different cause, grabs your microphone and begins shouting. Can you share responsibility for managing the participants with the leaders of the group? If so, if the meeting is disrupted you might ask the group's leader, "How would you like to proceed?" The wisest course in the midst of the meeting may be to quickly cancel the meeting, vacate the room, and re-schedule as a password-protected virtual meeting. Better yet, try to anticipate this scenario, so you might avert it, in consultation with those requesting the meeting, through targeted invitations and limits on attendance.

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SET A CONSTRUCTIVE TONE WITH YOUR OPENING. Arrive with others early so that you can greet those attending personally. Open with compassionate interest. For example, one administrator began, "We don't know how to solve the problem, and the FAQs sent out ahead explain our challenges. However, we value you and your advocacy and want to talk to you about your concerns and how we can make your experience with us even better."

AVOID MEETING EMOTIONS WITH LOGIC. If participants have strong emotions about the issue, acknowledge and respond to those. Explaining why their reaction is not accurate or their emotions not helpful will exacerbate the sense of not being understood. It's ok, if not uncomfortable, to be angry. First let them know you care.

HOW ELSE COULD WE UNDERSTAND THIS PROBLEM? Groups might advocate for simple, and perhaps untenable, solutions to complex problems. The impasse is exacerbated when we respond by explaining why their solution is not an option. You might instead invite a conversation about the consequences of and their experiences with the problem, rather than the proposed solution, with a goal of addressing the problems rather than the solution.

HELP THOSE ATTENDING TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER. If people are insulting each other, for example, summarize the substance of the remarks, leaving out the offensive parts, and ask if that summary is accurate before calling on the next person. Or encourage people to talk about experiences that led to the strong views that they express.

CONCLUDE by summarizing what you are taking away from the meeting and what you expect next steps to be. Follow through on and report back regarding commitments you make.

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