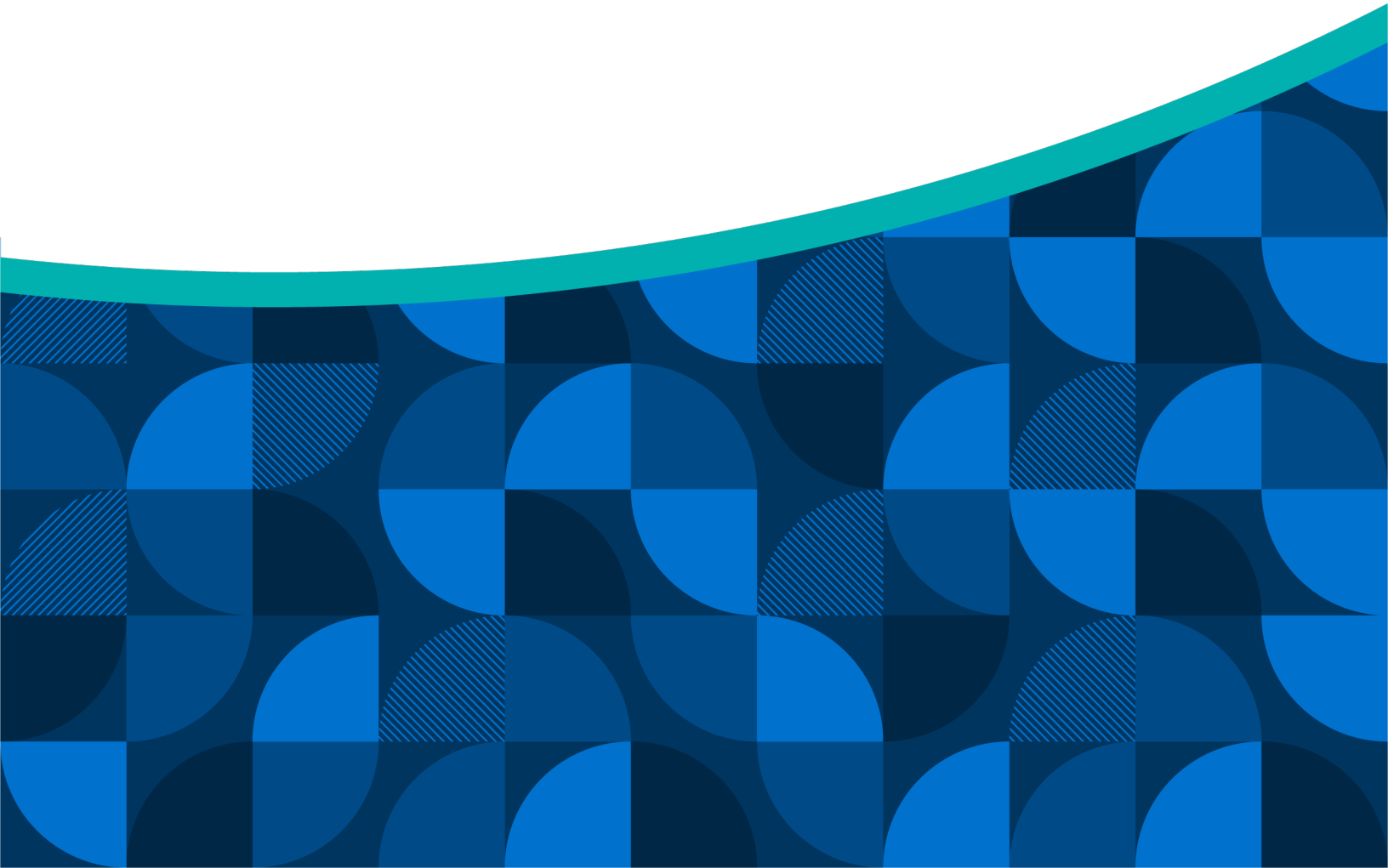




TOOL

Flashpoint Debrief Guide

Use this guide with your team to debrief a recent flashpoint and identify next steps



Bolster Flashpoint Preparedness through Debriefs

Debriefing is Essential to Equipping the Response Team for Future Success

By holding a debrief, or a meeting in which a crisis response team discusses, interprets, and learns from a flashpoint, **institutions can improve team effectiveness and better prepare themselves for future flashpoints**. Debriefs, also known as “hotwashes,” were first developed for use in the military and are now used across a range of industries, including higher education.

51%

Of organizations had already established an after action review process prior to the COVID-19 pandemic¹

25%

Increase in team and individual performance when an organization uses debriefs²

Set Your Team up For a Productive Debrief Session



Complete Within One Week of Crisis Ending

- A debrief should be held as soon as possible after a crisis comes to an end to ensure that information and experiences are still fresh in team members’ minds
- A 2022 public health study found that a debrief is typically suggested to be done within one week of de-escalation³
- EAB found that crisis communications plans in higher education frequently require debriefs to be held within 7-10 days after the crisis’s end



Include Members of Your Crisis Response Team

- A debrief should include the members of your crisis response team to ensure all areas of the crisis response are assessed
- EAB recommends designating a leader of the debrief session (often a Director of Public or Media Relations or Director of Communications) to facilitate the debrief



Ensure Team Members Feel Psychologically Safe

- Establish ground rules around respect and speaking courteously; as flashpoints can be highly sensitive topic areas it is important to ensure all feel empowered and respected when they participate
- Reiterate institutional values as well as the goals of the debrief session to keep participants focused and prevent derailment into blame or frustration



Include Actionable Next Steps

- After identifying areas for improvement in your institution’s crisis management, the debrief team should set clear goals or next steps for making positive changes in these areas
- EAB recommends keeping a record of notes from each debrief
- Consult EAB’s [library of flashpoint resources](#) for best practices and potential next steps in this area

1) [PWC](#)
2) [Tannenbaum and Cerasoli](#), 2012
3) [Public Health Ontario](#), 2022

Debrief Template: Introduction and Participation

1 Open the session by providing context about the purpose and goals of a debrief session

- ▶ Describe the purpose of the debrief session, including a brief description of the events leading up to and during the flashpoint, and the goals for the session today

2 Set ground rules for the conversation

- ▶ What rules and principles will guide discussion today?

Sample ground rules:

1. Critique ideas, not people
2. Be concise when voicing your opinion
3. Document key points
4. Try to avoid placing blame

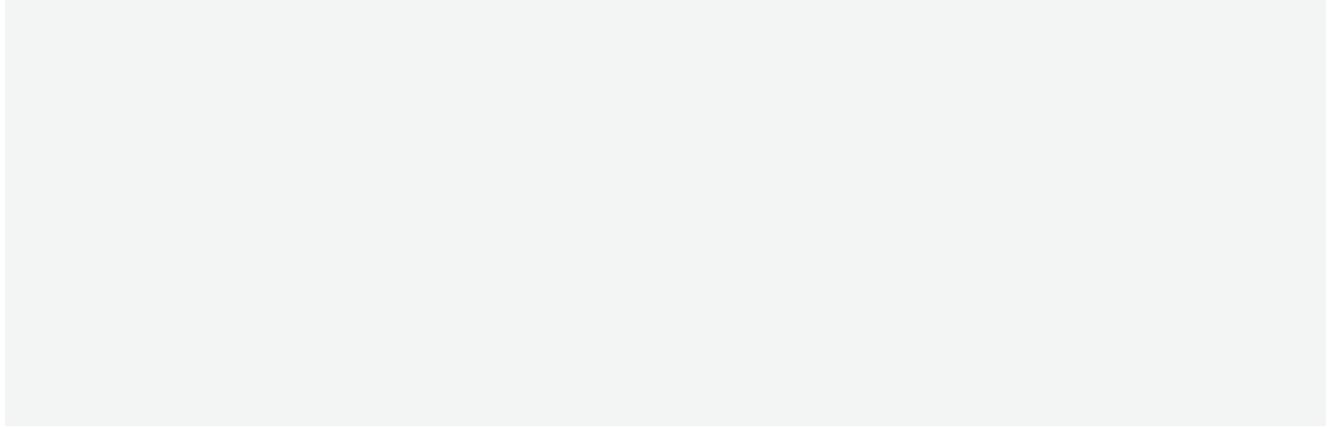
3 List who is present for the session

- ▶ Record the names and titles of participants in the debrief.

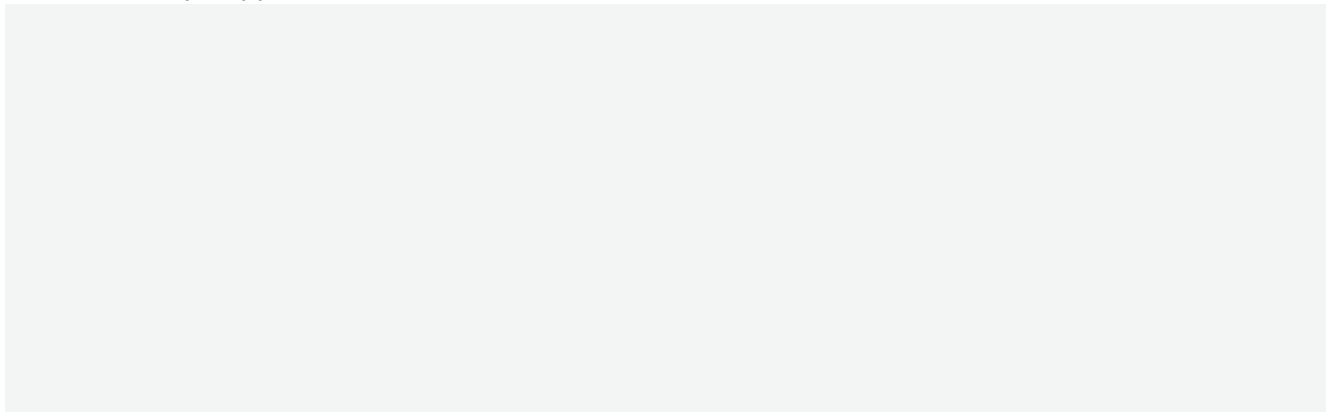
Debrief Template: Assessment

4 Compare actual response actions to pre-determined crisis response plan

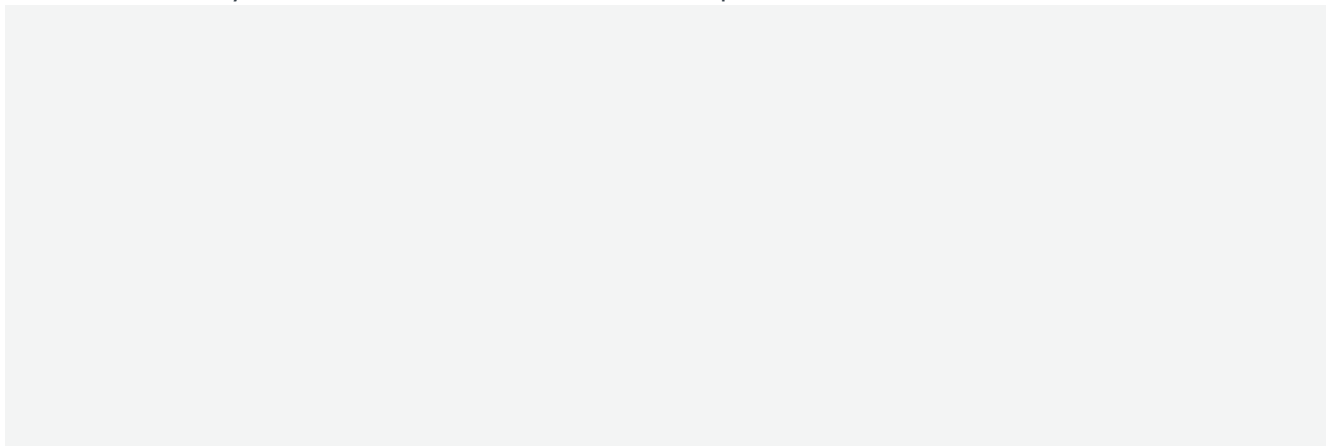
▶ What was supposed to happen, according to existing protocol?



▶ What actually happened?



▶ What caused any deviations or differences from the protocol?



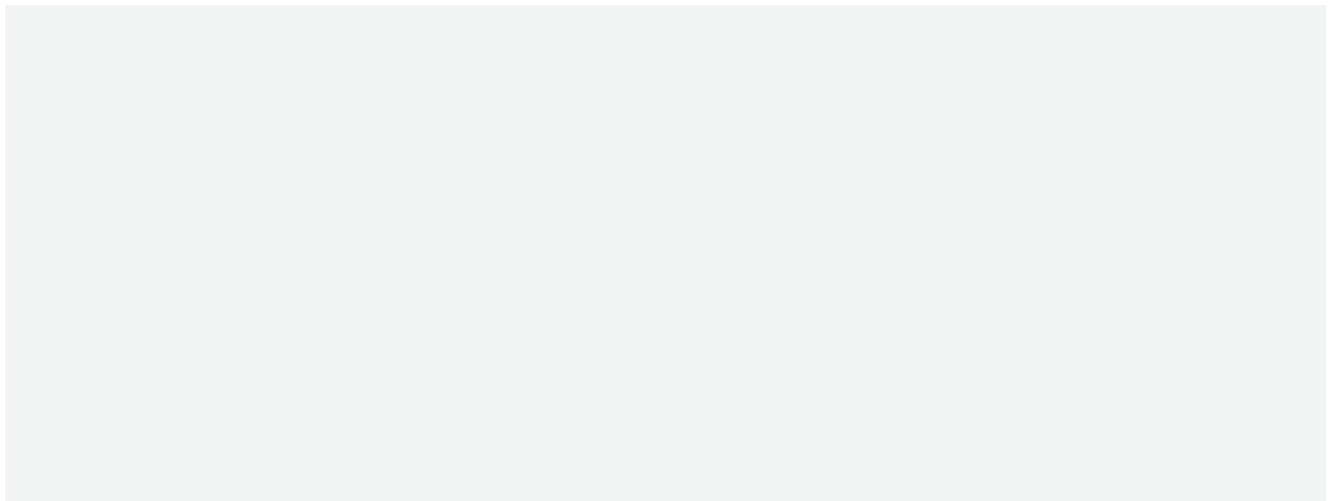
Debrief Template: Assessment

5 **Identify strengths and areas for improvement in flashpoint response**

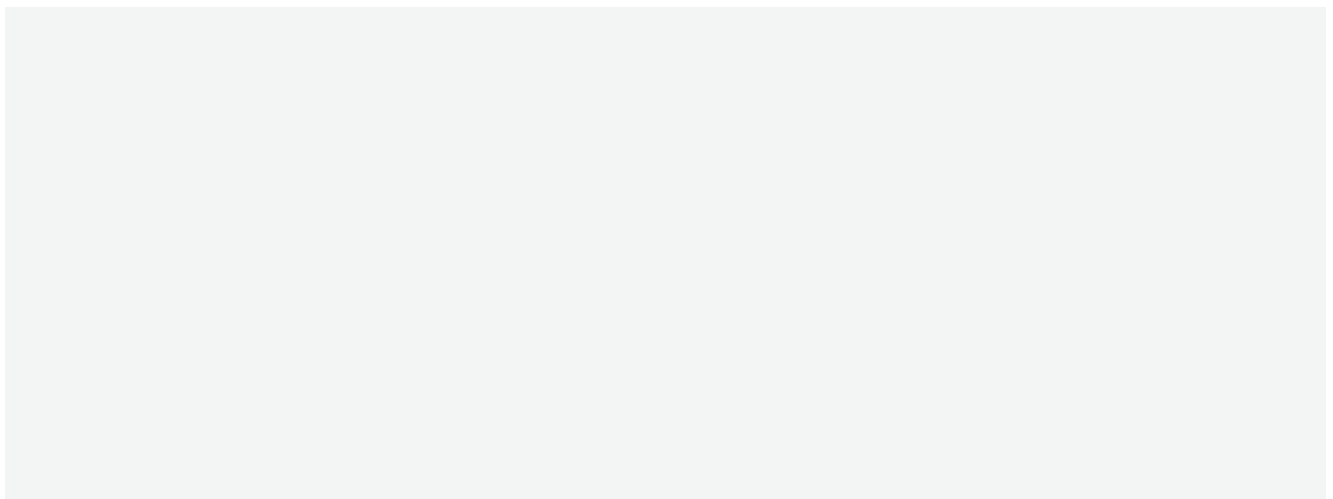
Consider these sample questions as a guide for thinking through areas of strength and areas for improvement:

- Were the right people involved in the flashpoint management process? Who was missing that later needed to be brought in?
- Were key individuals made aware of the issue in a timely manner? Should they have been alerted sooner?
- Did the response team meet frequently enough? Were meetings productive and efficient?
- Were all involved aware of institutional precedent and “north stars” or values when making decisions? Were these precedents and values adhered to in the flashpoint management process?
- Were those representing the institution made aware of the institution’s stance on the flashpoint (provided talking points or an internal FAQ guide? Were they aware of their roles in responding to media, student, or parent queries on the crisis?
- Did the institution release a holding statement within 24 hours of notification of the flashpoint? Did this statement adhere to holding statement best practices?

► List areas of strength during the crisis management process.



► List any areas for improvement during the crisis management process.



Debrief Template: Plan Next Steps

6 Identify areas to prioritize in order to better manage future crises

- ▶ List potential next steps for and assign said steps to specific participants.

Action Item	Persons Involved

For support on implementing next steps or guidance on best practices in flashpoint management, consult [EAB's Flashpoints Resource Center here](#). 