EAB
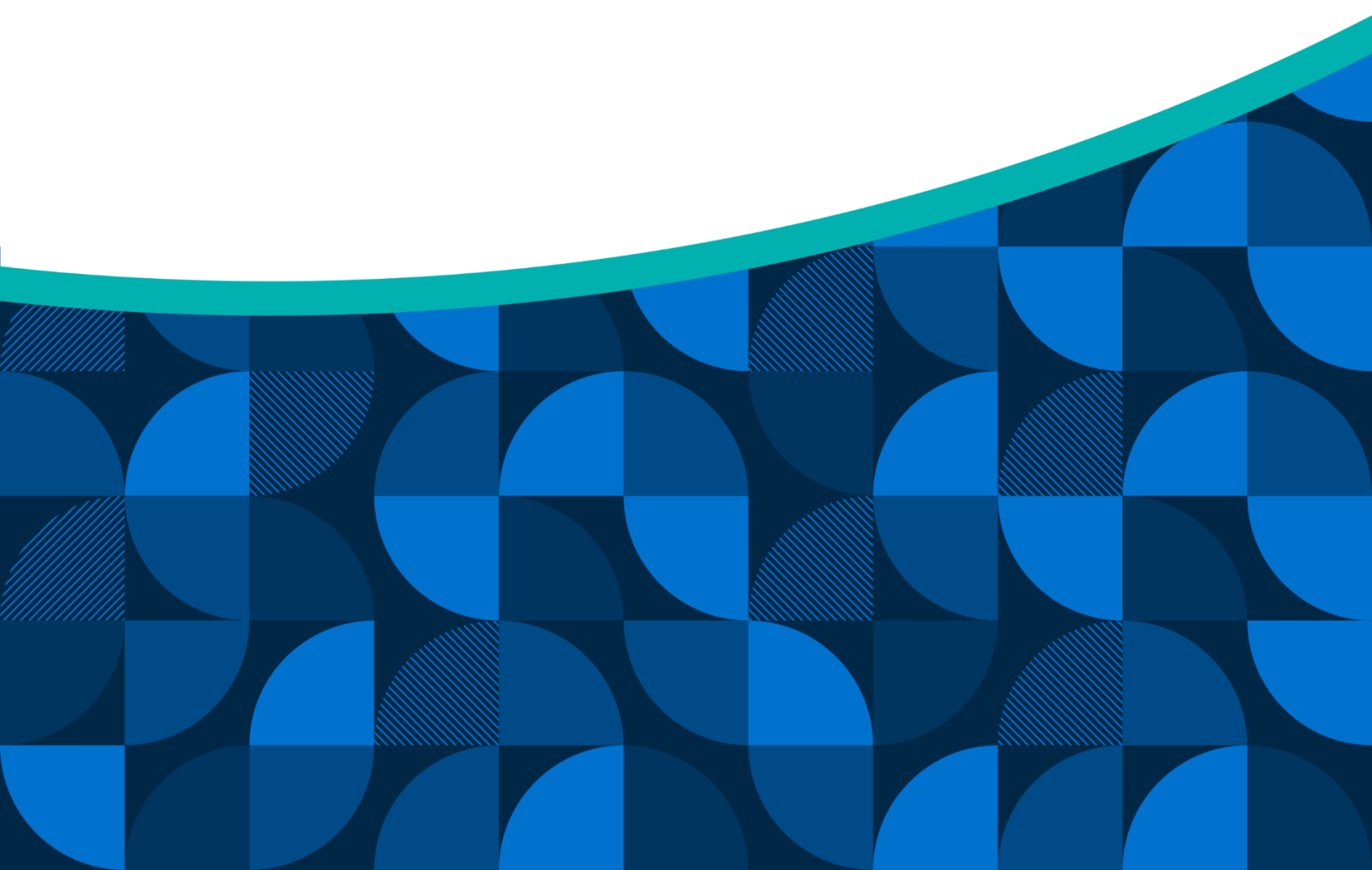
Flashpoint Statement Checklist

Use EAB's checklist before releasing your next flashpoint statement

Checklist for Public Statements Addressing Flashpoints

Now more than ever, institutional leaders are feeling the pressure to publicly respond to flashpoints at a moment's notice. EAB research demonstrates how flashpoints are increasing in frequency and intensity across the last few years, exhausting higher education leaders and leading to what feels like a never-ending crisis communications cycle. In some cases, these flashpoints result in small but costly mistakes that cause the situation to spiral further resulting in PR issues, leadership turnover, and reputational damage.

Costly mistakes are rare in other highly skilled fields with the help of a simple technique: consistently referring to checklist before completing a critical task. Dr. Atul Gawande, surgeon and author of The Checklist Manifesto, reduced surgery-related deaths by 47% in only months after requiring a pre-surgery checklist protocol. Learning from Dr. Gawande's research, EAB developed a peer-reviewed checklist that senior institutional leaders can use to defuse tensions and avoid errors when publicly responding to controversial flashpoints.

Deploy EAB's flashpoint checklist before releasing your next official statement.

Flashpoint Statement Checklist

☐ 1. Has a holding statement been released within 1 hour of the incident?
A holding statement will reduce risk of subsequent chaos if released promptly.

☐ 2. Has the institution's general counsel been consulted?
What liabilities or rights should the university be aware of before taking responsibility?

☐ 3. Does your statement only include factual information, not speculation?
What basic information can be shared that won't create mistrust if later proven wrong?

☐ 4. Does your statement align with your institutional values and previous statements?
Does making this statement diverge from your previous pattern of making statements?

☐ 5. Does your statement speak to the concerns and needs of those directly affected?
What are key stakeholder groups feeling, what questions do they have, and what supportive resources do they need?

☐ 6. Does your statement reference tangible action(s) taken by the university?
How can the university show they are already working toward a solution?

☐ 7. Is the chosen messenger(s) appropriate for the severity of this flashpoint?
E.g., President for campus-wide flashpoints, provost for localized issues.

☐ 8. Are chosen distribution channels a good match for the intended audience?
E.g., time-sensitive statements are posted as pop-ups on university homepages.

☐ 9. Do your internal communications on this topic pass the "front page" test?
Would you be comfortable with an email being leaked or released via FOIA requests?

3 Tips for Building Your Own High-Quality Checklist
Incorporate Boeing engineers' tips to craft useful checklists for other pain points in your everyday work.

Define a Pause Point
Determine the exact moment when the checklist should be deployed every time

Prioritize Speed
Limit the checklist to 5-9 items and ensure it can be executed in less than 60 seconds

Test and Revise
Revise the checklist each time you use it to ensure it stays useful and relevant

Source: Gawande, A. 2010, *The Checklist Manifesto;* EAB interviews and analyses

eab.com

Flashpoint Statement Checklist in Action

How Maple University Used EAB's Checklist to Shape their Statement

University Flashpoint Statement Response

Friday, April 8, 2024; Timestamp: **8:12 pm**

Maple University community,

Today, a community group distributed pamphlets to university community members on our west campus between 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm.

As mentioned in the brief statement released earlier this afternoon, the university leadership team has reviewed the community group's pamphlet and would like to correct any misconceptions and share resources for further questions.

First, the university leadership team emphasizes our disappointment that a group is spreading misinformation to strike uncertainty and panic in our community.

Second, the central mission of our university is to provide a safe and quality education for all students. Our faculty are committed to our university standards as outlined in our strategic plan.

Below, please find clarifications of the misinformation presented in the pamphlet:

1. The statements made about these faculty are inaccurate and the detailed Student Affairs program list can be found here.

2. The Office of Student Affairs' programs reflect guidelines set forth by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS). Programs are also based on student needs as affirmed by the University's Strategic Plan, and we encourage reviewing the Provost's annual program audit based on this plan.

3. Maple University does not discriminate against students based on their race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation. Our adopted programs are developed by leading experts in student well-being. Please find their statement on providing student services to a diverse student body here.

Program standards, objectives, and content are reviewed during the CAS program review process. This process takes place every five years, and when the Provost flags an issue during the annual program audit. Members of the campus community can express their concerns by following the university's content challenge process policy.

Maple University welcomes opposing viewpoints. Differing perspectives enriches our learning environment and provides an opportunity to better understand each other – a practice that we strive to embrace across our community.

Sincerely,
Maple University President

Other steps taken before releasing the statement:
- ☑ Legal counsel was consulted
- ☑ The team discussed alignment with previous statements

Holding statement released promptly and current statement references **tangible action(s)**

Statement **speaks to the concerns of those impacted** by the misleading information

Statement **passes the "front page" test** by ensuring all sentences and references can be clearly understood if reported out of context

Statement **includes factual information** and not speculation

Statement references **specific action(s)** for students and parents if concerns continue

Statement **aligns to core values** of the university and addresses stakeholder concerns