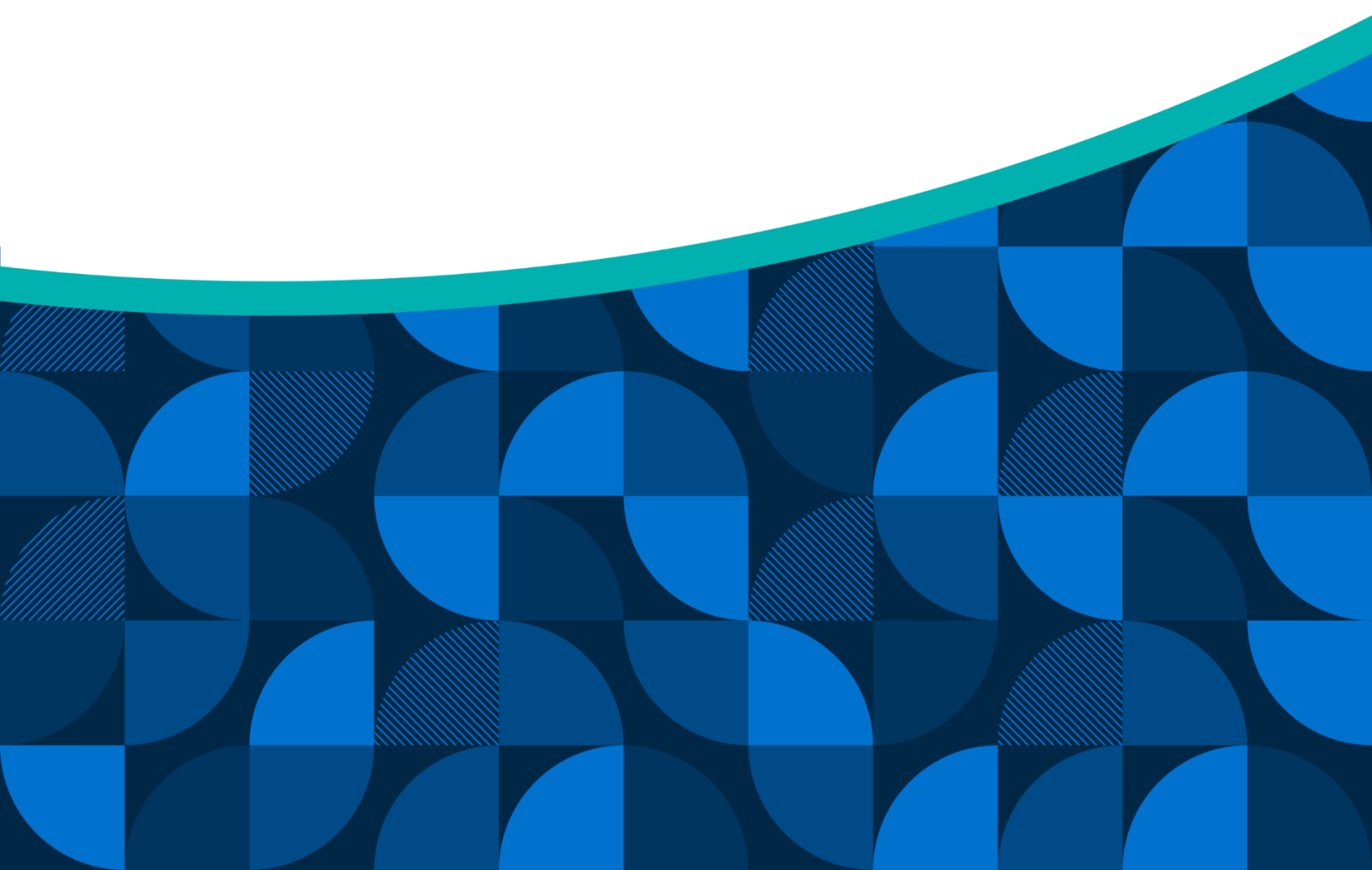




TOOL

# Flashpoint Tabletop Case Study Compendium

Use these case studies to prepare your institutions response to a variety of campus flashpoints



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## What are tabletop exercises?

Tabletop exercises allow institutional leaders to **simulate how they would react in the event of a complex flashpoint** that requires a cross-functional and multidisciplinary response, **without being under the emotional and logistical pressure of an active flashpoint**. Simulating the institutional response, when a real threat is not present, allows teams to identify opportunities to codify their plan of response ahead of time and refine it as needed.

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# How to Use this Compendium

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The Case Study Compendium is built to prepare your institution's key decision-makers to respond to a variety of campus flashpoints. Tabletop exercises are excellent tools because they require only a few hours and they can be conducted by existing staff (i.e., they do not require a team of externally contracted mediators).

Beyond the participants, two roles need to be filled: a facilitator and at least one observer. They should have the following traits:

- Ability to manage a conversation, listen carefully, interpret group dynamics, and offer insightful reflections
- Enough confidence in their standing with the leadership team that they can interrupt or redirect them comfortably
- Familiarity with the institution across multiple divisions

These roles could be played by the president's chief of staff if they do not have any formal role in emergency management, a trusted academic leader with widespread credibility, an engaged and knowledgeable trustee, a senior leader drawn from human resources, student affairs, institutional research, or another function that has a broad view of the institution.

The compendium describes 11 different campus climate flashpoint scenarios. In a meeting with members of your institution's flashpoint response team, use this compendium to prepare for possible flashpoints on your campus and determine effective responses. Each scenario has a brief description and two discussion questions.

Brainstorm possible responses to the provided scenarios to assess your institution's readiness for potential campus climate flashpoints and develop strategies to prepare your campus's response.

Consider the general discussion questions below for all case scenarios.

## **Discussion Questions to Consider across All Scenarios**

1. Has a similar flashpoint occurred on our campus or a nearby campus before? What did we do well? What could we have done better?
2. What parts of our campus culture could contribute to an incident like this? What pre-emptive measures can we take to address these issues?
3. What is our top priority in addressing this flashpoint? What key response components would serve that priority?
4. How do different groups communicate and coordinate with one another following a campus flashpoint such as this? How do we minimize redundant communication between different points of contact?
5. Who would be responsible for managing the response?
6. Who would need to be involved in the response?

# How to Use this Compendium (cont.)

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## Facilitator Guidelines

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- ▶ Set ground rules and expectations of participants at the beginning of the exercise. Below is a sample set of expectations and ground rules:
  - Even though it feels odd, try to behave as though this is really happening
  - You'll inevitably want more information than is provided, but you'll have to make do with what is available, planning for possible different contingencies, and stating your assumptions about what you believe to be true or what you do not know
  - Thinking out loud can sometimes keep others from thinking clearly. Try to take notes and only speak when you're ready to share, unless the whole group is at a loss and you must all brainstorm together to generate possibilities
  - Remember, a tabletop exercise is a "no-fault zone" where people can ask any question and admit uncertainty – it is a test of our plans, not of our leaders. There are no "hidden agendas" or trick questions in this exercise
  - Try to remain objective and align your suggested next steps with the institution's core mission and values
  - Acknowledge when your proposed course of action does not align with precedent in similar scenarios and share the risk and benefit analysis of diverging from the precedent
  
- ▶ Allow leaders to engage in back-and-forth without an intermediary. As hands-off neutral moderator, you should let people chime in as they are inclined, as long as the conversation is generative and productive. However, if you sense participants are becoming overwhelmed, frustrated, or confused, consider pausing to synthesize what has been said so far.
  
- ▶ Conflict is a valuable way to surface disagreements and try to resolve them. Interrupt conflict only if it becomes heated or if it becomes a conversation primarily between only two or three people. However, discourage participants from interrogating one another on their knowledge of obscure policies or subject-matter. If this begins to feel like a test of one leader or division, they will likely disengage.
  
- ▶ The facilitator should pose questions and add interjections that add value to the dialogue. Vet if proposed solutions are realistic and not superficial...but remember, you do not have enough time to explore every line of inquiry all the way to its conclusion. Participants will get frustrated if you keep challenging their ideas and want to talk each problem to death.

## Observer Guidelines

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Observers assist during the session by taking notes and noticing patterns or habits of thinking that are not evident to those participating in or facilitating the exercise. Observers should be familiar with the members of the team, and comfortable enough to provide honest feedback on group dynamics, decision-making, and efficiency.

Here are some prompts to help observers take rich notes that can provide substance to the debrief:

- Are there any topics, processes or systems where the leadership team seems to have a particularly weak understanding?
- Where did the group move too quickly without ascertaining shared understanding or agreement?
- Were any assumptions made about the capability or readiness of various departments to take certain actions that should be investigated further? Were these assumptions clearly stated by the group?
- Did the proposed solutions align or diverge from institutional actions to address similar issues in the past?



# Sample Tabletop Case Studies

Use the below sample scenarios and discussion questions with your team to prepare for future flashpoints.

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SECTION

1

# Sample Tabletop Case Studies

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## Preparing for Student Unrest Related to the Presidential Election

### Case Details

The presidential election result is expected to be announced in the next few hours. Students, faculty, staff, major gift donors and other members of your campus community have already taken to social media to proclaim their displeasure with anticipated outcomes of the election.

Some have started to call for a statement from university leadership demonstrating disapproval of the anticipated winner. Several student life staff members have elevated the possibility of protests on campus tomorrow.

### Discussion Questions

1. What proactive steps can you take to mitigate risks associated with protests?
2. How will your team respond to calls from the campus community for leadership to make a statement?
3. How will you communicate internally to faculty and staff about potential unrest on campus?

## Speaker Event Controversy

### Case Details

A student group at your institution, a public institution, invited John Doe, a controversial journalist and lecturer, to speak. Mr. Doe has a history of making inflammatory statements that have been judged as misogynist, transphobic, and intolerant by many observers. However, supporters view him as a crusader for free speech practices, particularly within the higher ed setting. Previous lectures by Mr. Doe on other campuses have prompted vocal protests.

The student group followed university protocol and received permission four weeks in advance of the event to invite and host Mr. Doe. The event was publicized according to university norms and admission was open to the general public.

A week before the event, other student groups began to mobilize against Mr. Doe on social media. Students wrote opinion pieces in support of and against Mr. Doe in the student newspaper. Four days before the event, the organizing student group informed university officials that protestors were planning to disrupt the event and that they were preparing counter protests as a precaution. Public safety officials developed a plan for protests zones for each group outside the venue.

During the event, as Mr. Doe began to speak, protestors inside the hall stood up and began chanting slogans. The protestors faced taunts and vocal hostility from audience members, as well as Mr. Doe, and were asked to leave by organizers. When they refused to leave, they were escorted out by public safety officers.

### Discussion Questions

1. What proactive measures can your institution take to prepare for on-campus events with speakers or guests who are known to have sparked past controversy?
2. How can your institution communicate with student groups about ensuring safety and equity when a group is planning to bring a speaker or host an event that may antagonize others on campus?

# Sample Tabletop Case Studies (cont.)

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## Outcry over Campus Flyers

### Case Details

During the middle of the night, a group of unidentified individuals put up a large number of flyers around campus with anti-Semitic messages, including specific references to individuals and student groups. The vandals also spray-painted a swastika on a first-year dorm and wrote "You don't belong here" on a wall in the meeting space for the student Hillel group.

Public Safety officials are notified about the flyers and vandalization early in the morning and initiate an investigation of surveillance footage. The provost's office is also notified about the vandalization. By mid-morning, students across campus are finding and reading the flyers, sparking strong condemnation on social media.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are the best ways to communicate to students that an investigation is ongoing? How can you guarantee that the public will receive updates at regular intervals?
2. How can you support students from marginalized identity groups after upsetting public incidents? How can these moments be used to instigate discussion and change on campus?

## Controversial Faculty Comments

### Case Details

Professor Smith is a tenured professor in the physics department. He attends a physics conference in Singapore as an invited lecturer. At a morning Q&A session, an audience member asks Professor Smith what steps he believes are necessary to address issues of gender inequality in the field of physics. A visibly irritated Professor Smith responds with the following statement:

*"I don't know why there's an imbalance in the field between men and girls, maybe men just find physics more interesting, maybe girls just don't have a natural affinity for physics. It's not my concern."*

Someone captures the remarks on video and posts them to social media, where they quickly go viral. Graduate students from the university see the video and start commenting angrily on Twitter. Students tags the physics department in tweets demanding condemnation and action against Professor Smith. The student newspaper notices the tweets and sends an email requesting a comment from the President's office for an article they are releasing on the incident. The article, along with the accompanying video, is published on the student newspaper's website the next day. The story is picked up by local, national, and international news outlets.

### Discussion Questions

1. What guidelines does our institution have for responding to comments faculty make as individual actors, whether in their personal lives or on their personal social media accounts?
2. What measures should be taken to address student concerns about faculty behavior?

# Sample Tabletop Case Studies (cont.)

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## Title IX Allegations Against Institution

### Case Details

Mary Fox, a rising senior at your institution, reported last fall to Public Safety that she was raped by Nick Jones. The ensuing investigation by Public Safety found that the evidence was insufficient to support Mary Fox's charges.

Earlier this week, Mary Fox lodged a Title IX complaint against the university, alleging that university officials ignored evidence she presented, suggested she was at fault in the situation, and tried to convince her to drop the initial charge. This complaint came just one day after the university published the results of a campus climate survey that found over 90% of sexual assaults at your institution go unreported.

Additionally, Mary Fox notified local news outlets about her allegations and has given several interviews on the incident. Regional media coverage is ramping up and several outlets have requested comments from the university.

### Discussion Questions

1. How can our institution remain as transparent as possible in ongoing or confidential investigations?
2. What are possible ways this incident could negatively impact our institution moving forward? How can we prepare for these setbacks?

## Viral Video Threatens Diversity Recruiting Event

### Case Details

In mid-March, a predominantly white university sports team films themselves enthusiastically singing a popular song with lyrics that repeat the n-word a number of times. The video quickly begins circulating on social media. Early the following week, the video has been posted to 20 online sites and there are 352,000 views of the video on YouTube. The story has also been picked up by national media outlets. News reports highlight that the institution's president hasn't spoken out about the incident and that the team members haven't been disciplined. Student groups start calling the administration "racially insensitive" and multiple local and national outlets publish follow ups on the story.

In early April, the institution will hold its largest diversity recruiting event of the year, which is key to hitting the school's diversity enrollment targets. It's an overnight event when students will host 200 admitted minority students Saturday night. The university is worried that this news story will negatively impact the diversity recruiting event.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are the possible enrollment ramifications of this incident and the institution's response?
2. How can the institution prepare now and for the future to address a similar campus climate incident when it surfaces?



# Sample Tabletop Case Studies (cont.)

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## Anger over Racist Sorority Event

### Case Details

Epsilon Kappa Chi (EKC) is one of the oldest and most popular sororities at your institution and is based at an on-campus property registered to their national corporation.

The sorority hosts an annual themed cocktail event. The stated theme of this year's event was 1960's to 70's. Video and photos from the event show students dressed in camo, rice hats, and displaying the Viet Cong flag. According to campus Greek life guidelines, the university cannot punish fraternities and sororities for party themes; only the sorority's national headquarters can do so.

Students and community members accuse the sorority of hosting a racist, Vietnam War-themed event. Within hours, students are on social media, demanding action against the sorority and the sisters in the video. Some call for the university to sever all ties with the sorority, including removing EKC from their on-campus property. Local media reaches out to the university and the sorority's national headquarters for comment.

### Discussion Questions

1. How has your university dealt with incidents involving Greek students in the past? What have been some of the lessons learned?
2. What do you view as the primary underlying issues/concerns involving Greek life on campus? How do the rules and guidelines impacting Greek status on campus affect institutional response?

## Campus Slogan Change

### Case Details

Your institution's traditional slogan has been 'Born to Fight,' a reference to your mascot, the Warrior. Concerned the slogan promotes violence and aggression, the Board of Trustees approves a new slogan, 'Fighting for a Better Tomorrow.' The Board sees the new slogan as an effective compromise between supporters of the old slogan and proponents of a friendlier slogan.

The President announces the slogan change in a campus-wide email that immediately elicits significant opposition. In particular, alumni decry the new slogan on social media and in communications to the alumni relations office. Calls to the alumni relations office show alumni overwhelmingly oppose the slogan. While current students share mixed opinions about the new slogan, a plurality of students support the change.

The advancement office shares concerns that the slogan blowback will impact alumni donations. Moreover, student opposition on social media is becoming increasingly vocal.

### Discussion Questions

1. What institutional changes do you believe lead to particularly vocal responses from alumni?
2. How can your institution assuage alumni concerns after unpopular changes on campus? What long-term actions can your institution take to ensure concerns do not linger?

# Sample Tabletop Case Studies (cont.)

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## Faculty Misconduct Reduces Enrollment

### Case Details

A professor at your institution is investigated for misconduct twice, and both times the University found that he did not break university policy. Unhappy with this finding, faculty members publicly voice their dissatisfaction with the outcome of the investigation. A news publication writes a story on the incident, which elevates the case to national news status. Young alumni, who support recruitment at your institution, organize on social media and boycott conducting prospective student interviews. After May 1st, your institution's enrollment manager finds that as result of the negative attention your institution has received, yield of American females dropped 5 percent and yield of underrepresented minority students dropped by 16 percent. First year student net tuition revenue dropped by 10 percent.

### Discussion Questions

1. What are the possible enrollment ramifications of this incident and your institution's response?
2. How can your institution successfully communicate to its student body an impartial commitment to fair and comprehensive investigations about sexual misconduct on campus?

## Free Speech Media Attention

### Case Details

Ace Cobe is a student in Professor Wright's class on 'Philosophy of American Governance.' During class discussions, Ace frequently interrupts other students and makes inflammatory comments about American culture, which makes many students feel excluded and uncomfortable. Professor Wright repeatedly asks Ace Cobe to let other students speak and in an office visit requests Ace temper his comments to ensure other students felt safe in the class.

Ace Cobe shares this conversation in an online blog and on social media. He writes a series of articles about what he deems a violation of his free speech rights at the university. National media attention is quickly drawn to this incident and Ace tells multiple news outlets that your institution is a hotbed of free speech suppression. Ace demands an apology from Professor Wright and a university reprimand of Professor Wright's actions. Several politicians issue statements decrying your institution and Professor Wright specifically. Professor Wright speaks with the Provost and says that she has begun to receive hate mail.

### Discussion Questions

1. What free speech policy for faculty, staff, and students does our university have in place? When did we last update it?
2. What divisions and departments should monitor social media in response to this scenario? How can our faculty coordinate effectively and share important information?

# Sample Tabletop Case Studies (cont.)

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## Campus History Controversy

### Case Details

Cody Phillips was one of the founders of Oak Valley State University. He bequeathed significant land holdings and capital to build the university and is honored by a large bust in Phillips Quadrangle, the main campus green that was named in his honor. However, during his lifetime Phillips supported eugenics against people of color. He mandated the university exclude African Americans from study, justifying this action with comments about white superiority. A previous university president acknowledged this earlier exclusion as a historical injustice.

In light of the national political climate, particularly around race, students become increasingly active on campus about social justice issues. One evening, student protestors smash the bust of Cody Phillips. They are arrested by Public Safety officials, charged with vandalism, and informed they will be suspended.

Students protest in-person and on social media demanding disciplinary hearings be stopped and the bust of Cody Phillips be permanently removed from the university. Additionally, protestors demand the university rename Phillips Quadrangle and create a racial justice commission to address other diversity issues on campus. In particular, students of color voice a series of concerns about institutional racism that draw attention from national media.

### Discussion Questions

1. Which buildings and statues on campus could be considered problematic due to the individuals and context in which they were erected?
2. What steps has our institution taken to study/address instances of historical wrongdoing on campus or on the part of past administrations? How do we plan to communicate about these steps?



# Debriefing the Exercise

Use this guidance to support your team through reflecting on the experience of the tabletop exercise and identify next steps

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SECTION

2

# Debriefing the Exercise

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After the exercise has concluded the facilitator can provide the below questions to participants, then provide five to ten minutes to reflect and take notes, followed by a group share out.

## Debrief Reflection Questions

- What worked well in this tabletop exercise?
- What did we seem to struggle with in this tabletop exercise? What might be our areas for improvement?
- What were the biggest discrepancies in our expectations or understandings?
- Why did we make a decision in a certain way?
- What other perspectives were not included that should be going forward? And how?
- What are the next steps we should take to remedy the problems that we surfaced during this exercise?

Sometimes, a debrief conversation is sufficient to identify clear takeaways and next steps. But institutions seeking to make the most of a tabletop will task their chief of staff, senior emergency management leader, or another team member to prepare a formal after-action report with clear next steps and then request updates overtime on the schedule of proposed corrective actions.

**Use the EAB After Action Report Template** in the appendix to complete an after-action report with your team.



# Appendix

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SECTION

3

- Sample Facilitator Responses and Interjections
- EAB After-Action Report Template

# Sample Facilitator Responses and Interjections

Purpose	Sample Questions or Statements
<b>Seek granular details that groups are inclined to breeze through</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So just to be clear, I heard that [XYZ] would need to occur, but I didn't hear who would be responsible for that. Could we clarify?</li> <li>• Let's pause for a second—you mentioned a campus-wide communication would go out, but what sort of content would it include?</li> </ul>
<b>Assess assumptions that are not clearly stated</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A few times so far, folks have referenced "resources" that we would make available to students or faculty in that event. But what "resources" are we talking about? Do they actually have the [equipment, training, curriculum] to do that?</li> <li>• OK, so we agreed we would purchase [XYZ]. Do we know which supplier or vendor we would use, if that is available right now, how much that would cost, or what account it would come out of?</li> </ul>
<b>Confirm a broad understanding of a technical or complex matter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You referenced [a process/system/technical topic] that I'm not sure the rest of the group understood. Would you mind just explaining for a moment what you're talking about?</li> <li>• Can we pause to raise hands – how many could explain what <i>Terry</i> just said to all of their direct reports? [Seeing few hands] <i>Terry</i>, could you explain that again?</li> </ul>
<b>Identify reliance on individuals or resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Alex</i>, you said you would handle media inquiries, but if you could not for some reason, who on your team would you deputize to do that?</li> <li>• What if in this case we were not able to get the Board of Trustees together for a few weeks?</li> </ul>
<b>Solicit participation from quiet members</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Juanita</i>, we've been talking about staff for a while here. I know some of those are unionized. How much does what is being said here align with your understanding of the contract and relationship?</li> <li>• Can somebody chime in and share how they think that would be received from the faculty point of view?</li> <li>• <i>Shawn</i>, we haven't heard from you yet. What would your team want to add if they were here?</li> </ul>
<b>Affirm participants who take risks to suggest a counterintuitive perspective or acknowledge uncertainty</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for saying that. That's a good point. Just curious, who else would agree with that?</li> <li>• <i>Roberta</i>, I just heard <i>Michael</i> say that the greatest impact would be on [XYZ] kind of students. Do you see it the same way? Could I ask you to play devil's advocate on that for a moment and disagree?</li> </ul>
<b>Refocus the conversation when it goes in unproductive directions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Dr. Gonzales</i>, I think you've brought up a valuable point here about faculty workload, but I'm not just sure it's a topic we can do justice within this exercise. Can we set that aside and return to what I think <i>Karen</i> was asking about, with [XYZ]?</li> <li>• [After a period of silence while the group is grappling] OK, if we aren't sure what to do here, why don't we list possible options and the benefits and drawbacks of each? What could be the consequences of each approach?</li> </ul>
<b>Manage the flow of discussion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm going to ask us to pick up the pace a bit. Let's fast forward through [a complex process we're currently discussing]. With just 10 minutes left to spend in this part, what are the final two to three things that would need to happen after that?</li> <li>• OK, I want to acknowledge we're all struggling on the media and communications component, but let's put a pin in that for now and at least see if we can address the financial implications in the next 10 minutes.</li> </ul>

# EAB Tabletop Exercise After-Action Report: Summary

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**Instructions:** As a team, fill out the following after-action report. Use the observer's notes to ensure all information is accurate. Be sure to include concrete next steps and completion dates where appropriate.

## Existing Policy Review

- 1 At what points during the exercise were existing policies unclear or insufficient in responding to the emergency(ies)?
- 2 In what particular situations might the institution benefit from the creation of a new policy? What specifically would that policy address?

## Role Call

- 3 At what points during the exercise were an individual's or department's roles unclear?
- 4 Where did you identify need for greater collaboration across departments?
- 5 What roles/responsibilities should be shifted from one department or individual to another, in order to avoid taxing department staffing and resources?



# EAB Tabletop After-Action Report: Action Planning

## Vulnerability Analysis

**Instructions:** Based on your answers to the previous questions, as well as your group discussion and notes, fill out the below chart highlighting the existing vulnerabilities, gaps, or shortcomings in your institution’s emergency response, and the action steps you will take to remedy them.

Description of the Vulnerability	Actions or Investments Needed to Address	Priority <sup>1</sup> (1 = most urgent, 2 = important, 3 = not urgent)	Individual/ Department Assigned to:	Due Date	Status

1) Higher priority deficiencies could be those that most impact our educational and research missions, most endanger the health and safety of our community, or most violate regulations and laws. Lower priority deficiencies would be those that merely seek to confirm to best practices or industry standards or that would enhance the quality of the response.

# EAB Tabletop After-Action Report: Action Planning

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## Final Considerations

Pulling up as a group, what are the **one to three next steps** that the team is committed to doing in follow-up to today's exercise:

1

2

3



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