

## APLU CSC Playbook:

# When to Issue Presidential Statements

### THE CHALLENGE

Public university presidents and chancellors face intensifying pressure from groups both on and off campus to issue a growing number of statements on events such as mass shootings, natural disasters, student deaths, hateful remarks, Supreme Court decisions, and much, much more.

At the same time, other members of the campus community complain of flooded inboxes or statements that aren't matched with actions.

### THE BIG PICTURE

Developing a formal policy, protocol, or guidelines outlining the circumstances in which a president or chancellor will issue a statement can:

- Lower expectations;
- Ease pressure on leadership to weigh in on every issue; and
- Reduce staff time devoted to drafting statements or responding to inquiries requesting one.

Additionally, having a menu of other ways to express support for various groups and causes can further limit the pressure for presidential statements.



## KEY FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN DEVELOPING A POLICY/GUIDELINES

When developing a policy for issuing a statement, institutions may consider outlining specific circumstances in which the president or chancellor would issue a statement.

Examples of these factors may include:

- Whether it is a significant issue directly affecting the university, its mission, or surrounding communities;
- Which audiences are most affected by the issue and is a statement the most effective way to communicate to them;
- Whether the event is connected to a president or chancellor's identity, biography, or experience;
- Whether the president/chancellor could acknowledge the emotion of the situation, describe the situation in the context of the campus community, and outline actions the university is taking in response;
- Whether weighing in on the issue risks entangling the institution in an intensely polarizing issue and alienating important constituents who may not share a given viewpoint.

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## WHO TO ENGAGE IN DEVELOPING A POLICY OR PRACTICE

Key personnel to consider including in drafting a policy include the:



- President/chancellor;
- Vice president of communications and the president's lead communicator;
- Provost;
- Vice president of government affairs;
- Chief of staff;
- General counsel;
- Vice president for student affairs;
- Vice president for diversity, equity, and inclusion;
- Others as necessary (e.g. athletics director, public safety lead, chief health officer).

## POTENTIAL PATHS FORWARD

Once adopted, sharing the policy with relevant members of campus leadership can reduce pressure for a statement down the line.

**Between the Lines:** Embedding the policy into new employee onboarding, new student orientation, faculty retreats, and regular training for vice presidents, deans, and lead college communicators can remind campus members of shared expectations.



- Internal pushback to the policy is most common for the first six months after implementation, then declines so long as the institution continually references the policy.
- Pre-written responses that can be customized to explain why

no statement is being made for a particular event and why other alternatives are a better approach can help reduce workload in responding to a request.

## ALTERNATIVES TO PRESIDENT/CHANCELLOR STATEMENTS

Instead of one-way communications to thousands of people on campus from a president or chancellor, there are many alternatives to acknowledge and address the issue. These include:

- A statement from a senior campus official who oversees work in the relevant area and who the president or chancellor delegates to respond;
- An acknowledgment of the event or issue in a weekly campus newsletter;
- Targeted communications for a community that is grappling with a given issue, which could be delivered by a campus administrator connected with that community;
- Direct engagement with campus constituency groups that might be affected by the incident;
- A campus panel discussion of a controversial political issue to foster and model thoughtful dialogue;
- A campus vigil following a student death or other tragedy.



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### EXAMPLES OF PUBLICLY AVAILABLE UNIVERSITY POLICIES ON ISSUING STATEMENTS

Several universities have published policies on the circumstances in which they will issue a statement. Examples include:

- [University of California, Irvine Policy on Chancellor Statements](#)
- [University of Missouri email guidelines](#)

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**Would you like to share your university policy with the CSC? Email us at [publicaffairs@aplu.org](mailto:publicaffairs@aplu.org).**

Thank you to the [APLU CSC Executive Committee](#) for offering on-campus insights that shaped this brief.