



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Force Review Board Feedback Memo

July 1, 2026

Introduction

The Force Review Board (FRB) consists of Seattle Police Department (SPD) officers who meet regularly to review use of force cases and make determinations as to whether:

1. the use of force investigation is thorough and complete; and
2. the force is consistent with SPD policy, training, and the law.

When appropriate, FRB provides feedback and recommendations to the Department. The goal of the FRB is continual improvement of SPD use of force practices and ensuring the Department remains current about evolving practices for force, de-escalation, and crisis response.¹

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) provides continuous evaluation of the FRB by attending all FRB meetings, participating in regular meetings with Force Review Unit (FRU) leadership to share timely feedback, and summarizing findings in periodic formal feedback memorandums.^{2,3} These memoranda summarize information shared by OIG in meetings with FRU leadership, as well as identify trends and observations that OIG has made since the last publication.⁴ This memorandum evaluates FRB meetings from May 2025 to March 2026.

Facilitation by the Chair

The FRB Chair (Chair) plays a key role in facilitating thorough and robust conversation about force cases. This review period included a transition in the Professional Standards Bureau and FRU leadership with a new Assistant Chief and the FRU Lieutenant moving into the Acting Captain role. While the FRB generally provided thorough review of serious use of force during this period, OIG has observed some facilitation patterns that could be improved.

A number of FRB discussions included speculation (e.g., providing conclusory explanations for officer actions or decisions without evidence, or diagnosing and making assumptions about subjects in crisis without the requisite expertise) rather than reliance on officer statements or actions to support conclusions. The Chair did not always intervene to address and remedy offered speculation. It remains important for the Chair to ensure FRB members maintain the standards and mission of FRB by facilitating discussions that are grounded in evidence and redirect discussions that rely on speculation. It is particularly important to reinforce expectations early and provide consistent discussion guidelines for newer board members. OIG observed use of anchoring or leading discussion questions during this review period. In previous memoranda, OIG has cautioned against anchoring questions, which can undermine objective FRB discussion. OIG acknowledges that it can be challenging to balance the need to remain objective while ensuring all topics and issues are fully discussed. However, using open-ended questions that do not contain value judgments, opinions, or suggested answers is critical.

The Chair continues to make good use of subject matter experts (SMEs) during discussions to provide specialized knowledge and inform the FRB's decision-making (e.g., training instructor for vehicle tactics). OIG did identify instances where SME contributions dominated or inhibited discussion by FRB members.

1 For more information about the FRB, please refer to [OIG_UseOfForceAssessment.pdf](#), pp. 21-22.

2 The FRU handles case selection for FRB review. The Captain of the FRU is the standing Chair of the FRB.

3 For more information about OIG areas of FRB assessment, please see [OIG_UseOfForceAssessment.pdf](#), pp. 22-24.

4 The [last memo](#) was published in June 2025.

It is important for Chairs to intervene when this is occurring to ensure SMEs are adding pertinent knowledge but not controlling the discussion. FRB members are charged with thoroughly discussing issues and making decisions regarding force, so it is important for the Chair to recognize this dynamic when it arises and bring FRB members back into the discussion.

The FRB and Chair should be mindful of how discussions reflect SPD views of the communities they serve and how those discussions may bolster or undermine the Department's legitimacy to community members. During the review period, FRB members misgendered a subject and relied on the use of an outdated term to describe another subject in crisis. OIG provided feedback to the Chair that these instances should be flagged and corrected during discussion.

FRB Discussion

Critical Review

For FRB to provide effective internal review for SPD use of force, FRB members must be willing to engage in critical analysis of tactics and decision-making and provide necessary feedback to the Department. OIG has observed that FRB continues to highlight issues and concerns not previously identified by the chain of command (COC), demonstrating the ongoing value and need for this additional level of internal review. In addition to addressing whether officer actions are within policy and training, FRB members explore whether standard practices were followed and identify any improvements that can be made. This analysis can result in individual feedback to officers and can be used to revise SPD policy and training.

As noted in the previous memorandum, new members can initially be hesitant to offer critical feedback or voice concern or dissent, but with time, most become more comfortable challenging and critiquing tactics and decision-making of fellow officers. OIG also observes that while newer FRB members have been more prone to speculate during their discussions, those with more experience have spoken up and redirected the conversation to what is documented and observable.

Crisis Discussion

FRB regularly reviews cases involving subjects experiencing mental health crisis. OIG provided feedback in the 2024 FRB Assessment that board members are expected to discuss how information known to officers about the subject's mental health (e.g., crisis template/plan) impacted their response.⁵ Case assessments continue to lack a focused discussion of what information on-scene officers had about a subject's mental health history, any information-gathering they did at the scene, and how that information affected officer tactics and decision-making. This information should be built into the case presentation provided at the beginning of the meeting. At times, FRB members failed to raise crisis considerations until the end of the meeting, if at all, despite relevance to the discussion.

A Sergeant or other representative from the Crisis Response Unit (CRU) serves as a SME at FRB meetings to provide input on crisis response and de-escalation. OIG has noted a pattern of the CRU representative speculating about subjects' mental health and discussing information not known to officers at the time of the interaction. For example, at one meeting the CRU representative speculated that the subject's actions were the result of substance abuse and not a behavioral health condition, an assessment the CRT representative is not qualified (or otherwise has the requisite information) to make. It also overlooks that mental health and substance abuse disorders commonly co-occur.⁶ OIG has observed FRB members

⁵ [OIG_UseOfForceAssessment.pdf](#), p. 25.

⁶ [Co-Occurring Disorders and Other Health Conditions | SAMHSA](#).

relying on the crisis SME to discuss the crisis components of a case instead of reviewing and analyzing those components on their own. The FRB's discussion of how crisis elements impact officers' decision-making and tactics is crucial to a critical review and cannot be substituted for or superseded by the SME's contribution.

Identification of Trends

Overall, the FRB continues to properly identify trends arising in the cases reviewed. For example, the Board identified a pattern of poor planning and coordination between officers (e.g., lack of assigned roles and communication with one voice) before contacting subjects, as well as hesitation or uncertainty about whether to physically engage with subjects. FRB members also identified a trend of officers not completing crisis templates when appropriate. Future FRB meetings should include continued discussion on ways the Department could address and remedy these patterns.

FRB members identified a reliance on the taser for compliance, rather than using hands-on control tactics. They also noted a pattern of officer reluctance to use hands-on tactics, leading to prolonged conflict and scuffles. FRB members have posited multiple explanations for this trend that relied on speculation, rather than officer statements or other information under review. Exploration of contributing or driving factors might aid future FRB discussions.

Demonstration Boards

FRB reviewed use of force by officers at four crowd management events during 2025. SPD manages over 900 crowd events per year requiring varying levels of police presence and enforcement. The reviews of the four demonstrations during this reporting period followed a similar structure to other FRB reviews.

The FRB reviewed a rally and counterdemonstration that occurred on May 24, 2025. The demonstration board was structured like an in-person Type III FRB. The FRU presented to the FRB and provided relevant documentation including the crowd management policy, a list of Office of Police Accountability (OPA) cases related to the incident, and SPD planning notes and after-action reports. A crowd management SME was present to answer questions from FRB members about the Department's crowd management policy, training, and philosophy. The facilitator followed a similar format to other board meetings, reviewing the incident planning, SPD training, execution of the event, communications, and post-incident documentation processes before asking FRB members to review and vote on each individual use of force. Several factors complicated the voting process, including the length of the event, the number of involved officers and uses of force, and identified inconsistencies in force reporting and documentation.

The FRB reviewed a protest at the federal building that occurred on June 10, 2025. This demonstration board followed the standard Type II FRB structure. An FRB member presented the case and showed videos of the uses of force under review. A crowd management SME was again present to answer questions. Unlike the review of the May 24, 2025, demonstration, this review included a discussion of the larger cultural context of the demonstration and of the SPD crowd management philosophy, encouraging a more thorough evaluation of officer tactics and decision-making. OPA initiated an investigation into this case during the meeting, so there was no voting on the aspects under investigation.

Valuable details were missing from demonstration discussions. The standard FRB structure does not permit involved SPD personnel (officers, supervisors, command staff) to inform, participate in, or be present at FRB meetings. Discussion by FRB members is limited to information available through case narratives, reports, body worn video, and SMEs. As a result, FRB discussions were missing valuable details

and context around planning and decision-making, which only could have been provided by the SPD personnel at the demonstration. Their perspectives are necessary to thoroughly and critically evaluate SPD decisions leading to use of force in crowd management situations.

Discussions were not adequately informed by the historical and cultural context of demonstrations.

During the review of the May 24, 2025, demonstration, inadequate consideration was given to the cultural and historical context for demonstrations. Demonstrators were protesting against an anti-transgender event in a historically LGBTQ+ neighborhood. Although this fact was touched on by the FRB, it was not explicitly linked to the impact on crowd attitudes and dynamics, and in turn, SPD decision-making related to use of force. Without this background, FRB members lacked a holistic analysis of the event and use of force. As described above, FRB improved on this for the review of the demonstration on June 10, 2025.

The FRB format is structured around uses of force and provides a comprehensive review of force. However, this format is not designed to review events that require a broader review of Department operations and decision-making. Using the FRB framework, rather than a designated crowd management framework, limits the assessment of these events. An additional internal process should be created for crowd management events that accounts for the specialized knowledge required to understand and examine crowd management tactics, includes the perspectives of involved officers, and is informed by the cultural and historical context for the event.

Next Steps

OIG will continue to attend all FRB meetings for ongoing assessment of SPD review of force and meet regularly with FRU leadership to provide timely feedback.

Appendix A. Seattle Police Department Response

Thank you for your continued partnership and for the detailed feedback provided in the recent memorandum evaluating Force Review Board (FRB) meetings from May 2025 through March 2026. We appreciate the time, observation, and analysis reflected in your review, and we remain committed to strengthening the FRB process and ensuring the Department maintains a high standard of rigor, objectivity, and community legitimacy in our use of force oversight.

Below is our consolidated response to the areas identified for improvement, as well as the insights noted during this review period.

1. Facilitation by the Chair

We agree with the need for more consistent facilitation practices and will take the following steps:

- Intervene earlier and more consistently to redirect speculative statements and ensure discussions remain evidence-based.
- Avoid anchoring or leading questions by reinforcing the use of open-ended prompts that do not suggest value judgments.
- Standardize expectations and guidance at the beginning of each meeting especially important given recent leadership transitions and the onboarding of newer FRB members.
- Balance SME participation by intervening when SME input begins to dominate and ensuring primary discussion remains with FRB voting members.
- Immediately correct misgendering or outdated terminology, reinforcing that respectful, accurate language is essential to maintaining community trust and aligning with Department values.

2. Crisis-Related Discussion Improvements

We appreciate the observations regarding the handling of crisis-related topics and will implement the following corrective steps:

- Include relevant crisis information at the outset of case presentations, including any mental health history, crisis templates, and information known to responding officers.
- Ensure crisis considerations occur earlier and more thoroughly during discussions, rather than being deferred to the end of meetings.
- Expect independent analysis from FRB members, rather than reliance on the CRU subject matter expert.
- Clarify requirements for completing crisis templates.

3. Trend Identification and Remediation

Your memo highlighted several important trends, including hesitation in engagement, inconsistent planning and coordination, and increased reliance on tasers over hands-on tactics. Going forward:

- FRB discussions will focus on documented evidence and officer statements, avoiding speculative explanations.
- Each meeting will include explicit discussion of potential Department-level remediation, ensuring patterns translate into actionable improvements in training, policy, or operational guidance.



4. Demonstration and Crowd Management Reviews

We concur that standard FRB structures are not well-suited for large or complex crowd management events. Consistent with your recommendations:

- We support developing a separate internal review process for demonstration-related events that incorporates:
 - Crowd management expertise;
 - Participation or perspectives from involved officers, supervisors, and command staff;
 - Consideration of historical and cultural context relevant to the event or neighborhood.
- We will improve integration of contextual factors, such as cultural history or event dynamics, into discussions of crowd-related uses of force.

5. Additional Observations Noted in the Memo

We also acknowledge the following:

- Despite areas for improvement, the FRB continues to surface issues missed at the chain-of-command level, demonstrating the value of this internal review layer.
- Newer FRB members benefit from additional structure and mentorship, and we will continue to reinforce evidence-based discussion norms.
- We acknowledge the concerns regarding speculation by the CRU SME, and will reinforce appropriate role boundaries and expectations.

6. Next Steps

We appreciate OIG's continued attendance at FRB meetings and regular communication with FRU leadership. We will implement the above corrective steps and continue collaborating with your office to ensure the FRB evolves appropriately and maintains the highest standards of review integrity and transparency.

Please let us know if you would like clarification on any of these points or if further discussion would be helpful. We look forward to continued partnership in strengthening SPD's accountability systems.