



Seattle Office of
Inspector General

Sentinel Event Review of Police Response to May 24th Cal Anderson Event: Methodology and Status Report

August 29, 2025

Introduction

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) is conducting a Sentinel Event Review (SER) of the City of Seattle (“the City”) and Seattle Police Department (SPD) response to a Christian fundamentalist event and counterdemonstration in Cal Anderson Park on May 24, 2025. The SER process is a collaborative stakeholder effort to identify root causes of significant events and design systemic improvements to prevent their recurrence.

The May 24th events occurred over the course of six hours, resulting in multiple uses of force and 23 arrests of counterdemonstrators. SPD’s tactics generated significant community concern given the broad implications for the protection of free speech and of vulnerable communities in Seattle. In keeping with its commitment to community-centered review of events impacting public trust, OIG is convening a panel of impacted community members and SPD stakeholders to comprehensively review the planning and response to the event and counterdemonstration. The SER aims to identify factors contributing to the escalation on May 24th and recommendations to prevent such escalation in future crowd events.

The SER will assess SPD crowd management tactics including officer interactions and use of force. The review will also examine the City’s decision to grant a permit for the event in Cal Anderson Park. OIG acknowledges the time sensitive nature of this review, particularly due to the permitting of a similar event in Cal Anderson Park on August 30th.

This memorandum provides an overview of the SER methodology and reports on the status of the project to inform community and other stakeholders.

Methodology

OIG previously conducted a multi-phase comprehensive SER of SPD’s response to the 2020 protests and will follow a similar methodology for this review.

Data Collection

OIG gathered data from the following sources:

- Social media (e.g., Twitter, Instagram, etc.);
- Print and video coverage from mainstream media (e.g., newspapers, TV, etc.);
- City of Seattle documents (e.g., event permit, press releases, etc.);
- Body-worn video (BWV) of SPD officers;
- SPD arrest reports;
- SPD Incident Action Plans (IAPs), event debriefs, and after-action reports;
- SPD policy manual;
- SPD Use of Force (UOF) reports; and
- Complaints to and investigations by the Office of Police Accountability (OPA).

Data collection began on June 3, 2025, and included over 75 hours of BWV review.

Expert Analysis

OIG worked with Professor Clifford Stott, a leading world expert in crowd psychology, to review the permitting process and the May 24th events. Professor Stott identified various aspects of SPD's pre-event planning and real-time decision-making contributing to the escalation of police, event attendees, and counterdemonstrators to inform the panel's review.

Panel Selection

OIG is committed to ensuring impacted voices and perspectives are considered in the review process and has partnered with the Community Police Commission (CPC) to conduct outreach, engage with impacted communities and individuals, and identify potential panelists. This engagement resulted in the identification of potential panelists and of community members interested in sharing their perspectives through written accounts.

OIG is also working with SPD to identify panelists representing each rank of the Department. The diversity in rank will help situate the perspectives of rank-and-file officers and leadership personnel. The panel will comprise six community panelists, six SPD panelists, and Inspector General Judge.

SER Panel

OIG has contracted Professor John Hollway to facilitate panel discussions between community members, SPD personnel, and Inspector General Judge. OIG is in the process of identifying a community facilitator to support communication and trust building among panelists. The panel will convene three times: once for trust building and establishing a foundation of knowledge needed to understand the process and events, once to review the chronology and key incidents, and once to identify contributing factors and formulate actionable recommendations.

A final report published by OIG will provide panelists' recommendations for improving SPD's protest response, drawing on their unique perspectives and experiences related to the May 24th counterdemonstration. Panelists participating in this SER will not assign individual accountability for acts taken during the incidents reviewed. Instead, they will identify strategies to improve SPD response to protests while protecting constitutional freedoms.

Current Status & Next Steps

As described in the methodology above, OIG has completed data collection and worked with Professor Stott to identify key trends and incidents to inform the panel's review.

OIG and CPC are outreaching with community organizations and individuals to identify panelists and others interested in sharing their experience. Panel selection is underway and panel meetings will be scheduled in September or October.

If you would like to share your experience with OIG, please email oig@seattle.gov. Note that emails sent to OIG are subject to disclosure under the Public Records Act, RCW 42.56.