

**MEMORANDUM**


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**TO:** Ricardo Garcia-Acosta  
Chair, Oakland Police Commission

**FROM:** Lisa Ausmus  
Deputy Chief of Police

**SUBJECT:** Plan to Conduct Qualitative Research to  
Better Understand Employee Views on the  
Internal Investigation and Discipline Process

**DATE:** February 3, 2026

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**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this memo is to explain the Department's plan to conduct qualitative research in the form of employee interviews and to request permission from both the Independent Monitoring Team, the plaintiffs' attorneys and the Police Commission to exempt the reporting requirements of Department General Order (DGO) M-03, *Complaints Against Departmental Personnel or Procedures*, for personnel interviews that occur as part of a qualitative study. The exemption will not affect reporting requirements for any criminal allegations, and DGO M-04.1, Criminal Misconduct of Department Personnel, will remain mandatory for all interviews conducted as part of this project. The Office of Internal Accountability (OIA) has outlined the necessity for this request herein.

**BACKGROUND**

The Oakland Police Department's 2024 study of Internal Affairs (IA) Outcomes and Discipline found that Black and Hispanic sworn members were sustained at a significantly higher rate than white members. The most concerning disparity occurred in internally generated cases. Despite analyzing a host of associated datapoints, OIA and Stanford researchers did not identify any specific cause of the disparity. When the OIA can identify a cause of the disparity through the data, either through a direct causal link or by identifying correlating factors that provide clues to the origin of the disparity, it recommends that the Department take steps to effect change and achieve greater equity in those particular datasets. When the data does not provide clear direction, however, as in this case, conducting more qualitative research may help the Department target the actual or perceived origins of identified disparity. This is one of the reasons that the Bureau of Risk Management recommended gathering qualitative data. In addition, the BRM recommended gathering qualitative data to complement the biannual employee perception survey. The recommendation was:

*The Department should gather qualitative data via interviews and focus groups with representatives from across the Department, including all ranks and bureaus, and members from police officer associations and unions, to help assess high-level themes about how the results of this report impact sworn staff.*

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OPD administered an IA perception survey in June 2025 and continued it through July 2025 to improve departmental policies, training, and communication regarding the internal investigation and discipline process. While the Department continues to analyze the survey results, preliminary findings indicate that most respondents believe the IA investigation and disciplinary processes are unfair.

To get deeper insight into how employees feel about the IA process, the Department created a working group to plan for the collection of qualitative data through in-depth interviews. Through these interviews, the Department hopes to learn more about perceptions and opinions around the fairness, transparency, and trustworthiness of the IA process. The interviews will supplement the 2025 survey data. The qualitative data collection will allow the Department to gather more insightful data than can be obtained through a traditional survey.

### What OPD Hopes to Gain from the Qualitative Interviewing

Gathering qualitative data through employee interviews is crucial because it provides the "why" behind the numbers from quantitative data, offering deep insights into employee experiences, motivations, and the context of behaviors. This leads to a more holistic understanding, better problem-solving, increased engagement, and more effective, targeted strategies for improvement, training, and cultural change.

While quantitative data (e.g., survey responses) shows *what* is happening (e.g., certain demographics perceive the process as unfair), interviews reveal *how* and *why* (e.g., poor management communication, perceived bias), uncovering themes, emotions, and unique perspectives missed by metrics alone.

Qualitative interviews are essential for uncovering the underlying reasons for trends, providing rich, descriptive context, identifying hidden issues, boosting engagement and trust by showing feedback is valued, driving innovation through open-ended questions, informing targeted solutions, and capturing true emotions and sentiment. By combining both quantitative data (scale and scope) and qualitative data (depth and reasons), organizations gain a complete picture, moving from "what" to "why," enabling more informed decisions and positive, lasting change.

### Anticipated Methodology

The Department will recruit volunteers using a recruitment questionnaire and a participant consent form. To encourage participation and ensure honesty, anonymity, and confidentiality, the working group recommends that comments made during the interview not be treated as complaints, except for those that would trigger the reporting of criminal misconduct. As such, we have prepared a Special Order that Chief Beere will sign authorizing the exemption. Participants will be provided with information about how to file a complaint and reminded of the Special Order exempting DGO M-03 reporting requirements at the beginning of their interview.

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The interviews will be conducted by two OPD professional staff with experience in conducting qualitative research, Dr. Tracey Jones and Dr. Carlo Beckman. The working group consists of Dr. Tracey Jones, Dr. Carlo Beckman, DC Lisa Ausmus, ACA Michelle Phillips, Director Darlene Flynn, Captain Gordan Dorham, Officer Sydney Kofford, DC Anthony Tedesco, OCA Brigid Martin, Lieutenant Michele Melham, Police Commission Chair Ricardo Garcia-Acosta, and Manager Kristin Burgess.

The goal is to recruit 10 to 12 participants representing various ranks, professional and sworn staff, and demographics. The 2024 IA Outcome Study found that Hispanic and Black sworn members were sustained at a significantly higher rate than white members, and female sworn members were sustained at a higher rate than male members in internally generated cases. Therefore, assuming a diverse response to the recruitment questionnaire, Hispanic, Black, and female sworn members will be included in the group selected. Additionally, the working group will be reaching out to the Black Officers Association, Asian Officers Association, and Hispanic Officers Association to partner with them on recruitment and outcomes.

Each interview will be scheduled for one hour. The working group is preparing structured interview questions to guide the interview. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy, then anonymized to protect confidentiality. Once all participants have been interviewed, Dr. Jones and Dr. Beckman will code the data, conduct the analysis, and prepare a report of the results. We plan to include the responses to the open-ended survey questions in the same report.

#### It is Appropriate and Necessary to Exempt the Qualitative Interviews from Triggering Formal Complaints

Unless an interviewee makes allegations that a member has engaged in criminal conduct, the Department is seeking to otherwise exempt the interviews from triggering formal complaints pursuant to DGO M-03. The Department seeks to implement this exemption through the Special Order accompanying this memorandum to ensure transparency and clarity. Limiting formal complaints to only those instances involving alleged criminal conduct creates a more efficient, less bureaucratic process that encourages honest and open communication from interviewees.

#### *Encouraging Open Dialogue and Trust*

Interviewees might be hesitant to speak openly about sensitive Department issues—such as poor management communication, cultural friction, or process inefficiencies—if they fear their comments will immediately trigger an adversarial, formal investigation. Exempting non-criminal feedback from the formal complaint process fosters a more trusting and relaxed environment, encouraging employees to provide genuine, candid feedback without fear of escalating their concerns into a full-blown formal inquiry that could potentially impact their working relationships or perceived anonymity.

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### *Resource Management and Efficiency*

Formal complaint investigations are resource-intensive, requiring significant time, documentation, legal oversight, and administrative overhead. By reserving these resources strictly for serious allegations of *criminal misconduct*, the Department can allocate its investigative capacity more effectively. This ensures that the most serious issues facing the department receive the immediate and thorough attention they require, rather than diverting limited resources to manage every minor interpersonal or administrative grievance through the same rigid process. In addition, interviewees will be reminded about the formal complaint process if they would like to make a formal complaint.

By adopting this proposition, the Department can gather more comprehensive, actionable feedback from its employees and manage resources wisely, while still ensuring that all serious allegations of criminal conduct are immediately and appropriately addressed through the established formal channels.

### **CONCLUSION**

The Department is seeking final approval within the 120-day timeline set forth pursuant to City Charter Section 604(b)(5).

The IMT and Plaintiff's Attorneys have reviewed and approved the exemption of the reporting requirements under DGO M-03 for the personnel participating in a Qualitative Study. When the Oakland Police Commission has reviewed and granted approval for the Special Order, we will begin distributing the recruitment questionnaire. The anticipated timeline between the start of interviews and a draft report is four to six months.

Thank you for your time, effort, and dedication to the City of Oakland.

Respectfully,



Lisa Ausmus  
Deputy Chief of Police  
Bureau of Risk Management

Attachment (1):  
SO 9219

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF POLICE  
OAKLAND POLICE DEPARTMENT

SPECIAL ORDER NO. 9219

TO: All Sworn Personnel

SUBJECT: Department General Order M-03 Exemption of Reporting Requirements for  
Participants of the Department's Qualitative Study on the Internal  
Affairs Process

DATE: 5 Jan 2026

EXPIRATION: Upon completion of all interviews regarding the Qualitative  
Study on the Internal Affairs Process

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The purpose of this Special Order is to allow for a limited exemption of the reporting requirements of Department General Order (DGO) M-03, Complaints Against Departmental Personnel or Procedures, for personnel who participate in the Qualitative Study on the Internal Affairs Process. However, this does not change any reporting requirements under DGO M-04.1, Criminal Misconduct of Department Personnel; appropriate reporting pursuant to DGO M-04.1 will remain in effect and unchanged for interviews conducted during this project.

The Qualitative Study on the Internal Affairs (IA Qualitative Study) process will be exempt from DGO M-3 requirements. This exemption applies to any complaints or information provided during interviews conducted as part of this Qualitative Study that could be perceived as potential complaints triggering the process set forth in DGO M-03, and applies to interview participants, interviewers, and reviewers. To ensure full transparency in responses and to safeguard the integrity of the research process regarding the anonymity and confidentiality of interviewees, any individual who voluntarily agrees to participate in the IA Qualitative Study will receive verbal and written instructions on how to file a complaint if they wish to make a formal complaint that triggers the process set forth in DGO M-03. This action will be viewed as a proactive fulfillment of the obligations that the researchers or interviewees have concerning DGO M-03. Reporting requirements and responsibilities outlined in DGO M-04.1 remain in effect.

By Order of

James P. Beere  
Chief of Police