

SWOT Analysis

City of Rochester Police Accountability Board

Prepared For :

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Background

The Rochester Police Accountability Board (PAB) was established in 2019 following a strong public mandate for independent civilian oversight of the Rochester Police Department (RPD). Its creation was the result of years of advocacy by community leaders and organizations seeking greater police transparency and accountability. However, shortly after its inception, legal challenges weakened its disciplinary authority, leaving the PAB without the power to exercise disciplinary measures for officer misconduct. These setbacks, combined with internal struggles—including leadership conflicts, high staff turnover, and a lack of clear operational structure—led to a turbulent beginning. Early dysfunction strained relationships with city officials and eroded public confidence, leaving many unsure of the board’s role and effectiveness. Despite these difficulties, the PAB remains one of the most well-resourced police oversight bodies in the country, with a larger staff and budget than many of its counterparts.

Approach

To assess the PAB’s current state, Breakthrough conducted a comprehensive SWOT analysis, drawing insights from staff focus groups, stakeholder interviews, leadership team interviews, conversations with national police accountability experts, and City leadership. In addition, it reviewed legislation, legal updates, program documents, and other source materials. These engagements formed the basis of the following SWOT analysis.

The SWOT report highlights themes identified by a diverse range of stakeholders. This means a significant number of stakeholders had to independently mention a point for it to be recognized as a theme in this analysis.

Current State

The PAB stands at a critical juncture in its evolution. Established with a public mandate to provide oversight, transparency, and accountability for the Rochester Police Department (RPD), the PAB benefits from a dedicated staff, engaged board members, and greater resources compared to similar oversight bodies nationwide. However, despite these advantages, the organization has struggled with mission clarity, staff cohesion, and government relationships. While new leadership has improved internal operations and city council relations, the PAB must work to clarify its mission, stabilize its internal culture, and solidify its authority to move forward effectively.

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats Analysis

Strengths

- **Public Mandate.** The community supports the concept of a police accountability board (PAB). The PAB had a strong public mandate at its inception, and stakeholders still support civilian oversight of the police.
 - There is a consensus on the PAB's mission, in general terms: "To provide oversight and promote transparency and accountability of RPD."
- **Strong Authorizing Authority.** The PAB charter provides investigative capabilities and above-average resources, specifically in terms of headcount (33 full-time positions), when compared to other police accountability boards nationally.
 - Headcounts from other police accountability organizations:
 - San Diego, CA-7 FTE
 - Albuquerque, NM-15 FTE
 - King County, WA-11 FTE
 - Denver, CO-14 FTE
 - Philadelphia, PA-21 FTE
- **Supportive Board.** PAB Board Members are supportive of the PAB's work and dedicated to oversight and accountability. They volunteer time each week to stay informed of the cases the PAB is investigating.
- **New leadership.** Hiring a new Executive Director has resulted in a fresh start.
 - Following a turbulent beginning as an organization, new leadership has worked to improve relationships among the Board, leadership team, and staff.
 - New leadership is also resulting in stronger relationships between the PAB and City Council members.
- **Staff.** The PAB is bolstered by a talented and hardworking staff.

Weaknesses

- **Mission in Action.** There are varied perspectives on how the PAB's work should be executed.
 - There are diverse perspectives on where PAB's work should be focused as it relates to activism, advocacy, and/or impartial fact-finding.
 - Stakeholders differ in their interpretations of what activities are allowed, not allowed, or advisable and how the work of PAB should be engaged. Recent

examples include the release of investigative reports and participation in the Robert Brooks community event.

- **Positioning within City Government.** There is a lack of widespread engagement and support from the rest of City government, and there have been adversarial interactions with specific entities over PAB's short history. Overall, key relationships within City Government are an area for growth.
- **Community Allies.** The original community partnerships that advocated for the PAB have not been thoughtfully maintained or expanded.
- **Investigations' Capacity Building.** As the investigative authority of PAB is one of its core functions, ongoing investment in high-quality training for investigators and other forms of capacity building (such as attending conferences and networking with similar agencies in other cities) is essential to emulate the quality of police investigative training staff.
- **Original Legislation.** There are multiple interpretations of the PAB's power lingering due to the original lawsuit impacting disciplinary actions available to the PAB. This is a primary tension between PAB, Corporation Counsel, RPD, Locust Club and City Council.
 - The Charter currently lacks legitimacy due to varying interpretations and the loss of direct disciplinary power. This ambiguity leaves the PAB with an unclear legal mandate.
- **PAB's Early Years.** The PAB has had a short (approved in 2019), tumultuous history.
 - Contentious interactions between the Board and Staff
 - Tense relationship with its authorizing body, the City Council
 - The transition of the original Executive Director and Board Chair,
- **Staff Culture**
 - Trust, communication, and cross-division collaboration within the organization are clear areas for growth.
 - The current staff culture has been influenced by a lack of a stable organizational framework, clarity about executing the mission, leadership transitions, and other typical start-up pains.

Opportunities

- **"DO THE WORK"** was the most consistent theme across all stakeholders. Under new leadership, presenting quality work products and strategically communicating accomplishments will help re-establish the PAB as a trusted city agency.
- **Vulnerable Populations.** Increased outreach and engagement with vulnerable populations (ie, New Americans, deaf community, LGBTQ, etc)

- **City of Rochester Department.** Establish the PAB as a high-functioning City department with politically savvy relationships within the City to achieve its mission.
- **Champions.** Foster supporters and champions within the community and among elected officials who are positioned to advocate for the PAB and spread awareness.
- **Public Education.** Continue to strengthen the communications and community engagement strategy to educate the public and strengthen community support.
- **Network.** Continue to connect with national/regional organizations and other police accountability boards.

Threats

- **Local political landscape.**
 - Ongoing legal challenges could continue to erode the PAB's formal powers.
 - Strained relationships with City Council and the Mayor's office.
 - Upcoming mayoral and City Council elections could result in changes to the legislation authorizing the PAB, budgetary support, and/or collaborative operations support.
- **National Events.** State and national interactions between police and the community can change perspectives on police accountability. National events can also trickle down to impact the local atmosphere.
- **Community Confusion and Misconception.**
 - Overall, community members do not understand what the PAB is for or what it does.
 - There is confusion about whether the PAB is part of the RPD.
 - The dysfunctional early years of the PAB still hold sway over the community's impression of the organization.
 - There is a lack of clarity about the fact that the PAB is a city department.

Appendix A: SWOT Participants

Thank you to everyone who took the time to participate in the SWOT Analysis.

Rev. Myra Brown	Regan Howlett
Rev. Julius C. Clay	Javannah J. Davis
Rev. Christopher Ortiz	A.J. Durwin
Rev. James Cooper	Evan M
Rev. Fredrick Johnson	Lam Bui
Pastor Donald Stevens	Chief David Smith
Rev. Julius C. Clay	Commissioner Dana Miller
Larry Knox	Councilmember Mitch Gruber
Rev. Keith Patterson	Councilmember Bridget Monroe
William Clark	Council President Miguel Melendez
Lwam Tecleab	Councilmember Stanley Martin
Sandra Simon	Pastor Wanda Wilson
DJ Hall	Lauren Bonds, National Police Accountability Project
Ben Whitwer	20 PAB Staff Participants
Delores Ivy-Paige	8 Neighborhood Association Presidents

Appendix B: Sampling of SWOT Questions

The following represent substantially similar questions that were asked to a variety of stakeholders participating in the SWOT analysis.

PAB SWOT Focus Group Questions (Community Stakeholders)

1. What is your understanding of the PAB's mission? In your own words.
2. What are the Police Accountability Board's greatest strengths in fulfilling its mission? What internal challenges or limitations does the PAB currently face?
3. What internal resources or capabilities set the PAB apart from similar organizations?
4. How does the community view the PAB's efforts in promoting accountability and transparency?
5. What successful initiatives or programs has the PAB implemented recently?
6. What skills or qualities do board members, staff, or volunteers bring to the organization?
7. What external opportunities could the PAB leverage to advance its mission (e.g., partnerships, funding, policy changes)?
8. Are there new community needs or concerns the PAB could address?
9. How can the PAB strengthen its relationships with local government, community organizations, or advocacy groups?
10. How might resistance from law enforcement, local government, or other stakeholders impact the PAB's initiatives?
11. Are there public misconceptions or misinformation about the PAB's role that could undermine its efforts?
12. What should be the PAB's top priorities for the next 3-5 years?
13. What would success look like for the PAB, and how can we measure it?