



A year in the Life of Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor

Pohnpei's Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) is the state's supreme audit institution, working to ensure that the way public funds are spent and used is always audited and reported in a transparent and timely way.

Here are some of the activities that POPA undertook during 2018, letting as many people as possible know about the importance of our work.

JANUARY

January is the month of the year dedicated by the Romans to Janus, the Roman God of Beginnings and Endings. For POPA, the beginning of 2018 brought new challenges for the year. POPA's Compliance Investigation Division (CID) lost an employee but continued the work they've been doing even though they are short-staffed. POPA's working together is already a success for them.

On January 25, 2018, POPA employee had a farewell lunch for Eugene of POPA's Compliance Investigation Division (CID), who was with POPA for almost four years. While public auditors understand this and are pleased for staff moving on to greener pastures, this is one of the weaknesses stated in POPA's SWOT analysis: low staff morale because low-ranking auditors have received the same salaries since 1997 due to a salary freeze.

Eugene (second to the left) together with the rest of POPA's team



Peer Review Team (middle row) with YOPA team

FEBRUARY

The word **February** is born from the Latin word Februarius, from Latin februare meaning to “purify” or “expiate.” Like a purification process, once every three years, APIPA members go through a Peer Review as required in Government Auditing Standard (GAS). This year, POPA together with Kosrae Office of the Public Auditor (KOPA) were assigned to do a Peer Review of Yap Office of the Public Auditor (YOPA). APIPA's peer review program is intended

to help member organizations in their efforts to meet professional standards. By completing the Audit Organization Description of its Quality of Control System (QCS Description), an organization can identify weaknesses in its internal quality control system and develop improved procedures to help ensure compliance with Auditing Standards.

On February 19-23, 2018, POPA and KOPA Peer Reviewed YOPA. The Peer Review team was composed of Alice George, Auditor III from KOPA and Alice Etse, Audit Manager from POPA with Cherry Lyn D. Somcio, Senior Auditor (POPA) and Elizabeth Jonah, Auditor II (KOPA) as observers.

MARCH

The month of **March** symbolizes spring time in the US - a time of growth and new beginnings.



SYL's and coaches from FIJI, Samoa, Pohnpei, Tonga and Cook Island with IDI

On March 19-29, 2018, Cherry from POPA was one of the 25 SAI Young Leaders invited to Chennai Interaction. For POPA, like the message of springtime, this was an opportunity to grow and to make a positive change. In this international interaction, SYLs were able to discover themselves so they can make positive change to their respective SAI. SYLs were also taught how to improve their respective

Change Strategies. POPA's change strategy is Communication Strategy for the office to promote its value and benefits to different stakeholders. POPA embrace this change and see the good in it.

At the last day of the interaction, participants took part in a networking game. Through this activity, SYL and coaches promised to have a strong tie and continue to help each other. SYLs and their coaches were inspired by the different stories from different participants.

Read Cherry Lyn's guest feature on the [PASAI blog](#) about her experience of the SAI Young Leaders program.



Networking activity

APRIL

April derives from the Latin aperire meaning "to open".

For POPA, this meant the opening of possible partnerships with different sectors, especially the youth sector. POPA believes that youth plays an important role in public service. It is their right to participate in the decision of the government that affects them.

On April 27, 2018, upon the request of Pohnpei Department of Education, POPA conducted a workshop in the conference room of Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor. The workshop focused on the value and benefits of Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor. We also discussed the perks of Auditing Profession and CID presented a video on Fraud Prevention. This workshop was an opportunity for POPA to explain the importance for all to know where and how the government is using public funds.



POPA with High School student's participants

MAY

May comes from the Roman Goddess Maia which is the Oscan Earth-Goddess, and an ancient Roman Goddess of springtime, warmth, and abundance.

During this month, POPA's Senior Auditor participated in the Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals. The audit team, consisting of POPA, KOPA, YOPA and the Office of the National Public Auditor (ONPA), worked together to finish the audit report. This audit was one of the most challenging performance audits they've done because team members came from different states and most of the time they just communicate through emails or Skype, and with slow internet connections.

Just as the flowers in May continue to grow, this was the month where SYL Cherry and her coach Alice Etse worked together to improve the Communication Strategy of POPA based on the feedback of IDI as well as the Integrated Change Plan of SYL. This was done aside from the other projects.



JUNE



FSM Police Academy

Summer in Pohnpei starts from **June**.

Tropical countries like Micronesia turn green because the plants bloom and grow quickly.



On June 22, 2018, the Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor conducted a fraud awareness workshop for the 2018 FSM Police Academy participants at their camp site, the Saladak Elementary School in U. The event was conducted as part of POPA's Community Outreach Program in promoting public awareness of fraud and corruption in the public sector and how they can be prevented. The workshop was featured in Kaselehlie Press on July 9, 2018. This is one of the public awareness activities of POPA in promoting the value and benefits of the SAI to different stakeholders.

On June 11-15, 2018, FSM audit Team (YOPA, POPA, KOPA and ONPA) attended the Audit Review Meeting in Nadi, Fiji for the Cooperative Performance Audit of Preparedness for Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In this meeting, POPA acknowledged the importance of SDG audits for the future of FSM.



This was also the month where the Communication Strategy of Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) was formally signed and approved by Public Auditor Iso Ihlen K. Joseph. The objective of POPA's Communication Strategy is to promote its value and benefits to different stakeholders especially Pohnpei citizens. Like plants and flowers in summer, POPA is very optimistic that their value and benefits will continue to grow.

FSM Audit Team in Nadi, Fiji together with other participants, mentor and Shofiq from IDI

JULY

July was named by the Roman Senate in honour of Roman general Julius Caesar.

Back in Rome, it was said that Caesar knew the names of each and every soldier fighting with him. That personal connection was a chance to win the confidence of his army. A leader doesn't need to be "best friends" with every member of his team, but from this story we can learn that having a personal connection with coworkers is something positive and it improves the leader to be empathetic with people. Being empathetic is a powerful leadership tool because it shows deep respect for co-workers.

POPA recognizes the value of each team member. They took a break from work on July 21, 2018 for a "bonding retreat". Together with their respective families, POPA had a picnic at one of Pohnpei's beautiful small islands, named Black Coral. They stayed overnight and were able to experience beautiful views of the sunset and sunrise. The POPA team was able to bond, rest, and enjoy the beautiful island and each other's company.

Sunset at Black Coral



AUGUST

In the Native American zodiac, the Bear represents stability, reason and taking action without fear. Like the Bear, POPA wants to be a role model in taking courage and being fearless in fighting against fraud and corruption. Its strength and powerful stature in the animal kingdom can be an inspiration about leadership.



On August 10, 2018, Ms. Sophia Pretrick, Investigative Advisor of the Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) closed the APIPA 2018 conference in Palau by presenting a session on "Fraud Awareness and Prevention". The session described and provided examples of the Federated States of Micronesia's Fraud Awareness and Prevention program and included a video presentation on fraud prevention.

APIPA participants



FSM Women's Conference

On August 27, 2018, Pohnpei Office of the Public Auditor (POPA) presented its Fraud Awareness Program at the 8th FSM National Women's Conference.

The conference was held at FSM-China Friendship Center (COMFSM) and attended by more than 300 delegates of women from Pohnpei, Chuuk, Yap and Kosrae States from different fields. The theme for the conference was "Working Together for Progress".

Ms. Pretrick focused on "Working together for good

governance". This was also the first time POPA distributed brochures about the audit process as part of the Communication Strategy. Along with brochures, POPA also distributed survey forms during the conference. The survey response was very low at only 12%, but the good news was that the overall response of the participants at the conference was positive. For now, POPA focuses on small victories. Like everyone else, POPA experience failures and rejections. What sets them apart is their ability to get back on track and learn from their mistakes and failures.

Together with the forms and brochures, POPA's Communication Strategy was presented to POPA's employees on August 23, 2018. In addition, the tracking system formulated by the Public Auditor moved into its final stage.

SEPTEMBER

For many, the month of September signals the end of summer, the beginning of autumn, and the start of a new school year. As the Greek philosopher Heraclitus once said, "The only constant is change." For POPA, this was the month where we focused on developing our new Audit Manual. Working together as a team, we were able to contribute in different ways to the manual.



Dinner with KOPA team after POPA's meeting with them regarding the update of POPA's Audit manual

OCTOBER

The tenth month by our Gregorian calendar is October from the Latin word octo-, meaning “eight.” And in the Chinese belief, eight is a symbol of success.

One of POPA’s challenges is that they don’t have an IT specialist in their office because of their limited budget. Fortunately, ONPA is willing to help, sending their own IT specialist, Duke, whenever POPA needs assistance. On October 8, 2018, Duke demonstrated to the POPA team how to upload reports onto POPA’s website.

Meanwhile, Cherry successfully achieved the agreed change strategy project milestones and was invited to the second two-week workshop in Washington DC from October 15-26, 2018. In this workshop, SYLs learned about communicating effectively, influencing skills, managing conflict, negotiation skills, creative thinking and further sessions on the four clusters (Discover Self, Discover Universe, Grow People and Create Value). SYLs also had the opportunity to visit international organizations like United Nations Headquarter in New York and World Bank in Washington DC, to interact with international stakeholders on emerging issues. The second week of the workshop was hosted by the US Government Accountability Office (GAO). The SAI Young Leaders were given 30 minutes to present the milestones of their change strategies and their journey as SYL.



POPA team with Duke of ONPA



Cherry presenting the Communication Strategy of POPA and her journey as SYL

NOVEMBER

November is all about action and continuity. POPA moved to a new office over one weekend, and continued to serve the public throughout. Change is not easy but if it is for the benefit of all, POPA embraces it.

All POPA staff pitched in to help. A lot of work was involved in packing up, lifting, loading, cleaning and settling in to the new office. At first, it was hard for them to let go of the old office, for many reasons. The former office is ideally situated near the Executive building where most government offices are located, so the necessary documents for audit are also located there. However, POPA sees this change as part of their growth and moving forward for a better service and continues to create positive change and promote the SAI’s value and benefit for Pohnpei’s citizens.

On November 19, 2018, Cherry presented POPA’s Communication Strategy upon the request of ONPA. In this brief meeting, both offices learned from each other. ONPA’s Five (5) year Communication Strategy focuses on specific stakeholders, while POPA’s Communication Strategy is for stakeholders in general.



Left to right: CID Investigator, Hainrick Jr. lifting one of the boxes; Audit manager, Elice Etse; Auditor II, Cardinia Joel; POPA's new office; Cherry with Duke of ONPA



DECEMBER

This is the time of the holiday season, especially Christmas - a time to focus on children and family gatherings. The POPA family worked together for their project, teaming up with Youth-4-Change to commemorate International Anti-Corruption Day on 9 December 2018.

The theme for this year was “United Against Corruption”. In this program, FSM citizen demonstrated their perspective about corruption through songs and skits. Seven groups registered for the talent show. Although POPA did not have enough time to promote the event, they consider it a success especially with the turnout and Youth Sector participating in and watching the event.

Read more about POPA’s Anti-Corruption Day activities in the [Kaselehlie Press](#).



Top to bottom: Youth-4-Change members fixing the sound system; Members of Youth-4-Change manually blowing up the balloons for decoration; Girl helping to sweep the gym for Any-Corruption Day; Pohnpei office Anti Corruption Day



CONCLUSION

Overall, POPA’s year was a success. Although they encountered challenges they survived by working together. Looking back, it is not only about what happened or what needs to improve but is also about rejoicing and being grateful. It was a big thing for them when POPA’s Communication Strategy was formally signed and approved by the Public Auditor. The office faces a lot of challenges especially in terms of resources. But with cooperation and determination they will be able to start and implement some of the activities in the Strategy. POPA overcome the challenges it faces everyday with support from everybody, especially friends like Jill, PASAI’s Communications Advisor, who offered to help them in the implementation of Communication Strategy. As 2018 came to a close, POPA focused on being grateful for all the blessings and victories they experienced, big or small. For the coming year, they will stay focus on serving the people of Pohnpei with integrity.