

GET TO KNOW US: Elizabeth Pape

WHY DID YOU JOIN THE OIG?

I've always had a passion for working in local government. I feel like it's a place you can really impact people's day-to-day lives. I previously worked as a program evaluator in Oregon, but I always wanted to return to my hometown, New Orleans. When the OIG started hiring evaluators, it was a perfect fit for me.

DESCRIBE YOUR JOB AS AN INSPECTOR AND EVALUATOR.

Our job is a little different from what you might expect from an inspector general office. We aren't really looking to find out if people are committing crimes or not doing their jobs right. Our role is to see if programs are performing the way they are supposed to and whether there are positive outcomes. City employees who implement programs have passion for the work they do and are engaged in planning and developing outcomes. But they sometimes lack the objectivity needed to really delve deep into understanding actual program outcomes and whether there is room for improvement.

NAME A FEW OF THE BIGGEST REPORTS YOU'VE WORKED ON FOR THE OIG AND WHAT RESULTS HAVE WE SEEN?

I worked on the report on the New Orleans Municipal and Traffic Courts. The most high profile result of that report was the finding that the Traffic Court's bookkeeper was charging the court over \$500,000 a year with very little oversight. He's in jail now. But we also looked at how the court managed information and whether it had the policies and procedures in place necessary to protect \$12 million in annual collections. After our report, the court hired a CPA to oversee its finances, implemented stronger policies and procedures, and even found a grant to pay for a new case management system.

I also recently finished a follow-up evaluation on the City's program for collecting past-due property taxes. During the original evaluation, which examined the 2010 tax year, we found that the City wasn't completing the collections process by selling property at the end of the three-year notification period. The City began auctioning property in the summer of 2015 and by the end of the year had collected \$12 million as a result of the sales.

YOU LED THE PROJECT TO CREATE GUIDES FOR BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, AND PUBLIC BENEFIT CORPORATIONS. WHY WAS THAT WORK IMPORTANT AND HOW CAN PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM IT TODAY?

I think the work local governments do is really important in people's lives. New Orleans is great because there are so many opportunities for citizens to get involved in local government decision-making through local boards and commissions. We hear a lot in the media Government rules and regulations are different from the private sector and it's important to provide those rules to board members in a clear and concise format. We created the Guides to support citizen involvement in government and to prevent them from running afoul of the strict rules of public governance. The Municipal Yacht Harbor board did a great job with helping us put the guide together. The Sewerage and Water Board, the biggest board in the city, has adopted the Guide for its operations.

WHAT'S ONE THING ABOUT THE OIG YOU WISH MORE NEW ORLEANIANS KNEW?

I want *all* New Orleanians to know that this is their office and that we work for them. I hope they feel empowered by the existence of this office and know that they can use it to make government accountable to them. We have a tremendous amount of power to get access to information about City programs. If New Orleanians wonder why a program doesn't seem to be working, they should demand that we look into it. If they think something costs too much, they should ask us to figure out why.

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL REQUESTS INPUT FROM STAFF EACH YEAR WHEN DEVELOPING THE STRATEGIC PLAN. WHAT PROJECTS HAVE YOU SUGGESTED FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN THAT YOU THINK ARE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT OR INTERESTING?

The Inspector General has been focused on public safety and the Sewerage and Water Board, so most of our projects are related to those areas. I've proposed a project about land use permitting that I think will be very interesting. The city recently changed how land use



decisions are governed. There have been changes to the City Charter, the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, and even to the organizational structure that affect how agencies responsible for land use decisions work together. I can't wait to explore how those changes have affected the land use permitting process for citizens, neighbors, and developers.

WHAT OUTSIDE-OF-WORK INTERESTS KEEP YOU BUSY?

Like many New Orleanians, I have an old house, so there are always projects and repairs to work on. I also like spending time in the city outdoors: riding bikes and playing in parks with my family.