

It's so easy to become a specialist in government work that it doesn't take long to become too narrowly focused.

Sharon Funasaki, a staff accountant with the Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) in Honolulu, didn't want to fall into that trap.

"Because government is so broad, you get to be really good in your specific area and you have no idea what goes on in the next department. We really need to have a broader background," she said.

Funasaki turned to certifications to give her both – specialized knowledge to work within the federal government and an understanding of a broad range of issues in all aspects of government financial management.

Funasaki, who passed the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants' (AICPA) accountancy exams 15 years ago, decided to also become a Certified Defense Financial Manager (CDFM) and a Certified Government Financial Manager (CGFM).

"I thought the CDFM was very technical and focused and I was glad for that. I wanted that knowledge," she said. While the CDFM Exams focused on the federal government, the CGFM Exams covered issues in federal, state and local government. "I thought the two complemented each other very well," she said.

Funasaki works on special projects for DFAS, particularly the Navy's working capital fund. She is also active in the local chapters of the American Society of Military Comptrollers and AGA, where she serves as one of the coordinators of an Oct. 20 conference titled, "Government Financial Management Systems are 'a Changin'."

Funasaki earned her CDFM and CGFM certifications about a month apart this past spring. She took AGA's three Government Financial Management courses to prepare for the exams.

For anyone interested in obtaining both the CDFM and the CGFM, she recommends taking the exams at about the same time because some of the federal government material overlaps. Basic knowledge is important, of course, but the exams will also force candidates to apply that knowledge to different situations, she said.

Taking the courses, studying the material and then taking three exams for each certification was hard work, but the payoff was well worth it, Funasaki said.

While it is yet to be seen whether the certifications will help her land a promotion or get a raise, the personal satisfaction of learning more – on a detailed level and on a broader scale – has been great.

"Knowledge always helps," she said. "I can't think of any negatives to taking the exams."