

**NEXTGEN**

**NATION'S**

**TOP 30**

**2018 NextGen Public  
Service Awards**

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# 2018 PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

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GovLoop and Young Government Leaders (YGL) and are proud to host the *8th ANNUAL NEXTGEN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS* for superior public service and achievement.

The awards recognize deserving individuals who are selected from the public service community for their intelligence, exuberance and dedication to improving and invigorating government.

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LEADER

This award recognizes government leaders who have demonstrated benevolence, competence, integrity, dedication and a commitment to improve and inspire our communities. This year's Exemplary Leader finalists are:



**John “Jack” Bienko is the Deputy Director for Entrepreneurship Education at the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).**

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Deputy Director for Entrepreneurship Education works with internal and external partners to ensure that SBA programs and policies are accessible to the country’s more than 30 million small businesses and countless aspiring entrepreneurs. That includes setting up national networks and programs, and pursuing innovations centered on finance, artificial intelligence, disaster recovery, regulatory reform and inclusivity.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Bienko has always believed in “the power of entrepreneurship in all facets of public service.” After pursuing opportunities in multiple sectors and engaging with a wider group of entrepreneurs, he found the perfect intersection between government and that community at SBA. Bienko continues to work with entrepreneurs daily. “You have to make sure you’re embedded in those communities as much as possible as it inspires and empowers you to be a better civil servant,” he said.

## BIG Impact Moment

When the Census Bureau wanted to engage coders and entrepreneurs to “hack” their data for potential new tools and business-focused data-sets, Bienko actively coordinated among SBA, the bureau and external partners to get the job done. As his nominator, Cordell Carter of the Aspen Institute, explained, “Jack has an amazing response rate and rarely declines an invitation to help — and if he does, he’s got someone in mind that can fill in.”

Led by Bienko, SBA and Census partnered with private-sector sponsors to host hackathons as part of the National Day of Civic Hacking and a continued open data roadshow. The White House Chief Information Officer, Secretary of Commerce and multiple press outlets recognized the outreach and small-business engagement. “Bienko has truly pushed the boundaries of extending SBA’s outreach so all entrepreneurial communities are aware of valuable federal resources,” Carter said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

“I wish citizens were aware of all the services and programs that might benefit them individually,” Bienko said. “And that there’s also a number of dedicated men and women who are working day and night to make sure those services are available and constantly improved.”

### I’M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**“I am ... driven and amazed by the opportunity to serve an entire nation.”**



**Gale Burstein is the Commissioner of Health at the Erie County Department of Health in Buffalo, N.Y.**

### JOB DESCRIPTION

As Commissioner of Health, Burstein oversees and coordinates the efforts of the department’s six divisions, including Epidemiology and Disease Control, the Public Health Laboratory, the Early Intervention Program, Public Health Preparedness, Emergency Medical Services, the Medical Examiner’s Office, and Environmental Health.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

Erie County serves a population of about 922,000. “It is a very diverse community and there is a great deal of poverty,” Burstein said. “We have so many people struggling with the adverse outcomes of the social determinants of health.” Government helps those populations better manage their health.

### I’M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

“I wanted to be able to prevent recurrent sexually transmitted infections in my adolescent patients. Now I am struggling with preventing opioid overdose deaths.”

## BIG Impact Moment

“Among her accomplishments was the creation of an interdisciplinary Opiate Epidemic Task Force, which brought together professionals that rarely interacted with one another but who all decided to work together to battle our community’s opioid epidemic,” said Burstein’s nominator, Cheryll Moore, the department’s Community Coalition Coordinator.

Burstein’s office was one of the first to confront the growing opioid epidemic in western New York. The community and members of law enforcement alike were frustrated by the lack of timely access to substance use disorder treatment — a necessary component to fighting addiction. “There was a huge void of information on where to get help, both immediate and long-term,” Moore said. The task force was able to create a 24/7 addiction hotline, staffed by trained counselors who could provide information and link people to evidenced-based care.

Additionally, the task force has created a program to approach opioid overdose victims with help. The program coordinates with peer counselors and law enforcement to follow up after a naloxone resuscitation and connect victims with appropriate substance abuse treatment and harm reduction.

These and other educational efforts led by Burstein’s task force have resulted in a decrease of about 17 percent in opioid overdose deaths in Erie County in 2017, compared to 2016. The rest of New York and surrounding states have seen significant increases during that time.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Burstein began her career as a pediatrician. During an adolescent medicine fellowship in Baltimore, she struggled with patients repeatedly being diagnosed with chlamydia. “I decided I needed to take some public health classes to better understand population health so I could figure out how to start addressing this problem instead of standing at the clinic door to dispense azithromycin to everybody that walked in,” she said. In those classes, she found a love for public health, which led to her to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). She worked at CDC until she returned to New York and became Erie County’s Health Commissioner.

# SARAH HAAK

## Exemplary Leader

## Exemplary Leader

# ANGELA HESTER



**Sarah Haak is the District Coordinator for the Texas Division of Emergency Management.**

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Texas Division of Emergency Management's Disaster District Committee (DDC) was tasked with Hurricane Harvey response and led the Dallas Fort Worth (DFW) Shelter Hub mission during the hurricane.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I firmly believe in doing what you love. I have been blessed with the opportunity to give back to my community while having the privilege of serving it on its worst day. My job is different than most others out there. I get paid to think of the worst kinds of disasters a community can be afflicted with, both natural and manmade, and then I get to work with locals to help them prepare for, respond to, recover from and mitigate those potential risks. I get to make a difference in my local communities every day even if everyone living there has no idea that the work is going on in the background. The biggest payoff is being able to help people on their worst day begin to recover and find their new normal."

### BIG Impact Moment

After Hurricane Harvey, Haak was the first one in the emergency operations center and the last one out when DDC returned to normal operations. Because of the storm's size and scope and the need for personnel at various locations across the state of Texas, the main challenge she confronted was the limited availability of qualified emergency management staff to assist with the DFW shelter operations mission.

"Sarah had to get creative and utilize staff from across the agency that wouldn't normally be considered for emergency operations center activations," said her colleague and nominator Russell Marshall, a TEM-AT Coordinator. "Together with the help of some key personnel, Sarah led the efforts to fill the training gap. She worked to train new personnel, helping to rotate staff through a variety of positions."

The training plan put in place will help ensure DDC's long-term capabilities; it multiplied the potential staff base by three-fold for future disaster responses. Haak's unique skill set and knowledge in the field of emergency and incident management were unparalleled and benefited the entire DDC organization, the region and the state.

She helped ensure that the evacuees from the affected areas were not only welcomed compassionately, but also that they made it back home or into transitional housing as safely as possible.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

After graduating from the University of Maryland with a Master's Degree in Science of Management in Homeland Security, Haak immediately set her sights on a career in the federal government. She joined the National Institutes of Health in 2007 work in project management. And then decided to put her career to good use by transitioning to the Department of Public Safety - for Texas Division of Emergency Management in 2015.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

Government is the glue that holds society together. It establishes the structure for communities to grow, build, and flourish. We have a responsibility not only as government employees but also as citizens to ensure that government is run in the most effective and efficient manner possible so as to maximize the benefits for every member of the community.



**Angela Hester is the Acquisition, Agile and Requirement Section Chief in the Solution Delivery Division at the Defense Health Agency.**

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Acquisition, Agile and Requirement Section Chief uses Agile approaches to ensure that program managers and clinicians have the IT systems they need to care for patients and make clinical decisions, and that those systems have the appropriate rigor and governance around them.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Hester started her public service career in the military as a dietician. "The Air Force gave me a career-broadening opportunity as a joint spouse assignment to work for the Tricare Management Activity, now the Defense Health Agency," she said. During her time there, Hester was exposed to program management and Defense Department acquisitions. "I really enjoyed the ability to help with planning and forethought to get IT capability out to our customers," Hester said.

### BIG Impact Moment

Hester has helped her teams drive faster and better results by meeting with her staff regularly, providing helpful feedback and offering suggestions to keep projects moving forward. She considers her main role as one that provides an environment for employees to excel and succeed. "Angie Hester has a track record of success," said Shawn Faherty, a Principal Health IT Consultant, who nominated Hester for the award. "She manages multiple projects simultaneously and delivers impressive results. Ms. Hester does not merely supervise her employees, she actively mentors them."

"I have a fantastic team," Hester added. "I feel my role as a good leader is that I can be gone and everything can still run smoothly."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I find great pride in the work that I can do as a public servant. I feel that pride allows me to come to work every day with a clear sense of mission and understanding of what we do and why we do it."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

**"I help customers meet their day-to-day targets and reach their strategic goals," Hester said. "As a government employee, I need to be a good steward of the taxpayer's dollar, while providing value in what I'm doing every day."**



# AMELIA KERMIS

## Exemplary Leader

## Exemplary Leader

# JOSEPH KOOLS



Amelia Kermis is a Program Analyst at the U.S. Census Bureau.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Program Analyst works with the Communication Research Division and the Creative Development at Census on integrated partnership in communication statistics. They're responsible for managing one of the largest federal communication campaigns. Specifically, the Program Analyst makes sure task orders and statements of work are done for contracts to begin.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

For Kermis, it all started out with an undergraduate degree in communication and biomedical engineering. "I was really interested in communicating complex data after I got my public health degree and ended up becoming a Presidential Management Fellow at the Agricultural Department's Food Safety and Inspection Service," Kermis said. "I love that intersection of data analysis and communication, and sharing a message to help people learn how they can be safe, consume food safely or why they should participate in the 2020 census."

### BIG Impact Moment

At Census, Kermis was promised about \$100 million to conduct critical quantitative and qualitative research to develop predictive models and hire a group of experts to designate target audiences for the campaign. She was also put in charge of developing strategies and tactics to better promote Census' message encouraging people to complete the 2020 census form online, under the umbrella of the Census Barriers, Attitudes and Motivators Survey Program. But because of budget lapses, she had only about \$15 million to complete the planned research. Rather than becoming frustrated or compliant, she looked for ways to reduce costs to accomplish all the planned activities.

"It is an honor to work every day with a professional of Ms. Kermis' caliber," said Maria Olmedo-Malagon, a Program Manager at Census who nominated Kermis. "She is not only a very smart individual with an outstanding educational background and strong work experiences, Ms. Kermis is also a 100 percent team player who is not selfish with her knowledge or her skills."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"The work we do is making sure that the 2020 census is really successful," Kermis said. "We want to make sure people know about it, how to respond and when to respond. It's really important. It's going to help people respond quicker and sooner and save more money."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**"I want to give back to the community that I'm a part of as well as make impacts at a national level. There's no better place to do it than working for the federal government."**



Joseph Kools is the Director of Executive and Organizational Development for the Federal Aviation Administration.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Director of Executive and Organizational Development works with current executives and senior managers to maximize their leadership potential and performance.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I am a second generation American and I have a deep sense of duty and service to our nation. I feel obligated to give back for the many blessings and opportunities that I have as a citizen. This is one way that I pay my dues."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Kools spent his first professional years in the military. First as an enlisted Soldier in the Wisconsin Army National Guard, then after earning an ROTC scholarship as a Commissioned Officer in the active duty Army. "I was in one of the first aviation classes after Aviation became a formal branch in the United States Army," Kools said. "I love flying and I fell in love with leading and developing people. I joined the military to earn money so I could attend College, but I ended up serving for 20 years." In addition to multiple aircraft certifications, Kools earned an MBA and a Ph.D. in leadership development and curriculum designed for adult learners.

### BIG Impact Moment

FAA is a large and complex organization with about 47,000 employees, and Kools has been at the forefront of its undertaking in strategic transformation of its workforce. This transformation requires a leadership team possessing the skills and mindset to envision the future, communicate the vision, and lead the workforce to achieve the change. In 2017, Kools developed the Transforming Our Performance Culture workshop for FAA's senior leaders. The workshop allows leaders to practice skills, engage in team-based simulation exercises, and develop a mindset that will shape the culture, performance, and decision making for the future of the FAA. "Developing others is his passion and Joe is the embodiment of a transformational and servant leader," John Leuth, a Program Management Specialist at the FAA, said.

As part of the FAA's mission to provide the safest most efficient aerospace system in the world, Kools works to collaborate and reduce barriers to ensure leader effectiveness. "The aviation industry is the economic workhorse of our nation, so sustaining it and preparing to meet future needs and challenges is an exceptionally important mission" Kools said. "To achieve our mission we need effective leaders with the tools to engage and empower our people. So, I gathered influential learning professionals from across the FAA and formed the Developmental Advisory Committee. We come together, assess what our senior leaders most need, identify how we can bridge those gaps and provide the required skills and mindsets." Kools added, "Engaging with the learning professionals and the leaders who are entrusted to lead and develop our workforce is a humbling experience, I can't think of a greater, more rewarding profession in which to serve the nation."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

The government matters because we, the people, are the government. "I wish the American people realized just how talented and dedicated our civil servants are," Kools said. "My coworkers and team members are truly the best people our country has to offer. They are smart, selfless, and committed to serving our country, our constitution and the American people." Kools works to be the best civil servant and leader he can be each day he is entrusted to lead his team and serve in the government on the FAA team.

# CINDI PEREZ

## Exemplary Leader

## Exemplary Leader

# ERIKA TAYLOR



Cindi Perez is the Director of Austin 3-1-1 for the city of Austin, Texas.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Director of Austin 3-1-1 provides information on behalf of city services and departments. The organization takes calls ranging from concerns about missed garbage pickup to loose dogs to suicide threats. It works to make access to city services as uncomplicated as possible for residents of and visitors to Austin.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Perez's passion for customer service led her to government work. "I consider it my profession," she said. Perez started in retail, where she enjoyed the face-to-face interaction with customers. "When something goes wrong, I just want to make it right," she said. Perez then moved into banking, continuing to serve customers until she was directing call centers.

### BIG Impact Moment

In February 2017, Perez led Austin 3-1-1 in becoming the first 311 center in the country to become ISO 9001-2015-certified. This certification confirms that Austin 3-1-1 processes minimize errors and increase staff productivity, and ensures that staff are consistent with every caller. "It ensures we're handling it in the best possible, most efficient way every time we touch a contact or speak to a customer so that we take care of whatever the issue may be the first time," Perez said. This has helped improve both customer and employee satisfaction.

"Cindi is a customer service champion and is dedicated to ensuring that Austin 3-1-1 continually improves services that are important to the community," said Paul Bestgen, the Public Information Officer who nominated Perez.

"I'm really big on supporting our City Manager's goal of providing uncomplicated access to city services," Perez added. Her work has helped empower employees and made them feel appreciated for the work they do, enhancing teamwork across every internal workgroup.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"There's value attached to public service. There's a perception that public service entities are monopolies, and one of my goals is to reverse that perception. I'm very proud to be a public servant because I'm representing the city of Austin. I belong to this community and I want to make sure I offer my services to anyone who needs it."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"It hurts when we read articles that claim city or government employees don't care and just go in to collect a paycheck," Perez said. "Even though the media likes to pick up our failure a lot, there are so many successes we can speak of." Public service is a way to go above and beyond for individuals in handling city services for residents, she said. "At 3-1-1, we represent ourselves as stewards of the community," Perez concluded.



Erika Taylor is the Supervisory Management and Program Analyst in the Office of Financial and Administrative Management's Division of Grants Management Operations at the Health and Human Services Department's Health Resources and Services Administration.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Supervisory Management and Program Analyst leads a team of 12 management analysts in the Division of Grants Management Operations. The team supports overall division operations by providing post-award training and technical assistance to internal staff and grant recipients. Additionally, the team generates reports and analyzes the data for division managers to evaluate staff compliance with standard operating procedures. The team is also responsible for completing closeout activities for the agency's grants.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"It allows me to see firsthand the impact that government grants can have on children, families and communities. I believe that the work I do is providing support and services to millions of Americans all over the country."

### BIG Impact Moment

Taylor formed a diverse group of analysts with a variety of skills into a coherent team. "Initially she was brought in as a team member to a small group of four, but her mastery of the technical aspect of our work and her inherent leadership skills made it apparent that she would be an excellent supervisor," said Victoria Carper, a Grants Management Officer who nominated Taylor. Originally, the group struggled to feel interconnected as they worked on a hodgepodge of projects. But after three years in her supervisor position, Taylor believes that the team now has a defined role within the division and functions as a cohesive unit. It's important to her that every team member has an opportunity to participate in multiple projects and take on a variety of responsibilities. "Everybody had something to call their own on the team," Taylor said. "I think it has helped to make everyone feel that they have value and contribute to the work that we do in a meaningful way."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Taylor was enrolled in graduate school to study school psychology at the University of Minnesota when she realized she had an interest in education policy. During her studies, she started an internship with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). After finishing her master's, Taylor started working full time at MDE as a Grant Management Specialist overseeing a state-funded after-school program. Taylor traveled across the state, conducting site visits to ensure compliance with program requirements and to see the programs in action. "I realized...that through a career in public service, I could potentially effect change on a larger scale; this was tremendously appealing to me," she said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Government services and support are such an essential part of our everyday lives, and many don't realize it's even there," Taylor said. "People need to know that there are great people in all levels of government that work hard every day for the good of the country."



Steve Viera is Director of Human Resources (HR) for the city of Corpus Christi, Texas.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Director of HR is responsible for employee recruitment, compensation, benefits, learning and development, and relations. The Director also provides executive leadership for internal and external customers on topics including compliance, policies, procedures, and state and federal laws.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I've always had a passion for working to help other people. My parents were always serving in the community, so I was exposed to public service early on and saw the joy that it brought them in their lives. Since I was surrounded by like-minded people, it was something that was ingrained in me and something that I wanted to continue."

### BIG Impact Moment

Viera joined the city of Corpus Christi while the HR team experienced a lot of turnover and changes. When he became Interim Director, the team noticed immediate improvement. "Steve came on board and settled the waters. He broke down silos and made us all work together as a team," said Liza Wisner, the Learning and Organizational Developmental Manager who nominated Viera. Viera encouraged employees to discuss their work with one another and exchange perspectives. "He reorganized for greater efficiency. Instead of just telling us what to do, he asked for us to provide guidance for an expected positive result."

Viera said that encouraging open discussion about coming changes helped his new team thrive. "One of the best decisions that I made was having an open-door policy, and taking what people had to say into consideration, and allowing them to be a part of the changes that needed to be made." By inviting employees to be a part of decision-making, Viera made it possible for them to embrace change and lead the organization to a better future.

"To Mr. Viera, leadership is about building an innovative shared vision for the citizens to come, hiring and developing great people, and ensuring that every person understands the vital importance of their contribution in achieving that shared vision," Wisner said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Public service is a privilege that should be based on moral and ethical foundations," Viera said. "It gives you the opportunity to help other people and make a difference."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Viera sought a career where he could create a positive and motivating work environment. For a time, he worked in benefits, where he was exposed to multiple HR functions. After serving as HR Manager for the city, Viera was chosen as Interim Director of HR. He enjoys the "ever-changing" HR field, and his passion for serving the community pushed him to pursue a career in the public sector.



Kruti Vora is a Strategic Analyst at the General Service Administration (GSA).

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Strategic Analyst ensures stakeholder involvement in projects and seamless collaboration across teams and agencies. Vora conducts interviews, research and analyses to re-engineer complex processes and make recommendations to senior leaders.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"My parents immigrated to America with nothing and they worked tirelessly to provide for me and my siblings. Public service is my opportunity to repay both my family and my country for the chance that I was given to thrive in ways that my parents would have never imagined."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

After graduating from Virginia Tech with a degree in finance, Vora entered a financial rotational program. After two years of budget rotation, Vora sought a permanent place in customer accounts and research, where she assisted with the federal acquisitions process. From there, she joined GSA IT, where she uses different skill sets related to performance management, budget, contracting and data.

### BIG Impact Moment

Government is always looking to improve collaborations and communication across agencies and between federal and local governments. As Strategic Analyst, Vora has demonstrated the ability to translate in-depth technical issues into strategic recommendations for leadership. "During collaborations, I try to make sure that people are heard, that they understand what I'm working on and that they're on board," Vora said. "Their opinion at the table matters. I want them to know that they are a valued member of the team."

One of Vora's most notable efforts was her development and management of the Telework Forum, which was dedicated to raising agency participation in telework. "She coordinated with divisions across GSA to improve the telework participation metrics, from counting paper forms to utilizing large datasets and data visualization tools," said Lesley Briante, the Associate CIO of Enterprise Planning and Governance and Vora's nominator. With Vora's leadership efforts and determination, telework was effectively implemented at GSA and other agencies. "Kruti is dedicated to her work and rarely gives up on projects or problems. Even when others have thrown in the towel, she perseveres and pushes through to find the solution," Briante said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

Although Vora did not plan to work in the public sector after graduation, she realized that working in government can have personal and professional benefits. "As the years went on, we are able to continue building our skill sets," Vora said. "In government, you're encouraged to keep growing. If you look for opportunities, they're there."



This award recognizes government leaders who have identified new opportunities and improved their organization in an innovative way. These individuals or groups have reimagined a process and improved it by changing the norm and driving results. This year's Innovator award finalists are:

# INNOVATOR

## Innovator

## KIRSTEN DALBOE & TEAM



**Kirsten Dalboe is the Director of Data Operations, Department of Health and Human Services' Office of the Inspector General (OIG).**

### BIG Impact Moment

Dalboe and her team delivered, in record time, the first secure, cloud-based application for OIG: the HHS OIG Enterprise Dashboard. The dashboard empowers OIG to make faster, more confident data-driven decisions in its fight against fraud, waste and abuse. Now, all 1,600 HHS OIG civil servants, investigators and analysts have instant access to operational information previously buried in legacy systems. "They went above and beyond to pull together roadmaps, project plans, technical implementation plans and ensure, above all, clear and consistent communications," said Caryl Brzymialkiewicz, the Assistant Inspector General and Chief Data Officer who nominated Dalboe for the award. "They mutually supported each other to ensure this joint project was a success. They have demonstrated what leadership should look like to achieve results and drive positive change."

#### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Director of Data Operations takes the lead on data intake and analysis. The team's goal is to derive meaningful results from data.

#### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Initially, Dalboe worked at the Homeland Security Department, rising to become the Chief Data Architect at the Enterprise Data Management Office.

#### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Everyone that I know who works in public service is incredibly passionate about what they do, and most of us work really hard every single day," Dalboe said. "There is a part of me that often gets sad that people have this perception of people who work in public service as not being motivated, when all I experience is people who are there because of how motivated and passionate they are, and how much they believe in the mission of the work of the government."

#### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**"It's really one of the most motivating things that I've ever done. I've worked in a fair number of big consulting firms, but there's something that's truly motivating about working on behalf of the citizens. It's fascinating, it's compelling, and the work is just so important that I can't stop thinking about it most days."**



Rob Coen, Natalie Melomed & Angie Donahoo make up the GSA's Federal Systems Integration and Management Center (FEDSIM) EXPRESS team.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

This team advances strategic partnerships with federal agency customers and industry partners by developing innovative acquisition programs and direct program expansion efforts in both the civilian and defense sectors.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

The team enjoys working to help federal agencies meet their missions and develop partnerships between government and the business community. It is gratifying for them to help small businesses grow by connecting them with government programs and government contracts in a win-win relationship.

## BIG Impact Moment

The team developed a business case to increase FEDSIM's work with small businesses and innovation and championed a policy deviation that would allow for faster set-aside determinations for small business. The team also partnered with the Small Business Administration (SBA) to create a program to support Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) Phase III projects. Most significantly, the team created a program to support GSA's new Commercial Solutions Opening (CSO), a new path to non-traditional innovation for all Federal agencies.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Rob Coen began his career at the SBA, where he worked for 12 years to help small businesses get off the ground. He ultimately became the deputy director for the northeast office in Boston before moving on to the National Institutes of Health (NIH). At the NIH, he ran the NIH Information Technology Acquisition and Assessment Center. Natalie Melomed's government career started at the Department of Defense in 2009, where she worked as a Contract Specialist. She also worked at the NIH as a Contracting Officer alongside Coen before both transferred to work at GSA. The combination of her previous commercial sector experience and work with various federal agencies led her to this team that works to advance strategic partnerships. Angie Donahoo started at GSA in 2008 as a Contract Specialist through the former Federal Career Intern Program. She also gained industry perspective working at McKinsey Consulting, but came back to GSA to help stand up its innovative acquisition service offerings for customers.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

**“Government matters because there are many successful and well managed programs that provide critical services that enable agencies to meet their missions and better serve our citizens.”**



Dori Koren is a Lieutenant with the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department (LVMPD).

### JOB DESCRIPTION

As Lieutenant, Koren oversees the Technical Operations Section, which is responsible for the deployment of advanced technologies for combating crime and terrorism. The unit is part of the state's fusion center, where the Lieutenant heads the new virtual crime-fighting and technical intelligence mission.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Koren was interested in counterterrorism at a very young age and pursued the field from sixth grade through adulthood. He developed an interest in local law enforcement after realizing the impact local government had in counterterrorism after the 2001 terrorist attacks. At age 21, he became a police officer in Las Vegas and worked as a patrol officer and detective for seven years. Koren was later promoted to Detective Sergeant in the counterterrorism unit, where he worked for several years before taking on his current role. As Lieutenant, Koren is the youngest in his rank for a fourth time.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**“It matters now more than ever.”**

## BIG Impact Moment

Koren established himself as a leader at LVMPD early in his career. “Within one year of graduating from the police academy, [Koren] was hand-selected to serve on the first LVMPD Homeland Security Saturation Team,” said Brad Voyles, a colleague at LVMPD who nominated Koren. “Shortly after, he became the youngest in the organization's history to promote to the position of Counterterrorism Detective.” As Lieutenant, Koren successfully established and managed the Technical Operations Section of the Southern Nevada Counter-Terrorism Center. “Dori has developed this unit into what has already become another best practice for law enforcement across the country,” Voyles said. “As just one example, Dori recently helped develop the first LVMPD gunshot detection program and served as the Program Manager for the agency.” With this effort, LVMPD was able to use sensor technology to detect 214 shootings in less than six months. More importantly, 64 percent of those shootings would have gone unreported to the police if not for this initiative. Koren attributes his impact on local government to his passion for public service and the department's progressive nature. “If you run into a Las Vegas police officer, they would tell you that we are lucky,” Koren said. “We work for the best police agency in the country in terms of innovation, effectiveness, community service and capability.”

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

“Whether it be cop killers and school shooters or mass attackers and terrorists, we are facing a threat environment that is more complex than ever before,” Koren said. He explained that with technological developments such as gunshot detection and automated license plate readers, government can increase citizen safety. “Today, because of technology, government has more of an opportunity to identify crime in real time and prevent violence before it occurs. This forward-leaning approach to policing is bound to make an unprecedented difference in safeguarding our communities.”

# RACHAEL SCHACHERER & TEAM

Innovator

Innovator

# SAHRA I. TORRES-RIVERA



Rachael Schacherer is the Chief of the Office of Management Analysis and Reporting at NIH's Clinical Center.

## JOB DESCRIPTION

The Chief oversees an office whose mission is to provide real-time data on hospital resource use and patient activity data. That data is made available to the NIH Clinical Center and to the divisions of NIH that send patients to the hospital.

## ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Schacherer always knew she'd work in public service. After graduating from college, she submitted a resume for federal positions through a special program for outstanding students and became an academic adviser at NIH. "Over time, I've really learned the language of research and the NIH mission, and I always tell people I can't cure cancer, but I'm helping the people who are helping the people who want to do that," she said.

## BIG Impact Moment

Schacherer improved a complex executive information system and provided her team with a state-of-the-art platform that has automated processes and drastically improved efficiency. The office had implemented a version of MicroStrategy software that was helpful, but somewhat limited in its functionality. More importantly, the old system was last upgraded in 2009 and the manufacturer had not supported it since 2013. Schacherer steered her team toward an updated system that allows for more visualization and organization. "When an opening provided the opportunity for Rachael to upgrade and modernize how her team delivers services, she jumped at the chance," said Adam Roy a contractor who works with Schacherer, who nominated him for the award. "With limited dollars for IT, Rachael needed to negotiate, budget and carefully plan for a major systems upgrade."

## WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"I wish [people] knew how many there are of us [public servants], and how on a day-to-day basis we're doing a job that we love, and that really is for them," Schacherer said. "The political debates you see on TV happen at such a high level in terms of leadership tension...and all of that. But the rest of us are just going to work and trying to make a difference."

## I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I genuinely want the opportunity to make a positive difference. No matter how big or small it is, I want that difference to have an impact on the lives of others. I feel really fortunate that I work for an organization like NIH, and I've also worked for the Government Accountability Office, and both of those organizations on a daily basis do incredible work for the American taxpayer on an international scale."



Sahra I. Torres-Rivera is the Deputy Chief Financial Officer at the Food and Drug Administration and Director of the Office of Financial Management, FDA.

## JOB DESCRIPTION

Torres-Rivera oversees five divisions, ranging from Travel Services to Accounting to Control Compliance and Oversight.

## ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Torres-Rivera studied accounting as an undergraduate. After law school, she began working at the Labor Department, which was implementing a new system at the time. After that, she was hooked on working to bring positive outcomes and finding new opportunities.

## I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I can help my agency to make a difference."

## BIG Impact Moment

Under Torres-Rivera's guidance, FDA's Office of Finance, Budget and Acquisition (OFBA) has implemented an innovative new technology called process robotics, which is a computer-coded, rules-based solution that uses bots to automate human activities for repetitive tasks. For example, the program has improved the OFBA accounts payable reconciliation process. "Leading innovation and change in any federal organization is challenging," said Marc Mancher, a contractor, who nominated Torres-Rivera for the award. "This team's leadership and vision was essential in getting the first process robotics solution implemented at FDA, the second such implementation in all of the federal government."

## WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

**"I wish [people] had an idea of how many hardworking people are in the federal government, and how compromised federal employees are with their missions and making a difference in the citizen's life," Torres-Rivera said.**

# THE SILENT HERO

This award recognizes a public service leader who has operated behind the scenes and laid the foundation for stellar public service results and community change at the local, national or international levels. This year's Silent Hero finalists are:

## Silent Hero

## BILL BANASZEK



**Bill Banaszek is the Communications Coordinator at Oregon's Public Employees' Benefit Board (PEBB).**

### BIG Impact Moment

Banaszek provides education, promotion, printing, design, development and related communications services for all PEBB activities. The board provides benefits for about 140,000 Oregonians, and during the October 2017 open enrollment period, Banaszek spearheaded a new and exciting "superhero" campaign, which helped get employees and dependents engaged in the process. "Employees really appreciated this new campaign and there was great feedback," wrote Susan Stigers, a Marketing and Communications Specialist who nominated him for the award. "Bill went beyond making all materials and announcements fresh and exciting. He looked for and found tremendous cost savings by working with others to have publications produced in-house, instead of being outsourced."

#### JOB DESCRIPTION

Banaszek coordinates communications, graphic design, public relations, media and webinars. He works to ensure that all content is written in plain language and is graphically appealing.

#### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Banaszek joined a journalism class in high school and realized he enjoyed putting papers together for books and magazines. He got his college degree in journalism, then decided to go for a degree in graphic design. "I thought I was going to be a writer," he said, "but it's been really nice to be able to do the writing and the design together at the same time." He was in the private sector for 20 years, then decided he needed more purpose in his job.

#### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I was in private sector for 20 years, and our mission was faster, faster; more money, more money; faster, faster; money, money, money. I just felt like there has to be more to your going to work and your career than just pay. I really felt a need to do more to help people get health insurance. I've always had great coverage and I felt others are not so fortunate."

#### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

**"We're folks just like they are, and we really do try," Banaszek said. "I know we hear negative news from some members, but the majority realize we provide very good benefits and think we're pretty innovative in what we're doing."**



# DANIEL COOK

## Silent Hero

## Silent Hero

# MARYELLEN O'SHAUGHNESSY



Daniel Cook is the Telebehavioral Health Center of Excellence Coordinator at the Indian Health Service (IHS).

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The center provides psychiatric and psychological care to patients at more than 25 sites nationwide by way of telemedicine technology. It facilitates planning, contracts, provider placement, and managerial and technical setup and support. The center also provides daily support for each live session.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I love finding new, innovative and ultimately low-cost ways of helping people. I come from a very low-income background and we had to be resourceful. I didn't have access to healthcare growing up, but now I get to give that service to people who were just like me. That circle is so rewarding."

## BIG Impact Moment

IHS is one of the government's most underfunded agencies. The team started with a very tiny, almost nonexistent soft money budget and no built-in supply of providers to begin providing telebehavioral health services. There were also perceptual barriers, meaning medical leaders at sites that needed services were skeptical about telehealth and didn't know its long history of success. Through positive personal interactions with stakeholders, Cook has been able to connect eligible individuals from coast to coast to behavioral health services.

In addition, Cook has proved tireless in his dedication to service. "He lost his assistant early on and embracing the 'doing more with less' motto, he continued to grow the program year-over-year, finding medical professionals in the private sector who were willing to provide mental/behavioral/medical health services via remote connections to IHS and tribal health clinic settings for individual members around the nation," said his colleague and nominator, Leisa Cook, Southeast Regional Office Branch Chief.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Government work is done by regular people. We are not nameless, faceless entities. We are a group of incredibly sincere and honest people who are doing our best to improve the lives of the citizens we serve," Cook said.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

After graduating with a master's degree in political psychology from The Ohio State University, Cook realized a career in politics was not for him. He packed up and moved west to Arizona, where tribal entities needed help. He began teaching and saw the need for improved technology and health services, so he combined his two areas of expertise to join IHS' telehealth department.



Maryellen O'Shaughnessy is a three-term Clerk of Courts in Franklin County, Ohio.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Clerk of Courts oversees two distinct divisions of county government: case filings in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas and 10th District Court of Appeals, and the state's largest county Auto Title operation.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I know I can make a difference. I had tremendous role models before me who dedicated their time to the greater good. I'm a fifth-generation Columbus resident. My great-grandfather started in 1870 by building the water system for the city of Columbus. It is a family tradition to be a public servant and to be a part of this community."

## BIG Impact Moment

Early in O'Shaughnessy's first term, a newspaper report detailed a net loss in cross-county titling revenues. The amount, though a small percentage of the overall revenues brought in annually by the Auto Title division, was enough to warrant a concerted effort by the Clerk and her leadership team to tackle the issue.

"Clerk O'Shaughnessy's response focused on leveraging technology and included creating dealer lounges at each Auto Title location to attract out-of-county dealers to do business in Franklin County," said her colleague and nominator, John Hocter, Communications Specialist. "The same concept was launched online with the creation of a dealer portal, which expedited the titling process for dealers to help keep more business in Franklin County."

Electronic kiosks were installed at each location, dramatically reducing wait times and expediting service for all customers, and the creation of a mobile app called *Auto Title Now!* connected dealers and the general public to important auto title information.

In addition, O'Shaughnessy is an aggressive proponent of gender and pay equity. Women make up nearly three-quarters of all managerial personnel in the Clerk of Courts office, and more than half of her senior staff of advisers. Her office is also an early adopter of the Columbus Commitment, an organizational pledge to pay equity in the city of Columbus.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Initially a vocal critic of the government's decision-making as a newspaper reporter, O'Shaughnessy decided to put her convictions into action and first ran for elected office in 1992. Since then, she has served three terms on the Columbus City Council and is currently serving her third consecutive term as the Franklin County Clerk of Courts.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"In Franklin County, we have a culture where we challenge the status quo. We are constantly asking, 'Is this the best idea?'" O'Shaughnessy said. "We have deployed new technologies and implemented new business practices, all in an effort to keep moving forward with our mission of providing timely, accurate and courteous service to our residents."



Lee Ann Torres is an Emergency Management Specialist for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Region III.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

Region III is within FEMA's National Preparedness Division for the Technological Hazards Branch. The Technological Hazards Division oversees the Radiological Emergency Preparedness (REP) Program to ensure that the health and safety of people living near commercial nuclear power plants would be adequately protected in the event of a nuclear power plant accident.

### BIG Impact Moment

Torres is a true team player and a dedicated and thorough employee. "She has encountered challenges with new documents and procedures being implemented by our headquarters for our exercise program and has served as the problem solver for all of her coworkers, rather than letting each person encounter the frustrations themselves," said her colleague and nominator, Joseph Suders, Technological Hazards Program Specialist. "Ms. Torres adjusts to the changes and then shares them with her coworkers."

Torres has also encountered challenges with team leaders who have less knowledge and experience than herself, but she always takes the high road, rather than creating a disturbance within the branch, and shares her knowledge and experience with all. The characteristic that drives her is persistence. She will not let the mission fail, whether it's her responsibility to do the work or not.

In addition to her management responsibilities, Torres has continually extended her assistance to the other eight site specialists with multifaceted administrative milestones within the REP Program in preparing complex, biennial and federally evaluated exercises that require planning and participation from state and local governments in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

Her willingness to assist the other site specialists has kept them on target with their responsibilities in planning the required exercises, and if not for her efforts, failure would be certain. The evaluated exercises encompass participation from hundreds of emergency responders. Her efforts have made the difference in ensuring that budgetary goals are met, hotel accommodations are made for up to 60 evaluators, hundreds of pages of required pre-exercise documents are reviewed, and final evaluation reports for each exercise are formatted and proofread, all within their required timelines.



Becky Jo Glover is the Director of Customer Service for the city of Grand Rapids, Michigan.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The 311 Customer Service team is a data-driven reporting and tracking system of well-trained citizen experience advocates. Every call is identified with a specific description that ties to one of 40 departmental databases or information systems from all areas of the city, giving staff information at their fingertips to effectively resolve issues.

### BIG Impact Moment

Like many cities, Grand Rapids had an outdated website with too many web pages and not enough consistency in the presentation of information. Users found it difficult to navigate and staff had trouble keeping it up-to-date. "Becky Jo advocated with the incoming Mayor and a team of like-minded civil servants from throughout City Hall to join a website revamp," said a contractor and nominator, Cynthia Francis. "Becky Jo was the flag bearer for prioritizing digital services, accessibility and mobile responsiveness. Her goal was to ensure that the website worked for everyone, and not just for government. For that reason, she mandated that every piece of content, every service, every page on their new website was put through usability testing by the city's Civic User Testing group of citizen users."

By starting with data, the team could prioritize needed content and transactions and retire outdated or seldom-used pages. Analytics showed that 279 pages accounted for more than 90 percent of all page views, and 50 pages received an average of 69 percent of all traffic each month. As a self-proclaimed "data wonk", Glover played an instrumental part in shifting the website redesign process from a traditional beautification exercise to one that focused on improving the value of the city's website.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Glover had a winding road to government. She started out working in the movie industry before taking an executive-level job in customer experience at Coca-Cola. But after the long hours forced her to spend quality time away from her family, Glover decided to take a significant pay cut to work for the government, first in Miami-Dade County, Florida, and then Grand Rapids.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Every day government employees are being asked to do more with less — less resources, less personnel — and yet the demands for government service are on the rise," Glover said. "Government employees are being stretched thin, but every day we go to work to serve our citizens because we care. And I think that is a little undervalued, just how much we care."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"It is incredibly important that today in the times that we serve, that we are able to make a difference in the people that we come in contact with every single day. I'm in public service because today I'm able to change a life."

# ADVOCATE

This award recognizes an individual who is consistently and relentlessly advocating for their project or team to further their organization’s mission, or an individual who is dedicated to cultivating talent, mentoring and guiding NextGen public service leaders to become our future community leaders at the local, state, national or international levels. This year’s Advocate award finalists are:

# ADVOCATE

## Advocate

**KIM BROWN**



**Kim Brown is the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Coordinator and former Transportation Options Coordinator for the City of Bellingham, Washington.**

## BIG Impact Moment

“As Transportation Options Coordinator, Kim created something out of nothing,” said Brown’s nominator and colleague, Amy Cloud, Communications and Outreach. Brown was responsible for getting city residents and government staff to consider alternatives to driving alone. She began by collaborating with vehicle-centric populations to rethink how they use roadways. That led to creating comprehensive pedestrian and bicycle master plans that direct how the city develops streets and infrastructure to make walking, cycling and riding the bus more popular and accessible modes of transportation.

“Her work included forming alliances with vital partners and stakeholders that don’t always ‘play nice’ — i.e., governmental agencies, citizen activists, the school district, state funding entities and so on. It was a masterful balancing act that allowed all participants to engage and win,” Brown’s nominator said.

Now, city street construction uses the master plans as touchstones in planning new or altered roadways. Additionally, Brown is leading a *Travel with Care* education campaign, to make roads safer for cyclists and walkers. This multifaceted campaign will ensure that residents can safely and comfortably take advantage of more services from the city.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The ADA Coordinator ensures that city programs, services, facilities and activities are accessible to all community members. In this role, Brown seeks partnerships with government, private-sector organizations and residents to provide a wide range of options to the entire population of Bellingham.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

“I’ve always been interested in community work, improving the lives of people in terms of their health and getting them engaged,” Brown said. Before joining government, she worked as a community health educator and childbirth instructor. She eventually began working with the city to create opportunities for all community members to live healthy, active lives by providing facilities for active transportation. Now, her ADA work expands her reach to ensure that people with disabilities have access to all aspects of city life.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

“I want people to know how comprehensive the ADA is,” Brown said. “It touches every aspect of everything the city is involved with — every building and sidewalk, meetings, recreation and cultural programs, library services, accessing the city website. It’s basically making everything the city offers accessible to everyone.”

### I’M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

“I enjoy working with people, I enjoy improving our community and making it easier for people to live healthy, productive lives.”





### BIG Impact Moment

Harris was a lead negotiator for the region's first mandated paid sick time law, and he was a key architect of the \$15 minimum wage law recently passed in Minneapolis. "Ron's entire life has consisted of overcoming challenges to be positioned as a leader in our community at such a young age," said Patrick Ness, Public Policy Director, who nominated Harris for the award. "His work on paid sick leave is one example of his intellect, strategic thinking, analysis, people skills, negotiating acumen and ability to move all parties ahead for the benefit of working people in Minnesota."

Harris was a founding member and one of the designers of the Community Equity Pipeline, which is a leadership cohort that trains members of communities of color to become advocates at the state Capitol. "This work is changing the face of public involvement in public decision-making," Ness said. "In City Hall, he is a bridge between community and public policy, bringing a high level of transparency and accountability to the functions of city government."

Ron Harris is the Senior Adviser to the President of the Minneapolis City Council.

#### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Senior Adviser to the President oversees strategy, communications, policy and legislative advocacy for the Minneapolis City Council. The role requires strong negotiating, strategic thinking and people skills.

#### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Government is full of folks that you'll never know their names, but they are worker bees," Harris said. "They transcend administrations. They transcend politics, and they are really there because they really do care."

#### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I think people deserve a government and a leadership that's responsive, respectful, dynamic and thoughtful. And it currently doesn't include all voices that it should include. I've found that public service has been the most rewarding thing that I've done. I can directly see lives impacted for the good. I feel like my job is to mitigate bad things and really amplify, promote and execute the good things."

#### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Prior to government, Harris worked as the Policy Director at a local nonprofit that focused on issues at the intersection of race, public policy and the economy. He worked to repeal laws that led to low-level offenses for residents. The City Council President — who had not yet taken that role at the time — saw the value in his work and wanted him to join her office.



### BIG Impact Moment

When Howland took the job, there was a massive backlog of collision data in the Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System. "In fact, it had never been current with CHP data," said Romy Haddad, a contractor, who nominated Howland for the award. "Through an approach that included technology and personnel, Chief Howland led the effort to modernize legacy systems and update the records across the board." During that process, Howland added data entry personnel through grant funding and deployed an electronic submission system for collision data and documentation. This was no small feat," Haddad said. The statewide electronic submission went live in October 2015 and by March 11, 2016, all new records became real time and the paper backlogs were resolved.

Overall, Howland has worked to increase the organization's adoption of new systems through change management. "This made significant improvements to the CHP network and improved response time, making officers and first responders more effective in serving California," Haddad said.

Scott Howland is the Chief Information Officer and Division Chief of the Information Management Division at the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

#### JOB DESCRIPTION

As CIO and Division Chief of the Information Management Division for the largest state police agency in the country, Howland oversees the technology and services fundamental to the patrol and safety of California's highways. This includes ensuring round-the-clock availability of technology that supports CHP's 11,000 employees.

#### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

After working in TV news, Howland said he wanted to be involved in serving people and saving lives personally, rather than watching other people do it. Howland started his career at CHP 27 years ago driving a patrol car in downtown Los Angeles. He has an eclectic background and experience in computer programming, legislative processes, media relations, cybersecurity and radio communications.

#### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"I think sometimes the government gets a bad rap," Howland said. "It would be nice for the public to understand how many committed people there are working hard every single day to ensure that government can provide public service to the people."

#### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**"I love helping people and wanted to make a difference. It is great being part of a team that provides service to the public 24/7 and makes a difference by saving lives every day."**





Linda Turner is the State Director for Special Education at the South Dakota Department of Education.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Director for Special Education programs for ages 3 to 21 manages the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which includes authorizing, approving and monitoring all local, state and agency special education programs.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

While in college, Turner planned to become a general education teacher, but she was encouraged to dual major in elementary and special education. "After I graduated, I took a position in special education and just loved working with the students and seeing the positive impact we could make in their lives," Turner said. She later applied for a state government job to make a bigger impact for students and was named Director five years ago.

## BIG Impact Moment

To apply for a federal State Personnel Development Grant, Turner needed to bring together the Division of Curriculum and Instruction, the Office of Finance and Management, and higher education and local education agencies. "Special education staff and general education curriculum staff needed to collaborate and work together to co-lead this multimillion-dollar grant request in order to benefit South Dakota's school districts," said Ann Larsen, Director of Division of Educational Services & Support, who nominated Turner for the award. "Each office was comfortable working in their silo, but Linda took time to cultivate these relationships and coordinate staff strengths in order to develop this grant." South Dakota was one of the few chosen in the fall of 2017 to receive the grant. "Now, instead of each group doing their own thing, they are working together and talking about what's best for the students and how much more they can do together," Larsen said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"Oftentimes people interpret government work as being intrusive," Turner said. "And really our goal is to provide assistance and support, to work together to improve our communities and our state and our nation."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

**"I want to make a difference for students by helping their families understand the process to access the services they need, and to help teachers and districts improve their practices to achieve high outcomes for all students."**



Stella G. Uzogara is the Epidemiologist for the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

State Epidemiologists track diseases and the health of infants, children, women, mothers and various populations. They make assessments and use data to evaluate the health conditions of those populations.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I can use my knowledge and skills acquired, through my work, to impact policy, to ensure health equity and access to healthcare services for all the people in the commonwealth, irrespective of their background or demographics. I believe that by doing this, I'm able to make a difference in the lives of all the people of my state, and that of the nation."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

After seeing the devastating effects of civil war in her home country of Nigeria — including malnutrition, infection and food shortages — Uzogara developed a strong interest in nutrition. She received multiple scholarships to study nutrition and food science abroad. After her studies, she went back to Nigeria to do public health work and teach. She later took a sabbatical, became a U.S. citizen and began working in state government.

## BIG Impact Moment

In addition to her role as state Epidemiologist, Uzogara conducted in-service training for the Department of Public Health's Women, Infants and Children program staff on cultural competence and sensitivity to health and food practices of new immigrants from Africa. The trainings led to increased awareness and cultural understanding of African health and nutrition practices that improved staff/client relationships, said Leonard Lee, Director, Division of Violence and Injury Prevention, who nominated Uzogara for the award. "It led to elimination of barriers to health access for these new immigrants and increased the new immigrant use of state health services and improved their nutrition," Lee said. As a Nigerian American, Uzogara said she could relate to her patients and health consumers, and took it upon herself to work with them — educating her clients, patients and staff colleagues. "Because I came from that part of the world, I know their health practices, I know their food practices, I know the taboos they have about food and health, which sometimes clash with life in the modern society like the United States," she said.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"The greater public should understand that government is for them," Uzogara said. "We are civil servants. We are here to serve the public, to make sure that they get the healthcare and services they need. And that we also like to get their feedback for improvement because we can relate to them as human beings."

This award recognizes a public servant who is blazing the path for their generation in government with courage and determination at the local, state, national or international levels. This year's Courageous Champion award finalists are:

# COURAGEOUS CHAMPION

## Courageous Champion

**GWEN CLEMENS**



**Gwen Clemens is the Director of Administrative Services and Operations for the King County, Washington, Department of Public Defense.**

### JOB DESCRIPTION

Clemens works with other departments in King County to ensure that Department of Public Defense employees have the office space, hardware and software, and technical support they need to provide strong public defense. She also oversees communications, contracts with the state and cities, data, and finance functions.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I believe that absolutely every single person has a right to equal access to opportunities. Public service gives me that opportunity to help influence how our government works, and how we as a society provide those opportunities to people."

### BIG Impact Moment

After a recent move to a new building, not everyone got an office. Based on various rules, regulations and guidelines across confidentiality within the practice of law, lawyers ended up with the offices, while social workers, investigators, paralegals and administrative staff who had traditionally been in offices, now had cubicles and open work spaces. Additionally, Clemens' relationship with the people aggrieved was fairly new; there hadn't been time to build trust. She organized focus groups to understand their concerns and creatively consider how to manage them. "Gwen, with her positive attitude, devotion to continuous improvement and learning around helping people increase their potential, has caused several sticky situations to smooth over and allow our work as public defenders to go on with little interruption," said La Mer Kyle-Griffiths, Deputy Director for workforce, learning and growth at the department, and Clemens' nominator.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

"Serving people who do not have the tools or resources to advocate for themselves has always been important to me," Clemens said. "I'm not a frontline person, but I love to plan and organize. So, working in the Department of Public Defense for those who advocate for clients is perfect for me. I see myself as an advocate for our employees."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

**"Government provides things that no one else can provide," Clemens said. "And it's government's role to provide opportunities so that we can have a civil society."**



Michelle Mabray is the Wellness Coordinator with the TSET healthy Living Program at the Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, Health Department.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

Mabray serves as an advocate for public health in rural Oklahoma, specifically working to reduce tobacco use and obesity rates within the county. In addition to working with internal stakeholders, she partners with city and government organizations, businesses, schools, nonprofit organizations, local congregations and child care facilities to achieve her mission.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Mabray has always been interested in public health. In high school, she was leader of Students Working Against Tobacco. Years later, she competed in the Miss Oklahoma pageant on the platform of heart health. But what pushed Mabray into public service was the disparity between her experiences in metropolitan areas and those of rural Oklahoma. On returning to Pittsburg County after traveling, she realized the impact she could have on local public health.

### BIG Impact Moment

One and a half years into Pittsburg County's five-year strategic plan, Mabray had already met all of her goals related to community health. Those efforts included assisting communities with the adoption and implementation of model Tobacco Free City Owned Property ordinances, encompassing more than 97 percent of the population living within incorporated cities in the county. She also partnered with more than 50 local partners spanning all sectors to improve the overall food system in southeast Oklahoma.

Additionally, Mabray led the development and implementation of a way-finding system consisting of more than 200 signs to increase the walkability and accessibility of the community; a walking school bus program in which students are chaperoned to school; and an adopt-an-intersection program in which volunteers maintain sidewalks, crosswalks and signs to increase safety. Finally, Mabray helped five communities receive \$20,000 in grants for the implementation of healthy initiatives.

Mabray achieved her goals by seeking myriad new partners, including cities, schools, healthcare and community organizations. "With these partnerships, she has taken an innovative approach to...implementing successful strategies to overcome the limited resources and lack of awareness of the importance of active living and transportation and access to healthy food initiatives," her colleague and nominator, D'Elbie Walker, Regional Director said.

"It definitely wasn't through my efforts alone," Mabray added. "It took that community engagement aspect and really partnering with agencies who were willing to collaborate and move the needle together, pull in the same direction."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I love my community. I am passionate about my community, their health, their well-being, and I feel like I'm able to utilize my best talents to help create change and innovation, and to really make a difference in my community."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"I would love to see our community be more engaged," Mabray said. "The choices and decisions that government makes, they're just people, and they're making those choices based off of research, but they're also making a lot of decisions off of what the community tells them are their wants and needs and what they prioritize."



Jamie Payne is the IT Program Manager/Collaboration Product Lead at NASA's Agency Applications Office.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

As an IT Program Manager for NASA's Agency Applications Office and a subject-matter expert in collaboration, Payne works as part of a team to define collaboration requirements across the agency and determine a core suite of collaboration tools that would and should be made available to all NASA employees.

### BIG Impact Moment

"Over the last few years in response to impassioned pleas from her internal customers, Jamie has championed the use of a [commercial off-the-shelf] enterprise collaboration hub, initially installed on premises while the team tested the software and considered the possibility of moving the hub to the cloud," said Marc Harrell, a contractor, who nominated Payne.

When a small group of users at Marshall Space Flight Center originally advocated for the use of this innovative collaboration tool, Payne was at first tasked with discouraging its use since it was not certified by the Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program. However, she took the time to understand the unique problems the software was solving before deciding. After immersing herself in the cloud-based platform and the results from the team, Payne turned into the platform's biggest advocate. As a collaboration expert, she understood the potential for the tool within NASA's unique atmosphere. Today, the agency's use of the platform, branded as NASA ExplorNet, is transforming the way NASA works. Rather than operating as 10 separate teams, ExplorNet's 10,000 NASA users now collaborate to solve problems quickly and support the agency's goal to operate as "One NASA."

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

"Both my parents were in different areas of public service...and we were always encouraged to be part of something bigger. And I believe that's what really drew me to public service. I wanted to be part of something big. And I chose the federal government, I think, purely because it's my way of giving back to what I think is the absolute best country in the world, and my way of supporting it."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"I want be part of something bigger and support this country in a way that produces positive impact and influence for generations to come. And I see public service as my route to contributing my part."

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"In my time in federal service, I have met the most dedicated government workers and citizens of this country who want to do their part," Payne said. "We may not all be able to go out and be a warfighter or influence legislation in Congress, but we can all do our part to help this country run efficiently, effectively, and for this country to continue to be a leader amongst all nations in science and how to treat mankind."



# ALEX PEREZ

## Courageous Champion

## Courageous Champion

# AARON WILLIAMS



Alex Perez is the Video Services Coordinator in Aurora, Illinois

### JOB DESCRIPTION

Perez manages Aurora Community Television (ACTV), the city's public access cable TV channel. ACTV offers programming 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. This means Perez oversees content, delivery and creation of programs for ACTV, and he is involved in assuring transparency of the Aurora city government through the regular recording and broadcasting of City Council meetings and other public forums.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"What I want the community and the greater public to understand is that public servants are out there working," Perez said. "Yes, there are those negative stories, but for every negative story, there's a positive story. It's a grind, but we are working to better the community, to better the country, and serve citizens."

### BIG Impact Moment

"In just his first year as director of ACTV, Alex has taken the public access station far beyond any role it has played in the past. He has launched a number of programs to get the community, and especially high school and college students, involved in ACTV operation and programming," said John Russell, a Grant Writer, who nominated Perez.

As the sole employee of ACTV, and with a budget of only a few thousand dollars, Perez has been forced to be resourceful in operating the station. Several of the projects he's started, such as an internship program and a healthy eating show called "Aurora Eats," are created at no cost. The internship program has allowed ACTV to provide social media links such as Snapchat, Instagram, YouTube and its own web page at a time when such community outreach features are found at very few public access stations.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

"I came to this job as an intern, and they kept me because of my work ethic. But when I was in college, working in public service didn't cross my mind. I wasn't like, 'Oh man, I want work in the realm of public access television!' But it was a testament to how much the administration that I work for trusts me now that they really gave me free reign to do what I wanted. Taking over a station that generates \$1.4 million annually was a dream come true. It allowed me to grow and to really flex my creative muscle. Also, learning the back end of government — how things operate, how budgets work, just the ins and outs — was something that I never thought of, but just naturally fell in love with. This job allows me to mix creativity and learning about government."

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"of the community."



Aaron Williams is the Adult and Digital Services Librarian, at the McCracken County Public Library in Kentucky.

### JOB DESCRIPTION

The Adult and Digital Services Librarian focuses on community partnerships such as e-book lending, laptop and hotspot lending, and sharing resources with citizens. The role is a community- and outreach-oriented position.

### ROAD TO GOVERNMENT

Williams started working at the library in 2010 as a part-time clerk. From there, he was promoted to a full-time library assistant, and then most recently to the Adult and Digital Services Librarian. The latest promotion comes on the heels of Williams' earning his master's degree in library science from the University of Kentucky.

### WHY GOVERNMENT MATTERS

"I wish people understood how passionate government workers are about the work that they do," Williams said. "I work with a group of driven, motivated people, who do this work because they believe in it. Government workers are fundamental to the success of our democracy."

### BIG Impact Moment

Williams conceptualized and led the Digital Inclusion pilot. "From his work at the information desk, Aaron observed that many in our community lacked home internet connectivity," said Library Director Susan Baier, who nominated Williams for the award. Williams wrote a successful grant funded by a local bank that allowed the library to purchase hotspots for circulation. Seeing the potential for an even greater impact, Williams secured additional funding from local partners to purchase laptops. The laptops and hotspots were bundled into "digital toolboxes" that now circulate outside the library. "All of our digital toolboxes were checked out within the first 24 hours, which was awesome because, it indicated we had a real need that was filled by providing this service for our community," Williams said.

### I'M IN PUBLIC SERVICE BECAUSE

"It gives me the opportunity to work towards a more informed citizenry, a more equitable society and a digitally prepared community. Our public institutions can provide the access, tools and skills training people need to be confident in their abilities and ready for today's world."



# ABOUT THE JUDGES

The NextGen Public Service Awards obtained over 250 nominations and were carefully reviewed by our panel of judges. During the scoring process judges took into consideration the nominees leadership qualities, commitment to continuously improve government, their impact on those they work with and the ability to make positive change happen.

## STEPH DRAHOZAL



Steph Drahozal is the Event Coordinator at GovLoop where she manages all of GovLoop's in-person events, online trainings and virtual summits. She previously worked as a Marketing Coordinator at Salsa Labs, a nonprofit software company. In 2014, Steph graduated from Virginia Tech with a Bachelor's Degree in Communications and minors in Marketing, Psychology, & Travel and Tourism Management.

## DR. JERRY JAILALL



Dr. Jerry Jailall currently serves as the Education Consultant for the Education Services for the Deaf and Blind, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction in Raleigh. He has served in education for 25+ years at the elementary-, middle-, high-, and university levels in Guyana, the Bahamas, the USA and the United Arab Emirates. He has taught at the undergraduate and graduate levels at The University of Mount Olive, USA; the University of Guyana; and the Abu Dhabi University. His past positions in state government include serving for 11 years as State Coordinator for the GOALS 2000 School Improvement Program and the Comprehensive School Reform program. Dr. Jailall holds five degrees, has written chapters in books and journal articles, and is Co-author of a Corwin Press bestseller, *The Principal as Curriculum Leader: Shaping What is Taught and Tested* (2017), used in several administrator training programs worldwide. His work locally and internationally includes advocacy for reinventing organizational policy, systems, and practices that are customer focused, and that utilize a 21st century framework and technologies. Dr. Jailall is involved in several service projects including serving on the Johnston County Mental Health Board. He has been an advocate for state employees, and for education and leadership reforms. He was a 2017 finalist in the "Advocate" category.

## NYA JACKSON



Nya Jackson is a Customer Success Specialist at GovLoop where she supports external partners and internal operations by acting as project manager on GovLoop's events and content pieces. Previously, she served as an AmeriCorps member and congressional intern. Nya holds a Bachelor's Degree in Integrative Studies from George Mason University. She currently resides in Washington, D.C.

## EMILY JARVIS



Emily Jarvis is the Senior Online and Event Editor at GovLoop - the knowledge network for government - where she has worked for six years. She is also the NextGen Leadership Program Manager and the NextGen Summit Content Manager where she is focused on providing wonderful speakers on leadership and development trainings for government attendees. Emily graduated from American University with a degree in broadcast communications. In her spare time, she loves to BBQ with her husband and take long hikes with her puppy.

## ALEXA MCKENNA



Alexa McKenna is a marketing professional with over three years' experience in the government space. She currently works as a Digital Marketing Analyst at GovLoop where she is focused on creating digital campaigns that engage the government community. Previously, she worked as a Public Sector Marketing Coordinator at Immix Group, an Arrow company. In 2014, Alexa graduated from Marquette University with a Bachelor's Degree in Communication. She currently resides in Washington, D.C.

## HANNAH MOSS



Hannah Moss is the Senior Manager of Production at GovLoop. In addition to researching the latest in government technology for our written and interactive media, Hannah writes a weekly advice column for women in the public sector. She previously worked at the Advisory Board Company and the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and holds a Master's in International Relations from the London School of Economics.

## EMILY SADIGH



Emily Sadigh works in Alameda County's Office of Sustainability where she designs and implements strategies to promote climate resilience and employee engagement in one of California's largest local governments. She is a Harvard-trained educator and certified Biomimicry Specialist who works across the public sector, universities, and businesses to connect innovators to partners and resources. She was a pioneer in university campus sustainability and has been recognized by Next City as one of the top young urban leaders working to improve U.S. cities. Emily leads Alameda County's participation as a host site for an award-winning climate action fellowship program that has launched more than a dozen young professionals into public service and environmental careers.

## JULIE SAAD



Julie Saad is a Special Assistant to the Director of the Potomac Service Center within DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. She leads special projects focused on building a community of engaged, innovative public servants united in purpose. Julie developed and implemented the center's first Employee Recognition and Awards Program and a career development initiative designed to unlock the full potential of the workforce. During her 12-year federal government career, Julie also worked as a Communications Strategist with the USCIS Office of Communications and as an HR Specialist and Program Analyst at the Office of Personnel Management. She has provided expert advice on how to navigate the federal application process and craft a strong resume to thousands at universities nationwide.

## BILL VALDEZ



Bill Valdez was appointed as the President of the Senior Executives Association (SEA) in September 2016. As President, Bill sets SEA's overall strategic direction and is focused on strengthening the Senior Executive Service (SES) through legislative and policy initiatives, building a leadership pipeline for the Executive Branch, and establishing SEA as a thought leader in the Washington, DC policy debates that impact not only the SES, but all civil service employees. Bill retired from Federal service after 20+ years as a career Senior Executive in July 2014. Bill is an Adjunct Faculty at American University's School of Public Affairs Key Leadership Program and is a co-editor of "The Handbook of Federal Government Leadership and Administration," which was published in November 2016. Bill was awarded the Presidential Rank Award (meritorious) in 2007, was elected as a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) in 2006, and was elected to Senior Executive Association's Board of Directors in 2005 and served as Chairman from 2011-13.

# THANK YOU



GovLoop is the Knowledge Network for Government with a mission to help government professionals do their job better. GovLoop helps over 275,000 members through a variety of knowledge-based programs such as free online trainings, research guides, in-person events, blogs and newsletters. The GovLoop community is a mix of federal state, local and industry professionals dedicated to improving government through collaboration, engagement and innovation.



Young Government Leaders (YGL) is a professional organization of men and women employed by or for the government who are “young” in their service and/or “fresh” in their perspective. Their mission is to educate, inspire and transform the current and future leaders of government. YGL’s membership consists of over 10,000 (and counting) young feds at almost 30 percent of the approximately 435 U.S. departments and agencies.

## NextGen Public Service Award Planning Committee

Leah Anderson, Sr. Marketing Manager

Megan Dotson, Event Manager, Next Generation of Government Training Summit

Brady Smithsund, Event Fellow

### Authors

Catherine Andrews, Sr. Director of Content

Joe Antoshak, Editorial Fellow

Francesca El Attrash, Sr. Editor and Writer

Emily Jarvis, Sr. Online & Event Editor

Nicole Johnson, Managing Editor

Hannah Moss, Sr. Manager of Production

Danielle Poindexter, Editorial Fellow

### Designer

Jana Choi, Design Fellow

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nextgengovt.com | nextgen@govloop.com | (202) 407-7408