



2025 NextGen Public Service Award Winners

nextGen

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT BY  govloop



Award Categories

Advancing Technology Champion

This category recognizes a forward thinker who has used technology as part of their approach to transformation. This individual is innovative, trying to move their agency to tools such as artificial intelligence or machine learning that allow employees more time to do mission-critical work.

Communicator of the Year

This category recognizes an individual who demonstrates strategic communication, internally and externally at their agency. This person will push the envelope to find innovative ways to share their message while keeping employees and stakeholders engaged.

Innovator of the Year

This category recognizes an individual who has identified and improved their organization in an innovative way, such as through remote/hybrid work, updating a process or finding a way to enhance the organization's culture.

Outstanding Colleague

This category recognizes an individual who exceeds expectations day-to-day. Whether they offer to run meetings, contribute ideas, or help colleagues in times of need, you can always count on them to pull their weight and more.

Manager of the Year

This category recognizes a manager or supervisor who goes above and beyond for their team and individual contributors. They care about their team, show up for them, listen to their ideas and advocate needs to upper management.

GovLoop is proud to host the 16th annual NextGen Public Service Awards for superior public service and achievement, in conjunction with the NextGen Government Training Summit in October 2025. We are celebrating 10 amazing winners across federal, state and local government. The awards recognize deserving individuals who are selected from the public service community for their intelligence, exuberance and dedication to improving and invigorating government.

Richard Chan

Branch Chief, Business Solutions
Consulting Services
U.S. Census Bureau



Chan's Focus

Chan ensures that agency IT projects adhere to governance standards and effectively deliver value enterprisewide. That's an inherently difficult task, considering how much data Census holds, but the bureau's legacy tools for data access and display were an added impediment. So, to make project information more accessible and actionable, Chan created a Microsoft Power BI dashboard that shows key performance indicators and other critical metrics.

The innovation eliminated silos and significantly improved transparency across divisions. Project managers, sponsors and stakeholders now can quickly and securely assess project health, resource allocation and performance metrics — leading to faster, more informed decisions that directly impact service delivery and operational efficiency.

"Instead of toggling between multiple tools, stakeholders now use a single intuitive platform to drill down into key issues," Chan said. "This enables us to focus more on talking about issues and roadblocks to identify real problems, so we can get to the meat of them."

He took swift action when licensing restrictions posed a critical challenge to the project's viability, and he's incorporated custom fields and displays to reflect specific user needs. But the work is ongoing, he said. "A lot of collaboration and iterative development are crucial to delivering a tool that's helpful to the users."

What the Nominator Said

"What truly sets Richard apart is his ability to bridge the gap between technology and mission. He understands that behind every dashboard, process or tool is a greater goal: improving how government serves its people. He is not only a problem-solver but a change agent — someone who inspires others through their actions, dedication and results."

How Chan Got Started in Government

Chan began his government career soon after college. He was drawn to federal service because it offered opportunities beyond what was available in the private sector — "opportunities to grow professionally while making a meaningful impact on public programs that affect communities nationwide," he said.

'I'm in public service because...'

"I'm in public service because I want my work to matter, not just for myself, but for the broader community. Public service offers a chance to contribute to positive, wide-reaching change, to be part of something greater than just any one individual."

Robert Guillemain

Pollution Prevention Coordinator
U.S. Environmental Protection
Agency



Guillemain's Focus

The Pollution Prevention (P2) program takes a novel approach to environmental protection. Instead of relying on traditional methods like recycling, treatment, or disposal to manage pollutants, P2 provides grants, guidance and other resources to help businesses avoid generating pollution in the first place. Guillemain came up with an innovative way to build on that idea: Helping recipients in a specific business sector coordinate their work on prevention measures.

They tested the idea with New England's craft beverage industry. P2 awarded grants to six businesses in 2022 to lay the foundation for BetterBev, a regional program that offers tools to help beverage firms assess and improve their operations, both to prevent pollution and reduce costs. The approach involves "a lot of good communication and building of relationships and saying, 'What can we do together that would make a big difference?'" Guillemain said. "That hadn't really happened before, although you think it would be very obvious."

What the Nominator Said

"Over 50 breweries have received BetterBev recognition for implementing operational efficiencies that save energy, water, and materials. The cost of these savings is estimated at over \$400,000 per year. By working together, the BetterBev team more than doubled the rate of reaching and servicing businesses."

How Guillemain Got Started in Government

Over the course of his career, Guillemain moved slowly but steadily toward a career in the federal government. His first job was in the private sector, but he soon shifted to the non-profit world and then, several years later, to state government. He joined EPA in 2001 and has been there ever since. "When I came here, I just felt that with the scale and scope of the projects that we were working on, this is where I wanted to be."

'I'm in public service because...'

"I'm a public servant because government takes on the hardest jobs. These are jobs that businesses don't want, or they've messed up, including public health, housing, education, and in my case, environmental protection. So, I'm a public servant because long-term civic progress needs to account for the deficiencies of short-term private profit."

Danilia Vandersee

Anti-Harassment and Conflict Resolution Program Manager
78th Air Base Wing, Robins Air Force Base



Vandersee's Focus

Preventing and responding to employee harassment complaints and resolving conflicts before they affect the mission at Robins Air Force Base requires informing 30,000 civilian, contract and uniformed personnel about programs and services. Vandersee discovered that despite extensive social and electronic media efforts, employees weren't getting that information, often because they had limited computer access.

To fix that, Vandersee developed and distributed physical marketing materials, including fliers and brochures. Ultimately, the eight Air Force bases under the Air Force Materiel Command adapted her materials and outreach program for their own use. Through her efforts, 254 harassment complaints were resolved without escalation to the formal complaint process, and 5,431 employees and supervisors were trained in techniques to resolve interpersonal conflicts as a team.

"The problem that we're trying to solve is for people just to be empathetic to other individuals' needs," Vandersee said. "People should be able to come to work, do their job and not fear retribution, retaliation, being harassed."

What the Nominator Said

"... [T]he Anti-Harassment and Conflict Management Program owes much of its success to the efforts of Ms. Vandersee. She can be counted on to look at challenges and obstacles as simply opportunities to provide a better and more responsive service. Her efforts ... ensure employees are treated with dignity and respect and work in environments that allow them to thrive and be successful."

How Vandersee Got Started in Government

Vandersee has worked in government since graduating from college, when she took a position in child and family services. She followed that with a job in the appellate court system, work she found amazing. But it was love that led to her current role: She married an active-duty airman, who was assigned to Robins. "That's how I ended up here ... in federal government, and it's been a rewarding day ever since."

'I'm in public service because...'

"I am in public service because people matter. People are the driving force for our mission, and it is important to make sure that people are treated with dignity and respect. And so that's why I choose to do the job that I do as an anti-harassment and conflict resolution manager, because people matter, and we care here, and we want people to know that they are important."

Matthew Mielke

Midwest Regional Chief,
Office of Regional Outreach and
Project Delivery
U.S. Federal Railroad Administration



Mielke's Focus

Mielke always thinks about how to keep things moving, both literally and figuratively. The Office of Regional Outreach and Project Delivery provides grants and guidance to localities, helping them undertake railroad projects that improve the movement of people and goods across their region — whether by a small, short-line railroad or a massive passenger rail line.

Behind the scenes, Mielke has earned a reputation as someone who can streamline and accelerate management processes that support FRA leadership's vision and directives. For example, Matthew led an effort to standardize several processes and reduce the time needed to write and negotiate grant agreements among stakeholders, addressing potential obstacles that could slow projects later on.

Mielke said such processes should be invisible to the public. "It's like referees in football: The best referees are the ones you don't know are there," he said.

What the Nominator Said

"While someone with his aptitude could easily use a top-down approach to management, particularly in a changing environment, Matthew's desire to build consensus leads him to take an inclusive approach to innovation. He is able to build rapport with others with his sense of humor and genuine concern for colleagues. This motivates us all to achieve the objectives using the innovative ways of operating designed under Matthew's leadership."

How Mielke Got Started in Government

Mielke began his career working as a consultant on environmental policy and planning. He loved the work, but he wanted to have a more direct impact, so when he saw an opportunity to work on environmental issues with FRA, he jumped at it. He found it an easy transition, since he had always enjoyed working on transit issues. As a father of a young boy, the train work is an added bonus. "I now bring home a little toy train from all my work trips. When I come home, it's like, 'Dad, where's my train?'"

'I'm in public service because...'

"I grew up watching 'The West Wing' — that was my favorite show — and I always wanted to work somewhere in public service, making every day better for everyone in some fashion... Right now, I'm in public service because I want to help people get from one place to another."

Michelle Mooney

Impact Manager
Salt Lake City Mayor's Office



Mooney's Focus

Mooney oversees two policymaking boards that advise Salt Lake City's mayor and City Council — the Human Rights and Racial Equity in Policing commissions — and is a liaison between the mayor's office and Utah's Community Partners Against Hate coalition. Fostering belonging and collaboration can be difficult during the best of times; the current political landscape makes the effort especially hard.

But thanks to Mooney's work ethic, local-level expertise, and commitment to transparency and accountability, the city's annual Human Rights Day celebration now needs a larger venue. She is working with Partners Against Hate collaborators on a youth summit and a series of films and community conversations. The National League of Cities' Race, Equity and Leadership program selected Mooney as one of 16 practitioners to receive direct technical aid and help with federal funding. She has represented Utah at the Eradicate Hate Global Summit, where she co-chaired, alongside U.K. and Canadian peers, a working group that's developing a centralized repository of police department resources.

"I hope the impact that I can have as a public servant is one that shows that you can build trust with government leaders," Mooney said.

What the Nominator Said

"In the past two years, the state and federal landscape has shifted tremendously to scale back on diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. As a young professional, Michelle did not lose hope in the impact of her work or the difference it can make when institutionalized throughout an entire system. She continues to ... instill light in the community members she works with and emphasizes the value in these efforts."

How Mooney Got Started in Government

Mooney started her career in higher education but struggled with the transition from studying in Florida to working in a rural Utah community. After one year — and with guidance from a sorority sister, who was the first chief equity officer in the Salt Lake City Mayor's Office — she joined the office as a part-time equity liaison. Within six months, she was promoted to her current full-time role.

'I'm in public service because...'

"I am in public service because public service is a fundamental part of democracy, and through my work, I want to truly make a difference and have a direct way to impact society."

Ana Medrano

Business Operations Coordinator
National Science Foundation



Medrano's Focus

Medrano manages the business and budget operations of both the Human Resources and Administrative Services divisions — which is to say the business backbone of NSF. Her role is to ensure that those operations are strategically and financially in line with leadership's vision and that they represent an effective allocation of agency resources. The job has become even more demanding this year, as the administration has brought both new ideas and a heightened focus on efficiency.

Where others might have been overwhelmed, Medrano saw an opportunity to elevate the business performance of the two divisions, making them more responsive and agile. "I help to ensure that the agency can meet its mission effectively, even in the face of tightening resources and the shifting of priorities," Medrano said.

What the Nominator Said

"Despite being relatively new to her current portfolio, Ana has built on her multiyear history of providing excellent customer service and counsel to colleagues at all levels. She is absolutely critical to the function of the office, and is passionate about stewarding its finances."

How Medrano Got Started in Government

Medrano knew from the get-go that she wanted to go into public service. While working on her bachelor's degree in business administration at George Mason University, in the Washington, D.C., area, she joined the Pathways Program, which provides students and recent graduates with the opportunity to gain experience and develop skills that can set them up for success in the federal government. She spent the first seven years of her career working with NSF contractors providing budget and cost analysis services, and that put her on track for her current position. "That's where I developed my expertise in federal budget planning and execution and gained a strong appreciation for how critical support functions are to the agency," she said.

'I'm in public service because ... '

"I am in public service because it gives me the opportunity to encourage meaningful change and contribute to something larger than myself."

David Raley

Digital Program Manager
U.S. Marine Corps Community
Services (USMC-MCCS)



Raley's Focus

USMC-MCCS provides Marines and their families with programs and services as diverse as counseling, recreation, educational opportunities and the base military exchanges where they shop. But outdated software acquisition and development processes, combined with slow government compliance requirements, added years to the adoption of new digital services. As lead on both digital customer experience and IT transformation and modernization efforts, Raley saw how this created inefficiencies not only for his MCCS colleagues but across the Department of Defense.

Raley put together a team to orchestrate a comprehensive transformation strategy and established strategic partnerships with managed service providers, streamlining the path to authorization. His efforts helped cut the authorization process from 18 to 24 months to under 30 days — and in some cases, software can be approved the day it's requested. Recognizing that thousands of DoD systems face similar inefficiencies, he established the StormBreaker program to share MCCS's improved processes and platforms with colleagues throughout the department.

"I really look at how do I challenge policy, practice, procedure [and] rule sets that are actually in conflict with mission. And then that all filters down into culture, which I like to describe as the way we work together and how we actually interact. It's really about how ... you rebalance the organizations back to looking at mission and outcome."

What the Nominator Said

"Mr. Raley didn't just meet his role's requirements; he fundamentally reimagined what was possible in government IT service delivery. This initiative will enable the entire DoD to deploy mission-critical capabilities at the speed of relevance."

How Raley Got Started in Government

Raley saw an opportunity to transfer his retail skills from a big-box store to the Marines. "I joined back in 2010, supporting store operations for the exchange here at headquarters. [I] had a very interesting journey to the role that I'm in now that has continued to evolve as I've built out skill sets," he said.

'I'm in public service because...'

"I'm in public service because I'm passionate about supporting the Marines and the warfighter with the quality-of-life services and also the technology support that we provide them."

Deena Bower

Senior Manager, Learning and Organizational Development
County of Orange, California



Bower's Focus

Bower oversees training and leadership development services for more than 19,000 county employees in 23 departments. As part of that effort, she implemented a comprehensive talent management platform that helps employees access training and advancement opportunities, assists managers with performance assessment and succession planning, and allows the county to better track and report on its compliance with hiring regulations.

Equally important, Bower is a strong mentor to her employees. During a recent departmental restructuring, she supported her team with open communication, regular check-ins and individual guidance to make sure every member was informed and included.

"We like to say we help both people and the organization thrive. I think that the work that we do helps our employees be their best, and that can ripple outward into the community. So, when people are supported and empowered at work, the services that they provide are better," Bower said.

What the Nominator Said

"What sets Deena apart is her ability to make people feel seen, heard, and valued. She doesn't just manage a team, she cultivates a culture. She invests time in mentoring, develops people's strengths, and leads by example with grace under pressure. Even in the busiest seasons, she never loses sight of the people behind the work."

How Bower Got Started in Government

Her mother worked in local government for 35 years — but Bower said she joined public service despite her mother's encouragement. "[Government] just didn't seem to move fast enough for me. I thought I could make a bigger change elsewhere," she said. Experience changed her mind, however. "Being here in this role has shown me I was wrong and my mom was right. I can see every day how our employees make a real difference in the community. I'm glad I landed in the right place."

'I'm in public service because...'

"I am in public service because this can be a place for big ideas and real, meaningful change, and I just really love being part of an organization that makes that possible and that I can see when I go out into my community just shopping or taking my kids to school. I see the benefits of the things that we do out there, and it just makes me very proud."

Brynn Fogerty

HR Manager
Jackson County, Oregon,
Library District



Fogerty's Focus

Fogerty supervises a team that runs HR in Jackson County's 15-branch Library District. As the district's first employee when it became self-run, she created from scratch all its HR policies and procedures and built a library workforce that reflects the community it serves, thanks to her emphasis on robust, collaborative recruitment.

Her two main goals are to "soften" HR so it's a better liaison between employees and the district and to help employees understand the policies affecting them. That isn't easy. "Often, HR gets kind of a bad rap," Fogerty said, "and people carry around baggage from other places where HR wasn't so great."

During her tenure, library staff have extended their service hours by nearly 35%. She guided the entire organization to a new HR information system, with minimal disruption. She has become an HR leader in Oregon's public library sphere, presenting at conferences and sharing ideas and tools with other government HR teams. Fogerty flatly rejects the notion of doing something because "that's how it has always been done."

"I have a people-first mentality," she said. "I want to help understand what's going on by having conversations and communicating."

What the Nominator Said

"Folks in [the HR] field are change agents, confidants, champions of employees and their career goals, and they are occasionally the rule enforcers. Brynn Fogerty is the person you want in this position.... I cannot imagine a better manager or better human who deserves this award."

How Fogerty Got Started in Government

Fogerty worked for six years on a Northern California community college HR team and fell in love with its cut-and-dry operations style. "If you wanted to know something or how to do something, it was written down for you. And my heart liked that. My learning style liked that," she said. Nearly six years ago, Fogerty joined the Jackson County Library District—which also embraces clear policies and procedures.

'I'm in public service because...'

"I am in public service because I like serving others. I have always been a helper by nature, and it lights my fire to help somebody, no matter how little or big the help is. Being in the role of HR manager means I'm literally helping those who serve their community, who are helping others, and that's just where my happy zone is."

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