



GOVERNMENT FINANCE OFFICERS ASSOCIATION
NEWS RELEASE

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GFOA Awards 2021 Scholarships

(Chicago, Illinois – March 26, 2021) Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) has announced the recipients of its 2021 scholarships. GFOA's mission is to advance excellence in government finance to build thriving communities. Awarding of scholarships is an important way GFOA accomplishes its mission.

The recipient of the **\$20,000 Goldberg-Miller Public Finance Scholarship** is **Justin Casanova-Davis**. *Funded by the Girard Miller Foundation.*

- **Justin Casanova-Davis** has been assistant town administrator for the Town of Brookline, Massachusetts, since October 2018. Previously, Justin was principal budget analyst for the City of Cambridge Budget Department. He holds a BA degree in Political Science from Boston College and a Suffolk Graduate Certificate in Local Government, Leadership, and Management. Justin is seeking an MPA at Suffolk University and will graduate in winter 2021. Justin's future career goals are to become a town or city manager and earn his designation as an ICMA Credentialed Manager, as well as serve as a mentor for others interested in a career in public service.

The recipients of the two awards for the **Frank L. Greathouse Government Accounting Scholarship** are **Emma Brandt** and **Kalina Mendez**. Each will receive **\$10,000**. *Funded by the Government Finance Officers Association.*

- **Emma Brandt** has served as assistant finance officer for Lapeer County Health Department in Lapeer, Michigan, since April 2020. Previously, Emma served as deputy records clerk for the Lapeer County Sheriff's Office.

Emma holds a BA degree in Business Administration from Baker College in

Auburn Hills. Emma is seeking an MBA with an Accounting emphasis from the University of Southern Indiana and will graduate in June 2021. Emma has volunteered as a coordinator for the Sheriff's Office Victim Service Unit since July 2019. This unit responds to families that have lost a loved one to an unexpected death in Lapeer County. Emma's future career goal is to become a chief financial officer of a Michigan county.

- **Kalina Mendez** has served as supervisor of finance for the Waukegan Park District in Waukegan, Illinois, since September 2017 and has been with the park district since January 2015. Kalina holds both an AS degree in Business Administration and a BBA degree from Robert Morris University. She is seeking an MS in Accounting and Financial Management from DeVry University's Keller Graduate School of Management and will graduate in May 2022. Upon graduation, Kalina will sit for the Certified Public Accountant Exam with the goal of a promotion to a manager role within the Waukegan Park District or another local government entity.

The recipient of the **\$10,000 Minorities in Government Finance Scholarship** is **Connie Ho**. *Funded by the Government Finance Officers Association.*

- **Connie Ho** has served as senior public affairs specialist at the Irvine Ranch Water District, California, since April 2017. Connie is also a 2020 Popular Annual Financial Reporting Fellow. Connie holds a dual BA degree in English and International Studies through the University of California at Irvine, and is currently pursuing an MPA from California State University at Long Beach. She plans to graduate in June 2022. Connie's future goals include managing projects that build on community engagement, governmental operations, and financial planning. Connie also hopes to bolster diversity and inclusion initiatives in the public sector.

The recipients of the four awards for the **Government Finance Professional Development Scholarship** are **Alexander Rocher, Brandon Saunders, Jessica Tapia, and Brenda Williams**. Each will receive **\$10,000**. *Funded by the Government Finance Officers Association Scholarship Reserve.*

- **Alexander Rocher** works as an accountant at the City of Plantation, Florida. Alexander has been with the City since 2018, and previously worked for Broward County Parks and Recreation. He holds a BA degree in Business Management from the University of Central Florida in Orlando, and is currently seeking an MS in Public Accounting from Nova Southeastern University. He plans to graduate in winter 2021.
- **Brandon Saunders** has served as assistant regional supervisor and senior exam staff for the Texas Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner since May 2016. Brandon has more than a decade of experience in highly regulatory environments and government supporting risk, compliance, and audit functions. Brandon holds a BS degree in Finance from Southeastern Louisiana University; and has Certificates

in Management Development and Project Management from the LBJ School University of Texas at Austin. Brandon is currently pursuing an MBA with a Project Management specialization from Louisiana State University with plans to graduate in 2022. His future goals include continuing to serve as an organizational resource, while managing projects and people in financial regulation, compliance, and consumer protection.

- **Jessica Tapia** has been an accountant with the Village of Barrington, Illinois, since 2018. Previously, Jessica worked with the McHenry County Probation & Court Services. She holds a BBA degree from Elmhurst University, and is seeking an MBA from Northern Illinois University. She plans to graduate in December 2021. Jessica's goals are to one day become a finance director at a municipality and earn her CPA certification.
- **Brenda Williams** has served as deputy treasurer in the Unclaimed Property Division for the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer in Raleigh, North Carolina, since 2013. Brenda holds a BA degree in Communications from UNC-Chapel Hill and a Certificate in Public Executive Treasury Management from the National Institute of Public Finance. She is seeking an MBA from the University of North Carolina, Kenan-Flagler Business School and plans to graduate in 2021. Upon graduation, Brenda plans to continue her service within state government. She intends to use the knowledge gained through the MBA program to have a broader impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of programs and services provided to the public.

The recipients of the three awards for the *Jeffrey L. Esser Career Development Scholarship* are **Megan Lee, Andre Morrison, Jr., and Elizabeth Whitt**. Each will receive **\$5,000**. *Funded by the Government Finance Officers Association.*

- **Megan Lee** serves as senior district office administrator for the North of River Sanitary District in Bakersfield, California. She is seeking a BBA degree from Columbia Southern University and expects to graduate in 2024. Her career goal is to become a finance manager or controller, and eventually a chief financial officer for a government agency.
- **Andre Morrison, Jr.** has worked with the City of Warrensville Heights, Ohio, since 2015. He is currently seeking a BS degree in Public Administration from Southern New Hampshire University and plans to graduate in 2021.
- **Elizabeth Whitt** has worked with Northwest Local School District as an accounting supervisor since 2014. She is pursuing a BBA degree at Wilmington College. She plans to graduate by December 2021. Upon completion of her degree, she will be obtaining her School Treasurer's license. Her future career goals are to become an assistant treasurer and eventually transition to a school treasurer position. Additionally, she participates in several Finance organizations, including GFOA and the Florida GFOA.

For more information about GFOA's scholarships, please contact Gen Carter, Senior Consultant, at gcarter@gfoa.org.

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Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) advances excellence in government finance by providing best practices, professional development, resources, and practical research for more than 21,000+ members and the communities they serve.