

2019 SAMMIES FINALISTS

PAUL A. VOLCKER CAREER ACHIEVEMENT MEDAL FINALISTS

This medal recognizes a federal employee for leading significant and sustained accomplishments throughout a federal career of 20 or more years.

Arthur A. Allen

Oceanographer

U.S. Coast Guard, Office of Search and Rescue

New London, Connecticut

Pioneered and perfected a modeling program that predicts where people lost at sea will be found, cutting search and rescue times and saving thousands of lives during a 35-year career

William K. Boyes, Ph.D.

Environmental Health Scientist

Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Research and Development

Research Triangle Park, North Carolina

Conducted important research on the harm that commonly used chemicals have on eyesight and the central nervous system, leading to new standards to protect the public from overexposure to these toxic substances

Michael G. Kozak

Senior Bureau Official

Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor

Washington, D.C.

For nearly five decades, helped shape foreign policy to protect U.S. interests abroad and advance democracy and human rights around the world

Ann McKee, M.D.

Chief of Neuropathology

Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Boston Healthcare System

Boston, Massachusetts

Revolutionized scientific research and our understanding of the long-term effects of concussions, including chronic traumatic encephalopathy, in veterans and athletes

Venkatachalam "Ram" Ramaswamy, Ph.D.

Director, Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Princeton, New Jersey

Developed a state-of-the-art modeling system to enhance understanding and prediction of global climate and provide earlier and more accurate forecasts of severe weather events, helping save lives and property

MANAGEMENT EXCELLENCE MEDAL FINALISTS

This medal recognizes a federal employee or team for a significant accomplishment that exemplifies efficient, effective and results-oriented government.

Victoria Brahm

Medical Center Director

Department of Veterans Affairs, Tomah VA Medical Center

Tomah, Wisconsin

Restored the quality and safety of a broken health care center for veterans that had become notorious for unsafe medical practices, excessive opioid use and a toxic work environment

Robert Cabana and the Kennedy Space Center Senior Management Team

Director, John F. Kennedy Space Center

National Aeronautics and Space Administration

Kennedy Space Center, Florida

Transformed the historic Kennedy Space Center into a globally distinguished, multiuser launch site for government and commercial space exploration, helping preserve our country's leadership in this important field

Krista L. Caudle, Ph.D. and the Laboratory Assay for Traumatic Brain Injury Integrated Product Team

Product Manager, Traumatic Brain Injury

Department of the Army, U.S. Army Medical Materiel Development Activity

Fort Detrick, Maryland

Developed, tested and acquired FDA approval for the first-ever blood test that detects mild traumatic brain injury in military service members and civilians

Osama El-Lissy

Deputy Administrator, Plant Protection and Quarantine

Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Washington, D.C.

Created a highly effective plan that led the United States to become the first and only country to eradicate the pink bollworm, saving cotton growers tens of millions of dollars annually

Shannon Sartin and Team

Executive Director, Digital Service at the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Digital Service

Washington, D.C.

Led the development of digital tools to make it easier for Medicare patients to access their electronic health records and for doctors to receive payment for the quality, not the quantity, of the care they provide

Paul Shute, Christopher Aragao and David Enright

Chief of Operational Innovation (Shute); Supervisory Veterans Service Representative (Aragao); Management Analyst (Enright)

Department of Veterans Affairs

Washington, D.C. (Shute); Providence, Rhode Island (Aragao); Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Enright)

Dramatically cut the time and manpower needed to make decisions on service-related mental health claims for veterans, helping tens of thousands of individuals each year receive their benefits faster

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS MEDAL FINALISTS

This medal recognizes a federal employee or team for a significant accomplishment in fields such as border security, counterterrorism, defense and military affairs, intelligence, nuclear nonproliferation, diplomacy, foreign assistance and trade.

Kara L. De Castro

Management Analyst
National Nuclear Security Administration
Washington, D.C.

Led pivotal international programs to convert weapons-grade nuclear materials for civilian use and enhanced security cultures to guard against their mishandling and misuse

Leticia Pibida, Ph.D.

Physicist
National Institute of Standards and Technology
Gaithersburg, Maryland

Strengthened our nation's defenses against nuclear and radioactive threats by developing performance standards and tests for detection systems that screen nearly 7 million cargo containers entering U.S. seaports each year

Ryan Shelby, Ph.D.

Diplomatic Attaché and Foreign Service Engineering Officer
U.S. Agency for International Development
Port-au-Prince, Haiti

Provided vital training and resources to help people in Haiti rebuild thousands of homes and roofs ripped apart by a Category 4 hurricane, making the structures safer and stronger to withstand future disasters

John P. Wagner

Deputy Executive Assistant Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of Field Operations
Washington, D.C.

Implemented facial recognition systems that simplify and fortify airport security, helping travelers reach their destinations faster while stopping suspected terrorists and others attempting to enter and leave the U.S. using false documents

Kurt Yankaskas

Program Officer, Noise Induced Hearing Loss Research Program
Department of the Navy, Office of Naval Research
Arlington, Virginia

Identified and implemented solutions to combat noise-induced hearing loss, which affects hundreds of thousands of sailors and Marines, and costs taxpayers billions of dollars each year in treatments for veterans

SAFETY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT MEDAL FINALISTS

This medal recognizes a federal employee or team for a significant accomplishment in fields such as civil rights, consumer protection, cybersecurity, transportation safety, worker safety, and emergency preparedness and response.

Emily Banuelos and the Taxiway Tango Tiger Team

Team Manager, Western Service Area
Federal Aviation Administration, Runway Safety Group
Des Moines, Washington

Designed and implemented enhanced surveillance technology that warns when commercial aircraft are lined up to land on a taxiway instead of the intended runway, averting the potential for catastrophic accidents

Kristen P. Finne

Senior Program Analyst and Manager, HHS emPOWER Program
Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response
Washington, D.C.

Developed a system for first responders to quickly locate and assist 4.3 million Medicare beneficiaries who rely on life-sustaining, electricity-dependent medical equipment and are at risk during prolonged power outages

Emily Joy Haas, Ph.D.

Senior Research Behavioral Scientist, Pittsburgh Mining Research Division
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Improved the health and safety of our nations' mine workers by using behavioral science to influence the adoption of new technologies and practices that reduce their exposure to known hazards

Jamie Rhome

Storm Surge Specialist and Team Lead, National Hurricane Center
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service
Miami, Florida

Created a new forecasting model and warning system that more accurately predicts the deadly storm surge caused by hurricanes, saving lives by alerting residents sooner of the approaching danger

James McWhirter, Mark W. Pletcher and the Navy Bribery Scandal Team

Assistant Special Agent in Charge (McWhirter); Assistant U.S. Attorney (Pletcher)
Department of Defense Office of Inspector General, Defense Criminal Investigative Service (McWhirter);
Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of California (Pletcher)
Mission Viejo, California (McWhirter); San Diego, California (Pletcher)

Uncovered and prosecuted the largest bribery and corruption scandal in the history of the U.S. Navy, resulting in dozens of federal criminal convictions and sanctions against numerous Navy officers

SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT MEDAL FINALISTS

This medal recognizes a federal employee or team for a significant accomplishment in fields such as medicine, economics, energy, information technology, space, meteorology and resource conservation.

Othmane Benafan, Ph.D.

Materials Research Engineer
National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Glenn Research Center
Cleveland, Ohio

Advanced the science and use of a special alloy that returns to its original shape after being heated, leading to groundbreaking technologies that enable safer, more efficient aviation and space exploration

McMahan “Mac” Louis Gray

Physical Scientist, Separations Materials Team
Department of Energy, National Energy Technology Laboratory
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Created a game-changing technology that removes carbon dioxide from power plant emissions and absorbs heavy metals, such as lead, from municipal water supplies

Daniel B. Jernigan, M.D.

Director, Influenza Division
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases
Atlanta, Georgia

Led response efforts for dozens of disease crises, including Ebola, the Zika virus, SARS and West Nile virus, while greatly improving our country’s ability to identify, prepare for and respond to inevitable flu pandemics

W. Marston Linehan, M.D.

Chief, Urologic Oncology Branch
National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute
Bethesda, Maryland

Discovered six different genetic origins of kidney cancer and provided the foundation for the development of targeted therapies that have saved thousands of lives

Christina A. Neal and the USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory Team

Scientist in Charge of the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory
U.S. Geological Survey
Hilo, Hawaii

Carefully monitored a large and sustained eruption of the Kīlauea Volcano in Hawaii and provided vital updates to protect residents, tourists and property from ash, lava and toxic fumes