

2016-2018
Impact Report

Governmental Entrepreneurial Leadership Accelerator



Silicon Flatirons







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Overview

The Governmental Entrepreneurial Leadership Accelerator (GELA) helps governments of any size to approach problem solving in new and innovative ways. The program teaches rising stars within government, along with University of Colorado Law School students, how to develop and use entrepreneurial thinking to address real public policy issues. Through an entrepreneurial boot camp, extensive research, and regular sessions with mentors and government leaders, teams develop and pitch solutions to specific challenges defined by state and local governments.

GELA is run out of the Silicon Flatirons Center for Law, Technology, and Entrepreneurship at Colorado Law in close partnership with the leadership of the City and County of Denver, the State of Colorado and City of Boulder.

3 years 	48 fellows 	12 problem statements 
48 mentors 	20 executive sponsors 	90 boot camp sessions 
222 books distributed 	countless pitch practices 	700 pitch night attendees 




History

- 2015 The idea takes shape. Government, community, and entrepreneurial leaders design a new concept to address the challenge of innovation in government.
- 2016 A 12-week accelerator launches with four problem statements identified by Denver. Nine Denver employees participate, along with five law students.
- 150 community members attend pitch night, with Mayor Michael B. Hancock leading a group of judges listening to four teams propose their solutions.
- One solution—Homework Home—begins its pilot. Another, centering on transportation for the homeless, makes the Mayor’s budget.
- 2017 The State joins the program and co-sponsors problem statements with Denver and selects three employees to participate. Denver sends nine rising stars and four law students are accepted.
- Four teams present their solutions to a panel of judges, including Mayor Hancock and Stephanie Copeland, Executive Director of the Colorado Office of Economic Development and International Trade.
- A solution designed to improve the health inspection of food truck vendors moves into implementation. Ensuing conversations spark the revolution of the relationship the City has with this booming industry, creating a vastly improved licensing experience.
- A fellow from the State Highway Patrol took the knowledge she learned from working on a problem statement involving opioids and helped her department implement the standard for all patrol officers to carry naloxone.
- 2018 The program expands to include the City of Boulder and Denver Public Schools, who select three and two employees, respectively, to participate. Denver has four employees participate and the State has five. Four law students participate, including one from the University of Denver.
- Mayor Hancock and Lt. Governor Donna Lynne, and a crowd of nearly 200 community members, hear the four teams pitch their innovative solutions.
- Two proposed solutions move quickly into implementation: one, to address the outdated system for neighborhood engagement during liquor licensing in Denver, and the other, to make a more effective grant distribution process for the Department of Local Affairs and local communities who use those funds for projects. Initial implementation steps begin on a third solution, to increase the number of foster parents in the state.

Problem Statements

Each team is assigned a problem statement that is suggested and sponsored by a department leader. These statements address actual challenges in Denver and/or the State. Within the GELA program, problem statements have a dual purpose. First, they provide an opportunity for fellows to immediately experiment with innovation, in a controlled environment, using the tools they learn in boot camp. (The boot camp teaches fellows entrepreneurial-based methodologies, such as design-centered thinking and lean startup.) Second, department leaders benefit from focused and dedicated bright minds working to solve the problem, bringing a fresh perspective.

2016

Statement:	Provide internet access for all students
Sponsor(s):	Scott Cardenas, Technology Services, City and County of Denver
Outcome:	The proposed solution creates a pilot program to bridge the “homework gap” experienced by disadvantaged students. The agency enthusiastically embraced the solution and the pilot was conducted during the 2016-2017 school year. Homework Home supplied about 100 families with youth attending Compass Academy with computers and/or connectivity so the middle school students could do homework at home, and therefore keep up with assigned online work. This was made possible through partnerships with PCs for People, Mobile Beacon, and the City and County of Denver Technology Services, which the team choreographed. Since this collaboration, the City and PCs for People have partnered on another project, an innovative engagement program for teens.
	
Statement:	Find cost-neutral approaches to increase transportation offerings for homeless populations
Sponsor(s):	Regina Huerter, Office of Behavioral Health Strategies, City and County of Denver
Outcome:	The proposed solution called for the City to invest in its own fleet of buses for transportation of the homeless. This would have resulted in a cost savings for the City and was included in the Mayor’s final budget and initial steps were taken to implement. However, ultimately, the agency decided not to move forward and purchase the fleet.
	
Statement:	Increase regulatory compliance for marijuana retail shops in a rapidly evolving marketplace
Sponsor(s):	Ashley Kilroy, Office of Marijuana Policy, City and County of Denver
Outcome:	The proposed solution uses connection, education, challenge, and reward to encourage compliance in the industry. The solution was not implemented by the agency.
	

Statement:	Increase solid waste diversion to meet Denver’s Sustainability 2020 goal
Sponsor(s):	Charlotte Pitt, Denver Solid Waste Management, City and County of Denver
Outcome:	The proposed solution creates a neighborhood composting ambassador program to increase the number of subscribers to Denver’s composting services. The solution was not implemented by the agency.



2017

Statement:	Reduce isolation for an aging population in Denver.
Sponsor(s):	Perla Gheiler and Derek Okubo, Agency for Human Rights and Community Partnerships, City and County of Denver
Outcome:	The proposed solution creates a “connector” staff person in a customizable van to engage with older adults and bring City services and resources to reach these citizens in their own neighborhoods and non-traditional settings. The solution was embraced by the department, which secured two grants to fund for the program for two years, starting in early 2019.




Statement:	Eliminate opioid-related overdoses and deaths at the Denver Central Library and surrounding public facilities.
Sponsor(s):	Rachel Fewell, Denver Public Library, and Lisa Straight, Environmental Health, City and County of Denver; Liz Whitley, Public Health and Environment, State of Colorado

Outcome:	The proposed solution addresses the problem through various measures, including adding a Library Resource Officer from the Police Department for increased policy enforcement and a Wellness Team– Opioid Task Force to act as a safety net for those individuals that are disrupted by the enforcement as well as an educational campaign. The library already was working to address the opioid-related overdoses and deaths, and found that the GELA team enhanced some of those efforts. The department is now developing the Wellness Team and educational campaigns through the Opioid Response Strategic Plan.
	On a related note, a team member was able to take her learned knowledge on the opioid crisis and naloxone to her department at the State Patrol and help implement a policy that calls for all patrol officers to carry the life-saving medicine.




Statement: Realize a low-barrier facility to increase service utilization by those experiencing homelessness.

Sponsor(s): Erik Soliván, Housing and Opportunity for People Everywhere, City and County of Denver; Kristin Toombs, Division of Housing, State of Colorado

Outcome:  The proposed solution develops a Navigation Center, which lowers three barriers the homeless population faces when finding shelter (partners, pets, and possessions), while also providing case management for a path to secure, permanent housing. The solution was not implemented by the agency for the City; however, the state is looking into ways that it can support local communities in implementing low-barrier shelters and found the GELA discussion worthwhile.

Statement: Encourage mobile vendors to thrive and be in compliance with the law while enhancing the quality of life for residents.

Sponsor(s): Ashley Kilroy and Nathan Batchelder, Department of Excise and Licenses, and Bob McDonald, Department of Public Health and Environment, City and County of Denver


Outcome:  The proposed solution creates an innovative tracking method for health inspectors to effectively locate and interact with food truck operators while also making the information available to the public. Agency leaders embraced the solution and have worked with food truck vendors and Technology Services to create an app on pocketgov to do just this.

These conversations also led these two agencies to collaborate with the Fire Department, which also inspects food trucks, to improve additional aspects of the relationship the City has with this booming industry, including getting started. A weekly one-stop-shop is now available to applicants for required inspections and licensing to begin operations. This new process has resulted in less bureaucracy, fewer man-hours spent by City employees, fewer trips to license offices for applicants, and thousands of dollars in potential savings for not only the City but also for food truck license applicants annually.

2018

Statement: The outdated system for neighborhood engagement during liquor licensing in the City and County of Denver creates barriers to community participation.

Sponsor(s): Ashley Kilroy and Dominic Vaiana, Department of Excise and Licenses, City and County of Denver

Outcome:  The proposed solution includes making the public hearings notice signs easier to read—which means refining the language as well as making versions in Spanish—and creating an online petition to encourage participation from the community. The signs were updates within a couple months of the program and Technology Services is scheduled to begin the online petitioning project in January 2019.

Statement: Colorado communities experience the negative cash flow impacts of an unnecessarily lengthy, technical, and time-consuming grant distribution process that also ineffectively utilizes DOLA employee resources.

Sponsor(s): Rachel Harlow-Schalk, Department of Local Affairs, State of Colorado

Outcome: The proposed solution eliminates unnecessary steps, employs a simplified agreement option, and leverages and streamlines dissemination of information collected in the DOLA grant management system to drastically reduce the exhaustive wait time for communities and thus allow them to start their projects sooner.



The department has embraced the solution and immediately worked with the State controller to roll out a new contracts template and introduce e-signature for a unilateral contract and is aligning other steps for full implementation in 2019.

Statement: The State of Colorado is experiencing a shortage of foster homes and needs to increase the pool of geographically and culturally appropriate certified foster homes to a total of 2,500 by July 1, 2019 to meet increased demand.

Sponsor(s): Korey Elger and Mary Griffin, Department of Human Services, State of Colorado

Outcome: The proposed solution offers two approaches to bolster recruitment of and improve retention of foster families: a streamlined online application process and a “Foster Village” support system.



The department initiated the budget process for both and is in the early stages of implementing the online application process. While the State is not currently pursuing creating the support system model, some counties are looking into it themselves.

Statement: Low-risk individuals with warrants are spending two to three days in the Denver Detention Center after being arrested.

Sponsor(s): Presiding Judge Theresa Spahn, Denver County Court

Outcome: The proposed solution recommended specific ways to improve the intake process at the Van Cise-Simonet Detention Center for low-safety risk, non-violent defendants with warrants for minor offences through a pilot program. The departments involved plan to run the pilot.



Fellows

See Appendix A for a full list of participants.

Fellows are typically mid-level up-and-comers nominated by their managers or department leaders to participate in GELA. Each has demonstrated leadership characteristics and growth potential. Nomination and selection into the program is a positive and rewarding experience. Fellows take a leave from their regular job duties to participate full time as GELA is an intensive program.

Fellows take the entrepreneurial toolkit they learn in boot camp and throughout the entire program back to their regular job duties. Fellows, and their supervisors, have noted their new mindset, confidence, and skills following GELA.

Additionally, to give exposure to career options in government and public service, GELA welcomes law students to participate as fellows. These students participate in a competitive application and interview process.

Alumni report the program helped them:

- Become a stronger leader
- Return to their job energized
- Reinvigorate their interest in public service in general
- Become a more confident and pro-active employee
- Improve their communication and listening skills
- Feel valued for being nominated
- Learn how to function better on a team
- Expand their knowledge of local government
- Strengthen their research and analytical skills
- Conquer anxieties about public speaking
- Feel motivated to be a change agent in their departments
- Understand their own strengths and weaknesses

“I have more tools now for improving teamwork and solving problems that can be applied in my job. I feel lucky to have been a participant.”

Emily Backus,
Certifiably Green Denver

Marked Professional Growth

Twenty-three percent of the government fellows, having returned to their jobs with new vigor and confidence, have received promotions and/or notable increases in their responsibilities. They each link this professional growth back to their GELA experience.

- Afsoon Ansari, State of Colorado
- Rebecca DeSantis, City and County of Denver
- Bogar Elizondo, Denver Public Schools
- Gilly Hulac, City and County of Denver
- Jim Nethercott, State of Colorado
- Emily Silverman, City and County of Denver
- Marla Trevor, City and County of Denver
- Matthew Wilmes, City and County of Denver

Stories of Fellows & Outcomes

Matthew Wilmes, Department of Public Health and Environment at the City and County of Denver, credits the tools and methodologies he learned in GELA to help implement a joint review application across multiple departments. “Having to pitch and convince multiple departments to work together was a lot easier after learning how to do that process in a meaningful way,” Matthew stated. He also received a promotion following his GELA 2017 experience.

Shortly after completing GELA 2016, **Rebecca DeSantis** was promoted to lead the team that she had been a member of in **Technology Services at the City and County of Denver**. She unequivocally attributes that promotion to her GELA experience. “Leading [the GELA] team through such a complex and visible project gave me confidence in my abilities to lead a team of people and be able to handle difficult conversations,” Rebecca said. She now manages a team of 13 analysts and five contractors.



“I am more confident because of the program. I have already embraced those ideas in my return to the workplace, and I have elevated my productivity.”

Jennifer Williams
Public Works, City and County of Denver

“I got a boost in confidence and improved some of my professional skills through the GELA program. I learned a lot about my self during the program, and I improved in areas where I needed growth,” **Bogar Elizondo of Denver Public Schools** explained. Immediately following his GELA 2018 experience he was promoted. His new position carries much more responsibility, including project assignments that are district wide.

“I continue to use the skills I learned in GELA at work every day,” **Gilly Hulac** said. Gilly is with the **Denver International Airport** and participated in GELA 2017 and received a promotion in early 2018. “GELA was a big part in helping me get my new role!” Gilly said. “I was recommended for the position based on the visibility that GELA gave me in my department, and the experiences with networking, negotiating, strategizing, and presenting that GELA gave me really helped me to ace my interviews. I am now part of a tight-knit, forward-thinking, efficient, entrepreneurial team that is doing great work for the airport!” Gilly was also able to use the subject-matter expertise she gained from her problem statement involving food trucks to help a DIA colleague with a new contract for an airport food truck.

Before GELA 2016, **Emily Silverman** worked in **Public Works** at the **City and County of Denver** as a city planner for a number of years. She mentions she was looking for a change, which coincided with her being selected for the program. “Participating in GELA allowed me to see a different pathway to growing professionally within the City,” Emily said. After GELA, she received a promotion into another department. Currently, as Denver Smart City Program Manager, Emily is responsible for developing and deploying Denver Smart City.

“This was a rare and awesome opportunity that I am grateful to have had the chance to participate in.”

Paul Flores,
Colorado Department of Revenue



Jim Nethercott, with the **Governor’s Office of Information Technology**, explains how GELA 2018 was a transformational experience for him: “GELA changed me; arguably at the core. I am now a more visible and key driver of problem solving within OIT, and one of OIT’s thought leaders around leveraging entrepreneurial thinking to get things done in government.” He cites the confidence he gained through GELA training, and his team’s successful efforts to provide an innovative solution, as helping him step up his leadership in two IT professional communities through speaking and authoring opportunities. “GELA gave me confidence and provided me with the tools I need to be a leader among my peers in achieving rapid results and positive changes,” he proudly explained.

Marla Trevor participated in GELA 2016 and has seen her career develop and transform ever since. Following the program, Marla was promoted from HR Specialist to a Sr. HR Data Analyst in the **Office of Human Resources within the City and County of Denver**. The new position involved more complicated high-level projects requiring Marla provide more detailed analysis. Then, in 2018, engaging the network she amassed in GELA, Marla learned of a position in another department from her GELA co-fellow Rebecca DeSantis, the hiring manager. Marla accepted the position and is now a Workday Analyst in the department.

Appendix A: Participants

City and County of Denver

Cinque	McKinney	City Attorney's Office	2016
Emily	Reisdorph	City Attorney's Office	2017
Lee	Zarzecki	City Attorney's Office	2018
Gilly	Hulac	Denver International Airport	2017
Sylvia	Luna	Denver Sheriff Department	2016
Lisa	Larsen	Denver Sheriff Department	2017
Gene	Dionido	Denver Sheriff Department	2018
Daniel	Carrillo	Department of Finance	2016
Marla	Trevor	Human Resources	2016
Victoria	Aguilar	Human Services	2016
Aaron	Green	Human Services	2017
Maribel	Vasquez	Human Services	2017
Robbie	Evjue	Public Health & Environment	2016
Matthew	Wilmes	Public Health & Environment	2017
Emily	Backus	Public Health & Environment	2018
Emily	Silverman	Public Works	2016
Karen	Nguyen	Public Works	2017
Jennifer	Williams	Public Works	2017
Rebecca	DeSantis	Technology Services	2016
Pennie	Billing	Technology Services	2016
James	Leeper	Technology Services	2017
Jules	Jupille	Technology Services	2018

State of Colorado

Katie	Zaback	Department of Higher Education	2018
Kristina	Heyl	Department of Human Services	2018
Alicia	Haywood	Department of Public Health & Environment	2017
Tracey	Martinez	Department of Regulatory Agencies	2017
Paul	Flores	Department of Revenue	2018
Jim	Nethercott	Governor's Office of Information Technology	2018
Joey	Jenkins	Office of Economic Development & International Trade	2018
Afsoon	Ansari	State Patrol, Department of Public Safety	2017

City of Boulder

Wendy	Korotkin	Boulder Fire and Rescue	2018
Cynthia	Garcia	Boulder Municipal Court	2018
Matthew	Lehrman	Energy Future	2018

Denver Public Schools

Bogar	Elizondo	Office of Choice & Enrollment Services	2018
Shelby	Johnson	Planning and Analysis Team	2018

Law Students

Tyler	Hayden	University of Colorado Law School	2016
Stephen	Carbonneau	University of Colorado Law School	2016
Adele	Ewan	University of Colorado Law School	2016
Christopher	Mochulsky	University of Colorado Law School	2016
James	Bradbury	University of Colorado Law School	2017
Liz	Kashinski	University of Colorado Law School	2017
Andrea	Maciejewski	University of Colorado Law School	2017
Ori	Noiman	University of Colorado Law School	2017
Corian	Zacher	University of Colorado Law School	2018
Tighe	Beach	University of Colorado Law School	2018
Bobby	Dishell	University of Colorado Law School	2018
Matthew	Bartling	Suffolk University Law School	2016
Gideon	Irving	University of Denver Sturm College of Law	2018

Appendix B: Route Fifty Articles

Route Fifty is a digital news publication focused on the people and ideas advancing state, county and municipal government across the United States. In 2017 the publication ran a series of articles about GELA, included contributed articles from four fellows.

- [In Government, 'Failure Is Just an Opportunity to Learn'](#), July 19, 2017, John Tomasi
- [An App for Citizens \(or Health Inspectors\) Frustrated With Finding Food Trucks](#), October 29, 2017, Gilly Hulac
- [Searching for Solutions After 14 Overdoses and One Death in a Library](#), November 1, 2017, Aaron Green and Afsoon Ansari
- [Reducing Barriers to Shelter and Services in Denver](#), November 5, 2017, James Bradbury
- [Reducing Isolation Among Denver's Growing Senior Population](#), November 8, 2017, Elizabeth Kashinski