

## GPL alumni share their paths to leadership during all-staff convening

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The GPL team was excited to welcome back four alumni fellows at a recent all-staff virtual convening. In a keynote conversation, Robert Fisher (GPL Fellow 2017-19) shared his perspectives on public service, writing his own job description, and how the skills he gained from his time as a GPL fellow translate into his current work as Deputy Chief of Staff to Nashville Mayor John Cooper. Highlights from his comments are included below.



Robert Fisher served as a GPL fellow in Memphis, Tennessee from 2017-2019. During that time he helped Seeding Success –a cradle-to-career education organization—explore the role of local government in contributing to improved outcomes for students in a collective impact setting. His primary project entailed [launching a Community Partnership Pilot](#), which served as a proof of concept for testing strategies that better match the highest need students (e.g. students who were chronically absent) with the right support services across Shelby County School District. After completing his fellowship, he went on to lead the initiative as a Director for Strategy & Innovation at Shelby County Schools from 2019-2020. Robert joined the administration of Nashville Mayor John Cooper in June 2020 as Education Policy Advisor. In his current role as Deputy Chief of Staff he drives the implementation of Mayor Cooper’s policy agenda and strategic initiatives. He also continues to manage the administration’s education portfolio.

*Question: What drew you into a career in public service?*

RF: As a child I spent a lot of summers with my grandparents in rural Arkansas. I remember one time going with my grandfather to fix the air conditioner of an elderly woman who lived near us. I asked him, ‘Why are we going over to this lady’s house?’ He said, ‘We’ve been blessed. We need to pass along our blessings to others.’ At a young age I knew I wanted to work in spaces that would allow me to improve the lives of people in marginalized communities, and in ways that have systemic impact. Today I feel as though I have a very strong place-based sense of purpose. Serving communities in the southern U.S. with large populations of people of color is really important to me.

*Question: After completing your GPL fellowship with Shelby County Schools, you were offered a full-time position working to expand the implementation of your initial project. What made you decide to continue working with Shelby County Schools and what was that transition like?*

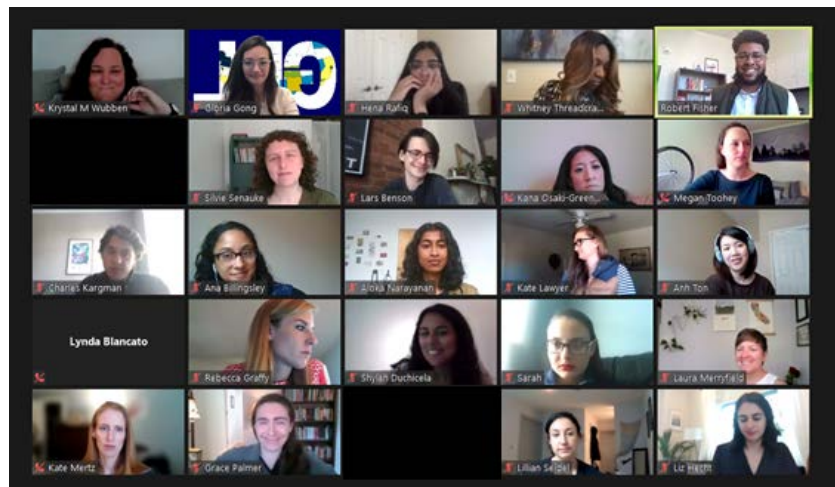
RF: I was really fortunate. Coming up on the second year of my fellowship, I was approached by the Deputy Superintendent with an offer to step into a new role that would build off my GPL project but with an expanded portfolio of work, tackling questions such as: are we leveraging our resources most effectively; are we prioritizing building improvements such that they reach the most high-needs populations, etc. It was an ideal situation, where I was essentially able to write my own job description, and I was especially motivated to continue working with my supervisor, who I saw—and continue to see—as a mentor.

*Question: What are some of the skills and lessons you learned at the GPL that have been especially helpful in your current role as Deputy Chief of Staff to Nashville Mayor John Cooper?*

RF: One of the things I learned as a GPL fellow that I continually confront is the fact that it's really hard getting governments to make big decisions. The GPL taught me how to scaffold a big, hard decision into smaller, easier decisions -- how to frame decision points for really busy leaders in ways that make change more approachable and appetizing. The GPL also taught me the language required to ask good data questions. I may not do a lot of quantitative data analysis myself, but I know what to look for and how to ask the right questions.

*Question: You accepted your position with the Nashville Mayor's Office at a very difficult time. Tell us about your decision-making process and what made you say yes.*

RF: I joined the Mayor's administration in June 2020, in the midst of COVID-19. On top of that, Nashville experienced the horrifying bombing of a downtown commercial building on Christmas Day, as well as major flooding and a deadly tornado. It's been a long year of crises. When deciding whether or not to take the job, I consulted with my parents who admittedly had some reservations. In the end, we agreed: when there is an opportunity to help people in a community you know, where you have something to offer, it's really hard to say no.



GPL alumnus Robert Fisher joins a convening of current GPL staff

In addition to hearing keynote remarks from Robert, the virtual all-staff convening also featured a panel of three recent GPL alumni: Saskia DeVries, Jasper Frank and Samantha Adelberg. Highlights from their comments are included below:



Saskia DeVries assisted Salt Lake County in leading collective impact efforts to redesign homeless service systems during her GPL fellowship. She currently works in Salt Lake County's Office of Data and Innovation, leading performance improvement projects across county programs, including economic development, housing, criminal justice, COVID vaccinations, and diversity & inclusion activities. She recently completed dual Masters' degrees in Public Policy and Information Science at the University of Michigan where she worked with Home Forward in Portland, OR, and the policy office of General Motors in Detroit, MI. Prior to graduate school, Saskia lived in Washington, DC, and worked on the U.S. Census Bureau's international team providing technical assistance to statistical offices in Armenia, Bangladesh, Egypt, India, Jordan, Kenya, Morocco, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, and Zambia.

"I often have to balance having a thirty thousand foot view of a strategic initiative while also appreciating how that initiative will be implemented; what are the smaller decisions that fold up into that larger strategic vision?" - **Saskia DeVries (GPL Fellow 2018-19)**



Jasper Frank worked on reentry projects in Rhode Island and Arkansas while at the GPL. He is currently the Vaccine Lead and Deputy Chief Operating Officer for Covid Operations at the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDOH). Prior to joining RIDOH, Jasper worked as a Program Manager with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services in Rhode Island, where he lead performance management and improvement initiatives at the Department of Children, Youth, and Families; the Department of Behavioral Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Hospitals; and the Rhode Island Veterans Home. He has also managed a workforce development program and taught adult learners (at Delgado Community College in New Orleans) and worked as an investigator at Brooklyn Defender Services.

"The adaptations and systems we set in place to confront COVID - testing, contact tracing, vaccine distribution, etc. - will influence the future of what government operations looks like moving forward. It's exciting to be on the frontline." - **Jasper Frank (GPL Fellow 2017-18)**



Samantha Adelberg is currently a Senior Policy Manager at Unite Us, a startup seeking to build public health infrastructure that connects health and social care providers. She previously served as a GPL fellow at the NYC Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity, where she worked to connect parents who interacted with the child welfare system and had substance use disorders to the appropriate services. Before joining the GPL, Samantha worked as a consultant in Ethiopia and as a member of Acumen’s Impact team, helping companies better understand their customers in order to improve business and social performance. Samantha is a Fulbright Scholar and co-author of a book of Panamanian oral folklore.

“In my daily work I am constantly asking myself, how can we strategically increase access to care for the people and communities that systems have historically failed?” - **Samantha Adelberg (GPL Fellow 2018-19)**

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