

**NASPE Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Awards Nomination**  
Category: Recognition, Innovative Program

State of North Carolina

2015

EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE

Service Awards Program

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## SUMMARY

The State of North Carolina has established an innovative approach to recognizing Excellence in Service with a partnership between the Office of State Human Resources (OSHR), Correction Enterprises in the Department of Public Safety, and the Museum of History in the Department of Cultural Resources.

Prior to 2014, OSHR contracted with a third-party vendor to manage the Service Awards Program. To make the program unique to North Carolina and its employees, OSHR formed a committee to redesign the program based on the following opportunities:

- Offer more meaningful awards
- Make the program more efficient; and
- Instill pride in working for state government.

The employee Service Awards Program, EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE, was born of this effort in January 2014. The primary components of this new, innovative program are:

- Offer products made primarily in North Carolina or, at a minimum, made in the USA
- Celebrate and promote North Carolina's heritage, culture, symbols, and craftsmen
- Create efficiencies by operating the program within state government
- Add another recognition celebrating the completion of a two-year probationary period
- Utilize Correction Enterprises' inmate workforce whose mission is "To provide marketable job skills and transitional opportunities for inmates in a professional and safe work environment while providing quality goods and excellent service to our customers at a savings to the citizens of North Carolina"
- EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE recognizes employees at two years, five years, ten years, and thereafter in five-year increments. The service awards, themselves, are unique items crafted especially for the Employee Service Awards Program. Most of the items are made by inmates in the Department of Public Safety through Correction Enterprises, and others are handmade by North Carolina artisans

The website for the North Carolina Office of State Human Resources is <http://www.oshr.nc.gov/Reward/recognize/recog.htm> and the link to Service Awards is <http://www.serviceawards.nc.gov/>.



**1. Provide a brief description of this program.** EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE recognizes employees at two, five, and ten years and thereafter in five-year increments. The service awards, themselves, are unique items crafted especially for the Employee Service Awards Program. Most items are made by inmates through Correction Enterprises, and others are handmade by North Carolina artisans. The primary components of this new, innovative program are:

- Offer products made primarily in North Carolina or in the United States
- Celebrate and promote North Carolina's heritage, symbols, and craftsmen
- Create efficiencies by operating the program within state government
- Add another recognition celebrating the completion of the two-year probationary period
- Utilize Correction Enterprises, the state's prison industries program which aids in rehabilitating inmates by teaching them trade skills in an effort to provide better opportunities for employment upon release, thus reducing recidivism
- Provide exemplary customer service to include ease of communication and training through a written booklet, a website and online ordering process, and timely delivery of awards.

**2. How long has this program been operational?** This newly revamped program has been offered since January 1, 2014. In March 2013, the Office of State Human Resources (OSHR) approached the Director of Correction Enterprises to assist in reviewing the State Employee Service Awards Program in order to evaluate the possibility of Correction Enterprises contributing products to the program. An inventory of all Correction Enterprises industries was conducted to see if potential items could be manufactured internally and offered as service awards that state employees would be honored to receive. The inventory confirmed that

Correction Enterprises could take over the entire contract, offering products made by inmates and supplemented by products produced by craftsmen throughout the state.

**3. Why was this program created?** This program was established to provide a unique award to State Government employees as they reach milestones in their career. The “Made in North Carolina” products instill employees with pride in our state and in their jobs.

**4. Why is this program a new and creative method?** This new program is a product of collaboration between several state agencies as well as NC artisans. The brand “EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE” was created by a committee which consisted of representatives from OSHR as well as the North Carolina departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Cultural Resources, and Public Safety to include the NC Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice and Correction Enterprises.

Now, 70 percent of the service award selections are made in North Carolina. The most creative aspect of the program is that many of the products are made by incarcerated men and women through Correction Enterprises. The products they make give the inmates valuable trade skills while providing the program with beautiful handcrafted items suitable for the celebration of loyal state employees. Handmade items from local artisans, such as NC pottery, serve as a valuable addition to our overall recognition efforts. The committee contracted with local artist Anna Freeman to add custom artwork as a special feature to the program. Tickets to North Carolina tourist attractions such as the North Carolina Zoo, North Carolina Aquariums, Biltmore House, and Tryon Palace are also unique and popular gifts.

Each state agency receives a training guide for planning and implementing a service award ceremony. These ceremonies are also a great opportunity to recognize employees for their

loyalty and dedication to state government and public service. Recognition in front of peers is a valuable strategy that promotes retention, creates greater feelings of loyalty, and can even improve productivity among employees. In addition to celebrating an employee's contributions these events also serve as a time to reinforce key aspects of outstanding performance.

**5. What were the program's startup costs?** All start-up costs were assumed by Correction Enterprises. They had a facility available that required minor up-fit, and they hired one staff member to supervise the program. Inmate labor and shipping routes were already available. Up-fit costs of approximately \$53,000 included:

- \$11,500 spent on plumbing and roofing repairs, painting and a new heating system.
- \$2,500 spent for the storage racks, storage bins, and work tables.
- \$6,400 used to purchase a new shrink wrap machine.
- \$1,000 spent on a copier.
- \$1,000 used to purchase other miscellaneous items such as scales, racking, pallet jacks, and related shipping materials.
- \$28,826 to \$44,099 salary range for the addition of one staff member.

**6. What are the program's operational costs?** State agencies purchase the awards from a selection of products offered to employees based on their years of service. Operating costs are embedded into the pricing structure of items purchased and all products are priced competitively. Correction Enterprises operates as a receipt-supported entity at no cost to the State of North Carolina. The Correction Enterprises and Service Awards websites are updated internally with no additional expenditure.

7. **How is this program funded?** Correction Enterprises funded the initial up-fit expenses.

Operating costs are embedded in the pricing structure of items purchased.

8. **Did this program originate in your state?** Yes

9. **Are you aware of similar programs in other states?** Most states offer an employee recognition program but we believe North Carolina is uniquely positioned as the only program that focuses on products made in North Carolina and made with inmate labor. This provides a twofold advantage: we are teaching inmates valuable trade skills while promoting state pride by providing items made in North Carolina.

10. **How do you measure the success of this program?** Success is measured by state agency feedback, employee feedback, as well as an annual award evaluation which looks at the volume and popularity of awards items, discontinues unpopular items, and replaces them.

It is also important to note that positive comments have been received from many state employees about the quality of the awards. For example, one recipient personally called the potter of a the pottery serving bowl she received to let her know how much she appreciated her beautifully packaged award that was handmade in North Carolina.

11. **How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?** The program began in January 2014. The sales volume for the first year far exceeded expectations. Each product has been evaluated based on first year orders and some have been eliminated based on lack of orders. Additionally, we have added new items and will continue to evaluate the demand for each item. The program has been extremely successful and so well received that Correction Enterprises has now been asked to create a specialized product group of gifts specifically designed for retirees. We anticipate that the program will continue to grow.