

**2007 Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award Nomination for
Leadership in State Human Resource Management**

Nominee:

**Thomas H. Wright
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1. Describe how the nominee has demonstrated leadership by participating on major state government committees, task forces and/or special projects related to state human resource management.

North Carolina Governor Mike Easley appointed Thom Wright to serve as State Personnel Director in February 2001. Thom's extensive experience in state government human resources (HR) made him uniquely qualified to lead North Carolina's complex system. North Carolina has 90,000 positions subject to the State Personnel Act in both general government agencies and the University of North Carolina system. An additional 30,000 positions in 228 local government agencies also are under this jurisdiction. As State Personnel Director, Thom is charged with providing leadership and direction on all aspects of human resources management to ensure that North Carolina has a productive state government workforce. The State Personnel Director also directs the Office of State Personnel (OSP) and is a member of the Cabinet.

In 2002 Governor Easley appointed an Efficiency Commission, comprised of private sector leaders as well as government officials, to identify long-term efficiencies in personnel, information technology and redundancy. Thom served on the Human Resources Committee, which examined private industry practices and their application to state government. The group focused on increasing productivity, giving managers more flexibility, and rewarding high performing employees with an overall goal of ensuring that state government can compete in the marketplace. The group's recommendations have been a catalyst for innovative strategies.

Thom has been very involved in the development of the North Carolina Pandemic Influenza Plan, a statewide effort that includes working with state and federal agencies to ensure that North Carolina is prepared for a pandemic event. His efforts have focused on the Business Continuity area, specifically the Continuity of Operations Planning (COOP) for the state government workforce. Thom's leadership resulted in a comprehensive plan that ensures state government's essential operations will function effectively in this situation.

For the past three years, Thom has served as one of four state government executives on the Steering Committee for BEACON, North Carolina state government's first integrated enterprise information system. BEACON will modernize and standardize key business processes and will update the fundamentals of state government operations in human resources, payroll, budget management, taxation, data storage and accounting. The first phase of the seven-year project is the development and implementation of an integrated HRIS/Payroll system. As a Steering Committee member representing the HR system and its stakeholders, Thom has worked closely with the project management team, the consulting group, state agency executives and human resources directors to ensure that BEACON's design will meet current and future information needs. He has been a strong advocate for BEACON since its

inception and has devoted significant resources from OSP to make it a reality. Thom has used his influence with key executives and stakeholders to acquire agency resources for the project. With testing of the HRIS/Payroll system set for fall 2007 and “go live” in January 2008, North Carolina is transforming how business is conducted. Thom’s involvement and leadership at each phase of the project – design, blueprinting, and testing – has ensured that human resources “owns” an information system that will enhance its ability to use data to meet critical workforce requirements.

As a result of Thom’s networking and collaboration with SAS Institute, North Carolina state government is developing an information system with predictive modeling capability, an add-on to BEACON’s business warehouse system. The Human Capital Management system will make workforce planning a more efficient and dynamic process. It is through Thom’s efforts that this tool will be available to human resources professionals.

Describe how the nominee has demonstrated exceptional leadership in the field of human resource management beyond your state human resources organization.

Thom has been an active member of the SHRM, IPMA and World at Work organizations. In addition, he completed the Certified Public Manager Program “with excellence” in 1995 and the American Compensation Association (World at Work) certification program in 1999. Thom is a patron of the arts and serves on the Board of the Raleigh Little Theater.

Describe the nominee’s leadership and/or management skills in implementing human resource management programs.

Thom is a visionary, seeing patterns and possibilities that lead to positive change. This, combined with his extensive practical experience, has led to new ways of approaching human resources programs and services. Thom is the driving force behind many key initiatives. His interest in creating a performance culture in organizations led to a partnership with the Office of the Commissioner of Banks (OCOB) to conduct a demonstration project around building a performance culture in a public sector agency. OSP staff worked with OCOB’s leaders to develop a mission, vision, values and strategic plan that include strategic and reporting measures as well as a simplified performance management system that includes performance pay. Employee engagement scores have increased significantly during the first 9 months of the project, and there is anecdotal information that retention and recruitment are enhanced by the performance culture emphasis. Several other agencies have asked to work with OSP to create a performance culture in their organizations.

The Special Emphasis Project was designed to ensure a working environment in which employees are treated fairly, and to improve the functioning of the human

resource system for all employees. Throughout the 1990s, several unfavorable trends were identified by OSP that negatively impacted African-American male and women employees. Interagency teams developed and implemented a number of initiatives to address these employment issues, including: Managing Differences: Females in the Workplace; Leadership Institute for Female Employees; Successful Change in the Workplace; Career Development Program; Mentoring Program; Employee Networks; Recruitment Guidelines and Tools; INROADS Summer Internship; and Managing Differences: Reaching African-American Males. As a result of these initiatives, more minority and women employees have been identified as “high potentials” and there has been an increase in promotions into occupations and levels where they are underrepresented. The Special Emphasis Project received the 2004 Rooney Award for Innovative State Human Resource Management and has been honored with several awards from INROADS, including Corporate Sponsor of the Year. *Diversity Magazine* featured the Special Emphasis program in a 2005 issue. To further demonstrate OSP’s commitment to equity, Thom led the effort to award a \$20 million dental insurance contract to a historically underutilized business.

Under Thom’s direction, OSP staff developed a modern, integrated approach to classifying jobs and managing compensation. This “Career-banding” system combines banding, market-based pay and career development planning into a seamless process. It replaces an outdated classification system that had exploded through the years into over 5,000 separate job titles. At this time, 24% of the positions in the state system have been banded. The project has been a catalyst to start a review of the entire human resources system, an effort Thom has asked for since his appointment.

Thom’s vision includes making learning more available to the workforce, and he has increased the resources and priority for these efforts. North Carolina’s leadership in e-learning is an outstanding example of the results. A variety of excellent synchronous and asynchronous training courses are available to employees across the state on a 24/7 basis, most of them at no additional cost. North Carolina’s e-learning program won the 2005 Rooney Award for Innovative State Human Resource Management, the 2005 Live and Online Award for Synchronous Training, and the 2006 Training Magazine Editor’s Pick Award for “Best Synchronous Program.” In addition to e-learning, Thom advocated for the creation of a statewide Training Resource Network to share resources, reduce duplication of effort and increase training capacity throughout state government. The Equal Employment Opportunity Institute (EEOI) Trainer Network certifies agency trainers to deliver this important program to new supervisors and managers faster and builds agency capacity and expertise.

Mediation was one of the first innovative programs Thom put in place. OSP designed and developed a statewide Employee Mediation and Grievance Process as an alternative method of resolving employee grievances, which

agencies have the option of adopting. Seventeen agencies are using mediation and five more are considering implementation. OSP has sponsored eleven mediation-training sessions with 225 employees completing the training.

Describe how the nominee has demonstrated leadership within the NASPE organization to support NASPE’s mission to share information on human resource issues so that members can better achieve their state’s mission and business objectives. Include evidence of local or national acclaim in the field and influence on other states’ personnel executives.

Thom is an active and involved member of NASPE, attending annual and mid-year meetings and participating in teleconferences. He currently serves on the HRIS committee and has been a member of the program committee. He is very committed to sharing information with colleagues to benefit all states’ programs. In 2005 he brought Dr. John Sullivan, an internationally recognized expert on human resources, metrics and performance culture, to the attention of NASPE members and to present at the 2005 annual meeting. The State of Indiana is using North Carolina’s career-banding program as a model for its program. E-learning programs make it easy to share training resources with other states. Virginia is a large user of the “Online Hiring” course, and seven other states have sent learners to the five-week facilitated “Online Trainer” course. Synchronous open enrollment programs are free and have no boundaries; staff members from other states frequently attend. Thom is a proponent of partnering, eliminating duplication of effort and sharing resources for the greater good at all levels – local, state and national. His involvement with and commitment to NASPE models this belief.

Describe any relevant state human resource management programs or initiatives that were successful because of the nominee’s involvement.

In addition to the programs and initiatives already discussed, Thom has demonstrated his commitment to continuous improvement. In 2001 he realigned the Office of State Personnel into a matrix organization to improve client service and build generalist human resources skills to complement existing specialist expertise. Thom sought resources to provide training and development opportunities for human resources professionals in state government and obtained \$50,000 per year for this effort. Creating a performance culture in OSP is a key goal. A strategic plan outlining the mission, vision, and values with strategic and reporting metrics is in place. The centerpiece of the plan is a HR Innovations web site that will be a solutions center for HR professionals, executives and leaders. With his guidance, state personnel policies and rules have been re-written to allow for more flexibility and clarity. The performance management policy and process have been simplified to allow more flexibility for agencies. North Carolina state government’s HR system has made significant progress because of Thom Wright’s leadership, vision and tenacity.



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MICHAEL F. EASLEY
GOVERNOR

March 30, 2007

Ms. Lisa Collins
2007 NASPE Rooney Awards Program
Council of State Governments
P.O. Box 11910
Lexington, KY 40578-19190

Dear Ms. Collins:

It is my pleasure to endorse the nomination of Thomas H. Wright for the NASPE 2007 Leadership in State Human Resource Management Award. As the State Personnel Director, Thom has demonstrated outstanding leadership in guiding North Carolina state government's complex human resources system. With more than 30 years of dedicated service to the state, Thom's practical experience, vision and creativity have resulted in innovative programs and services that benefit the state government workforce and ultimately all of North Carolina.

Thom has been very involved in key projects with statewide impact. As a member of the BEACON steering committee, he is leading the first enterprise effort to implement an integrated information system. His work on the Governor's Efficiency Commission provided valuable insights and has resulted in human resources system improvements. Statewide initiatives such as the Special Emphasis Project, the E-learning program and the mediation program have created a more equitable workplace, made learning more accessible, and provided tools to resolve conflict constructively at the agency level.

Thom also excels at building partnerships with other organizations that benefit the HR system. The performance culture demonstration project with the North Carolina Office of the Commissioner of Banks and his work with SAS Institute to develop a human capital management system are just two examples. Thom shares information about these initiatives with colleagues in other states and organizations so that they may benefit also.

I hope the Award Committee will agree that Thom is a very worthy recipient of the 2007 Leadership in State Human Resource Management Award. Thank you for your consideration.

With kindest regards, I remain

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Easley".

Michael F. Easley

MFE/ab

