



To NASPE President Juan Williams and Executive Director Leslie Scott Parker,

I enthusiastically endorse Sarah Kerley for NASPE's Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award for Leadership in State Human Resource Management. Serving as a Director At-Large at NASPE, Sarah also serves as Chief Administrative Officer at the Illinois Department of Central Management Services (CMS). Sarah is a cornerstone on my CMS executive leadership team. She is leading the charge to reduce barriers to hiring and creating a pipeline for younger talent to start working at the State of Illinois, and to hopefully *stay* at with State of Illinois. In the past year alone, Sarah has spearheaded the expansion of our relationships with higher education, developed capacity to manage aspects of the statewide employee experience, and piloted an intern-to-hire program that is allowing agencies to bring in fresh talent, at the ground level, for hard-to-fill positions.

Always striving for innovation and efficiency, Sarah played a critical role in updating the State's application process from a paper application to an online application. Sarah designed and helped get passed the most significant changes to Illinois' Personnel Code since its inception in 1955 that helped move the State's arcane and arduous hiring process into the 21st century. Part of that reform was intended to address both recruitment and retention challenges where Sarah laid the groundwork for what is now our Really Great Careers marketing campaign. In 2024, this campaign achieved 76 Million impressions across social media, television, radio, and online search engines. She also leads our statewide recruitment team and our diversity and inclusion team, which hosted and/or participated in 400+ events across the State over the last year to meet the people where they are. Because of these efforts, we have made strides in increasing several aspects of our applicant pool diversity including work experience, ethnicity, and geographic location.

Under Sarah's leadership, since 2019, Illinois has cut its vacancy rate almost in half to 8% from 14%, reduced its average time-to-hire to 111 days down from over 400, and increased the State's overall workforce by nearly 10% up to over 55,000 from just over 50,000. While there are more metrics I could share that would further explain Sarah's indelible impact on Illinois' approach to hiring today, the reality is no data point could effectively encapsulate Sarah's human-centered approach to her work. Whether you are an applicant, a seasoned employee, or the Governor, Sarah's approach to helping you solve your issue is the same. She gives her all, always in all ways.

Ultimately, the State of Illinois continues to grow its workforce, with much credit due to Sarah Kerley. With her experience and achievements, Sarah would make an exceptional awardee of the Eugene H. Rooney, Jr. Award for Leadership in State Human Resource Management.

Thank you for your consideration,

RAVEN A. DEVAUGHN

Director

Illinois Department of Central Management Services

2025 NASPEs AWARD

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

Nominations from dues-paying states are considered for eligibility. Nominated leaders and programs should have a positive effect on the administration of state human resource programs. A state's central human resource department or line agency human resource operations may administer nominated programs.

Programs and projects must have been operational for at least six months and must be transferable to other states. Selection criteria are based on the questions asked on the award application. Included in this packet are the specific criteria for each award and their categories. Nominations are encouraged in all areas of human resource management administration.

NOMINEE INFORMATION

Nominee: Sarah Kerley Title: Chief Administrative Officer

State: IL Agency: Central Management Services

Telephone: 312.718.1317

E-mail: Sarah.Kerley@Illinois.gov

Brief Biography of Nominee (One paragraph, please): As Chief Administrative Officer, Sarah is responsible for the State's personnel and labor functions and is the liaison to the Governor's Office and State agencies, with an emphasis on improving efficiency, quality, and transparency in State hiring and personnel functions. She leads the development and administration of the State's merit employment system for approximately 45,000 State employees. In addition, she oversees the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) to develop equity-based workforce diversity and inclusion strategies to cultivate and retain a richly diverse, high-performing workforce.

NOMINATOR INFORMATION

Nominator: Cynthia Johnson Title: Deputy Director

State: IL Agency: Central Management Services

Telephone: 312-848-0242

E-mail: Cynthia.johnson3@illinois.gov

ALL SUBMISSIONS MUST:

- Meet all eligibility requirements • Meet deadline requirements
- Include a complete nomination packet • Conform to all copyright laws

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DETAILS

Provide a narrative answer for each of the questions. You are limited to four-pages (based on regular 8 1/2 x 11" paper double-spaced in 12-point font). Also, provide one letter endorsing the nominee's achievement. Do not send supporting documentation.

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.

Sarah was the visionary and mastermind behind the creation of the State of Illinois' "really Great Careers" campaign. Although the State had not previously advertised commercially in many arenas, Sarah recognized that the State needed to be more proactive in reaching potential candidates in today's highly competitive environment. As a result of her vision and leadership, the "Really Great Careers" campaign was created and shared on television, radio, and social media, resulting in a very significant improvement in applications for postings of over 1,800%! In 2024 alone, the Really Great Careers campaign has secured 76 Million impressions across multimedia platforms, including social media, television, radio, and online search engines.

The Department of Central Management Services Diversity & Inclusion team is tasked with helping to ensure equity in personnel activity for the State. Sarah has overseen the growth of Diversity & Inclusion team from its inception into its current staff of eleven employees supporting four Employment Plan Councils. Sarah's stewardship of this team has ensured its work forges ahead and provides value to the State of Illinois.

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

For 50 years, the State of Illinois' employment decisions of the Governor's Office and other state bodies were all subject to approval by a federal court under a Consent Decree. By creating strong internal governance on hiring practices including the establishment of Compliance and Hiring Resource Teams, drafting and implementing a Comprehensive Employment Plan, and enforcing policies and procedures that safeguard the integrity of the State's hiring process, the State was finally able to end the court's oversight. Sarah was the primary architect and driving force in the work to create, enact, and enforce all these important safeguards and assure the court that the hiring practices for the State of Illinois were in good hands.

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

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In 2019, Sarah began the work to lead the State's efforts to modernize its Human Resources functions, most notably moving from a paper application process to a fully online electronic one. That change alone accelerated hiring for the State and began to reverse years of declining headcount. The work to modernize continues, as the State is moving toward completion of its transition from a mainframe computer system supporting employee records to an electronic one, using the same system as candidates apply to. Once completed, HR processes will be all in one place, allowing State HR teams to do their work more efficiently and effectively.

The State of Illinois' Personnel Code was established in 1957 and was not designed to support modern HR operations. Under Sarah's leadership, multiple legislative changes have been made to the Code to align with and support the goal of efficient, transparent HR function. Without Sarah's spirit, expansive knowledge of HR function, and vision of how the Code could better ensure the success of the State, the changes to the Personnel Code, which, in turn, allow for the improvement of the State's HR technology and processes, would not have been possible.

4. Describe how the nominee has demonstrated leadership within the NASPE organization in support of 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.

Sarah has a passion for the NASPE community. She is deeply interested in the challenges and successes of other States and is always happy to share her insights and learned lessons. As a result of her interest and recognition of the importance of NASPE's work, she serves on NASPE's Executive Committee. In addition, Sarah oversaw Illinois' preparation as host of NASPE's July '24 national convention.

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

While Sarah's leadership has innumerable impacts on the State of Illinois, one achievement that stands out is the impact her efforts have made on the number of State of Illinois employees. For calendar year 2024, the State experienced a 7% year-over-year increase. That increase increased the State workforce to a level that had not been seen since 2009. This shows Sarah's effectiveness, initiative, and drive have greatly benefited the people of the State of Illinois.

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