



2026 NASPE Awards Program

Advancing the HR Profession Award

Submission Deadline: April 17, 2026

Submission Method: Submit via the 2026 NASPE Awards Nomination Form.

Upload this completed template within the form.

Nominations from dues-paying states are considered for eligibility. Nominated programs or efforts should demonstrate a positive impact on the administration of state human resource 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. Nominations are encouraged in all areas of human resource management administration.

NOMINATION INFORMATION

Title of Nomination: Illinois' Emerging HR Leaders Program

State: IL

Contact Person: Sarah Kerley

Contact's Title: Chief Administrative Officer

Agency: Illinois Department of Central Management Services

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NOMINATOR INFORMATION

Nominator: Bobby Tucker

Title: Deputy Director of Statewide Personnel

State: IL

Agency: Illinois Department of Central Management Services

Telephone: 217-606-9561

E-mail: Bobby.Tucker@illinois.gov

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- Meet all eligibility requirements
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- Include a complete nomination template
- Conform to all copyright laws



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DETAILS

You may include links to websites as part of your nomination. Narrative responses should generally not exceed 4–6 pages (12-point font, double-spaced).

1. Please provide a brief description of this program.

The Illinois Department of Central Management Services' Emerging HR Leader Program is a structured professional development experience designed to prepare up-and-coming HR Managers for the role of agency HR Director. The program combines foundational HR knowledge with hands-on, real-world application through mentorship, job shadowing, and applied HR projects. Participants develop the skills, confidence, and practical experience needed to contribute strategically to HR initiatives and organizational success.

Over the course of the program, participants also complete and present on a final project to gain experience in implementing a solution to an issue that they identify. Examples of the variety of final projects presented by cohort participants include impactful topics like creating a comprehensive, yet effective new employee orientation, streamlining the process to approve the filling of a vacancy, developing a training curriculum for managers and supervisors, creating a program to provide career development guidance for current employees, and creating standardized tracking and visibility into the filling of vacancies for all stakeholders.

Program overview: https://ilgov-my.sharepoint.com/:b/g/personal/bobby_tucker_illinois_gov/IQCuDyw_WbO-S4ersw0cVhoCAVbDyQ_WPXDu_34WRkXF2mE?e=NHDU8V

Program Collage: https://ilgov-my.sharepoint.com/:i/g/personal/bobby_tucker_illinois_gov/IQCblfWo51fTrHpG1ILMb2CAY_A_T4Kg3M8AkgaAgik960?e=6Mnpyf

Program informational video:
[Illinois Emerging HR Leader Video.mp4](#)

2. How long has this program or effort been operational?

The program's inaugural cohort began in May of 2025 and graduated in April 2026. Applications are now open for the program's second cohort.

3. Why was this program/effort created?

This program was created to address the need to prepare the next generation of agency HR Directors for the State of Illinois. We recognized that many of our aspiring HR leaders were not

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experiencing the many facets of State HR offices nor were they seeing alternative ways of performing the work and solving problems. Through mentorship, job shadowing, monthly meetings and presentations, networking, and a final project, those aspiring leaders are able to learn a great deal more about the HR Director role and be more prepared for when they step into that position than had previously been possible.

4. What are the costs of this program/effort?

Very minimal. The greatest investment is the time spent mentoring, job shadowing, attending meetings, etc. Other than the graduation ceremony, we did not have any expenses.

5. How is this program/effort funded?

The limited expenses we had were funded through the Department's Bureau of Personnel's regular operating budget.

6. How do you measure the success of this program/effort?

Success for this program can be measured most directly in the outcomes for the participants, as the primary objective of the program is to prepare the next generation of agency HR Directors. To be fair, that is dependent upon the available vacancies, but, in the short time since the program's inception, the participants have already achieved success. One promoted into an agency HR Director role during the cohort, while another accepted a promotion – although not into an HR Director position. The other four graduates of the cohort are all in a substantially better position to move into an HR Director role, should one become available. Anecdotally, the participants all grew professionally – and personally – a great deal over the past year, whether it was opening up a shy personality or gaining a much broader understanding of the possibilities and challenges of the important work of an agency's HR Director.

That being said, the success of any professional development program is ultimately through the impact it has on its participants. To that end, there is no better expression of the personal impact of the Emerging HR Leaders Program than a few comments from graduates:

"The mentors, the job shadows, the guest speakers – all such valuable knowledge that we were able to gain and carry with us. I'm excited for my next chapter with the State and so thankful for this opportunity to help get me there."

"Being part of EHRL was such a meaningful experience, and I am incredibly grateful for the time, effort, and belief you invested. Your encouragement truly made a difference, and it helped me grow in ways I will carry forward. I appreciate the opportunity, it means more than you know."

"Being part of the Emerging HR Leaders program has been transformational. Not just in what I learned, but in the relationship and community we built together."

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7. How has the program/effort changed since its inception?

The program has grown from an idea on a Word document into a robust learning experience. Feedback and insights from the participants and the program's Steering Committee have allowed us to refine the program's offerings to ensure the best use of time on those parts of the program that were most valuable or needed by the participants. Additional preparation, training, and planning have been included for our second year to ensure the most impact for mentoring and job shadowing, as well as retaining the most impactful presentations and activities and adding new ones requested by the participants.

8. Can this program or effort be adapted or replicated by other states? If so, how?

Absolutely! The program's plan and materials can easily be adapted to fit each state's needs.

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