

**The National Association of State Personnel Executives**

**Eugene H. Rooney, Jr.**

**Innovative State Program Award**

**Submission**

**Program Title:** Young Employees Initiative

**State:** North Carolina

**Contact Person:** Linda D. Coleman, State Personnel Director

North Carolina Office of State Personnel

1331 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina

(919)807.4908 (telephone) (919)733.0653 (fax)

## **Program Summary –**

In 1999, the Office of State Personnel (OSP) embarked upon a Special Emphasis Project (SEP) to address employment trends and respond to concerns that are unique to specific demographic groups in NC State Government. The Young Employees Initiative (YEI) is one component of the OSP's Special Emphasis Project (SEP). This Initiative's purpose is to seek ways state government can create an inclusive work environment for young employees, specifically those aged 18-29. This Initiative is critical in providing state government the tools necessary to recruit, engage and retain a pool of competitive and skilled employees who will be eligible to take the place of retirees.

The YEI has an Advisory Committee, which is led by OSP staff and includes young employees aged 18-29 from various agencies and professions throughout State Government. The YEI Advisory Committee has evolved from its original role of conducting research and submitting reports to that of strategic planning and implementing programs. While the Advisory Committee continues to conduct surveys, issue reports and make recommendations to the State Personnel Commission, it now takes the lead in developing and implementing programs which support a work environment that respects and values young employees; designing marketing tools to attract young people to State Government; and promoting State Government as a viable career option for young people. Also, YEI Advisory Committee members are serving in ad hoc capacities on OSP committees that make decisions which impact all State employees.

The YEI is a tremendous value for NC State Government. It has yielded great benefits with minimal operational costs. The YEI has increased awareness of the value of employing young people and the importance of community service and work life balance. The Project Lead receives countless inquiries regarding the Initiative and the work of the Advisory Committee. The YEI Advisory Committee is becoming the voice needed to help ensure that State Government recruits, engages and retains young employees to provide services to North Carolinians.

**1) Program Description:**

The Young Employees Initiative (YEI) is a program designed specifically for the recruitment, engagement and retention of young individuals aged 18-29 in North Carolina State Government.

The program, originating from the Special Emphasis Project (SEP) on Young Employees is administered under the Office of State Personnel's (OSP) Division of EEO, Diversity and Compliance. The YEI Advisory Committee consists of young employees aged 18-29, representing various agencies and professions and guides the strategy for the program. The Division Director serves as senior advisor, and a Human Resource Consultant serves as project lead for the YEI program.

The role of the YEI Advisory Committee is to research, plan and make recommendations regarding the recruitment, retention and engagement of young employees. Sub-committees identify, develop and execute strategies to address recommendations of the full Committee that targets young people. The Committee also monitors the effectiveness of the initiatives.

In addition to serving in an advisory capacity, Committee members participate in various activities which include: networking sessions; community service projects and represents OSP at college and university career fairs; the NC State Fair; and the State Wellness Expo.

**2) How long has this program been operational?**

The program has been operational since 2008, beginning with the establishment of the Young Employees Advisory Committee by the SEP. The Committee was charged with researching and examining how to recruit, engage and retain young employees. The Committee coined "Young Employees Initiative" (YEI) as the program title.

The Committee researched "best practices" for embracing the younger generation of employees, statistical data (quantitative), and focus group data (qualitative). The research revealed that young employees like giving back to the community, assuming a balance between work and other aspects

of their lives, using more efficient technology, and seeking opportunities to develop and grow professionally. The Young Employees Project Report was completed and presented to the State Personnel Commission at its October 2008 meeting. The Commission accepted the Report's recommendations for action.

### **3) Why was program the created?**

The program was created to address two major trends in the labor force: the declining number of young individuals available for work, coupled with the increasing number of employees eligible to retire in NC State Government. OSP created the Young Employees Initiative to help counteract the potential "knowledge drain."

A 2007 report from the US Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics stated that the number of young workers entering the labor market will not be sufficient enough to replace those who are eligible to leave by 2015. To put this in perspective, the percentage of NC State Government employees eligible for retirement balloons from 9.4% of the workforce in 2010 to 34.4% in 2015.

The turnover rate of young employees in State Government was another reason the program was created. The projected number of employees eligible to retire and the potential loss of knowledge that will impact the quality of services to the citizens is of concern for the state. Adding to this dilemma was a pattern of a higher turnover rate among young employees than other state employees, as indicated in the 2008 Young Employees Project Report.

### **4) Why is the program a new and creative method?**

The YEI Advisory Committee is composed of current state employees aged 18-29, whose purpose is to identify and address concerns surrounding the recruitment, engagement and retention of other young people. The issues are addressed from the perspective of the targeted audience, using many of the findings from the 2008 Young Employees Report.

The YEI Advisory Committee members not only advise OSP on methods of engaging young

employees, but also implement initiatives to market and promote State Government as a viable career option. Some of the initiatives include: highlighting available benefits which would appeal to younger workers (such as flexible work options and student loan repayment programs); promoting Community Service Leave; developing a marketing campaign targeting young potential employees (such as a Young Employees brochure, logo and motto); providing input on the state's new electronic application process known as E-Recruit; and developing creative recruitment techniques. One creative technique is young employees are actually recruiting at college/university career fairs. This impresses students by giving a new face to state government.

**5) What is the program's start up cost?**

There was no cost to start up the program.

**6) What are program's operational costs?**

The program operates using skills from the YEI Advisory Committee members and existing OSP staff and resources. Currently, the program's operational costs are limited to printing materials. In the event of outside programs and activities, state agencies and universities continue to recognize the importance of the work of the Young Employees Initiative and have waived any fees that would be considered as operational costs.

**7) How is the program funded?**

The program is administered through the Office of State Personnel. OSP is a state agency which receives general fund appropriations from the NC Legislature.

**8) Did this program originate in your state?**

NC State Government developed/designed the Young Employees Initiative (YEI) to address the issues of recruitment, engagement and retention of young employees. YEI is part of the OSP's 1999 Special Emphasis Project which was established to develop or enhance new/existing programs to address employment trends for all demographic groups.

**9) Are you aware of similar programs in other states?**

Many states speak to the concerns of an aging workforce and recognize the need for recruitment and retention of younger employees. However, OSP's recent research did not reveal any states that have developed programs similar to the Young Employees Initiative.

**10) How do you measure the success of this program?**

There are no formal evaluation measures at this time. However, OSP has examined the turnover rate (quantitatively) and feedback (qualitatively) from young employees, and other stakeholders. Comments from young employees range from "This is something we really need" to "I'm glad we have this type of program for young people." Comments from college students at career fairs indicated they had no idea that the state offers opportunities in so many professions. Also, there have been several requests for young employees to be involved in OSP's ad hoc committees. The turnover rate for young employees has declined from 20.7% in 2007 to 14.6% for 2011.

**11) How has the program changed and/or differ since its inception?**

The program began as a Young Employees Advisory Committee to research and make recommendations for attracting, engaging and retaining young employees. It has evolved from being solely advisory in nature to now being a Committee that designs and implements programs.

The Committee's presence is visible at college and university career fairs, the NC State Fair and the OSP Wellness Expo, conducting networking activities for young employees, serving as ad hoc advisors to other OSP initiatives, i.e., Teleworking, On-boarding, E-Recruit, etc. Highlights of young employees' activities have been included in the Governor's blog and on the OSP Facebook page. The YEI Advisory Committee continues to seek and develop marketing tools i.e. social media, designed to be more attractive to young people as they consider their careers.

A new program of YEI is the "Reverse Career Fair." This program is designed to bring in career counselors, school deans, and students from area colleges and universities to broaden their understanding of the various career opportunities within State Government.