

**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.**

Human resource management in Virginia government has undergone a systemic change under the leadership of Sara R. Wilson, who was appointed director in 1998 and immediately became involved in overseeing a range of HR initiatives that have dramatically altered how the Commonwealth's workforce is managed. Through her collaborative approach, Ms. Wilson brought together managers and employees in effecting the most radical change in the compensation system in 40 years. Ms. Wilson's stewardship of compensation reform is perhaps her single greatest achievement, but by no means the only one. She has taken the lead in initiative "E-HR," moving traditional HR services from the file cabinet to the Internet, directing the utilization of Web-based services for health care, recruitment and compliance with EEO requirements.

The 2007 "Grading the States" gave the Commonwealth of Virginia the only A received for People management as a result of her leadership. The department also received an International Personnel Management Association "Best Practice" Award for innovative information technology recruitment. Her valued advice and counsel has been utilized through her membership on a number of *ad hoc* committees and task forces on compensation and technology-related issues. Ms. Wilson has also been a key player in training other directors and senior-level state employees through her involvement with and teaching at the Virginia Executive Institute during the time she has been with DHRM.

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

In assessing Sara Wilson's leadership beyond her agency, it is important to understand the past to appreciate the present. Since 1974, the director's position in the Department of Personnel and Training (from which DHRM evolved in 2000) has been essentially a revolving door. No director, a political appointee of the governor, lasted beyond that governor's four year-term. The lack of continuity, the absence of institutional memory, hobbled the agency and led to it being regarded with suspicion by the legislature. At one point, the personnel department of Virginia state government was on the verge of being dissolved by one house of the legislature, only to have its funding restored as part of a budget compromise. When she was appointed DHRM director after a stellar career in the private sector, Ms. Wilson brought to state government a determination to reengineer its processes. Under her leadership, the state of HR management in Virginia underwent a dramatic cultural shift, scraping the patina of age from time-encrusted policies and moving from "We've always done it that way" to "We can find a better way." Again, her collaborative leadership style made the difference. She is constantly finding new ways to bring people together, whether in small groups assigned to solve a problem or in large groups, such as the annual HR conference she initiated that brought together over 400 HR professionals for a three-day, intensive program of HR-related topics. In many respects, Ms. Wilson leads with her heart. She is a deeply caring person whose compassion for others constantly seeks solutions to troubling problems of the state workforce. In her role as chair of the annual employee charitable fundraising campaign, she has led the effort to have greater employee involvement in the program, which in 2007 raised over \$4.4 million, despite the looming economic downturn.

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

Sara Wilson is the embodiment of "Management By Walking Around." She has transformed HR management by actually meeting with HR managers and agency directors on their own turf, constantly asking how processes and programs can be bettered or whether there were problems she could help solve. It is not an overstatement that before Ms. Wilson assumed the directorship of the Commonwealth's central personnel agency, seldom had other agency heads met with or even been introduced to the state's personnel director. Because the central personnel department oversees a diverse workforce that includes colleges and universities, independent agencies and the legislature in addition to executive agencies, a cohesiveness of policy is of paramount importance. Under Ms. Wilson's leadership, that cohesiveness has been achieved in stark contrast to the hodgepodge of policy exceptions that had been the norm for decades. Her leadership and management skills, along with her eagerness to solve problems through face-to-face meetings, led to her reappointment as DHRM director, the first such reappointment of the agency's director in nearly 30 years. What is remarkable about her initial appointment and subsequent reappointment is that they were made by governors of two different political parties.

**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.**

Under her guidance and direction, DHRM has accumulated several honors, including a prestigious 2002 National Innovation Award from the Council of State Governments for the agency's Workers' Compensation program. Not only have new

efficiencies been introduced that have reduced workers' compensation costs by \$29 million over a three-year period, injured workers were returning to work faster, resulting in a 31 percent decline in lost-time claims. She has also been active in NASPE, serving on the Executive Board and Marketing and Finance Committees. There she exhibited the same traits of openness, collaboration and problem solving that have made her such a valuable asset for Virginia's state workforce.

Ms. Wilson recently served as President of the NASPE and hosted the 2007 Annual Meeting. It was agreed by all that it was an annual meeting that will set the standard for all future meetings. The work that Ms. Wilson did as President helped to further the cause of human resources being able to have a seat at the table when Governors and others are making important decisions.

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

There is not a single area of human resource management in Virginia that has not been improved during Sara Wilson's tenure as DHRM director. Increasing use of technology, greater choice of benefits, a totally revamped compensation system that places a premium on performance, emphasizing "e-everything – utilizing technology to reform recruitment through the use of the Recruit Management System and training through the Learning Management System while eliminating redundant agency systems - establishing agency credibility with legislators and other constituencies.

The list goes on, evidence of the positive impact she has had on processes and policies since her initial appointment in 1998. Selection as this year's Rooney Award recipient would recognize the outstanding leadership Ms. Wilson has exerted in human resource management, not only within the borders of the Commonwealth of Virginia, but throughout the United States through her involvement with the National Association of State Personnel Executives.



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Office of the Governor

Timothy M. Kaine  
Governor

March 28, 2008

Eugene H. Rooney Awards Program  
National Association of State Personnel Executives  
**VIA E-Mail**

Dear Judges:

It is with sincere appreciation for her outstanding record of accomplishment and her role as a national leader in the field of human resource management that I second the nomination of Sara Redding Wilson for the Rooney Award sponsored by the National Association of State Personnel Executives.

In the weeks leading up to my inauguration as Virginia's 70th Governor in 2006, I was determined to bring agency heads of the highest caliber to the Commonwealth's government. But I was also concerned about continuity in critical areas, including human resource management.

With that concern in mind, I reappointed Sara R. Wilson as Director of the Virginia Department of Human Resource Management, marking the third administration she would serve since her appointment in 1998. The fact that she was initially appointed by a member of a different political party than my predecessor and myself speaks to her outstanding record of accomplishment during her tenure as Director.

Her sense of fairness, ethical standards above reproach and strict non-partisanship, coupled with her genuine desire to help solve tough problems, are recognized across state government. The fact that Virginia was the only state to receive an "A" grade in the People category of the Governing Performance Project only reinforces the talent she has displayed in guiding human resource management in the Commonwealth.

Ms. Wilson is a valuable asset to my administration. I respect her judgment on a range of HR-related issues, especially during this time of budgetary pressures. I can think of no one more deserving of NASPE's Rooney Award than Sara Redding Wilson. I hope you will give her nomination every consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "TK", written over a horizontal line.

Timothy M. Kaine  
Governor