



Promoting Program Accountability in Adult Education: The National Reporting System

Annual Report

October 2008 to September 2009 (FY09)

Introduction

The National Reporting System (NRS) for Adult Education is the outcome-based accountability system for the state-administered, federally funded adult education program. The NRS meets the accountability requirements of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), identifies and defines measures for national reporting, establishes data collection methods, and sets requirements for reporting to the U.S. Department of Education (ED). NRS data include student descriptive and participation measures, and outcomes that measure student success in

- Improving literacy skills
- Obtaining and retaining employment
- Obtaining a GED or secondary credential
- Entering postsecondary education

The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is working under the direction of ED's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) to assist states in meeting NRS requirements through a technical assistance and support project titled *Promoting Program Accountability in Adult Education*. This annual report provides an overview of the project's achievements over the past year. Through training and technical assistance, data collection and analyses, support for assessment and implementation of federal policies and procedures, and communication and dissemination of important NRS-related information via *NRSWeb*, the NRS support project ("the NRS project") has promoted continuous improvement of the adult education program. To learn more about the project and its products and services, visit *NRSWeb* at <http://www.nrsweb.org>.

Training and Technical Assistance

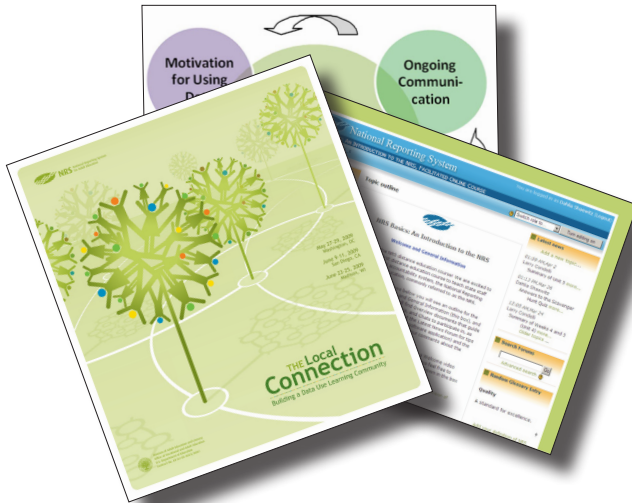
Training and technical assistance are central activities of the NRS project and provide states with the information and tools they need for data-driven continuous improvement. Through regional small-group training, self-guided and facilitated online training, and assistance to individual states, the NRS project has helped states implement NRS requirements and procedures, improve their data systems and data quality, and use data to improve local programs. This year, participants have again given the project's training high marks. They praise the organization of the sessions and the opportunities it gives them to meet together and develop plans and to interact with their peers from other states that are also working on using data for program improvement and other NRS-related issues.

Training

Regional Training

In the summer of 2009, the NRS project held three 3-day regional training events on *The Local Connection: Building a Data Use Learning Community*. This training focused on the characteristics and essential elements of learning communities at the state and local level. Along with presentations on the steps in the process of establishing and sustaining a data use learning community, the training reviewed the barriers to and motivators for using data and how learning communities can facilitate a data use culture in local programs.

Included in the training was a demonstration of selected technology and communication tools (e.g., blogs, social network services, document



sharing applications, and wikis); descriptions of how state and local staff could use these tools to build and maintain the interaction needed to sustain a data use learning community; and a group project where participants had the opportunity to experiment with at least one of the demonstrated tools. Some state groups customized the tools for their own use and have since launched them publicly. For example, staff from New York used a social network service to develop and launch an interactive communication platform for awardees of Literacy Zone grants in New York called “NYS Literacy Zone.” Participants also developed a state action plan for developing local learning communities to encourage locals to value and use data for program improvement.

This training helped participants understand how implementing data use learning communities can

Comments from Participants at the 2009 NRS Regional Trainings

It was thorough and engaging and provided opportunities for shared thoughts and efforts.

The tools were instrumental in making it possible to envision getting a learning community started.

I am confident that our team will be able to implement and use the information, concepts, and materials presented here when we return to our state.

be a powerful strategy to overcome the persistent barriers local programs face in using data for program improvement. The three regional meetings included 80 staff from 38 states and territories.

Online Training

Online training is a flexible, low-cost way to assist adult educators and administrators with NRS-related topics. *NRSWeb* provides six interactive, self-guided training options that include 31 courses and are designed specifically for adult education staff. These courses allow trainees to work independently at their own pace based on instructions included in each course’s Web training materials. Course topics include NRS basics, data quality, and the use of data.

This year the project launched an online version of its popular 2006 *Learning To Be a Data Detective* training. This in-depth seven-part course includes a variety of readings and Excel-based tools that illustrate the art of being a data detective and using data to monitor performance, understand programs, and plan and evaluate program improvements efforts.

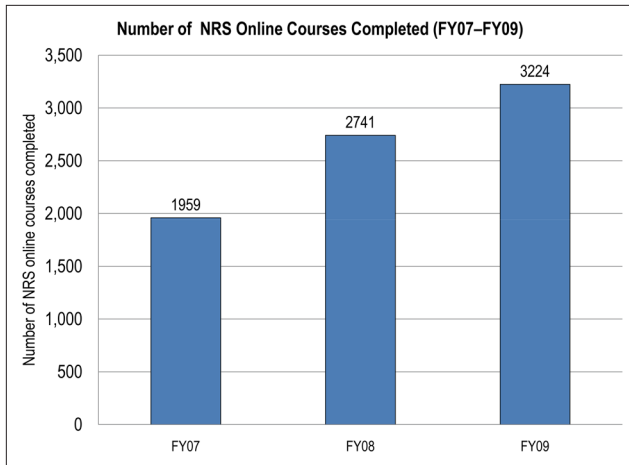
Comments from Participants in the New Data Detective Online Course

[T]his training was well-organized and thoughtfully developed.

[T]he Excel worksheets provide a good hands-on experience.

[I liked learning how] using data can help adult education programs find successful practices.

Access and use of NRS self-guided online courses continued to increase (nearly 20%) since last year. In total, users completed more than 3,200 courses. And more than 740 new users have registered for the online NRS courses since October 2008, 577 of whom completed at least one course (77%). Of the six training options *NRSWeb* offers, the three most popular were the *Data Use Guide*, *What is the NRS?*, and the *Data Quality Guide* courses.



The project launched its first facilitated online course, NRS Basics, in 2009. This 7-week course presents an overview of the basic requirements and ideas behind the NRS and is designed for state staff with little knowledge of the NRS. The course is facilitated by instructors and includes a variety of activities, including narrated presentations, readings, facilitated discussions, and a group project. Topics covered are

- History of the NRS,
- Principles of accountability,
- NRS measures and methods,
- Assessment and goal setting for the NRS, and
- Designing good NRS data systems.

The first course included 20 participants from 14 states.

Comments from Participants in the New NRS Basics Online Course

Thank you for creating such an interactive learning venue.

I enjoyed this course very much—it was easier than I thought to maneuver the online process. I enjoyed reading what other states are doing—my peers are impressive!

[T]his course has helped connect the dots, so to speak, and it gives me a much better understanding of why we have these policies and what we are working toward in ABE [adult basic education] as a whole.

Technical Assistance

The NRS project staff has in-depth knowledge of the national adult education program, the NRS and its requirements, and data systems for collecting and reporting information for the national system. At the request of the DAEL, project staff have reviewed state data systems to provide assistance on plans for developing, revising, and implementing them. Project staff have also conducted workshops for state and local staff on NRS requirements, collection systems, improving data quality, and using data. Last year, three states—Rhode Island, North Dakota, and Utah—received direct technical assistance. NRS staff reviewed each state’s data system and discussed findings with Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE) and state staff.

Data Collection and Analyses

The collection and use of NRS data are vital to accountability and program improvement in adult education. Quality data paint a picture of how adult education is doing and provide a guide for action. The project has assisted DAEL in monitoring the quality of state data and describing the adult education program, provided information to the field, and presented data to inform and improve practice.

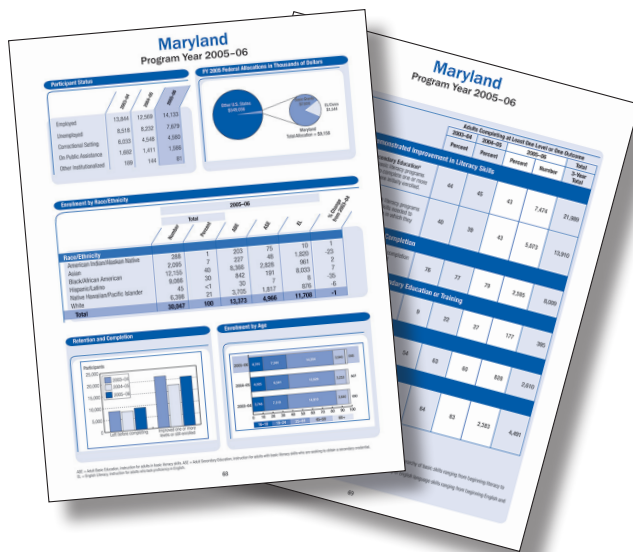
NRS Data Quality Checklist

To allow DAEL to assess the quality of NRS data, states must complete the NRS data quality checklist annually along with their annual NRS data submission. This year NRS project staff used a Web-based tool for states to complete their checklist and monitor their progress over time. Specifically, states could complete the checklist over time, as well as print and save their submitted checklists for their records and future reference. Further, NRS project staff were able to identify which states had received the announcement, started the checklist, and submitted their checklist. Once all states had submitted their data, NRS project staff analyzed and submitted state responses to DAEL.



Report to Congress

Each year the NRS project team assists DAEL in preparing the annual *Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Report to Congress on State Performance*, which is a barometer of adult education at the national and state levels. It provides Congress and the public an overview of the purpose of the adult education program, data on student enrollment and demographics, and a summary of student educational gain over time and achievement of other goals (including obtaining a secondary credential, entering postsecondary education, and finding and keeping a job). In addition to national data, the report provides demographic, fiscal, and performance data for each state, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. Congressional reports may be found on the OVAE's Web site at <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/resource/index.html>.



Assessment

The NRS project team assisted DAEL in implementing the 2008 regulations issued by ED that require all assessments to be evaluated by independent experts for their suitability for use in the NRS. Staff worked with test publishers and trained expert psychometricians to assist them in completing the assessment review process.

The project continues to assist states in understanding assessments by giving them the information they need to make informed

decisions. The *NRS Assessment Database* helps fulfill this function by providing basic information about adult education tests (submitted by test publishers) in an easily searchable format on *NRSWeb*. This year staff continued to maintain and expand the database.

Communication and Dissemination

The NRS project team communicates and disseminates information on NRS policies, procedures, and data, including changes in federal policy. This knowledge is crucial to the successful implementation of the federal accountability system. The NRS project provides guidance through publications, including the *NRS Implementation Guidelines* and *NRS Tips* that are regularly updated and posted on our primary communication vehicle, *NRSWeb*.

NRS Implementation Guidelines

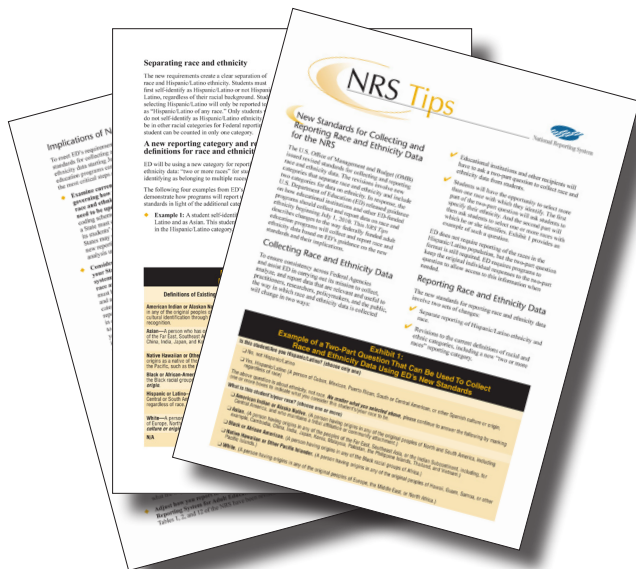
The *NRS Implementation Guidelines* provide guidance on data collection, data matching, and quality control. It also describes the data flow process, provides definitions of core and secondary measures, and discusses NRS reporting requirements. As the NRS evolves, project staff revise the guidelines to include new changes and modifications. This year, the project added new guidance for reporting student race and ethnicity as well as minor editorial changes.

NRS Tips

NRS Tips are short summaries that give brief, timely, and understandable explanations of NRS policies and procedures. They have typically been released after important changes in NRS requirements or in conjunction with training or other events. During the past year, the NRS project released one *NRS Tips* on the Web site, titled *New Standards for Collecting and Reporting Race and Ethnicity Data for the NRS*. This *NRS Tips* describes changes to the way federally funded adult education programs will collect and report race and ethnicity data beginning July 1, 2010, based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education (<http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2007/pdf/E7-20613.pdf>). The revisions involve new



categories that separate race and ethnicity and include two categories for data on ethnicity.



NRSWeb

One of the primary means of communicating with the adult education community is through the project's Web site, *NRSWeb*, located at <http://www.nrsweb.org>. *NRSWeb* is the adult education field's source for NRS policies and procedures, changes to the federal accountability requirements and guidelines, publications and related information, self-guided and facilitated online training, materials from face-to-face training, webinars, and a calendar of future events.



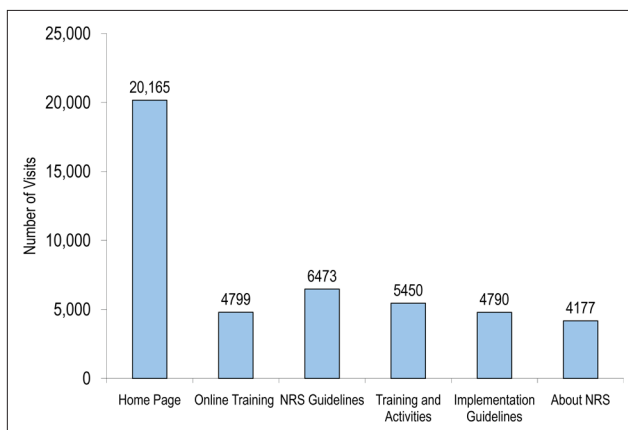
New state staff are directed to the Web site to obtain materials (such as the *NRS Implementation Guidelines*) and other information to help orient them to NRS policies and procedures, including the newly released *NRS Tips*. The *NRSWeb* site design allows viewers to look for information by interest or by document type. The "What's New" section highlights important topics; a direct link on the home page points new viewers toward learning more about the NRS; and state directors and local program staff can find training, reports, and important topics on the NRS through different entry points on the site.

The following table provides the frequency of visits to *NRSWeb* and the types of information that are most important to the viewer over the past year. The Web site had 23,759 visits to more than 80,000 pages. On average, visitors viewed nearly four pages per visit. The majority of visitors were new to *NRSWeb* (60%).

NRSWeb Statistics, FY09

Visits	23,759
Absolute Unique Visitors	15,298
Average Pages Viewed/Visit	3.72
Average Number of Minutes Visitor on Site	2:57
Percentage of New Visits	60%

The most frequently visited pages at *NRSWeb* include the home page, NRS Online Training, NRS Guidelines, Trainings and Activities, Online Courses, NRS Implementation Guidelines, About NRS, and State and National Reports.





NRS in the Future

The *Promoting Program Accountability in Adult Education* project will continue in FY 2009–10 to support the NRS through training and technical assistance to states and to DAEL to support data analysis, reporting, and assessment reviews. Some of the activities planned for next year include the following:

- **NRS Leadership Institute:** a blended course that includes two segments of online learning coupled with two face-to-face training sessions; participants were selected via an application process during FY09.
- **NRS Basics:** a 7-week facilitated online course; participants will include state staff who apply with approval from their state directors.
- **NRS regional training:** three face-to-face training sessions offered across the country;

participants will be selected by state directors.

- **Targeted training:** training on a specific NRS-related topic; participants from a limited number of states will be selected via application process.
- **Developing State and Local Report Cards for Adult Education Programs:** a self-guided online course based on the popular 2006 regional training; it will be open to all learners.

With a new presidential administration and the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act looming, next year promises to be a period of change and innovation for adult education. The NRS project staff look forward to continuing their work supporting DAEL on accountability issues and supporting states' efforts to use data for program improvement.

Contact NRS

www.nrsweb.org

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Vocational and Adult Education
Division of Adult Education and Literacy
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/index.html>

About AIR

Founded in 1946, the American Institutes for Research (AIR) is a not-for-profit corporation with a long history of accomplishment. AIR's staff of more than 1,000 professionals performs basic and applied research, provides technical support, and conducts analyses based on methods of the behavioral and social sciences. Since 1998, AIR has conducted projects for OVAE on evaluation and accountability in adult education, including the NRS.

The Promoting Program Accountability in Adult Education project is administered by the Division of Adult Education and Literacy in the Office of Vocational and Adult Education at the U.S. Department of Education. Contract No. ED-04-CO-0025/0011.



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH®