



NRS: A Brief History

**NRS Basics: An Introduction to the NRS
Facilitated Online Course**

The NRS has an interesting history that I think is worth knowing. I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to lead the development process and it remains one of the most exciting things I've done in my professional life.



Brief History: Overview

- Wave 1: **Development** of the NRS
 - Pre-NRS: Emergence of accountability
 - Development process
- Wave 2: **Implementation**
 - Refinement of measures and procedures (1999–2001)
 - State implementation(2000–2003)
 - Training and T/A on requirements, data quality, data use
- Wave 3: Focus on **Improvement**

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I like to think of the NRS as having three phases or waves of development beginning in the 1990s with the emergence of accountability as a central part of public policy, an implementation phase where we worked with states to get the NRS going and the phase I think we're in now, which is one of fine-tuning the NRS and working with states to train and encourage staff to use NRS data for program improvement.



Wave 1: Emergence of Accountability

- General trend toward accountability for education and employment programs (late 1980s—early 1990s)

I am going to focus most on the first wave which really began as part of the general trend toward program accountability in government, especially for education and employment programs, which emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s.



Wave 1: Emergence of NRS

- **1993: Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA)**—required all Federal agencies to develop indicators of program performance to demonstrate they are meeting their goals.
- **1995: Adult education program threatened with elimination** into workforce development block grant system. Lack of data on program effectiveness cited.

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Several important events of the 1990s converged to bring about the NRS.

First at the Federal level, Congress passed the Government Performance and Results Act or GPRA, which required all federal programs to develop performance indicators to demonstrate that they were meeting their mandated goals.

At about this same time the Adult Education, Perkins Vocational Education and Job Training Partnership Acts all were expired and Congress, in the move to stream line government popular at the time, proposed to develop a single workforce training system, this would have meant the elimination of the federal adult education program as a separate program.

The lack of data about adult education's purpose and effectiveness was one reason cited for the proposed change.



Wave 1: Emergence of NRS

- **1996: State directors and U.S. Department of Education develop a framework** for a system of program accountability.
- **1997: National stakeholder meeting** to validate framework and identify outcome measures.

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Alarmed, the state directors of adult education asked the Department of Education to develop an accountability framework so that data would be collected to demonstrate the importance of the adult education program.

The Department agreed and in 1997 convened a national meeting to establish this framework.



Wave 1: 1997 Development Meeting

- **Goals & Measures Identified**

- Educational improvement and lifelong learning
- Enhancement of employability
- Improve civic participation
- Improve literacy and education within the family

At that meeting, state directors and other adult educators identified a long list of outcome measures they thought students could achieve as a result of participation in adult education instruction. These measures fell into four categories, education and lifelong learning, employment, civic participation and family literacy.



Wave 1: Criteria for Including Measures

- Maintain state and local control, flexibility to meet learner needs
- Minimize burden
- Accommodate methodology to produce valid and reliable national data
- Definitions and procedures compatible with other agencies

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After the meeting we developed criteria so that we could reduce the measures to a manageable number and to those we thought states and programs could reasonably collect.

We wanted to ensure the measures could accommodate the differences in state systems and learner needs and to keep the burden to a minimum.

We also had to keep in mind we were developing a national system that needed measures that could be collected in a valid and reliable way and was compatible with other federal programs.

This meant we had to eliminate self-report measures and measures that could not be quantified.



Wave 1: Technical Working Group

- Panel of state directors, volunteer literacy and local program directors and accountability experts
- Helped select measures and methods and advised OVAE on implementation

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To help us make these decisions we worked with a technical work group. This group consisted of state directors of adult education, volunteer literacy providers and local program directors, and experts in accountability.

The group also helped guide other decisions and gave advice on implementation so we could make the NRS work.



Wave 1: Workforce Investment Act (WIA) Passage 1998

- Set new performance accountability requirements for states to measure program effectiveness
 - Based on student achievement, credential and transition outcomes
- Requires measures tied to state **performance standards**.
- **Rewards** for states exceeding standards
- Allows state **sanctions**— states must “consider” local performance.

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About a year after this meeting WIA passed, which mandated for the first time, an accountability system for adult education to measure student achievement in literacy skills, credentials and transition outcomes of employment and advancing to postsecondary education. Many of the accountability measures in WIA came out of decisions made at the 1997 meeting.

WIA also required states to set performance standards on the measures and set up an incentive reward system for states that exceed standards.

The Act also requires states to consider their local program performance when they award grants to providers.

This legislation, though now expired, continues to be the legislative authority for the Federal adult education program.



Wave 2: Implementation

- Transitional year 1999
- Guidelines published, national training, state technical assistance
- Performance standard setting process
- Refinements to measures and procedures
 - Definitions, procedures and tables defined, data quality checklist developed
- Data quality training (2002)

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The NRS development process continued throughout 1998 and 1999. 1999 was the year OVAE introduced the new system to the field through the publication of the first NRS Guidelines and a national training for state staff in the summer of that year. This training was followed with technical assistance to several states to help them implement the NRS with their local programs.

The NRS went into effect in July of 2000 and refinements to measures procedures and tables were made during the first few years, based on states' experiences implementing the system. OVAE developed a process for setting performance standards with the states and also established a data quality checklist. States describe how they are meeting NRS requirements, and states must submit it each year with their data.

In this second wave, we also focused on data quality and held a second training in 2002 on NRS requirements, which emphasized methods for collecting quality data.



Wave 3: Improvement

- Implement new policies and procedures
- Continue to refine NRS procedures and measures
- Stronger focus on state monitoring of local programs
- Use quality data for program administration and improvement
 - States trained on data quality and use
 - [Click here for examples of training](#)

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In the last several years, the focus of the NRS project has been to improve the system by implementing new policies, procedures and measures in response to changes in the field and state experiences using NRS and other accountability data.

Our biggest emphasis in Wave 3 has been to encourage the use of data for program improvement. We have had several national training seminars on this topic, including program monitoring and developing state report cards. Take a look at some of them on the project website, NRS Web.