I. PURPOSE AND INTENT

As a result of a U.S. Department of Education visit, the Office of Adult Education has developed a standardized policy providing guidance on participant goal setting for local providers receiving federal and state adult education funding.

The intent of this policy is to provide local adult education programs with guidance that leads to participants effectively setting and achieving short- and long-term goals. This requires that educational services be designed and delivered to meet participant goals.

“An effective goal-setting process that focuses on instruction and learning is central to good educational practice. Setting goals allows adult education students to specify what they want to accomplish and provides a benchmark for both individual and program performance.”

— NRS Goal Setting Tips

II. GOAL SELECTION

Goals should be selected that are appropriate to the educational level of the participant at program entry. This policy aligns goal selection with the Office of Adult Education’s Assessment Policy, which requires local programs to provide educational services to the participant as determined by their assessment test at program entry.

Goals should align with the participant’s program of enrollment. The selection of goals at the beginning of an enrollment should match the participant’s program of enrollment.

III. COLLABORATIVE GOAL SETTING PROCESS BETWEEN THE PARTICIPANT AND THE LOCAL PROGRAM STAFF

Goal selection is a collaborative process between the participant and local program staff. Participants need to select their own short- and long-term goals, however, they also need the expertise, guidance, and counseling of local program staff.

“Students often do not know their goals when asked about them, or respond with very broad or unrealistic goals. Programs need to work collaboratively with students to help them develop goals that guide learning and participation. Collaborative goal setting allows program staff members to contribute knowledge of what the program has to offer and to share experiences working with other students in similar situations. Students share their needs and aspirations—the sources of their goals.”

— NRS Goal Setting Tips
Local program staff must work with participants to ensure that goals selected are achievable and also counsel participants about the selection of appropriate short-term goals necessary to achieve their long-term goals. Goal counseling is done by local program staff with participants during the creation of the participant’s ALP and periodically during the program year.

Local program staff must ensure that the educational services needed to achieve participant goals are provided.

“Programs should have a goal-setting process whereby students meet with teachers or an intake counselor to help identify and set goals for instruction. The best time for this process to occur is when the learner first enters the program. The goal-setting process should help learners set both a realistic timeline for attaining each goal and a means for determining whether the goal is achieved. Since learners often change their goals after they begin instruction, it is often advisable to extend goal setting over additional orientation sessions during the first few weeks of class.”

– NRS 2010, Page 46

IV. IDENTIFYING ATTAINABLE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS

The participant, along with guidance from the local program staff, select as many short-term and long-term goals as determined appropriate to meet the needs of the individual. Short- and long term goals are defined as follow:

- **Short-Term Goals:** A short term goal is any goal that is achievable within the specific program year, which would lead to the achievement of any long term goal(s).

- **Long-Term Goals:** A long term goal is any goal that is desired, but not likely to be achievable within the specific program year.

“Setting the timeline and evidence of achievement will help the learner realize whether the goal is short or long term and whether it is achievable. For example, when learners enter a program, many of them state very broad goals, such as attaining a GED or getting a job. Breaking the goal down into discrete steps—with short- and long-term milestones along the way—establishes a series of goals that help learners and teachers design instruction and identify the appropriate goals for NRS purposes.”

– NRS 2010, Page 46
“When a student has one of the follow-up goals, the program is held accountable for helping the student attain the goal. The program or State must obtain information on whether the student achieved the goal after he or she leaves the program. For this reason, not only is it important that the student attain the goal during the program year but also that the program’s instruction and services be oriented toward helping the student achieve the goal. For example, a student with a goal of GED attainment should be at a literacy level that makes passing the GED tests likely within the year. The student also should receive instruction that helps him or her acquire the additional skills needed for passing the tests. Similarly, if the student’s goal is to obtain a job, the program should provide instruction and services to help the student acquire the skills needed to obtain employment.”
– NRS 2010, Page 46

“While setting a realistic goal is important for accountability, students’ long-term goals should not be ignored simply because they are not obtainable during the NRS reporting period. States should ensure that local programs set goals appropriately and do not avoid setting goals because they do not want to follow up with learners. Poor goal-setting procedures do a disservice to the learner, and good instructional practice requires assisting learners to achieve their goals. In addition, ignoring long-term goals denies the State the opportunity to demonstrate that it can help learners achieve such goals.”
– NRS 2010, page 46

V. EMPLOYMENT AND/OR POSTSECONDARY GOALS (AS APPLICABLE)

All participants that enter the local adult education program with a labor force status of either “Employed” or “Unemployed” MUST select an employment or postsecondary education short-term goal, as follows:

- **Employed at Entry:** Participant must choose “Retain/Improve Employment” or “Enroll in Postsecondary Education” as a short-term goal.

- **Unemployed at Entry:** Participants must choose “Obtain Employment” or “Enroll in Postsecondary Education” as a short-term goal.

Participants that enter the local program with a labor force status of “Not in the Labor Force” are exempt from this requirement.
VI. PARTICIPANT GOALS

A. PRIMARY GOALS

1. Educational Gain: Improve Basic Literacy Skills/Improve Basic English Skills (Required Goal for all Participants)

   “Within the NRS framework, all students are assumed to have at least one goal: development of literacy skills. That is, all students are assumed to be in the program to improve their literacy skills, and thus have the default goal of either improving literacy skills or improving English language skills. This assumed goal is the reason that all students are counted in the educational gain measure. Students often have other goals, but only four are directly relevant to NRS accountability requirements: obtaining employment, retaining employment, achieving a GED or high school credential, and entering postsecondary education. Note that the default goal of educational gain remains, regardless of whether the student designates any of the additional goals.”

   – NRS 2010, page 45

   Educational gain is a required goal for all participants. Improve Basic Literacy Skills (ABE/GED/HSC) or Improve Basic English Skills (ESL) would be identified within MAERS according to the participant’s program of enrollment.

2. Function At or Above 9th Grade Level (ABE only)

   - This goal applies only to participants assessed below the 9th grade level in Reading, Math or Language as determined by an Office of Adult Education-approved assessment (pre-test), and placed in an ABE program of enrollment.
   - To achieve this goal, the participant must score at or above the 9th grade level in all subject areas that the participant received instruction, as determined by an Office of Adult Education-approved assessment (post-test).
   - This goal may be used to help the participant achieve long-term goals, as applicable.
   - Achievement of this goal indicates that the participant is ready to move into a GED Preparation or High School Completion (HSC) program of enrollment, as applicable.
   - This goal is not subject to NRS follow-up and is not a NRS performance measure.
3. **Achieve English Language Proficiency (ESL only)**

- This goal applies only to participants who lack English Literacy skills as determined by an Office of Adult Education-approved assessment, and are placed in the ESL program of enrollment.
- To achieve this goal, the participant must score 236 or higher in Reading, 236 or higher in Listening and 231 or higher in Writing (as available) on the CASAS assessment test.
- This goal may be used to help the participant achieve long-term goals, as applicable.
- This goal is not subject to NRS follow-up and is not a NRS performance measure.

4. **Pass One or More Official GED Tests**

- This goal applies to participants who are assessed at or above the 9th grade level in Reading, Math or Language, and/or placed in GED Preparation courses.
- This goal is selected for participants on a path toward obtaining a GED.
- This goal may be used to help the participant achieve long-term goals, as applicable.
- This goal is not subject to NRS follow-up and is not a NRS performance measure.

5. **Attain High School Diploma Credits**

- This goal applies to participants who are assessed at or above the 9th grade level in Reading, Math or Language, and/or placed in local board approved High School Completion courses.
- This goal is selected for participants on a path toward obtaining a High School Diploma.
- This goal may be used to help the participant achieve long-term goals, as applicable.
- This goal is not subject to NRS follow-up and is not a NRS performance measure.
**NRS Follow-Up Goals:** The NRS follow-up goals are outcomes that participants may achieve as a result of receiving instruction in an adult education program. If a participant has selected one or more of these goals as a short-term goal (achievable within the program year), then the local program serving the participant must complete the follow-up process outlined in the Office of Adult Education’s Follow-Up Manual. Local adult education programs cannot discourage participants from selecting goals that require follow-up.

Local adult education programs must provide educational instruction, along with assistance/linkages towards achieving postsecondary and employment goals.

“...When a student has one of the follow-up goals, the program is held accountable for helping the student attain the goal. The program or State must obtain information on whether the student achieved the goal after he or she leaves the program. For this reason, not only is it important that the student attain the goal during the program year but also that the program’s instruction and services be oriented toward helping the student achieve the goal...” — NRS 2010, Page 46

The NRS goals, which are included in the selection of Primary Goals, are as follows:

6. **Obtain a GED** – The participant obtains certification of attaining passing scores on all five GED tests, by achieving an average score of 450 or higher.

7. **Obtain a High School Diploma** – The participant obtains a local school board approved diploma documenting satisfactory completion of secondary studies.

8. **Enroll in Postsecondary Education** – The participant enrolls in a postsecondary educational or occupational skills training program that does not duplicate other services or training received, regardless of whether the prior services or training were completed.

9. **Obtain Employment** – The participant enters employment by the end of the first quarter after the program exit quarter. Employment is working in a paid, unsubsidized job or working 15 hours or more per week in an unpaid job on a farm or business operated by a family member or the participant. The exit quarter is the quarter when instruction ends, the learner terminates or has not received instruction for 90 days, and is not scheduled to receive further instruction. A job obtained while the participant is enrolled can be counted for “entered employment” and is reported if the participant is still employed in the first quarter after exit from the program.

10. **Retain/Improve Employment** – The participant remains employed in the third quarter after their exit quarter.
B. SECONDARY GOALS

Participants may select any of the following secondary goals which apply. These secondary goals are not subject to NRS follow-up and are not NRS performance measures.

1. **Reduction in Receipt of Public Assistance**: Participant’s Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or equivalent public assistance is reduced or eliminated due to employment or increased income.

2. **Achieve Citizenship Skills**: Participant attains the skills needed to pass the U.S. citizenship exam.

3. **Voting Behavior**: Participant registers to vote or votes for the first time during the program year.

4. **General Involvement in Community Activities**: Participant increases involvement in the following community activities:
   - Attending or organizing meetings of neighborhood, community, or political organizations.
   - Volunteering to work for such organizations.
   - Contributing to the support of such organizations.
   - Volunteering to work on community improvement activities.

5. **Involvement in Children’s Education**: Participant increases involvement in the education of dependent children under their care, including:
   - Helping children more frequently with their school work.
   - Increasing contact with children’s teachers to discuss children’s education.
   - Having more involvement in children’s school, such as attending school activities and parent meetings and volunteering to work on school projects.

6. **Involvement in Children’s Literacy Related Activities**: Participant increases involvement in the literacy-related activities of dependent children under their care, including:
   - Reading to children
   - Visiting a library
   - Purchasing books or magazines for children
7. **Achieve Work-Based Project Learner Goals:** Participant acquires the skills taught in a short-term learning course designed to teach specific work-based skills. A short-term course is an instructional program of at least 12 hours but no more than 30 hours in duration. Project learners are not counted for the educational gain measure and are not assigned an educational functioning level. No core outcome measures are reported for project learners.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (available at [www.nrsweb.org](http://www.nrsweb.org))**

- *NRS Implementation Guidelines, 2010*
- *Guidelines for Conducting the Follow Up Survey, 2001*
- *NRS Tips: NRS Goal Setting*