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1.0 Welcome to NIRS – Disclaimer

For illustrative purposes, I will present the NIRS Learning Module topics using AUCD's -AAA Test Center for a co-located UCEDD + LEND, which contains only sample or demonstrative data. Note that no actual program or participant details are used.

Please note that the forms shown in the demonstration videos may differ from the online forms, as forms are updated each August based on federal guidance.

If you have any questions, please message NIRS@aucd.org.

1.1 Overview of NIRS

Welcome to the video of the "Welcome to NIRS" section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled "Overview of NIRS". This video will answer the questions "What is NIRS?" and "Why NIRS?".

So, let's jump into it. NIRS, spelled N-I-R-S, stands for the National Information and Reporting System. NIRS is a collective effort by the Association of University Centers on Disabilities, AUCD, and its member organizations and federal partners. NIRS facilitates federal reporting so that Centers and Programs can show the impact of their Interdisciplinary training and efforts to improve the lives of those with disabilities.

To provide a brief history, University Centers for Excellence and Developmental Disabilities, or UCEDDs, and Leadership, Education and Neurodevelopmental and other related Disabilities (LEND) Programs began network-wide data collection in 1987. Amendments to the Developmental Disabilities Act and Bill of Rights Act, also known as the DD Act, included a provision requiring ongoing data collection of comparative data that would reflect the national impact of UCEDDs. A plan was proposed and endorsed at the October 1987 AUCD annual meeting for implementing the network's first data collection system. The proposed plan resulted in the 1990 publication of NIRS.

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Beginning in 2003, LEND programs began using NIRS to collect data elements required for reporting to HRSA or MCHB. Three years later, in 2006, Leadership Education in Adolescent Health Programs (LEAH) and Pediatric Pulmonary Center (PPC) training Programs started tracking current and former trainee surveys through NIRS.

Lastly, the MCHB-funded Developmental Behavioral Pediatric, or DBP training Programs began using NIRS in 2009. NIRS is enhanced every year to reflect changes in federal reporting.

Again, NIRS is an application that helps Centers and Programs collect data that should be reported to federal agencies. Each Center/Program can select a different application. There are many applications on the market. I want to highlight the main benefits of using NIRS.

1. The first benefit is that no cost is associated with using the NIRS application and storing data from multiple years. While other applications may charge to maintain historical data, AUCD will never charge Centers and Programs for using NIRS no matter how long you choose to use it.

2. The second benefit is that ownership and storage of historical data belongs to your Program. AUCD holds no ownership of your data. Your data will always be available to you, no matter how long you choose to use NIRS.

3. The third benefit is that NIRS is built to the specifications of the federal funder. That means that information is already in the format that the federal funder desires when it appears in your federal reporting. AUCD coordinates very closely with federal agencies, specifically the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, MCHB, of the Health Resources and Services Administration, HRSA, and the Office of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, OIDD, of the Administration on Community Living, ACL, which are the two main federal funders for LEND, LEAH, and DBP Programs and UCEDDs. AUCD works closely with UCEDDs to import their data directly into

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federal reporting systems, helping to reduce duplication of data entry. AUCD also works with LEND, LEAH, and DBP Programs to support them in entering their data into federal reporting systems.

4. The fourth benefit is that Centers and Programs can access technical assistance through multiple channels, including support from AUCD staff who can assist with any questions by messaging NIRS@aucd.org.

5. The fifth benefit is that NIRS contains prebuilt reports that can provide quantitative and qualitative data for reporting to federal agencies. Many Programs also use the data for various internal needs.

6. The final benefit is that people can access expertise from across the national network by using a public search engine. They can search for Products and Projects based on data entered into NIRS by Centers and Programs. Member associations can also create profiles in the Network Member Directory, allowing stakeholders to find collaborators and experts in specific areas.

Thank you for watching this training video. For questions or suggestions to improve AUCD's Data Coordinator Orientation Modules, please reach out to NIRS@aucd.org.

1.2 NIRS Resources on the AUCD Website

Welcome to the video of the “Welcome to NIRS” section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled “NIRS Resources on the AUCD Website”. This video will show where NIRS resources are located and discuss how resources are structured on the AUCD website.

To locate NIRS resources, you first need to go to aucd.org in an internet web browser, where you will find the landing page. To access NIRS resources, you should click on the “About” section. In the navigation bar, you will see three (3) hyperlinks:

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1) “NIRS”,

2) “NIRS login”, and

3) “NIRS Search”.

We will cover the second and third links in later videos. For now, click on the first link titled “NIRS”.

On this page, you will find general information about the network, benefits of NIRS, resources on how you can contact the NIRS team for any questions via emailing NIRS@aucd.org, a brief history, and information on how to join a nationwide listserv to receive email updates on federal reporting if you manage your Center or Program’s NIRS data.

At the top of the page, you can also see four links:
1) NIRS resources for OIDD-funded Programs,
2) NIRS resources for MCHB-funded Programs,
3) a public search engine, and
4) a link to access the NIRS application if you already have a login.

Before going forward, you should decide which federal agency you are interested in finding resources for. If you are interested in reporting items for your UCEDD training Program, you should click the first link for “NIRS Resources for OIDD-funded Programs”. If you are interested in reporting items for your LEND, LEAH, or DBP training Program, you should click the second link for “NIRS Resources for MCHB-funded Programs”.

It is important to note that the resources I show on screen may differ from those you see. Resources are updated year to year based on changes in federal reporting. This demonstration is intended to show you generally where you can go to find resources helpful for your Center or Program’s needs.

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For this demonstration, I will use the first link for OIDD-funded Programs. Both resource pages are set up in the same format, so you can follow along regardless of the site you select.

This first page contains general information so that you can stay up-to-date on current events. For example, you can find contact information for AUCD staff if you have any questions by messaging NIRS@aucd.org. Additional information on NIRS, recent and updated materials to stay current on federal guidance, a calendar of current events and upcoming deadlines, and a search function to find previous events can also be found on this page.

If you are looking for past events, you should click on the link to view archived discussions and then type “NIRS” in the text box. Click “search” to find all NIRS-related topics. You can then look through any topics you are interested in and read more about them.

At the top of the NIRS resources page, you also see additional links under additional resources:

1) Support of OIDD- or MCHB-funded Programs, depending on which site you are on. This link contains resources directly from the federal funder. If you are looking for resources on how to handle or classify certain records, definitions, or information on how to handle federal reporting, you should click on this link. Of note in this section may be guidebooks on completing annual program performance reports and reference guides for site reviews or site visits.

2) The second link, “Training Courses, Demos, Tips Sheets,” contains helpful information developed by AUCD by request of Centers or Programs. You should click on this link if you are interested in orientation materials for new NIRS users, tips sheets or guidebooks on completing specific tasks in NIRS, or if you want a demonstration on exporting/importing bulk records in and out of the NIRS application.

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If you are a new data coordinator, I highly recommend reviewing the “NIRS Overview Training”, courtesy of New Hampshire UCEDD/LEND, located under “Training Courses” on this page, as it is helpful for learning the basics of NIRS.

Additionally, many data coordinators recommend reviewing your Center/Program’s 5-Year Work Plan with your Director, as the work plan will provide contexts valuable for data entry into NIRS.

Please feel free to explore our website and resources on your own. We will be sure to reference helpful resources from our website where applicable in the NIRS Learning Module videos.

Thank you for watching this training video. For questions or suggestions to improve AUCD's Data Coordinator Orientation Modules, please reach out to NIRS@aucd.org.

1.3 Network Member Directory

Welcome to the video of the “Welcome to NIRS” section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled “Network Member Directory”. This video will highlight the purposes of the directory, discuss features of the Network Member Directory, and walk through an example of searching for collaborators.

The Network Member Directory allows network members to share expert information and expertise across a wide array of disciplines and topics. It also allows stakeholders, including the AUCD member organizations, federal agencies, and policymakers, to locate information with professionals working to enhance the lives of those with disabilities. The directory also allows Centers or Programs to reflect ongoing work efforts through various funding streams and deliverables.

To access the Network Member Directory for UCEDD and LEND Programs, you need to open an internet web browser and navigate to aucd.org. At the

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top of the screen, click on the “About” section. In the middle column, click on the first link titled “Network Members”.

On this page, you will find an interactive network directory map, an overview of network Centers, and a search function. Let's examine each one individually.

1) On the interactive network directory map, you can click and drag, zoom in and out, and select individual Programs that are color-coded. If you select one of the markers on the map, it will open a display panel with additional information, including the Center's contact information and a link to their directory page, which lists their faculty and staff.

2) You can see an overview of the network Centers on this page. At the time of this recording, there are 68 UCEDDs in blue, 60 LEND Programs in red, and 15 IDDRCs in green. You can click “Learn More” to read more about each type of Program.

3) There are also several options to search the network. The search on the left allows you to quickly locate Centers and Programs within specific states and specific faculty/staff by state. You can use the search engine in the middle if you are looking for collaborators in a specific discipline or area of study, expertise, or by name.

   You will also see a link to the NIRS Public Search Engine that will allow you to browse the Centers' or Programs' work efforts.

Let’s practice searching for collaborators by Center and Program. For example, if you select “New York” from the drop-down menu, you can find all Centers or Programs in the state of New York, and you can click on the profile you are interested in.

In another example, if you return to the Network Member page, you can also search via faculty/staff. Let’s say you are interested in finding collaborators who are working in education with people who have

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disabilities. Under “Experts”, select “Education/Special Education” in the “Discipline” drop-down box.

When you click search, you will receive a list of all faculty or staff, contact information, and which Center or Program they are affiliated with. In our example, you can see that there are multiple pages of results. You will note that there is an option to download the results as a .CSV file or print them as well. If you want to view more results on the page, click on the “Show Entries” drop-down box.

For our demonstration, I am going to click on Sharon Williams at the Virgin Islands, UCEDD. If you click on her name, it will take you to her Network Member profile, where you can read more about her interests, council membership, work experience, and so on. You will also note that any Projects and Products Sharon has worked on are also linked on the right-hand side of the screen. Another feature about the directory is that if you are interested in seeing more about other faculty or staff at the Virgin Islands UCEDD, you can click on the Center name at the top of the page, and it will give you additional information where you can learn more about other faculty or staff.

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1.4 NIRS Public Search Engine

Welcome to the video of the “Welcome to NIRS” section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled “NIRS Public Search Engine”. This video will walk through the public search engine and its functions.

The NIRS Public Search Engine allows you to search for member funding information and deliverables through Projects and Products entered in NIRS. Initiatives entered in NIRS by network members funnel directly into the search engine. The search engine may help stakeholders find collaborators or assist with policy education initiatives nationally.

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As mentioned in the previous video, you can reach the NIRS Public Search Engine via the Network Member Directory. As an alternative, you can also reach it by going to aucd.org and clicking on the “About” section. In the middle column, click “NIRS search”.

Firstly, if you want to learn more about a Project or Product—that is, funding or deliverables developed by Centers or Programs—there are resources on the right under the header ‘Helpful Information.’

In the search engine, you can see that you can add keywords if you have words you know are relevant to the topic of interest. You can also add additional keywords.

There is an option to select “Exact Match,” meaning that it will be specific to spelling. You can also indicate if you want results based on “and” or “or” criteria. Keep in mind that each additional keyword added with an “and” criteria will limit the number of matches you receive. That is because the search engine will return only records with both keywords entered in them. If you select “or”, the potential search results will be widened because it will match based on records that have either word. You will also see that there is an option to search for initiatives in specific states of the country.

In our example, we are interested in research on retaining employees across the nation. Enter each keyword on each line, “employment,” “research,” and “retain,” selecting the “and” comparator for each.

Next, you have the option to select either Projects or Products. You can also select both. For now, I will just click the two boxes for Projects and Products because I want to search for funding opportunities and any deliverables created.

If you select the check box for Projects, you will see additional search options:

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- Core Function: The term “Core Function” originates from the Developmental Disabilities Act and Bill of Rights Act, or DD Act. This option allows you to search by various contexts, such as:
    - Training efforts for trainees,
    - Direct problem-solving or consultation initiatives via technical assistance,
    - Clinical and specialized services for people with disabilities,
    - Research or evaluation initiatives,
    - Development of deliverables or distribution of knowledge or information,
    - Continuing education for professionals and training for community members,
    - Adaptation of community services or other forms of assistance for people with disabilities, and
    - Piloting of exemplary or innovative practices within the Center’s state.

- For “Area of Emphasis”: You can specify topic areas for Projects, such as Projects that support people with disabilities in quality assurance or improving consumer or family-centered systems of care, education to maximize access and learning potential for people with disabilities in schools, access of childcare services, support of healthcare services, employment for people with disabilities, housing and housing supports, transportation, and accessibility of social, recreational, and leisure activities. There is also a section for areas of emphasis not included in the DD Act, though, that are included in the UCEDD Notice of Funding Opportunity, such as improving the quality of life for people with disabilities, assistive technology devices, and leadership in all spaces of society and the workforce.

- For “Target Audience”: This option allows you to specify the targeted audience for the Project, such as if it targets university students or Program intermediate or long-term trainees, short-term trainees, professionals or paraprofessionals, family members or caregivers,

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adults with disabilities, children/adolescents with disabilities or special health care needs, policymakers, and the general-public.

- For “Unserved or Underserved Population(s)”: You may specify Projects that work with demographic populations historically impacted by adverse health outcomes. Examples might include Projects that work to improve the lives of people in racial or ethnic groups, those who do not speak English proficiently, groups of people who live on a reservation, those who live in a rural area that may not have access to equitable services, and Projects that support those in the United State territories. You can even search for Projects that do not serve underserved populations.

- For “Primary Target Audience Geographic Descriptor”: This option allows you to search for the Project's geographic scope, such as whether it works to support people across state lines, supports single or multiple counties within a single state, or supports state-wide initiatives. There are options for regional, national, or international Projects, and an option for “Not Applicable”.

- For “Funding Type”: You may search for Projects by funding type, such as whether they are funded by a grant, contract, cooperative agreement, their university, per capita reimbursements, in-kind contributions, or another category that includes all other funding types.

- For “Funding Source”: You may also search for Projects that are funded by the federal government, a state agency, local affiliates, or other funding sources.

If you select the check box for Products, you will see additional search options:

- For “Product/Publication Type”: This option allows you to be specific with the type of deliverable you are interested in. For example, if you

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are looking for brochures, you can select the option to receive only brochures in your search results. There are a total of sixteen (16) options.

- For “Target Audience”: You can also search for deliverables that were created to provide information geared to families, professionals, policymakers, and/or students.

- For “Alternative Format”: This option allows you to search for deliverables that are offered in specific formats, such as captioned, braille, audio, large print, specific electronic formats, and a variety of languages other than English.

Next, you will see options to select specific Network Centers. You can leave this option blank to search nationally, or you can search exclusively for UCEDDs or LENDs.

In the next box, I suggest searching for the most current year of completed data and prior. Centers and Programs enter data between July 1 and June 30 of each year, so data in the current year may not be complete. You may select as many years of data collection as you wish.

In our example, I will select only the most recent year of data collection and click search. You will see that I received only a few Projects in the results. At the top of the page, there is an option to print search results, download a .CSV file with results, or select individual records to include in a .CSV file. You can also click on the record title to read more about the Project, including its abstract, or click to see more details via a drop-down menu.

If you are unhappy with your search results, you can return to the top of the page and select “Refine Your Search” to tune up your search criteria or select “Start a New Search” at the top right-hand section of the page. Let’s see what happens if you change the keyword matching for one of our keywords from “and” to “or.”

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When you search again, you will see that you now have more results because more records match our keywords. In fact, the results are split into two pages. Just like in the previous video, you can click on the “Show entries” drop-down menu to list more records on a single page.

Generally, it is better to search widely across topics by keeping your search as simple as possible. Again, the more specific and the more selections you make, the fewer records will fit the search parameters. For best results, try to search within the most recent year of complete data collection or prior.

Thank you for watching this training video. For questions or suggestions to improve AUCD's Data Coordinator Orientation Modules, please reach out to NIRS@aucd.org.

1.5 Enrolling in the NIRS Platform

Welcome to the video of the “Welcome to NIRS” section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled “Enrolling in the NIRS Platform”. This video will cover how to gain access to NIRS for the first time if your training Program is newly funded or if your Program has never used NIRS before.

Please note that to request enrollment in the NIRS Platform, you must meet one of the two criteria:

1) Your Center/Program must be a current recipient of UCEDD core grant funding from the Administration for Community Living (ACL), or
2) Your Center/Program must be a current recipient of LEND, LEAH, or DBP grant funding from the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB).

If your Program has decided to use NIRS for first time, you might ask “What is the next step in gaining access to NIRS?”. You should send an email to NIRS@aucd.org with the subject line: “Request to open NIRS account for [Your Program]”

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Your email should include the following required information:

- Program Name
- Department
- Organization
- Postal Address
- Main Phone
- Main Fax number
- Main Email
- Website
- Program Type (possible options: LEND, UCEDD/LEND, LEAH, DBP, or UCEDD)
- Logo, and
- Contact information, which includes the email address(es) of faculty, staff, data coordinator(s), and/or director(s), who will be the primary contact and NIRS data manager. The person(s) identified will be assigned the highest access level of Administrator.

Please note that faculty, staff, data coordinator(s), and/or director(s) who will be the primary contact will carry the title “NIRS Data Coordinators”, even if it may not be their title in the Program.

Please also note that Center/Program data is password-protected. Only you can see your Program data, which belongs to your Center/Program. AUCD does not own your data.

You will receive a Welcome email from AUCD when your NIRS account is set up. The welcome email will include the following:

- Link to NIRS
- Name of your Center/Program, and
- List of staff who have Administrator access to NIRS.

Individual encrypted emails with login credentials will be sent to those users at the same time.

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1.6 Logging in to NIRS

Welcome to the video of the "Welcome to NIRS" section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled "Logging in to NIRS". This video will walk you through logging into the NIRS application.

To log into NIRS, you need to have an account with your username and password. If you do not have a NIRS username or password, please reach out to your Center's NIRS Data Coordinator or Program Director to request a login.

To log on to NIRS:

1. Go to the AUCD homepage at www.aucd.org
2. Click on the "About" section at the top of the screen. In the middle column, under "NIRS," click on "NIRS Login": https://systems.aucd.org/nirs/db/.
3. The first step is to make sure that you are on the correct login page. The login page will default to the log in for UCEDD and LEND Centers or Programs. At the top of the page, click the first "login here" if you are logging in as a LEAH or DBP Program. You will also find a separate login for State Disability and Health Grantees, or SDGH and another login for the LEND Program Quality Improvement Network, or LPQI.
4. For the first field (Center Name), select your Program's name from the drop-down menu.
5. In the second field (Login), enter your NIRS login or username.

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6. In the third field (Password), enter your password.
7. Hit the Submit button, which will take you to the NIRS Dashboard Welcome Page, where you can access all of the NIRS options.

If this is your first time logging in, you may wish to update your password. To do so, hover your cursor over your name in the top right-hand corner of your screen, where a drop-down menu will appear. Select “Change Password,” follow the prompt, and save your changes.

After 15 minutes of inactivity, NIRS will automatically log you out. If you are working on any data entry or editing, be sure to save your work before you step away from your computer.

Thank you for watching this training video. For questions or suggestions to improve AUCD's Data Coordinator Orientation Modules, please reach out to NIRS@aucd.org.

1.7 Overview of the Dashboard and NIRS Datasets

Welcome to the video of the “Welcome to NIRS” section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled “Overview of the Dashboard and NIRS Datasets”. This video will orient new users to the NIRS Dashboard, what kinds of data are recorded in NIRS, and how each Dataset is structured.

When you first log into NIRS, you will see several things:

1) At the top of the page, you will see the NIRS ribbon, which contains your Program’s name, the reporting period you are in, the dates included in the current year of data collection, and a drop-down menu with your name. If you hover your cursor on your name, you will also see additional options, such as an option to update your password.

2) Just below the ribbon, you will see a navigation menu for each of the NIRS Datasets. From left to right, the Datasets are Trainees, Projects, Activities, Products, Goals, and Directory. We will discuss

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each of these Datasets in depth in future modules.

3) The “Admin” section menu item will take you to the tools that are accessible only to users with administrative access.

4) The final section below the Datasets is the dashboard. The dashboard provides an overview of operations to date, including the number of records entered in each Dataset, the total amount of funds leveraged across federal, state, local, and other funding sources, and the amount of funding across specific agencies.

5) If you scroll down, you will also find resources that might be helpful, such as the NIRS learning modules. If you wish, you may also add notes that can only be seen by you.

For the remainder of this video, we will discuss the general structure and purpose of each Dataset.

If you click one of the Datasets at the top of the page, you will see a navigation menu.

Each Dataset is set up in the same way; On the left side, you will find options to add new records and manage existing ones. On the right side, you will find administrative tools, such as prepopulated reports with predetermined fields, called “Standard Reports”. You may develop your search query using the Custom Reports tool, and search across records entered in that Dataset.

- The Trainee Dataset contains information on trainees who have received training through your Center/Program. Information includes the trainee's name, contact and demographic information, and data specific to their training experience. Former trainee surveys are also managed in the Trainee's Dataset.
- The Projects Dataset includes records of grant, funding, and collaboration efforts that your Center and Program are engaged in.

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- The Activities Dataset includes any initiatives and time-delineated efforts your Center or Program is engaged in.
- The Product's Dataset includes data on deliverables that your Center/Program develops.
- The Goals Dataset allows Centers/Programs to document and track ongoing evaluation efforts or set objectives in coordination with their work plan over time.
- The Directory Dataset contains the list of faculty/staff profiles who have participated in grant-related work at your Center/Program. Directory faculty/staff profiles are used to:
    1. Reflect work efforts of your Center/Program Projects and Products, and

    2. Share expert information on the public-facing Network Member Directory on AUCD's website. Stakeholders may search by expertise to locate contact information and collaborations with professionals in the network.

- The Admin section includes tools that allow Centers and Programs to manage access to their password-protected data, access tools helpful for data entry/data cleaning, facilitate federal reporting, and more.

Thank you for watching this training video. For questions or suggestions to improve AUCD's Data Coordinator Orientation Modules, please reach out to NIRS@aucd.org.

1.8 Overview of the NIRS Fiscal Year

Welcome to the video of the "Welcome to NIRS" section of the NIRS Learning Modules, titled "Overview of the NIRS Fiscal Year". In this video, we will highlight the differences between "Program Year" and "Fiscal Year" and the general rules for entering data across all Datasets in NIRS.

As a reminder, the ribbon at the top of the NIRS page displays the reporting period and the dates for the current year of data collection. For example, in

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our demonstration, you see the text "FY 2026 = Program Year 2025 | 07/01/2025 - 06/30/2026."

It is important to understand the distinction between the terms "Program Year" (PY) and "Fiscal Year" (FY), especially for LEND, LEAH, and DBP Programs reporting to MCHB.

While both terms refer to the same period of July 1 to June 30 of each year, they differ in one key aspect:

- The **Program Year** refers to the start of the data collection year.
- The **Fiscal Year** is based on the end of the data collection year.

In the example of July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2026:

- The “Program Year” is listed as 2025 because data collection begins in 2025.
- The “Fiscal Year” is listed as 2026 because data collection ends in 2026. Therefore, PY 2025 = FY 2026.

All federal reporting data across all Datasets must be entered in NIRS from July 1 to June 30 each year. Programs should ensure that data is entered within this timeframe when submitting records in NIRS.

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