



Our History

NERCOMP continues to be a pioneer in information technology and professional development for colleges and universities since its beginnings in the 1950's as the New England Regional Computing Program, Inc.

Early History: 1956-1966

In 1956, IBM Corporation and MIT launched a ten-year cooperative effort in computing. A major part of this corporate sponsored research affiliation was that New England colleges and universities would have available to them the second shift of the IBM-704 computer installed at MIT. This provision of the joint IBM-MIT effort had a major impact on computing in New England.

The New England Regional Computing Center (NERCC) was formed out of the MIT Computation Center in 1957, to manage the computer access project. All of this computer access activity was performed under the general direction of Dr. Philip M. Morse. In 1956, there were 20 member institutions involved in the NERCC. For many of the institutions, the affiliation they had with NERCC constituted their first exposure to a large computer (by 1957 standards). A number of institutions made extensive use of the facilities through NERCC, until they were able to obtain their own computer equipment.

Toward the end of the 1950s, computing had become so complicated with so many variations and facets that no institution could expect to meet all its computing needs with its own computers. Recognizing this trend, Dr. Morse and others at MIT began to develop a replacement for NERCC. After much effort and discussion with members of NERCC, they were able to secure NSF support and establish the New England Regional Computer Project (NERCP).

NERCP began with the broad charge to assist institutions in sharing computer resources, with a special focus on small institutions. NERCP believed that making available scarce software and applications was more important for sharing, than the exchange of raw computing power. To this end, NERCP began to build a network, in which it was envisioned that a user at one place would be connected to a program at another institution. It is estimated that up through 1966, NERCP member institutions used approximately 20-25% of the services of the MIT Computation Center. Dr. Morse, Principal Investigator, was assisted by a Steering Committee chosen from the participating institutions, in this endeavor.

1967-1980

In 1967, NERCP cut its ties with MIT and established itself as NERCOMP. At this time, NERCOMP had forty member institutions, and Richard K. Wells was the first President of the Corporation. NERCOMP

later incorporated itself in 1970 with the goal of promoting the sharing of computing resources among institutions of higher education.

Over the next decade, NERCOMP ran a regional time-sharing network and managed point-to-point telecommunications services for its members. During 1968-1969, an NSF grant allowed NERCOMP to conduct a study of the kind of services that were needed at member institutions, while identifying which services could be provided over a time-sharing network.

In 1971, Robert R. Rolla replaced Richard K. Wells as President of NERCOMP. NERCOMP established a hard-wired telephone network to begin the process of opening up the resources of New England's major university computer centers to schools throughout the region. The network connected academic computer centers at seven New England institutions: Babson College, Bowdoin College, Brown University, Dartmouth College, MIT, University of Massachusetts, and Worcester Polytechnic Institute.

In both 1971 and 1972, the NSF renewed its support of NERCOMP in the form of a grant entitled "An Experiment to Determine the Education Services Demanded by Users of a Multi-Computer Network." Total support for this project, as of 1972, was \$220,000.

Despite its best intentions, NERCOMP became the equivalent of a retail agent to bring computer resources from some institutions to users at other institutions. NERCOMP realized that the long-range need for a retail agent would diminish, and sought to become more of a facilitator of the exchange.

In 1975, NERCOMP was awarded a three-year grant from the NSF for research and experimentation into methods of computer networking, totaling \$209,000. A major component of the NSF-supported program was to identify the kind of management structures that are successful in coordinating the activities of a large number of diverse educational institutions sharing a distributed computer resources. In addition to the NSF grant, NERCOMP was assisted in its plans by three grants from CDC, made over a three-year period. NERCOMP's plans called for the establishment of a packet-switched network (or its equivalent) to allow more reliable communications between large computers, (2) the establishment of a user services network, and (3) the setting up of a structure for making decisions and setting policy.

In August of 1975, an article written by then Philip Morse and Ronald Conrew, entitled "Distributing Computer Networking: Making it work on a Regional Basis," appeared in the Science Magazine.

Also In 1975, NERCOMP achieved permanent tax-exempt status as a section 501(c)(3) educational association of colleges and universities.

In 1976, Raymond Neff was appointed President of NERCOMP, followed by Thomas E. Kurtz in early 1977, and Robert E. Gibbs in mid-1977. Gibbs remained president until 1992.

By 1977, NERCOMP began phasing down its support from NSF grant support, in the attempt to become wholly self-supported. During that same year, NERCOMP launched the Academic Computing Advisory Panel (ACAP) to advise institutions about information technology for academic and administrative purposes.

1980-1990

During the 1980s, NERCOMP focused its efforts on networking, microcomputer training for faculty and administrators, cooperative buying in microcomputers, consulting and conferencing. The need for NERCOMP to provide time-sharing services was dwindling in the early 1980s, as smaller universities developed their own computer systems. By 1983, NERCOMP was completely out of the time-sharing business.

NERCOMP focused many of its efforts on the delivery of educational and professional conferences in the mid-1980s. The conferences provided members with the opportunity to develop professional contacts with their colleagues, and to share knowledge and experiences with new technologies. As institutions adopted their first personal computers in the mid-to-late 1980s, NERCOMP's educational conferences became a showcase of the new technology, while delivering much-needed training to its members.

In 1988, NERCOMP launched the Journal of Computing in Higher Education. This Journal was transferred to Carol McKnight in December 1991.

1990-Present

In 1994, NERCOMP hosted its first Annual Conference "Investigating the Information Enterprise." At this time, NERCOMP defined itself as an association of information systems and technology users affiliated with colleges, universities and other educational and research institutions throughout New England.

NERCOMP became an association of EDUCAUSE (then CAUSE) in 1997. This strategic association enhances and coordinates both NERCOMP's and EDUCAUSE's educational conferences and initiatives.

Today, NERCOMP has over 295 members.