



Request for Proposals (RFP) for Accessibility and Inclusion Resource Creation

Issued by: Smarter Balanced

Release Date: April 6, 2026 | Due Date: May 8, 2026

1. Introduction

Smarter Balanced invites qualified organizations to submit proposals to support the creation, refinement, review, and production of accessibility resources for Smarter Balanced assessments. Smarter Balanced may select one or more suppliers through this RFP, depending on the responsiveness of proposals, demonstrated expertise, and project needs. This procurement aligns with University of California policies and procedures to promote transparency, competition, and fairness. The goal of this RFP is to secure high-quality, secure, and scalable support for accessibility resources that strengthen equitable access to the Smarter Balanced assessment system.

2. Background and Objective

Smarter Balanced is a member-led consortium providing summative, interim, and formative assessments for grades 3–8 and high school. To support meaningful access for multilingual learners, students with disabilities, and other students who benefit from designated supports and accommodations, Smarter Balanced requires ongoing development and maintenance of accessibility resources across item types, content areas, and grade bands.

This RFP is intended to identify organizations with the technical, linguistic, accessibility, and project management expertise needed to produce and manage accessibility resources in alignment with Smarter Balanced requirements. The selected supplier(s) must be able to work securely, meet milestone-driven schedules, follow resource-specific guidelines, upload materials accurately in the Test and Item Management System (TIMS) and other secure environments, and maintain rigorous internal and external quality-control processes.

3. Scope of Work

Smarter Balanced seeks one or more organizations that can support general statement-of-work requirements as well as resource-specific deliverables. The work includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- **TIMS and secure system workflows:** creating, validating, uploading, tagging, and tracking accessibility resources in accordance with the TIMS manual and Smarter Balanced file-naming conventions.
- **Security and confidentiality:** complying with secure handling requirements, nondisclosure expectations, and restrictions related to artificial intelligence and automated tools unless prior written approval is granted.
- **Quality assurance:** implementing a documented quality-control plan, conducting 100% internal reviews, supporting external review where required, and resolving issues identified by Smarter Balanced within established turnaround times.
- **Accessibility resource development:** producing and maintaining accessibility resources such as Text-to-Speech (TTS/TTSVI), braille, English glossaries, translated glossaries, illustration glossaries, Spanish translation, Spanish TTS, and American Sign Language (ASL) resources, as applicable to the awarded work.
- **Project management and tracking:** maintaining milestone dates, updated status trackers, staffing plans, and communication protocols for emergent issues.

All deliverables must align with Smarter Balanced guidelines and applicable standards, including WCAG 2.2 AA, UTF-8 and Unicode requirements, Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) where relevant, and Braille Authority of North America (BANA) guidance for braille resources. Any AI-assisted work must remain subject to prior written approval and full human review by trained personnel.

4. Anticipated Benefits

This procurement will support the continued development of accessible, standards-aligned assessment materials that help ensure students can engage with Smarter Balanced assessments through appropriate supports. For Smarter Balanced and its members, this work promotes consistency, quality, and operational readiness across accessibility resources while supporting secure and efficient production workflows. Selected supplier(s) will have the opportunity to contribute specialized expertise to a multi-state assessment system that emphasizes quality, accessibility, and responsible implementation at scale.

5. Proposal Requirements

Proposals must address the components used for evaluation in this solicitation. At a minimum, respondents should provide complete responses to the required questionnaires and pricing materials below, along with any supporting documentation necessary to substantiate their approach, staffing, experience, and proposed pricing.

- Questionnaire: Company Information and Business Practices (Sustainability)
- Questionnaire: Data Security and Management
- Questionnaire: Individual Resources (e.g., Text-to-Speech, Braille, ASL)

- Questionnaire: Quality
- Questionnaire: General SOW Requirements
- Questionnaire: Project Management
- Price Sheet

Where applicable, respondents should also be prepared to provide information on organizational capacity, relevant staff qualifications, quality-control processes, secure handling procedures, subcontractor management, resource-specific expertise, and ability to meet fixed milestone dates for batch-based production.

6. Response Submission Requirements

Responses must be submitted electronically no later than **Friday, May 8, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.**

Questions and Clarifications:

- Clarifying questions regarding this RFP must be submitted by **Monday, April 20, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.**
- Responses to submitted questions will be published by **Monday, April 27, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.**

Submission Instructions:

Detailed submission instructions, including portal access and procurement contact information, are provided in the official solicitation materials.

Proposals must be submitted through the [University of California Public Bid website](#) (RFP 003948-Mar2026). For more information, visit the [University of California Procurement website](#).

7. Evaluation Criteria and Scoring Rubric

Responses will be evaluated using the following weighting structure:

Category	Subcomponent	Weight
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Business Practices (Sustainability) and Data Security and Management	20%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Individual Resources and Quality	35%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	General SOW Requirements and Project Management	20%
Pricing / Quantitative	Price Sheet	25%

The qualitative portion accounts for 75% of the evaluation, and the quantitative pricing portion accounts for 25% of the evaluation.

8. Timeline and Key Dates

Event	Date	Notes
RFP Released	April 6, 2026	RFP released.
Questions Due	April 20, 2026	Organizations submit any clarifying questions about the RFP by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Responses to Questions Published	April 27, 2026	Smarter Balanced posts responses to submitted questions by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Response Submission Deadline	May 8, 2026	All required documents must be submitted electronically by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Notification of Selection(s)	June 9, 2026	Smarter Balanced communicates decisions to all organizations who submitted a response.
Contract Negotiations/Onboarding	June through August, 2026	Selected organization(s) begin discussions leading to potential agreements and onboarding.

Note: This timeline is subject to change at the discretion of Smarter Balanced.

9. Proprietary Information Disclosure

Organizations must clearly identify any information they consider proprietary. Proprietary information will only be shared with the evaluation committee convened specifically for this RFP. All other submitted information may be considered shareable with the state and territory educational agencies that compose Smarter Balanced's membership. Additionally, information may be disseminated in accordance with the University of California, Santa Cruz policy regarding public records disclosure.

10. Cost-Effective Procurement Support

This RFP is designed to support Smarter Balanced in identifying qualified supplier partners for accessibility resource development and related services. Where permitted by applicable regulations and procurement rules, the outcomes of this RFP may also help inform efficient future procurement planning for related work.

11. Non-Binding Nature

This RFP is intended solely to identify potential organizations for contract award and does not obligate Smarter Balanced to enter into any agreement. Smarter Balanced reserves the right to reject any or all responses, request clarifications, negotiate with selected respondents, or

pursue alternative procurement approaches as needed. All submitted materials may be used to support evaluation and planning activities, except for information properly identified as proprietary.