



**Request for Proposals (RFP)**  
**for English Language Arts/Literacy Content Development**  
**Issued by: Smarter Balanced**  
**Release Date: April 13, 2026 | Due Date: May 22, 2026**

## 1. Introduction

Smarter Balanced invites qualified organizations to submit proposals to support the creation, refinement, review, and production of ELA assessment content 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 ELA assessment content 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 ELA assessment content 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 ELA assessment content 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

The RFP seeks to identify one or more organizations capable of developing and delivering a comprehensive suite of ELA assessment content aligned with Smarter Balanced standards and specifications. This work includes:

- Development of ELA assessment items across Claims 1–4 and across grades 3–8 and high school
- Identification, sourcing, rights clearance, and review of passages and stimuli, including listening stimuli and performance task materials
- Development of thematically linked stimulus sets for performance tasks
- Recruitment, training, and facilitation of educator and subject-matter expert review activities
- Implementation of quality-control, revision, and approval processes
- Documentation and reporting to support Smarter Balanced review and approval workflows

All work must be conducted within Smarter Balanced’s Test and Item Management System (TIMS), which serves as the authoritative system of record. Suppliers will be responsible for authoring, uploading, managing, and tracking ELA content and associated metadata within TIMS, ensuring accuracy, consistency, and alignment with Smarter Balanced specifications.

All deliverables must align with Smarter Balanced ELA Content Specifications, Item and Task Specifications, Stimulus Specifications, Style Guide, Fairness Guidelines, Accessibility and Universal Design Guidelines, and metadata and blueprint alignment requirements.

The work also requires strict adherence to test security protocols, confidentiality requirements, and secure handling of assessment materials.

## 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 ELA assessment content 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: Organizational Experience and Staffing
- Questionnaire: Test Security and Test Item Management System
- Questionnaire: Content Development
- Questionnaire: Quality Assurance
- 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 22, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.

### Questions and Clarifications:

- Clarifying questions regarding this RFP must be submitted by **Friday, May 1, 2026**, at 5:00 p.m. Pacific Time.
- Responses to submitted questions will be published by **Friday, May 8, 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 003954 English Language Arts/Literacy Content for Smarter Balanced Assessments). 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	Organizational Experience	10%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Test Security	10%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	General SOW Requirements	15%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Project Management	10%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Test Item Management System	10%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Quality Assurance	15%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Content Development	20%
Questionnaires / Qualitative	Staffing	10%
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 13, 2026	RFP released.
Questions Due	May 1, 2026	Organizations submit any clarifying questions about the RFP by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Responses to Questions Published	May 8, 2026	Smarter Balanced posts responses to submitted questions by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Response Submission Deadline	May 22, 2026	All required documents must be submitted electronically by this date at 5 p.m. Pacific.
Notification of Selection(s)	Week of June 22, 2026	Smarter Balanced communicates decisions to all organizations who submitted a response.
Contract Negotiations/Onboarding	July 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 ELA assessment content 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.