



USABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND ACCOMMODATIONS IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this guide is to provide support for Smarter Balanced member states in their efforts to communicate information to districts and schools for the successful implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessments. States can use any tool included in this document, or modify any tool, as they transition to the assessment system. Successful implementation will help to ensure that educators and families are confident in the selection and use of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations that promote positive and productive experiences with the Smarter Balanced assessments. Successful implementation will also highlight the connection between needed usability, accessibility, and accommodations approaches in the classroom and during the assessments.

This manual provides states with both (a) clarification of the critical information to convey to districts and schools about the *Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines*, and (b) strategies for ensuring that the information in that document is conveyed to districts and schools. Our use of the terms “districts” and “schools” throughout this guide is intended to be inclusive of all the many entities found throughout Smarter Balanced member states, including local education agencies (LEAs) and charter schools.

BACKGROUND

Smarter Balanced provides a system of valid, reliable, and fair next-generation assessments in English language arts (ELA)/literacy and mathematics for grades 3–8 and high school. The Smarter Balanced assessment system includes a comprehensive suite of standards-aligned assessments and tools—including instructional supports, interim assessments, and summative assessments—to support effective teaching and maximize learning for each individual student. Computer adaptive testing technologies are used for the summative and interim assessments to provide meaningful feedback and actionable data, which teachers and other decision makers can use to help students succeed.

RESOURCES THAT SUPPORT THE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

The diversity of students’ needs in Smarter Balanced member states is complex. Therefore, the Smarter Balanced assessment system is also complex. Navigating the system is possible via several supporting resources (see Table 1). The resources are described briefly in this section.

Table 1: Assessment System Implementation Resources

Assessment System Implementation Resource	Appropriate Use of Resource
Accessibility and Accommodations Framework	<p>Use this document to learn more about the foundational principles regarding the resources available in the Smarter Balanced assessments. This document provides information about best practices; advances in assessment enabled by digital technologies; and developments in valid measurement that guided Smarter Balanced throughout test development.</p>
Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines	<p>Use this document for all information related to the provision of resources for students during the assessments. This document will provide the descriptions and recommended uses of each universal tool, designated support, and accommodation available for the Smarter Balanced assessments. A state may elect not to make available to its students any universal tool, designated support, or accommodation that is otherwise included in the <i>Guidelines</i> when the implementation or use of the universal tool, designated support, or accommodation is in conflict with the state’s law, regulation, or policy.</p>
Test Administration Manual	<p>Test administrators will use this document both in preparation for and during assessment events to ensure the valid administration of the Smarter Balanced assessments. This document provides detailed information on the school- and classroom-level administration of the summative assessment.</p>
Braille Test Administration Manual	<p>Test administrators will use this insert in parallel with the <i>Test Administration Manual</i> when administering the assessment to a student who uses braille. This document provides additional information specific to braille administration.</p>
Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP) Tool	<p>Teachers and academic decision makers, possibly with guardians and students, may use this optional tool to help match individual student needs with the most appropriate available universal tools, designated supports, and/or accommodations.</p>
Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines	<p>The purpose of this document is to support the process of developing and reviewing Smarter Balanced assessments that are fair for all groups of test takers, despite differences in characteristics including, but not limited to, disability status, ethnic group, gender, regional background, native language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.</p>

Assessment System Implementation Resource	Appropriate Use of Resource
Tools for Teachers	<p>These instructional resources may be used during instruction to help educators tailor instruction and boost student learning. Resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interim Connections Playlists • Instructional Resources • Formative Assessment Strategies • Accessibility Strategies • Professional Learning Resources • Interim Assessment Item Portal
Sample Items Website	<p>Use this site to preview examples of test questions used on Smarter Balanced assessments in English language arts/literacy and math. Test questions are developed with extensive involvement by educators, including test question writing, reviewing for accuracy, and ensuring questions are fair for all test takers.</p>
Smarter Content Explorer	<p>Assessing the range of knowledge and skills is important for college and career readiness. Use this site to learn how test items connect to academic standards.</p>
Smarter Annotated Response Tool (SmART)	<p>Use this tool to better understand how student writing is scored on Smarter Balanced assessments and support writing instruction in schools and classrooms. Browse a range of response types, explore interactive scoring rationales and rubrics, and practice scoring.</p>
Remote Teaching and Learning	<p>Use this site to discover how Smarter Balanced resources can be used to support teaching and learning in remote and hybrid teaching contexts. The suggestions provided on the site may also be used for in-person instruction.</p>
Desmos Calculators	<p>Use the embedded calculators offered by Smarter Balanced and Desmos that are free to students and include cutting-edge accessibility features. The calculators are also compliant with the latest web accessibility standards.</p>
Starting Smarter	<p>Families can use this site to better understand their student’s summative test score report and how they can support their child’s learning at home.</p>

Accessibility and Accommodations Framework

Recognizing the diverse characteristics and needs of students who participate in the Smarter Balanced assessments, the member states worked together, through the Smarter Balanced Test Administration and Student Access Work Group, to develop an *Accessibility and Accommodations Framework* that guided Smarter Balanced as it worked to reach agreement on the specific universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations available for the assessments. The work group also considered research-based lessons

learned about universal design, universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations. The overarching goal of Smarter Balanced is to provide every student with a positive and productive assessment experience, generating results that are a fair and accurate estimate of each student’s achievement. State, district, and school staff, parents, policymakers, and other decision makers can refer to this document to learn more about the underlying research base as well as lessons learned.

Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines

The [*Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines \(UAAG\)*](#) describe the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations available for the Smarter Balanced assessments. These guidelines are intended for school-level personnel and decision-making teams, as they prepare for and implement the Smarter Balanced assessments. The guidelines provide information for classroom teachers, English language development educators, special education teachers, and related services personnel to use in selecting and administering universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations. The guidelines are also intended for assessment staff and administrators who oversee the decisions that are made in instruction and assessment.

States may use the FAQs, an appendix in the UAAG, to assist districts and schools with transitioning from their former assessments to the Smarter Balanced assessments. In addition, the FAQs may be used by districts to ensure understanding among staff and schools regarding the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations available for the Smarter Balanced assessments. Schools may use them with decision-making teams (including parents) as decisions are made and implemented with respect to use of the guidelines.

Test Administration Manual

The *Test Administration Manual (TAM)* can be found by accessing the Smarter Balanced member portal. The TAM provides step-by-step test administration guidance for those individuals responsible for ensuring the valid assessment of the Smarter Balanced assessments. It is the responsibility of test coordinators and test administrators to understand and follow the information in the TAM. Classroom teachers, English language development educators, special education teachers, and related services personnel will also find useful information in the TAM.

Braille Test Administration Manual Insert

The *Braille Test Administration Manual (TAM) Insert* can also be found by accessing the Smarter Balanced member portal. The Braille TAM Insert is intended as an addition to the TAM for test administrators administering the assessment for students who use braille. The document is not intended as a stand-alone document and contains recommendations for pre-, during, and post-administration specific to braille administration.

Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP)

Specific student assessment needs for the Smarter Balanced Assessment System can be documented in an Individual Student Assessment Accessibility Profile (ISAAP), or in the state’s own decision-making process form. The ISAAP (or state-developed form) allows educators and schools to focus on each individual student

to document the designated supports and accommodations required to ensure valid results for the assessments.

Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines

The *Bias and Sensitivity Guidelines* document is used to support the process of developing and reviewing Smarter Balanced assessments that are fair for all groups of test takers, despite differences in characteristics including, but not limited to, disability status, ethnic group, gender, regional background, native language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. The Guidelines provide a foundation for diverse item writers and reviewers to address multiple viewpoints when evaluating assessment content for bias and sensitivity.

Tools for Teachers

Tools for Teachers is part of the Smarter Balanced suite of tools created by educators that include lessons, activities, strategies, and professional development resources to help tailor instruction and boost learning. *Tools for Teachers* provides educators, students, and families with standards-aligned assessments, student performance data, classroom instructional support, and professional learning.

DESIGN ELEMENTS THAT SUPPORT USABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Smarter Balanced assessments were developed with the recognition of the diverse characteristics and needs of students who participate in the assessments. Through the work of the Smarter Balanced member states, an array of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations is available to ensure that students' usability, accessibility, and accommodations needs are met.

- ▶ **Universal tools** are available to all students, based on student preference and selection.
- ▶ **Designated supports** for the Smarter Balanced assessments are those features that are available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators with parent/guardian and student.
- ▶ **Accommodations** are changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access during the Smarter Balanced assessments by generating valid assessment results for students who need them and allowing these students to show what they know and can do. Smarter Balanced member states have identified accommodations for students for whom there is documentation of the need for the accommodations in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan.

Universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations may be either embedded in the test administration system or provided locally (non-embedded). For more information, see the [*Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines*](#).

OVERVIEW OF STEPS FOR STATES TO TAKE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

For effective implementation of Smarter Balanced assessment guidelines, Smarter Balanced identified six steps for states to take:

1. Comparing Previous to New
2. Identifying Key Decision Makers
3. Developing Tools for Districts/Schools
4. Developing and Implementing a Communication Plan
5. Developing and Implementing a Training Plan
6. Checking on Implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines

These steps are the focus of this guide.

STEP 1: COMPARING PREVIOUS TO NEW

Understanding the differences between the previous policies for assessment participation and accommodations, which districts and schools are familiar with, and the new policies for the Smarter Balanced assessments is a very important step in the transition process. This step highlights the possible areas of differences in participation criteria and approaches to usability, accessibility, and accommodations. In each section, ways to convey the differences between previous and new by developing a crosswalk of the two are provided.

PARTICIPATION CRITERIA CROSSWALK

All students, except those with significant cognitive disabilities who meet the criteria for the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards (approximately 1% or fewer of the student population), are to participate in the Smarter Balanced assessments and meet the same performance expectations (see Appendix A). Further, only those ELs who are enrolled for the first year in a U.S. school may be excused from participation in the English language arts (ELA)/literacy assessment.

To assist your districts, schools, and families with the Smarter Balanced participation criteria, your state can develop a crosswalk matrix of your previous assessments and the Smarter Balanced summative assessments. A general crosswalk format is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: General Crosswalk Format for States to Compare Previous Participation Criteria and Smarter Balanced Participation Criteria

State's Previous Participation Criteria	Smarter Balanced Participation Criteria	Differences to Note
<p>Math general assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria here]</p>	<p>Math general assessment criteria: all students, including ELs, students with disabilities, and ELs with disabilities, except those students with disabilities who are participating in the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards.</p>	

State's Previous Participation Criteria	Smarter Balanced Participation Criteria	Differences to Note
<p>ELA general assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria here]</p>	<p>ELA general assessment criteria: all students, including ELs, students with disabilities, and ELs with disabilities, except possibly:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. those students with disabilities who are participating in the alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards, and 2. those English learners who are enrolled for the first year (i.e., fewer than 12 months) in a U.S. school. 	
<p>Math alternate assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria here]</p>	<p>Math alternate assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria agreed to by its consortia developing the alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards, or by its own criteria if the state is not part of a consortium]</p>	
<p>ELA alternate assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria here]</p>	<p>ELA alternate assessment criteria: [state inserts criteria agreed to by its consortia developing the alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards, or by its own criteria if the state is not part of a consortium]</p>	

USABILITY, ACCESSIBILITY, AND ACCOMMODATIONS CROSSWALK

In the past, states have had different approaches to usability, accessibility, and accommodations for their assessments of ELA and mathematics. Even if your state has had a computer-based assessment, the Smarter Balanced computer adaptive assessments create an opportunity to rethink how usability, accessibility, and accommodations policies are framed and communicated.

The Smarter Balanced assessment features (universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations) have shown to improve the assessment experience for all students. To be most beneficial for students, universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations should be used consistently in instruction and for assessments.

Smarter Balanced member states have agreed to a set of usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines. This is likely to mean that some past practices no longer apply and that new ones have been added. It is important for states to identify the differences between the previous and new for districts and

schools. Ensuring that districts and schools have ways to communicate to their educators and decision makers, including families, will be important as well. This latter goal is the focus of the following steps in this guide. A state may elect not to make available to its students any universal tool, designated support, or accommodation that is otherwise included in the guidelines when the implementation or use of the universal tool, designated support, or accommodation is in conflict with the state’s law, regulation, or policy.

Smarter Balanced identified three categories of resources—universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations—with each having both embedded and non-embedded versions. These three categories can be the basis for the first crosswalk that your state creates. It is recommended that this crosswalk address terminology changes. Table 3 provides a general crosswalk template for this purpose. Note that it is recommended that the Smarter Balanced terminology appear in the left-most column; then your state’s terminology can be added in the next column, followed by a column for comments on differences.

Table 3: Crosswalk Format for States to Compare New Terminology to Previous Terminology Related to Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations

Smarter Balanced Terminology	State’s Previous Terminology [example entries]	Differences to Note
<p>Universal Tools: access features of the assessment; these are available to all students based on student preference and selection</p>	<p>[e.g., Best Practices (provide state definition)]</p>	
<p>Designated Supports: features that are available for use by any student for whom the need for support(s) has been indicated by an educator (or team of educators with parent/guardian and student)</p>	<p>[e.g., Accommodations (provide state definition)]</p>	
<p>Accommodations: changes in procedures or materials that increase equitable access during the assessment for students who need them and for whom there is documentation on an IEP or 504 plan</p>	<p>[e.g., Accommodations (provide state definition)]</p>	
<p>[no similar term in <i>Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines</i>]</p>	<p>[e.g., Modifications (provide state definition)]</p>	

Tables 4 and 5 present the matrix of specific universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations for the Smarter Balanced assessments. The information in these tables, along with the footnotes that follow them, can provide the basis for developing crosswalks of the previous and new.

Table 4: Summary of Embedded Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations

Universal Tools	Designated Supports	Accommodations
Breaks	Color Contrast	American Sign Language ¹²
Calculator ¹	Illustration Glossaries ⁷	Braille
Digital Notepad	Masking	Braille Transcript
English Dictionary ²	Mouse Pointer	Closed Captioning ¹³
English Glossary	Streamline	Speech-to-Text
Expandable Passages and/or Items	Text-to-Speech ⁸	Text-to-Speech ¹⁴
Global Notes ³	Text-to-Speech in Spanish	
Highlighter	Translated Test Directions ⁹	
Keyboard Navigation	Translations (Glossary) ¹⁰	
Line Reader	Translations (Dual Language) ¹¹	
Mark for Review	Turn off Any Universal Tools	
Math Tools ⁴		
Spell Check		
Strikethrough		
Thesaurus ⁵		
Writing Tools ⁶		
Zoom		

¹ For calculator-allowed items only in grades 6–8 and HS

² For ELA performance task full writes

³ For ELA performance tasks

⁴ Includes embedded ruler, embedded protractor

⁵ For ELA performance task full writes

⁶ Includes bold, italic, underline, indent, cut, paste, spell check, bullets, undo/redo

⁷ For math items

⁸ For math stimuli and items and ELA items (not for reading passages)

⁹ For math items

¹⁰ For math items

¹¹ For math items

¹² For ELA listening Items and math items

¹³ For ELA listening items

¹⁴ For ELA reading passages, all grades

Table 5: Summary of Non-embedded Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations

Universal Tools	Designated Supports	Accommodations
Breaks English Dictionary ¹⁵ Scratch Paper Thesaurus ¹⁶	Amplification Bilingual Dictionary ¹⁷ Color Contrast Color Overlays Illustration Glossaries ¹⁸ Magnification Medical Supports Noise Buffers Read Aloud ¹⁹ Read Aloud in Spanish ²⁰ Scribe ²¹ Separate Setting Simplified Test Directions Translated Test Directions Translations (Glossary) ²²	100s Number Table Abacus Alternate Response Options ²³ Braille ²⁴ Calculator ²⁵ Multiplication Table Print on Demand Read Aloud ²⁶ Scribe ²⁷ Speech-to-Text Word Prediction

¹⁵ For ELA performance task full writes

¹⁶ For ELA performance task full writes

¹⁷ For ELA performance task full writes

¹⁸ For math items, paper-pencil assessment

¹⁹ For math stimuli and items and ELA items (not for reading passages)

²⁰ For math, all grades

²¹ For all items except ELA performance task full writes

²² For math items on the paper-pencil assessment

²³ Includes adapted keyboards, large keyboards, Sticky Keys, Mouse Keys, Filter Keys, adapted mouse, touch screen, head wand, and switches.

²⁴ For math and ELA paper-pencil assessment

²⁵ For calculator-allowed items only, grades 6–8 and HS

²⁶ For ELA reading passages, all grades

²⁷ For ELA performance task full writes

STEP 2: IDENTIFYING KEY DECISION MAKERS

Smarter Balanced emphasizes the accessibility of its assessments, and, in doing so, offers a variety of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations for diverse students with unique accessibility needs and preferences. With this more inclusive thinking, new approaches should be implemented to determine which students need which universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations.

Therefore, it is important to think about the key decision makers in this shift. Three areas for consideration here are: (1) who needs to make decisions about universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations; (2) who needs to implement the guidelines; and (3) who needs to support the implementation of guidelines. These three areas are addressed in this step.

WHO NEEDS TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT UNIVERSAL TOOLS, DESIGNATED SUPPORTS, AND ACCOMMODATIONS?

Districts and schools in most states have depended on IEP teams to make decisions about accommodations for students with disabilities who are receiving special education services, and on educators or administrators to make decisions about accommodations for English learners (ELs) and students with 504 plans.

The *Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* expands the number of individuals making decisions about universal tools and designated supports, just as the avenues to access for all students have been expanded through the universal tools and designated supports. Thus, as states consider how to ensure that the guidelines are implemented as intended, the number of potential decision makers who need to receive communications about making decisions must be expanded.

The guidelines explicitly indicate that **universal tools** are available to all students. Test administrators and educators preparing students for testing need to be aware that this is the case. It is important that, as soon as possible, clear communication is sent to all administrators and educators about universal tools. This information should also be available to families upon request or included in any discussions about statewide assessment.

Designated supports are available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators with parent/guardian and student. Although Smarter Balanced encourages schools to use a team approach to make decisions about each individual student's designated supports, ultimately an adult is responsible for these decisions and for entering the supports into the test registration tool. Educators must understand that students may use the designated supports only when an adult (or team) has specifically indicated that the student needs selected supports and has ensured that the supports are entered into the test registration tool.

Educators will need to be trained in how to make decisions about designated supports, including being aware that it is important not to select too many designated supports for a student because too many unneeded designated supports can interfere with optimal student performance. Educators making decisions about designated supports also will need to be familiar with the student's characteristics and needs, because this

information is critical for making effective decisions about needed designated supports. Ideas for resources that states and others can create to help with this decision-making process are provided in Step 3.

If your state has school-based teams or EL teams, these should also be considered when developing all training materials and processes. These teams will be valuable in ensuring that multiple perspectives are brought to bear on the characteristics and needs of students and in making decisions about needed designated supports.

For students with disabilities, decisions about **accommodations** will be made by the IEP team or the 504 team. These teams should always seek information from others.

It is important to note that the team approach encouraged by Smarter Balanced does not require the formation of a new decision-making team and that the structure of teams can vary widely depending on the background and needs of a student. An IEP or 504 team, or a locally convened student support team, can inform the test registration tool. For most students who do not require accommodations, an initial decision about needed designated supports by a teacher may be confirmed by a second person (potentially the student or the student’s parent/guardian). In contrast, for a student who is an EL and also has been identified as having one or more disabilities, the IEP team should include the English language development specialist who works with the student, along with other required IEP team members and the student, as appropriate. The composition of teams is not defined by Smarter Balanced; it is subject to state and federal requirements but otherwise is under the control of each district.

Regardless of whether a formal team process is used, access and fairness depend on decision makers having knowledge about:

- ▶ the member standards;
- ▶ the Smarter Balanced assessment targets; and
- ▶ ways of collaborating with other educational decision makers for successful student access.

WHO NEEDS TO IMPLEMENT THE GUIDELINES?

The implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines starts at the state level, through effective communication about the Smarter Balanced guidelines to districts and schools. Identifying who needs to be involved in districts and schools is also the responsibility of the state.

For districts, communication likely needs to be with several offices, each with a targeted message. Some examples are:

- ▶ Superintendent’s office—to ensure that the superintendent and staff know about the changes in policies
- ▶ Assessment office—to provide training on the guidelines
- ▶ Curriculum and instruction office—to ensure that all staff are aware of the new guidelines
- ▶ Special education office—to provide information about accommodations and implications of the new policies for IEP team procedures and forms as mentioned in the guidelines
- ▶ EL/Title III office—to provide information about language supports in the guidelines

Each state should develop a list of who needs to receive information and the specific nature of information each party needs to receive.

At the school level, the following professionals should be involved in the implementation process:

- ▶ special education teachers or 504 committee representatives
- ▶ language educators and facilitators (ESL/bilingual teacher[s], another ESL/bilingual/migrant teacher or EL administrator, language acquisition specialist, interpreter)
- ▶ assessment officials (test administrator[s], guidance counselor, reading specialist)
- ▶ general education teachers (classroom/content teacher[s])
- ▶ school psychologists
- ▶ first/native language special education practitioners
- ▶ school administrators (principal, school/district official[s])
- ▶ parent(s)/guardian(s)
- ▶ students

Implementation efforts should also include assessment, special education, Title III, and curriculum and instruction specialists. These individuals will be able to establish collaborative networks that facilitate the implementation process.

WHO NEEDS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES?

States can pursue different avenues of support for the implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines. Included among these avenues are families, the community at large, and higher education institutions.

Families can be a critical source of support. Working through parent/teacher organizations can facilitate this source of support.

Other important support can come from the greater community, including businesses. Ensuring that the greater community understands the new assessment policies and practices will reduce unexpected concerns being voiced after the assessments have been administered.

Thinking innovatively about sources of support for the implementation of the guidelines can help decision makers to reduce burden on the state. For example, enlisting faculty and staff in higher education institutions to help develop training materials is one possibility. Requesting the inclusion of information on the guidelines is another possibility.

STEP 3: DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR DISTRICTS/SCHOOLS

Providing districts, schools, educators, and families with concrete resources can help to ensure that the guidelines for the Smarter Balanced assessments are implemented as intended. In most states, implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessments is a significant shift from past state assessment practices. This means that district and school leaders, educators, and teams of decision makers will need to quickly become familiar with the assessments and the guidelines. Creating resources that meet their needs can go a long way to ensuring that these individuals know the assessments and are confident about their decision making.

Step 3 provides strategies for identifying needed resources and formats for delivery of these resources to districts and schools across a state. This step also suggests resources for states to consider developing to support their districts and schools during and after the transition from the former state assessments to the Smarter Balanced assessments. Templates for some of these resources are provided in this guide, along with suggestions for organizations with which to partner in the development of some resources.

Because of the importance of parents in the successful implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines, this step also provides ideas for the development of resources for families. Several possible resources are suggested, with examples included.

These resources are only as good as the extent to which they promote and support the implementation of the guidelines. To ensure that the resources that a state develops are effective for these purposes, this step provides suggestions for ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the resources.

DETERMINING RESOURCES AND DELIVERY FORMATS FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

Identifying who needs resources to support the implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines should be done prior to developing or adopting resources. A formal needs assessment is one way to do this, although it will require time to survey districts about their needs. A state that lacks time to do this might rely on its past experiences related to usability, accessibility, and accommodations interactions with its districts and schools. State staff should think about questions such as:

- ▶ What questions have our districts most frequently asked of the state about its accommodations policies?
 - For example, has the state received many requests about how IEP teams should be documenting accommodations on the IEP that are not allowed by the assessment?
- ▶ What types of issues have emerged in analyses of our state’s data on the use of accommodations?
 - For example, does the number of students using accommodations differ dramatically from one district to another, or from one school to another? What are our state’s current means for distributing information to districts? Does this current distribution method reach the people who need to know this information, given that the system is online?

- ▶ What kinds of concerns have been raised by administrators, teachers, school psychologists, parents, or others about the accessibility of the current statewide assessments or the accommodations that are currently available?

- ◉ For example, are most questions being raised by parents rather than schools?

The answers to these kinds of questions can inform the content of resources that are needed, the audiences that are most in need of resources, and the possible platforms for resource delivery (e.g., in-person training, web-based supports, pamphlets).

DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

Making Resources Specific to Your State

The Smarter Balanced usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines were developed for the Consortium; each state will want to design district and school resources that reflect the state. This can be accomplished by using state logos along with the Smarter Balanced logos.

Who Can Help Develop Resources

Many individuals within each member state are committed to the successful implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines. These individuals can assist with the design and development of the resources that are generated to ensure the successful implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessments. Consider using an existing educator committee or convening an ad hoc committee for assistance. Also, consider contacting institutions of higher education, educational service units, and districts for assistance with the identification of needed resources as well as with the development and review of the resources.

DEVELOPING RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Students' families should be continuously informed about the new Smarter Balanced assessments and usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines that are part of these assessments, since families are major decision makers in their children's education processes. Family input is critical to proper identification of students' usability, accessibility, and accommodations needs. Families' perceptions of what universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations are most effective for and most preferred by their children can inform decision making in preparations for the test administration.

Resources for families should incorporate questions about recommended universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations and their frequency and combinations of use in the home environment. Possible types of resources could include policy summaries, summaries of recent developments, tips for families, questionnaires, forms, etc. Resources for families should avoid excessive terminology and should be made available in a variety of families' native languages.

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF RESOURCES

In the process of distribution of educational resources, it is important to collect feedback from intended audiences on the level of effectiveness of these resources. Effective resources are adaptable, easy to access

and understand, appropriate for each given audience, easy to remember and reference, and user friendly. To measure the effectiveness of resources, electronic or paper evaluations can be collected when these resources are shared with audiences. Alternatively, three to four recipients of resources can be interviewed about their reactions to those materials.

Another productive method of measuring effectiveness involves testing a sample of readers about the content and format of each resource. It is also important to provide resources in multiple formats and to keep them updated so that they reflect the most current information in the usability, accessibility, and accommodations domain.

STEP 4: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Developing a clear and comprehensive communication plan will help to ensure that the critical information that needs to be conveyed about the implementation of the Smarter Balanced usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines is conveyed to the people who need the information. This step describes what states can do to develop and implement their own communication plans. It covers (1) what needs to be communicated to districts; (2) who needs to be involved in communications about the guidelines to districts; (3) multiple methods for districts and schools to communicate; (4) defining accountability/responsibility for the accomplishment of the plan; and (5) measuring effectiveness of the plan.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE COMMUNICATED TO DISTRICTS?

Smarter Balanced has built assessments that are based on a framework of accessibility for all students, including English learners (ELs), students with disabilities, and ELs with disabilities. Smarter Balanced recognizes that the validity of assessment results depends on each and every student having appropriate universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations.

A communications plan can provide a roadmap for disseminating important information and materials to districts. District and school staff will need to understand how the decision-making process and supporting information in the *Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* document can be used to select universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations for the Smarter Balanced assessments. Clarity of message is critical. Designating a single point of contact and developing a way for all internal staff to understand and communicate the same message are important aspects of a strong plan. The communications plan should include goals, activities, timelines, and who is responsible for each task.

The process of communicating with districts is not a one-shot event, but is a continuing process that provides additional information and resources as the Smarter Balanced assessments are rolled out and implemented. Districts will need information about both major and minor details. Your state should be prepared to carry out parts of the communications plan at critical points as the Smarter Balanced assessments are rolled out. A template of a communications planning resource is provided in Appendix B.

WHO NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED IN COMMUNICATIONS ABOUT THE GUIDELINES TO DISTRICTS?

Districts need to receive accurate, consistent, and coherent information about the Smarter Balanced guidelines. Several different agencies have important information and knowledge that should be incorporated into the communications plan. Leads from your state's assessment, special education, Title III, and curriculum and instruction divisions will need to work together to create a comprehensive communications plan.

MULTIPLE METHODS FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS TO COMMUNICATE

District and school leaders and IEP team members need to have the training, resources, tools, and information to successfully use the Smarter Balanced guidelines for decision making. Multiple methods of communication should be incorporated to support training and learning needs. Methods of communication may include:

- ▶ Posting resources, awareness information, and “how to” documents on your state’s website
- ▶ Holding virtual conferences and webinars
- ▶ Holding in-person trainings
- ▶ Using a train-the-trainer approach
- ▶ Facilitating Communities of Practice (CoPs)
- ▶ Disseminating information and responding to questions via blogs and other social media

So that your state can continuously improve how it communicates information, it is vital to know what in the communication process is working and what is not working. Communication is not a one-way street. A high-quality communications plan describes both formal and informal processes that schools and districts can use to get additional information, ask questions, and make comments. To ensure that your state has planned for this two-way communication, it may be helpful to have a Communications Interaction Plan. Appendix I provides a template for this resource.

DEFINING ACCOUNTABILITY/RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE PLAN

A high-quality communication plan includes deliverables and timelines, and lists those responsible for carrying out the various activities. In order to evaluate whether a communication plan has accomplished this purpose, appropriate goals need to be identified. Some possible goals to consider are:

- ▶ All educators understand that universal tools are available to all students.
- ▶ All educators understand that designated supports are available for use by any student for whom the need has been indicated by an educator or team of educators with parent/guardian and student.
- ▶ All students have access to the accommodations on their IEP or 504 plan.
- ▶ All IEP team members know when to revise a student’s IEP due to implementation of the Smarter Balanced guidelines.

States should add other appropriate goals and replace ones that are not appropriate.

MEASURING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PLAN

Because a communication plan represents a specific point in time, it is important to periodically review the plan; there may be a need for refinement, adjustments, and revisions. A high-quality communication plan includes a process for receiving useful and timely feedback that will both highlight what is working well and identify areas of concern. The plan should identify measures that will indicate whether districts and schools

are getting the information they need in ways that support the usability, accessibility, and accommodations decision-making process.

STEP 5: DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING A TRAINING PLAN

Having a strong plan for providing training to districts and schools is an essential step in the process of bringing the information in the *Smarter Balanced Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* to the field. To address this topic, Step 5 includes ways to identify critical information and training needs, involve critical audiences, set up a timeline, designate training methods and people, implement the training, and evaluate training outcomes.

IDENTIFYING CRITICAL INFORMATION AND TRAINING NEEDS

States must determine what information needs to be communicated, through training, to key decision makers. Providing the right level of information for decision makers is important for decision makers to feel confident in making the right decisions about designated supports and accommodations for students who are taking Smarter Balanced assessments. Conducting a needs assessment can help determine what information your state's decision makers are in most need of learning through training.

INVOLVING CRITICAL AUDIENCES

In planning for training, an important consideration is whom your state's critical audiences are. Who needs training on usability, accessibility, and accommodations? Your state may routinely provide training or informational updates on accessibility and accommodations. The implementation of Smarter Balanced assessments in your state presents an opportunity to examine your training approach and critical audiences and make adjustments, if needed.

Smarter Balanced recommends that training includes such key decision makers as general educators, special educators, English language development educators, assessment coordinators, test administrators, school psychologists, and parents.

Training is most successful when the participants, or the critical audiences in your state, believe that their needs are being addressed when the information is needed most. As previously mentioned, a needs assessment can help involve critical audiences, from the planning stages on, to ensure that their needs are being addressed.

SETTING UP A TIMELINE

Establishing a timeline for training is critical. Key questions to ask related to training timelines include the following:

- ▶ When are Smarter Balanced assessments given in my state?
- ▶ When do decision makers typically hold IEP team meetings?
- ▶ What format will the training use (e.g., in-person, webinar)?

It is important to plan the training well in advance of when decision makers will need to hold IEP team meetings so that all decision makers can receive the training necessary to make informed decisions. If your state has previously provided training on accessibility and accommodations, it will be important to consider whether your previous timeline will work with the timeline for administering Smarter Balanced assessments.

There are other timeline considerations. Trainings must be accessible to all participating educators, parents, and other participants. For example, if trainings are held in person, planning for trainings at multiple locations throughout the state may need to be factored into the timeline. In-person trainings must be planned around educators’ work schedules, with ample time to plan for substitute teachers. When in-person trainings include parents, timing should address needs for arranging time off of work and/or child care. Web-based trainings need to be provided in ways that will ensure that all participants have access to necessary content, tools, and other resources.

Table 7 illustrates steps in putting together a timeline for implementing a training plan. See Appendix C for a worksheet that can be used in planning a training timeline.

****Table 7: Steps in Putting Together a Timeline for Implementing a Training Plan**

Activity	Start Date	End Date	Important Notes
Begin planning the training			
Determine the audience for the training			
Decide what information needs to be conveyed by the training			
Decide on date(s) and (if needed) location(s) for the training			
Develop training content			
Prepare needed materials (for in-person training)			
Convene the training event			
Evaluate the training			
Administer Smarter Balanced assessments			

DESIGNATING TRAINING METHODS AND PEOPLE

Trainings are most effective when the methods are appropriate to the content of the training and the experience level of the participants. In preparing to provide training on usability, accessibility, and accommodations for Smarter Balanced assessments, consider what format your state's previous trainings have taken. Will previous formats be effective in communicating the components of decision-making related to usability, accessibility, and accommodations for Smarter Balanced assessments?

An effective training will also address diverse learners and include multiple methods of communicating information (e.g., print-based as well as auditory, opportunities for reflection and hands-on practice). For participants who have limited experience providing universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations for Smarter Balanced assessments, an in-person training may allow for question-and-answer formats that can correct potential misunderstandings on the spot. For more experienced participants, a web-based training or webinar may be sufficient.

IMPLEMENTING THE TRAINING

Conveying the training to those who need it includes making sure that critical audiences have information about the training in sufficient time to plan to attend or plan for the training. For in-person trainings, implementation includes establishing a meeting location and attending to travel logistics for participants. In addition, those leading an in-person training should make sure that there are enough training materials for those who are attending the event.

For web-based trainings, communicating expectations for where, when, and how the training should be accessed is key. Also, having technical support available to troubleshoot for participants who have technical challenges in accessing the training is essential.

EVALUATING TRAINING OUTCOMES AND IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL NEEDS AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER TRAINING

Training on usability, accessibility, and accommodations has both short-term and long-term outcomes. In evaluating short-term outcomes, it will be important to consider whether or not participants believe that the information provided in the training was sufficient, that their questions were answered, and that the training methods were conducive to participant learning. Long-term outcome evaluation should focus on improved decision making related to usability, accessibility, and accommodations. In examining long-term outcomes, states may want to pay attention to overall rates of students using universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations and types of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations used. Interviews with members of decision-making teams, including students, may serve to identify potential needs and resources for further training.

As Smarter Balanced assessments are implemented in your state, it will be important to evaluate the effectiveness of training in ensuring that decision makers have the information they need in order to make effective decisions for students who need designated supports and accommodations.

STEP 6: CHECKING ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SMARTER BALANCED GUIDELINES

After your state has devoted considerable effort and resources to ensure that districts and schools are implementing the Smarter Balanced usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines as intended, it will be important to check on the implementation. Doing so will help your state identify whether there are any additional implementation needs. Step 6 addresses what needs to be checked and for what reasons; who needs to check on what parts of the process; and what flags may point to intervention needs.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE CHECKED AND WHY?

In order to facilitate successful implementation of Smarter Balanced assessment processes in your state, educators at each level (state, district, school) should consider the following steps:

- ▶ Becoming familiar with Smarter Balanced assessment policies;
- ▶ Including all students in large-scale assessment;
- ▶ Documenting decisions related to students' usability, accessibility, and accommodations needs;
- ▶ Providing universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations depending on students' individual needs and preferences;
- ▶ Documenting the use of designated supports in students' ISAAPs, or other appropriate tools, and documenting the use of accommodations in students' IEPs;
- ▶ Evaluating the effectiveness of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations; and
- ▶ Making decisions based on evaluation results.

Additional consideration should be given to test security and ethical practices when administering Smarter Balanced assessments.

WHO SHOULD CHECK ON WHAT?

Decision makers in your state need to be aware of their responsibilities, depending on their levels of decision making, to support effective implementation of Smarter Balanced guidelines. Table 8 highlights core responsibilities of decision makers at each level. Decision makers should keep in mind that the lists of responsibilities in Table 8 are not exhaustive lists, and additional responsibilities should be considered depending on the context of your state.

Table 8: Responsibilities of Decision Makers

Decision Makers	Responsibilities
State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Communicating with Smarter Balanced, as well as with schools and districts, about usability, accessibility, and accommodations guidelines and practices ▶ Providing resources for districts and schools ▶ Identifying professional development needs in districts and schools ▶ Collecting, analyzing, and reporting data on universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations ▶ Suggesting policy and practice improvements, if necessary, based on state findings
Education agencies; higher education institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Developing resources for consortia, states, districts, schools, and communities ▶ Identifying needs for research focused on usability, accessibility, and accommodations ▶ Offering professional development opportunities and resources ▶ Preparing qualified professionals
Districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Communicating with schools and the state about usability, accessibility, and accommodations needs ▶ Overseeing administration of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations ▶ Evaluating effectiveness of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations on the district level ▶ Collecting, analyzing, and reporting data to the state ▶ Addressing professional development needs in schools
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Identifying usability, accessibility, and accommodations needs ▶ Allowing sufficient time for students to practice working with universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations ▶ Administering universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations ▶ Evaluating effectiveness of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations on the school level ▶ Making improvements, if necessary, to the use of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations

FLAGS FOR INTERVENTION NEEDS

When implementing Smarter Balanced usability, accessibility, and accommodation guidelines, your state should be mindful of the fact that universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations practices need to be customized to address individual students' needs. This section addresses some flags for intervention needs that may arise, depending on each particular assessment context.

Usability, accessibility, and accommodations information can be analyzed in different ways. Here are some questions to guide data analysis at the school and district level.

1. Are there policies in place to ensure ethical testing practices, the standardized administration of Smarter Balanced assessments, and that test security practices are followed before, during, and after the day of the test?
2. Are there procedures in place to ensure that test administration procedures are not compromised with the provision of designated supports and accommodations?
3. Are students receiving designated supports and accommodations as documented in their IEP, 504, or other plans?
4. Are there procedures in place to ensure that test administrators adhere to directions for the implementation of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations guidelines?
5. How many students are receiving designated supports and accommodations?
6. What types of designated supports and accommodations are provided, and are some used more than others?
7. How well do students who receive universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations perform on Smarter Balanced assessments? If students are not meeting the expected level of performance, is it due to students not having had access to the necessary instruction, not receiving the appropriate universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations, or using universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations that were not effective?

The following questions can be used to formatively evaluate the universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations used at the student level.

1. What universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations are used by the student during Smarter Balanced assessments?
2. What are the results of assessments when universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations are used versus when they are not used? If a student did not meet the expected level of performance, is it due to the student not having access to the necessary instruction, not receiving the appropriate universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations, or using universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations that were not effective?
3. What is the student's perception of how well the universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations worked?
4. What combinations of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations seem to be effective?
5. What are the difficulties encountered in the use of universal tools, designated supports, or accommodations?
6. What are the perceptions of teachers and others about how the universal tool, designated support, or accommodation appears to be working?

7. How have the characteristics of the student changed over time to warrant a plan or designated support or accommodation change?

School- and district-level questions can be addressed by a committee responsible for continuous improvement efforts, while the student-level questions need to be considered by an informed adult or IEP or 504 team. It is critical to stress that formative evaluation is not the responsibility of just one individual; the entire team should contribute to the information-gathering and decision-making processes.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATION CRITERIA FOR ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT ON ALTERNATE ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS (AA-AAS)

The criteria for participation in the alternate academic assessment reflect the pervasive nature of a significant cognitive disability. All content areas should be considered when determining eligibility for this assessment.

In addition, evidence for the decision for participating in the alternate academic assessment is **not based** on:

1. A disability category or label
2. Poor attendance or extended absences
3. Native language/social/cultural or economic difference
4. Expected poor performance on the general education assessment
5. Academic and other services student receives
6. Educational environment or instructional setting
7. Percent of time receiving special education
8. English learner (EL) status
9. Low reading level/achievement level
10. Anticipated disruptive behavior
11. Impact of student scores on accountability system
12. Administrator decision
13. Anticipated emotional duress
14. Need for accommodations to participate in assessment process

Alternate Assessment Participation Determination

Participation Criteria	Participation Criteria Descriptors	Agree (Yes) or Disagree (No); Provide Documentation for Each
The student has a significant cognitive disability	<p>Reviews of student records indicate a disability or multiple disabilities that significantly impact intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior.</p> <p><i>*Adaptive behavior is defined as essential for someone to live independently and to function safely in daily life.</i></p>	
The student is learning content linked to (derived from) the state standards	Goals and instruction listed in the IEP for this student are linked to the enrolled grade level standards and address knowledge and skills that are appropriate and challenging for this student.	
The student requires extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade- and age-appropriate curriculum	The student (a) requires extensive, repeated, individualized instruction and support that is not of a temporary or transient nature and (b) uses substantially adapted materials and individualized methods of accessing information in alternative ways to acquire, maintain, generalize, demonstrate, and transfer skills across multiple settings.	

The student is eligible to participate in the alternate content assessment if all responses above are marked Yes.

APPENDIX B: COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING RESOURCES TEMPLATES

Communications Planning Template – Messages and Methods

Communication Target	Assessment Division	Special Education Division	Title III Division	Curriculum & Instruction Division
District Superintendent				
District Coordinators				
Other District Staff				
School Principal				
School Staff				
Families/Parents				
Community Media				

Note: The state department divisions listed and the communication targets should be changed to meet your state’s needs. Each cell (when appropriate) should be filled with information on the messages to be communicated and the methods used to communicate.

Communications Interaction Plan Template

Communication Target	District Personnel	School Personnel	Families	Community Members
Questions about Guidelines				
Implementation Feedback				
Data on Use of Non-embedded Universal Tools, Designated Supports, and Accommodations				

Note: The list across the top (district, school, families, community) and the communication targets should be changed to meet your state’s needs. Each cell (when appropriate) should be filled with information on to whom (or which division) in your state the communication should be directed.

APPENDIX C: DEVELOPING A TIMELINE FOR TRAINING

Timeline for Implementation Training

Activity	Start Date	End Date	Notes
Begin planning the training			
Determine the audience for training			
Determine what information the training should convey			
Determine the training format			
Develop training content			
Prepare needed materials			
Hold the training			
Evaluate the training			
Administer Smarter Balanced assessments			
Evaluate the implementation of the training in improving decision making			
Project end			