

Some Top-Level Decisions a Consortium Should Consider
in Relation to the USED Assessment NIA¹

Center for Assessment
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A consortium must make decisions regarding the overall shape of its proposal. These annotated questions are intended to help a consortium be aware of and make large, “top-level” design decisions. This document identifies top-level considerations in the conceptual design of the assessments, in the constraints of the consortium, and in the way decisions will be made by the consortium.

As the consortium proceeds through these practical questions it will become clear that the answers and the resulting assessment design should be informed and driven by the consortium’s definition of *college readiness* and the consortium’s belief about what constitutes *sufficient evidence* that a student has met that definition of college readiness.

The logical starting point for a consortium’s definition of college readiness are the college- and career- ready content standards that it adopts. Typical standards, however, have not included definitions of proficiency or college-readiness. The recent draft NGA/CCSSO Common Core State Standards (CCSS) also did not include definitions of proficiency that could be considered sufficient to guide assessment development and the development of performance standards. This is because most collections of content standards, including the CCSS, are written with the content standard as the unit of analysis, when proficiency [or college readiness] is conceived of at a higher level of integration and generality than mastery of an individual standard. What do the cooperating institutions of higher education value in terms of “college ready” information? What does the consortium want to specify in terms of “college ready” information?

The definition of “college readiness” in terms of assessment information is a central design decision. A consortium should decide on its definitions and then choose an appropriate assessment model. For example, an end-of-course model states that a student will be declared as “college ready” in terms of this assessment if the student scores satisfactorily on a series of tests that usually are taken in grades 9, 10, and 11. An end-of-span model states that the evidence for being college-ready must be gathered close to when the student graduates/enters college, and involve demonstration of cumulative knowledge, i.e., what has been retained and what can be integrated and applied. Another example: a content mastery model asserts that the student is adequately proficient on each specified part. A general proficiency model asserts that the student’s overall performance is adequate without assertions about performance on specific content or skills (i.e., the definition of adequate performance does not specify performance on each part). A consortium that chose a content mastery model would design a very different “through-course assessment component” than would a consortium that chose a general proficiency model.

The definition of *sufficient information* refers specifically to what will be reported that will achieve the purposes of the consortium. The most common information now reported for individual student summative purposes are a total scale score and a few subscores on a score report, a declaration of a proficiency level, and perhaps a summary statement about growth. What does an IHE need and want? Other audiences? To determine whether the information is sufficient “to achieve the purposes,” consider question #1.

The definition of *sufficient evidence* should be the basis for the reported score or profile. When the consortium provides a score and asserts that a student is “college ready,” what does the consortium consider adequate evidence to make that claim credible and technically adequate? Getting that evidence is what drives the design of the assessment.

Conceptual Design Considerations

1. What significant educational problems does the consortium address with this assessment proposal?
 - 1.1. If the proposal is funded, what will the benefits be in terms of outcomes for students, parents, schools, IHE, or others?
2. What information will the consortium’s assessment produce? To whom and how will the assessment information be available?
 - 2.1. How much of this information will come from summative assessments? How much will come from other assessments or other activities?
 - 2.2. How will this assessment information address the problems in #1?
 - 2.3. How will this assessment information make things any different from what has been done up to now?

Note: A consortium should persuade itself that its proposal will make a difference over and beyond what has been done up to now. Some possible reasons for projected greater success are:

- a) newer, better information from what was provided before (e.g., information on growth as well as status will result in low-performing schools improving more rapidly because...);
- b) better use structures (e.g., a focus on teacher accountability as well as school accountability will result in low-performing schools improving more rapidly because...);
- c) overcome poor quality implementation (e.g., provide the same assessment information for the same purposes, but in more useful ways or involving more of the targeted users (e.g., providing the same score information, but more quickly and in a more understandable format will result in low-performing school improving more rapidly because...));
- d) carry through implementation to more advanced end point (e.g., the right system was being implemented well, but just needed more time)
- e) influence the outcomes in some other way.

Note: These should be coherent and specific. For example, if the consortium proposes the use of computer-based performance assessments but does not change the nature of scores reported, the use structures, the implementation quality or implementation sustainability, then how does the consortium propose that the new assessments will have an effect? If the proposed effect

comes primarily from faster return of results, for example, then why would it matter if the score were based on performance assessments or not?

Note: Some of the design decisions will be to help avoid unintended negative consequences.

3. What content standards will the consortium’s summative assessments address? What is the basis for that decision?
 - 3.1. For example, if the consortium adopts the CCSS, will the summative assessment address standards of Speaking, Listening, cross-curricular writing in science and social studies, mental math such as estimations, problem solving in mathematics, critical reading of literature more than a passage long, etc.?

Note: What is the general intention of the consortium in terms of claims about college readiness in relation to standards? (See #1) To really answer this specifically the consortium will need to closely analyze the content standards and proficiency definition, but the consortium can make a decision about what is the general summative assessment target.
4. **Will** the consortium submit a proposal for Category A (Comprehensive Assessment Systems), Category B (High School Course Assessments), or both?
 - 4.1. If only A, will the consortium propose more summative assessment than “once in high school”? That is, will the consortium propose under Category A developing a single high school assessment or a set of end-of-course-exams, both, or some other design?
 - 4.2. If B, how will the consortium’s states integrate the STEM and Post-secondary Career Assessment specifications with the other parts of the states’ assessment systems?
5. Will the summative assessment design be the same for every grade and content area?
6. Will the consortium use adaptive testing for summative purposes?

Note: What, why, and how? (See questions 1-5 above.)
7. Will the consortium use local assessment information to produce summative student results?

Note: What, why, and how? (See questions 1-5 above.)
8. What proportion of an approximate award of \$160 million would the consortium propose be spent on developing summative assessments?
 - 8.1. What proportion would be spent on other deliverables (e.g., interim assessment products, formative assessment supports, professional development, research studies to secure IHE use, etc.)?

Note: What, why, and how? (See questions 1-6 above.)

Consortium Constraint Considerations for the Assessment Design

1. Will the consortium target essentially 100% computer-based administration at some point in time (allowing for separate administration for things such as performance assessments if in the

consortium’s design)? If so, what is the implementation schedule to get from where states are currently to that target?

2. How much administration time will the consortium specify for the summative assessments (e.g., one class period, three class periods, more)?
3. Are there commitments for a state that might be difficult to change for legal, political, or cultural reasons (e.g., a statutory requirement that certain results be returned within a certain time period; certain information may not be collected or reported; certain content standards will/not be assessed; the state department of education/board of education/other entities will/not be involved in the assessment process in certain ways)?
4. What is the on-going cost to states that the consortium will design towards?
 - 4.1. What are the definitions of what is included, and the assumptions for net cost? (For example, is the consortium aiming at a per student/content test of under \$8; \$8-12; \$12-16; \$16-20; over \$20?)
 - 4.2. What are the assumptions about future cost implications (e.g., cost savings from using technology for test scoring; cost savings from teachers writing items)? How will these assumptions be checked?

Note: It is natural to hope that hard problems will be solved in the future. For example, it is easy to say that “future technologies will enable computer scoring of complex item responses at far lower costs than possible today.” For this and other technology/infrastructure issues, what specific technologies has the consortium identified as being currently available and scalable; what specific capacities has the consortium identified as not currently being available but counts on being developed for operational use by a time point specified in the proposal? How much of that development is included in the proposal?

Consortium Decision-Making Considerations for the Assessment Design

1. How will decisions be made, by whom?

Note: For example, will the process be to have a smaller group of states (e.g., Governing States or Design States) make initial decisions and propose to the larger group of states? How many persons from which states will be in the group(s) that decide? Will the process be the same as the proposal evolves?

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