

Guidance for Supporting Assessment Peer Review Submissions

To meet the requirements outlined in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), all states are required to demonstrate the technical quality of their federally required assessment systems. The U.S. Department of Education (USED) requires all states to submit evidence specifying how their assessment systems meet each of USED's Critical Elements. Critical Elements are established criteria that describe statutory and regulatory requirements for state assessment systems. During the peer review process, states are required to demonstrate how their assessment systems address each Critical Element. Each state must prepare and submit for peer review approximately four weeks prior to USED-scheduled assessment peer review dates.

States are required to submit evidence for all assessments in mathematics, reading/language arts, and science, as well as for English language proficiency (ELP) assessments and any locally selected, nationally recognized high school academic assessments that a state administers or makes available for district use. States must demonstrate that all assessments within their statewide system are valid and reliable measures of student performance. For all assessments, states must provide evidence that each assessment is an accurate measure of state standards and includes accommodations needed for all students to participate in statewide assessments (with an exception for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, who may take an alternate ELP assessment if they are unable to participate in the general assessments). States must submit evidence that demonstrates that assessments are:

- » aligned with state content or ELP standards;
- » valid and reliable measures of state content or ELP standards; and
- » of adequate technical quality.

State education agency (SEA) staff may have questions about the overall assessment peer review process, including questions about what documentation or evidence the state submission should include for its assessments. SEA staff may request support from technical assistance (TA) providers to identify appropriate documentation, communication tools, or procedural guides for use as documentation of evidence that Critical Elements are addressed within a state's assessment system. This guide provides suggestions for TA providers when working with SEA staff, identifying possible actions and considerations that can support state development of their assessment peer review submissions.

To support SEA and TA staff, the Center on Standards and Assessment Implementation has developed the Peer Review Evidence Organizer for use in developing and organizing state submissions. The purpose of the this tool is to help identify and organize state evidence, in addition to identifying the Critical Element(s) each piece of evidence is related to. TA providers and SEA staff can use this tool to first catalogue all possible evidence for the peer review submission and mark the Critical Elements that are met by documents. Users

can then filter by Critical Elements, identifying those that have been sufficiently met and those that will need additional evidence before state submissions can be finalized. This tool can be used to organize and track all collected evidence to help develop a comprehensive submission that addresses all required Critical Elements.

Information on the assessment peer review process has been taken from the U.S. Department of Education's [A State's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education's Assessment Peer Review Process](#) guidance document, which provides information on the assessment peer review Critical Elements.

Reviewing Assessment Peer Review Requirements

Before commencing work with SEA staff, TA providers should start with review of the Critical Elements and updated guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, noting the additions associated with the authorization of ESSA (e.g., states now have the option to administer native language assessments for American Indian and Alaska Native students). SEAs may have questions about what the Critical Elements are and how each relates to states' assessment systems (e.g., How does a state demonstrate the validity of its assessments? What constitutes cataloging of state policies and procedures?). There may also be questions about identifying evidence that best exemplifies Critical Elements requirements (e.g., which documents states should submit, what peer reviewers are looking for in state documentation). As TA providers review the Critical Elements with SEA staff, this is a good opportunity to address any questions or confusion that SEA staff may have around the content and expectation of evidence required for each Critical Element.

A State's Guide to USED's Assessment Peer Review Process provides an overview of each Critical Element requirement and how each Critical Element is related to technically sound assessment practices. The guide also includes examples of evidence that could be submitted to demonstrate compliance with each Critical Element (e.g., to demonstrate policies for including all students in state testing, the USED guide lists test coordinator manuals, test administrator manuals, and accommodations manuals as possible state evidence that can be included in the state submission).

Familiarity with the Critical Elements will help TA providers collaborate with SEA staff to develop a common conception of the Critical Elements, identifying the elements applicable to state assessments (e.g., Critical Elements 7.1–7.3 apply only to locally selected high school academic assessments), and the documentation that states can submit to meet each element. Once TA providers are familiar with the assessment peer review process and associated Critical Elements, work can commence with SEA staff.

Reviewing States' Peer Review Documentation

During the planning process, TA providers should collect information about the state's prior assessment peer review submissions, including identification of resources and supports that were previously used to understand peer review submission requirements. Prior state peer review submissions for all required assessments should be compiled and examined to identify the state evidence that was submitted for review, as some documents may still be applicable to a new state submission (e.g., testing handbooks, technical assessment documentation). This will also allow SEA staff and TA providers to review any responses and notes from USED and peer reviewers, identifying any previous issues that should be addressed in subsequent peer review submissions.

States may also elect to review USED decisions letters sent to other states regarding peer review submission. Decisions letters are posted on the [USED website](#). Each letter includes a determination as to whether states have fully met, substantially met, partially met, or not met peer review requirements. These letters also identify any additional documentation that must be submitted for any Critical Elements that were not sufficiently addressed during peer review. This information can provide insights into the perspectives of peer reviewers in terms of how states are expected to demonstrate compliance with the Critical Elements. This process may be particularly helpful when reviewing decision letters for other states that belong to the same assessment consortia and identifying any questions or issues that may be pertinent to other state submissions. States may also be interested in contacting other states to further discuss decision letters and learn more about how states responded to USED.

Planning Work with States

Identify State Staff and Their Peer Review Capacity

To begin, TA providers should ask the state to identify all SEA staff who will contribute to the peer review submission and categorize the level of familiarity and experience each SEA staff member has with the assessment peer review process. This will help TA provider staff gauge the level of familiarity participating SEA staff have about the peer review process, including any prior experience contributing to a state peer review submission. If SEA staff have limited experience with the assessment peer review process, TA providers will want to identify the information and guidance that SEA staff will need to successfully complete their peer review submission.

Project Timeline and Milestones

Based on discussions of SEA staff capacity and identified needs, TA providers should establish a project timeline to identify progress metrics and deadlines leading up to completion of the state submission. This project timeline should account for capacity building and developing SEA staff understanding of assessment peer review as needed, and time for reviewing state documents and developing analytic notes on how each document addresses Critical Elements. The timeline should also include a schedule for regular meetings with SEA staff to discuss progress and address questions or issues that may arise, identifying the TA provider and SEA staff that will participate in these meetings. This project timeline will guide progression of state submission development. A sample project timeline may look like this:

- » Weekly check-in meetings with key TA and SEA staff
- » Identification of SEA staff (two days)
- » Review of peer review requirements and Critical Elements (one week)
- » Review of prior state peer review submissions (three days)
- » Creating an outline of all state test administration processes (three days)
- » Identifying Critical Elements that will be addressed by the state (three days)
- » Compiling state documentation for evidence (two weeks)
- » Reviewing state documents and identifying associated Critical Elements (two weeks; repeat the process each time new documents are identified)
- » Editing the pool of state evidence to identify the most pertinent and relevant documents (one week)
- » Developing the narrative text for final state submission (one week)

Developing an Outline of Test Administration Processes

In preparation for state submission development, TA providers can suggest that SEA staff outline all state policies and procedures related to each state of assessment administration. While this step is not required for developing a state submission, this process can be a critical part of helping states identify and catalogue all their protocols, prompting identification of applicable documents that can be submitted as evidence of Critical Element coverage. SEA and TA staff might consider including protocols for assessment administration preparation and secure handling of assessment materials both before and after administration, as well as protocols guiding reporting of assessment results. States should have clear guidance for expected actions related to assessments, including identification of roles and responsibilities during assessment-related processes. Prior to identifying state documents and artifacts for evidence, SEA staff might develop an outline of all assessment administration policies, covering actions that must be completed prior to, during, and after assessment administration. This outline should also include state protocols for accurately and punctually sharing assessment protocols with district and school staff; this might include identifying assessment-related training materials or training modules that could be included in the state submission. After developing an outline of state assessment administration processes, SEA staff can use this information to identify state evidence that best exemplifies these processes and can be selected for the state's submission.

Analyze Critical Elements

As part of planning discussions, SEA staff should identify the Critical Elements that will be addressed by state evidence and begin identifying documents or artifacts that may be incorporated into the state submission. If the state developed an overview of all its assessment-related processes, this can be used as a tool for identifying how Critical Elements apply to different processes. Reviewing existing state testing processes can also help identify Critical Elements and processes that might be addressed by the state's assessment vendors. For example, Critical Element 4.1 requires documentation of assessment reliability for each student group, necessitating technical documentation from the assessment vendor. Once SEA staff are well versed with the Critical Elements and their alignment to state protocols and policies, they can identify which Critical Elements the state will address and which may have to be addressed by the assessment vendor. States that are members of an assessment consortium such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers should check with the consortium to determine the peer review support that the consortium provides. Reviewing prior state assessment peer review submissions can also help determine which Critical Elements are to be addressed by the state. Identifying the Critical Elements that the state will be responsible for will then guide the progression of project work and impact the evidence selected for the state submission.

Developing State Submission for Assessment Peer Review

Collecting State Evidence

Once SEA staff have identified the Critical Elements to be addressed by state-supplied evidence, they can start identifying the documentation or artifacts to be included in the state submission. Evidence for the state submission should demonstrate state policies and protocols overseeing all aspects of state assessment administration, from information dissemination and training to data handling and security. A review of existing state protocols and policies related to testing can help identify where SEA staff may start to look for state documentation to include as evidence. SEA staff may need to work with different state departments to identify and compile all documentation and artifacts related to assessment. Referencing an overview of

existing state policies and procedures regarding testing, evidence should be collected from state guides related to assessment administration and handling (e.g., state testing handbooks, state test security guides, training materials for administering computer-based assessments). TA providers can support SEA staff in identifying possible evidence that might be most effective for meeting Critical Elements requirements. This might include identifying and reviewing state handbooks for administering and handling statewide assessments as well as any state documentation for administering and monitoring assessment accommodation options.

SEA staff and TA providers may elect to review state-produced guides that are developed and disseminated to identify proper assessment-related protocols. Different state guides may have been developed to address different state assessments; one guide might have been developed for administering state English language arts and mathematics assessments, while a separate guide might have been developed for administering state ELP assessments. There may not be a comprehensive state document that addresses every aspect of administering; multiple state guides may need to be submitted to demonstrate compliance with different Critical Elements. For example, information on the assessment accommodations provided by the state may be in a document or guide separate from the assessment handling guide; both should be included in the state submission to demonstrate how the state addresses different Critical Elements. SEA staff may have to liaise across different programs to identify and access all guides and protocol documents related to the myriad aspects of assessment administration and handling. SEA staff should also consider communications (e.g., newsletters, emails) that may contain information or guidance related to assessment protocols and include the communications in document review. After state documentation and artifacts related to the Critical Elements have been identified, analysis can commence.

Analyzing State Evidence

After reviewing Critical Elements and state evidence, TA providers can commence providing analytic support. For each possible piece of state evidence, TA providers can work with SEA staff to identify how each piece demonstrates alignment with the Critical Elements and to what degree alignment exists. SEA staff may need support in reviewing all collected state evidence and identifying the Critical Element that is addressed by each piece of evidence. At the onset of this process, TA providers can address questions SEA staff may have about the proper alignment between state evidence and Critical Elements and ensuring that all applicable Critical Elements are identified. TA providers may elect to analyze some sample state evidence and provide examples of how documents meet Critical Element requirements. These examples should also help SEA staff recognize what constitutes strong and weak alignment between state evidence and Critical Elements.

As SEA staff and TA provider staff review state evidence, it is important to take detailed notes that specify how each document addresses Critical Elements and is relevant to the state submission. For each piece of state evidence, notes should specify which Critical Elements are addressed and how strongly each piece of evidence addresses the statutory and regulatory requirements of the Critical Elements. The CSAI Peer Review Evidence Organizer can be a helpful tool for SEA staff to itemize state evidence and organize these notes for use in the state ELP assessment peer review submission. This tool includes prompts for users to list all potential state evidence and identify all associated Critical Elements for each piece. For each piece of state evidence, there may be multiple Critical Elements that are addressed; for example, a state's testing guide may demonstrate protocols for administration of both general and alternate assessments. In these cases, USED encourages states to avoid submitting multiple copies of the same documents; instead, states can identify and reference specific page numbers or sections applicable to each addressed

Critical Element. SEA staff can use Peer Review Evidence Organizer to make notes about the alignment between state evidence to different Critical Elements and make notes about the strength of alignment. The notes should also include identification of specific page numbers or sections that are most relevant to each Critical Element, identifying the areas or sections that peer reviewers should ultimately focus on. These analyses will be critical for developing an assessment peer review state submission, as these notes will be used to provide detail and context for peer reviewers.

For peer review submissions, states will want to develop a narrative that specifies how state evidence demonstrates alignment to all required Critical Elements and provide details that may not be readily apparent when reviewing documents. Peer reviewers will be comprised of experts in learning standards and assessments who will apply their technical expertise to the review process. To support this review process, states will want to ensure that their peer review submission text is clear and specific about why each piece of evidence is being included and how each piece addresses a Critical Elements requirement. Analysis notes will help develop concise text that enables peer reviewers to rapidly and accurately identify how each piece of state evidence addresses Critical Elements requirements.

Reviewing Analysis and Revising Submission

Once initial document analyses have been completed, TA providers can support SEA staff in reviewing notes to identify areas of strong evidence and areas necessitating further documentation. For each Critical Element, TA providers can offer a review of the associated state documents and artifacts and check the level of alignment between proposed state evidence and Critical Element requirements. For each piece of state evidence, SEA staff should have noted whether each document represents strong, moderate, or weak evidence for the state submission. In this review, TA providers can offer feedback on how well each piece of state evidence demonstrates the statutory and regulatory requirements of the Critical Elements, particularly in terms of the clarity of each piece. For the state submission, SEA staff will want to focus on only submitting evidence that clearly demonstrates Critical Elements requirements and can use TA provider feedback to refine the list of state evidence. TA providers can also conduct a high-level review of state evidence to ensure that all Critical Elements are addressed with strongly aligned state documentation.

TA providers can also help SEA staff identify areas where state evidence is weak or nonexistent. If there are Critical Elements that have weakly aligned evidence or lack evidence entirely, TA providers can highlight these elements for SEA staff to review and address. Critical Elements that are not adequately addressed by state evidence will require SEA staff to identify additional documents for review or contact other SEA departments to obtain pertinent documents. SEA staff may also have to consider whether Critical Elements missing evidence may require documents from assessment vendors. For Critical Elements with weakly aligned evidence, SEA staff will need to determine if there are other identified documents that might better address Critical Elements requirements or if new documents will have to be identified and analyzed. This review process will support SEA and TA staff in identifying any Critical Elements that will require new or revised state evidence to address requirements.

After sharing feedback with SEA staff, TA providers should devote meeting time to discussing feedback, particularly the areas of convergence and disagreement on how state evidence exemplifies Critical Elements requirements. For the areas of disagreement, TA providers can focus on understanding SEA staff perspectives regarding evidence and their alignment to the Critical Elements. These conversations can inform analytic notes that are used to develop narrative text. If there are persistent questions about

what constitutes strong evidence, TA providers may need to focus on identifying the characteristics of strong evidence and on helping SEA staff bolster their capacity for reviewing state documents and identifying the correct alignment to the Critical Elements.

After SEA staff have worked with TA providers to refine conception of strong evidence and demonstration of Critical Elements, additional analysis will be conducted on state evidence to ensure that document alignment to elements is correctly identified. This additional analysis will ensure that state evidence is reviewed multiple times (possibly by different staff members) and assessed for proper alignment to Critical Elements. The analysis cycle can also refine the state submission and identify state documents that are weakly aligned and unnecessary for review. The analysis process should be repeated each time new state evidence is identified to assess how strongly the evidence addresses Critical Elements. This repeated analysis will ensure that state evidence is reviewed multiple times to correctly identify alignment to Critical Elements while also removing documents that are not applicable or relevant to the state submission. This process can also be valuable for developing interrater reliability and ensuring that different readers apply a common understanding of Critical Elements alignment to the state submission and its development process. This will help the state develop a document analysis process that SEA staff can codify and apply to subsequent peer review-related work.

Final Evidence Review

In preparation for developing the state submission, SEA staff should conduct a high-level review of the final selection of state evidence and identify how well the Critical Elements are addressed. In this high-level review, SEA staff should identify the state evidence that was identified as representative for each Critical Element. This final review will clarify how each piece of state evidence addresses the Critical Elements and ensure that duplicate documents are not incorporated into the final state submission. For each piece of state evidence, TA providers and SEA staff should finalize analytic notes that identify how the evidence addresses Critical Elements requirements, specifying the page numbers or sections that peer reviewers can focus on. These notes can subsequently be used to develop explanatory text for the final state submission.

Finalizing the State Submission

Based on the high-level review of final state evidence, TA providers can then support SEA staff in refining and finalizing their state submission. The final state submission should be comprehensive and clear about how each piece of state evidence directly addresses each Critical Element. SEA staff will want to ensure that their submission is specific about the sections and text that peer reviewers should focus on. States are required to fill out the [Academic Assessment Peer Review Submission Cover Sheet](#) and [Index Template or the ELP Assessment Peer Review Submission Cover Sheet and Index Template](#) and list all the state evidence that is included in the submission. Each template includes a section for writing narrative text explaining how each piece of collected evidence exemplifies each Critical Element and demonstrates how state protocols and policies meet those statutory and regulatory requirements. The final state submission will include the filled-in cover sheet, template, and attached state evidence.

The template should include brief but comprehensive narrative text that explains how the state's protocols and practices meet all Critical Elements requirements. This narrative text should identify all state evidence that is being submitted and specify how each piece of evidence addresses Critical Elements requirements. If the state used the Peer Review Evidence Organizer, the notes from the tool can be incorporated into

narrative text for the template. Otherwise, any other notes that TA providers or SEA staff have created can be used to develop text. The narrative text should be concise in describing how Critical Elements are addressed, identifying the particular sections or page numbers of protocol or policy text that the state would like reviewers to focus on.

Once SEA staff have filled out a template and attached aligned state evidence, a final review should be conducted. This final review can be conducted by TA providers or SEA staff who are familiar with the assessment peer review process but were not involved in the development of the submission. This final review will ensure that all state evidence is correctly listed and identified in the index template and that each piece of evidence has narrative text that specifies how it addresses Critical Elements requirements. The final review can also be used to make final copy-editing changes to ensure that the submission is error free. After a final comprehensive review, the state submission can be sent to USED for peer review.

State Submission Process

States are expected to submit their peer review submission approximately four weeks prior to their scheduled assessment peer review date. Each state will receive instructions for submitting their completed template and associated state evidence into a secure web portal. SEA staff will need to email their state's USED contact to provide notice that their state's submission will be uploaded to the secure web portal.

During the peer review process, reviewers will conduct an independent review of state evidence and write evaluation notes on an assessment peer review notes template. These notes will be used to identify any additional evidence or clarification that may be needed from the state. If peer reviewers have any questions about a state submission, USED may facilitate a conversation between the state and peer reviewers for clarification. USED will make final determinations and inform states whether their ELP assessment system has been approved. USED will also inform states of additional information or clarification needed for system approval. States will then refine their submission and provide clarification to USED questions or concerns until USED grants final approval.



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