

Association for the Assessment
of Learning in Higher Education



Position Statement

ACCELERATE:
Assessment Principles for Best Practice

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**ACCELERATE guides all who
engage with or use assessment
results**

This document is intended to provide guidance, recommendations, and a summary of the representatives of the participating organizations' perspectives. This paper is not a peer-reviewed research article and does not present original empirical findings. Readers should interpret the content as the organizational representatives' professional stance rather than as formal research evidence.

Abstract

The development of A.C.C.E.L.E.R.A.T.E. (the ten principles of assessment best practice, also known as ACCELERATE) emerged from revisiting and reviewing of the original *Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning* (AAHE, 1992, 1996). It began as an annual strategic initiative of the 2024-25 President of the Association for Assessment of Learning in Higher Education (AALHE), Dr. Constance Tucker. The original nine principles were reviewed by groups of assessment scholars and practitioners to discern the relevance and endurance of those principles to meet today's evolving educational contexts while also considering whether they could support the advancement and bolstering of the field of practice of assessment as a whole. Inviting several assessment scholars, professionals, and leaders in the organization and the field, and in consultation with several authors of the original nine principles, over the course of nine months, ACCELERATE emerged and evolved into the current set of ten best practices growing out of collaborative and co-creative conversations, thinking, research, feedback, input-seeking, and idea generation across various fora and sources.

Context Setting

The What

Assessment is the process of collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information and evidence to guide decision-making, change, and improvement. The ten assessment principles for best practice—ACCELERATE—are value-based commitments that guide the important work of any professional (within education and beyond) whose aim is to **improve, innovate, and excel in any learning, planning, development, or improvement/efficacy context in service of learner and organizational success**. ACCELERATE guides **all who engage with or use assessment results**—learners, faculty, staff, administrators, assessment and education development professionals, institutional and organizational leaders, accreditors, peer reviewers, employers and employees, consultants, and the human resource arms of any organization. The principles articulate what best assessment practice looks like because assessment is an opportunity: an opportunity that co-creates **learner, educational, process, people, policy, and structural well-being**.

The Why

The professional field of assessment needs a framework to (1) **actively contribute to creating an empowering, thriving environment** for learners, educators, employees, and leaders who have historically been pushed out or shut out, (2) **ameliorate harm** in lived experiences of learning, performing, growing, and advancing, and (3) **assure a culture of careful accountability**—first to our learners and those without voice or power; then, to our field of professional practice and our

organizations and institutions; and finally, to our accreditors and other oversight entities. The profession must actively catalyze and enable the understanding and deployment of assessment that reimagines and instates structures and practices that best serve humanity and the common good. It must be noted that the why of ACCELERATE is imperative to, and is the very essence of, making the principles relevant, meaningful, and usable.

The Who

These ten principles guide and strengthen the efforts of assessment and continuous improvement **professionals** (folx with assessment, evaluation, continuous improvement, or strategic planning in their title or responsibilities), **employers** (such as organization leaders, people development professionals, and in-house quality assurance personnel among others), and **educators** (faculty, staff, and administrators across all levels and types of education and EdTech) who are charged with investigating or assuring the quality and effectiveness of programs, processes, policies, projects and initiatives, organizational entities, educational and career pathway training and development, and the learning and development across entire institutions and organizations in service of its people and any and every learner's success.

The When

The ACCELERATE assessment principles must be integrally woven into **every step of the assessment process**, from planning through reporting and, most importantly, use.

The How

Assessment principles bring to life the commitments of:

1. **Inclusive** design and decision-making,
2. **Eliciting, expanding, and engaging** community and industry partners, evidence, sources, and methods,
3. **Acknowledging and addressing power dynamics and positionality** in how information is shared, and stories are told,
4. **Ensuring fairness and accessibility** in distributing responsibilities and resources,
5. **Supporting and amplifying individual and collective agency** to lead and sustain meaningful change.

The Where

Assessment principles are designed for active use—adaptable and applicable across all assessment contexts. These principles can be applied in the classroom at the course level; outside it, in administration; in co-curricular programming; across academic arenas like programs, certificates, degrees, core/general education, etc.; at the institutional level; in professional or organizational skills validation processes; in professional development pathway creations; and in all continuous improvement endeavors and contexts within and beyond education, including professional fields or corporate/non-profit organizations.

Assessment practitioners must ensure that assessment is:

A: Aligned Purposefully

Statement: Ensure that assessment practices are consistently aligned with values, mission, articulated outcomes and/or objectives as applicable, as well as with relevant policies, strategic goals, and the needs of community partners in the assessment context.

Evaluation: How does the assessment design and implementation demonstrate clear alignment between assessment methods and organizational espoused values, learning outcomes or process objectives, relevant policies and processes, strategic goals and mission, community/organizational values, and/or needs?

The Why: A lack of alignment between values, mission, curriculum, outcomes, objectives, etc. and the assessment design and methods used will usually offer data insights and evidence that do not capture an accurate state of being and can lead to missed opportunities and ill-informed decision-making.

C: Continuously Cultivating

Statement: Ensure that assessments continuously improve curricular and programmatic processes and policies within any given context.

Evaluation: Where and how is the assessment facilitating improvement and how is it inspiring change?

The Why: If the assessment is conducted as a routine compliance exercise without an iterative focus on what can be improved and how one could measure impact/growth, assessment would more likely than not become onerous and thoughtless in meaningfully contributing to necessary improvement, innovation, and growth.

C: Collaborative and Co-Creative

Statement: Intentionally collaborate and co-create with diverse partners, including learners, in all parts of the assessment endeavor.

Evaluation: Is the assessment truly partnering with community members (in design through dissemination) who will be directly or peripherally impacted by the findings or decisions?

The Why: If we do not truly partner with diverse perspectives, voices, and lived experiences in the assessment planning, design, deployment, and dissemination of findings, especially those community members impacted by the decisions, we are more likely to produce skewed data, reports, and recommendations that can do more harm than good to our partners.

E: Equity and Empowerment-Motivated

Statement: Seek excellence and catalyze fairness at the individual level all the way through the structural level by enabling access and opportunities for success for all and by enabling people to make changes and inform decision-making in their environments.

Evaluation: Is the assessment intentionally and comprehensively uncovering gaps and individual, structural, or systematic barriers in the existence of empowering contexts and utilizing that information to advance equity, best practice, and/or innovation?

The Why: If we do not commit to fostering culturally inclusive and transformative strategies, especially for those who lack contextual power, assessment will not contribute purposefully to actively getting rid of policies and practices that hold some back, and we are more likely to perpetuate and preserve unhealthy status-quos and ways of being.

L: Learning-Centered

Statement: Engage in broad and deep, practice-based learning—for the assessment context and the assessment practice.

Evaluation: Grounded in a philosophy of learning through doing and adapting through learning, does this practice-based assessment endeavor cultivate constructive and courageous growth within the assessment context as well as within the assessment practice through iterative reflection?

The Why: Assessment is not research in that it is a pragmatic, authentic, and context-specific, powerful approach to getting the most useful information to inform decision-making at a given point in time. It is not meant to be perfect but iterative in its own perfection of design and delivery even as it is meant to foster and nurture growth and learning (willingly, hopefully, and unwillingly, if needed) in the context in which it is carried out. A lack of focus on learning and iterative growth can lead to stagnant assessment practices and contextual cultures that do not truly serve anyone or anything.

E: Energized by Expertise

Statement: Conscientiously engage in training and gaining of expertise through experience and active, focused learning to hone design, deployment, meaning-making, and dissemination literacies for the assessment endeavor to be valuable, relevant, and maybe even joyous to oneself and partners served.

Evaluation: How energized, well-trained, and engaged (including in the time commitment to building expertise) are those conducting the assessment and those community partners collaborating or impacted by the assessment?

The Why: For assessment to be meaningful, useful, and potentially transformative, it needs to be facilitated by experts who have robust and deep assessment expertise that is ever-growing. Just the way not everyone is a good teacher and not everyone is a good leader, not everyone is a strong assessment practitioner. Some may be good with data analysis. Others may be good at standards assurance or yet others at context awareness. Any assessment context is best served by the assessment practitioners building and honing the expertise to design and deploy uniquely relevant assessments (with the contextual data and assessment literacies and related fluencies needed) for that particular context that enables that context's success.

R: Responsiveness-Oriented

Statement: Proactively explore and/or address systemic and emerging contextual needs of all learners, community partners, and the assessment context.

Evaluation: How does the assessment approach adapt to contextual shifts and proactively address the needs of those most impacted?

The Why: If an assessment endeavor is not able to be like a river when faced with rocks and boulders, it cannot have meaningful and positive impact within the assessment context. It will no longer serve its purpose.

A: Action-Driven

Statement: Be obsessed and ambitious with, and foreground purposeful assessment use within, any assessment context while planning and deploying any assessment.

Evaluation: How has the assessment process, encompassing design, implementation, and reporting been intentionally structured to identify and respond to the needs of users, thereby driving meaningful assessment use and impact that actually makes a difference in the assessment context?

The Why: Assessment is not research in that it is meant to serve a clearly articulated purpose that frames it and its findings are meant to be used in a timely and meaningful way right away. If the assessment practitioner is not grounded in a deep understanding of the diverse (and possibly conflicting) needs and priorities within the community and assessment context and does not ensure the appropriate use of the assessment endeavor, it can lead to wasted effort on assessments without clear application, or worse, unjust decision-making or ill-timed, mis-used assessments that erode trust within the context.

T: Transparent & Trustworthy

Statement: Actively build trust by maintaining a laser focus on ensuring and communicating transparency, and clearly outlining where and to whom accountability is directed at all stages of the assessment process.

Evaluation: Where, to whom, and how are the explicit mechanisms for accountability embedded? To whom are these mechanisms directed, and how is accountability demonstrably enacted (e.g., through clear roles, documented responses to feedback, or public dissemination of results and actions taken)?

The Why: Assessment involves labor within the assessment context—cognitive, meta-cognitive, intellectual, emotional, and of course, physical – on part of everyone involved and impacted. When that labor is not consistently acknowledged, recognized, nor rewarded, any interest or investment in current or future assessment endeavors will be short-changed and the assessment context will suffer as improvement or innovation towards excellence, empowerment, fairness, and well-being will usually not be noticed or worse, even carried out.

E: Enduring and Evolving

Statement: Ideate strategies and strengthen practices to meaningfully serve our communities iteratively, with a focus on maturity, scalability, and sustainability.

Evaluation: Is the assessment effort pragmatic, replicable and/or expandable (if needed), the value discernible, and the whole exercise meaningful to partners—short-term but also, long-term?

The Why: If designed assessments are not replicable, evolvable, scalable, and versatile in their applicability and endurance, then the labor involved in engaging in assessment may feel pointless or unproductive. The value of an assessment exercise grows exponentially when the assessment can be replicated or adapted across diverse assessment contexts for meaningful decision-making and when its effect can be experienced and confirmed short-term and traced long-term.

*Note. ACCELERATE is framed in action-oriented language with each principle covering one main idea/commitment for assessment practice. It reflects commitment to meaningful improvement across diverse, interconnected contexts; emphasizes the assessment field's leadership responsibilities; and commits to relevant, applicable integration for use across K-20+ academic, co-curricular, and administrative institutions, functions, and contexts; professional career advancement/development pathways, and corporate, non-profit organization learning and improvement efforts as well. Above all, these ten principles of best practice are about ensuring learner and context success and equitable access to opportunities for this success. The ACCELERATE principles of best practice embody contemporary justice values to assure a responsive, inclusive, enabling, and transformative assessment practice in service of the learner and their learning context, the community, and any institution exploring change and innovation (as applicable). Underlying this entire endeavor of reviewing, revising, and developing these new, ten principles, is a commitment to assessment growing as a field of practice and intentionally catalyzing learner, community, and organizational success and improvement. Therefore, this set of principles is intended to be a living document that records, nurtures, and sustains our progress in identifying and undergirding our practice in robust, adaptable, and effective ways that reflect our values and commitments to the well-being of those we serve and in service of our own well-being as well to ultimately affect positive change.

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