

## Valuable Perspectives for EdTech Companies

The U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Technology (OET) hosted a series of conversations with educators and learners with disabilities as well as group design sessions at an [accessible educational technology \(edtech\) event](#) in partnership with [New America](#). This document summarizes several lessons learned.

### 5 Things Learners with Disabilities Want You To Know

“Edtech companies need to have disabled people with a variety of disabilities as developers and testers. Disabled people are creative and know what their needs are.”

Post-secondary student with ADHD

1. **Hire individuals with disabilities.** Their contributions during the design and testing stages ensure accessibility\*, and their unique ideas, creative problem-solving abilities, and diverse perspectives greatly enrich collaborative teams
2. **Ask questions.** Engage in active dialogue with the disability community. You can start by reaching out to national advocacy organizations, such as [The Arc](#) or [TASH](#), and asking to have conversations or host listening sessions with individuals with disabilities on their experiences with edtech.
3. **Test tool compliance.** Before releasing a tool, seek out and collaborate with individuals representing a range of disabilities to thoroughly test the product. Inaccessible educational materials cause learners to face significant delays in accessing their education, ranging from days to weeks and even months.
4. **Prioritize designing for accessibility from the outset.** Retrofitting accessibility features after development is typically more challenging and expensive. Begin by utilizing simple search engine searches and automated checkers. You will be amazed at the wealth of information available. From there, delve deeper and commit to accessibility through policies, hiring practices, design processes, and resources.
5. **Provide training.** Provide multiple avenues and modalities for users to receive accessible technical support for your tools, such as how-to guides, videos and customer support via chat and phone call.

### 5 Things Educators Want You To Know

“My advice for edtech companies is to think about learners with disabilities. They are in every classroom!”

- Elementary School Educator

1. **Design with learners and educators in mind.** When designing and developing edtech tools, consider the needs of learners with disabilities, as they are present in every classroom. Edtech is most valuable when it incorporates differentiation, accommodating the diversity of all learners. Moreover, consult with educators during the design and development stages of your tools. Educators possess invaluable insights into what works and what does not work in the classroom environment.
2. **Think simple.** Tools that involve excessive steps (e.g., multi-factor authentication, ambiguous symbols) can discourage both educators and learners from following through with their usage.
3. **Ensure interoperability.** Make sure that edtech is accessible across various devices and operating systems. Many learners may only have access to a mobile device at home.
4. **Incorporate life skills.** When designing edtech, strive to make the examples and content relevant to learners’ lives and real-life scenarios whenever possible. Educators already do this when teaching academic content, so they are also looking for similar opportunities in their edtech.
5. **Include multiple languages.** The lack of different languages available in tools presents a significant barrier as so many learners and families speak multiple languages and may require learning support in their native language.

**Looking to learn more about accessible edtech?** Check out [OET resources](#) and [New America resources](#)

\* Definitions for the term “accessibility” can be found on the [AEM Center’s website](#)