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Request for Proposal
for
Williamson County, Texas

Prepared and Submitted by



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This document is a part of the quotation of ALTA Language Services, Inc. (ALTA) to provide Spanish language testing services to Williamson County, TX.

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I. Introduction

ALTA understands that Williamson County is looking for a qualified and experienced vendor to provide oral and written Spanish language assessment services on demand.

II. Company Profile

ALTA Language Services has been in business since 1980 and has provided language testing services since 1998. Headquartered in Atlanta, GA, ALTA is a recognized language services organization in commercial and government markets. Our focus is providing the highest-quality language services, delivered using modern communications technology with the aim of reducing costs and administrative burdens. ALTA features six distinct departments – Interpretation, Testing, Training, Translation, Sales, and Software – that are overseen by directors, executive directors, COO Hannah Lodge, and CEO Robert Jones. An organizational chart can be provided on request.



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ALTA was established in Atlanta in January 1997. We currently have 34 full-time employees and 329 part-time employees (developers, evaluators, and instructors). The average ALTA employee turnover is 5%.

In addition, ALTA stands apart from the competition as the only employee-owned language test provider. Employee ownership provides added benefits to our language testing clients through our level of commitment to providing exceptional customer service. Every employee – from our test developers, psychometrician, and language evaluators to the person answering the phone – has a vested interest in the success of your testing initiative.

Our Translation and Interpretation Quality Management Systems are ISO 9001:2015 certified. ALTA plans to be certified for Testing by the end of 2022.

ALTA has an established quality policy that is communicated and used company-wide:

Listen to customers, internal and external.

Think like owners and make customers happy while looking for ways to continuously improve our processes.

Act on opportunities to delight customers and grow our business.

This quality policy was developed in conjunction with our ISO 9001:2015 Quality Management System, the scope of which currently includes our Translation and Interpretation departments and will include our testing department by the end of 2022. To ensure ALTA's policy is fulfilled, ALTA monitors external and internal issues. We use a number of tools to monitor these issues, including customer surveys, corrective action reports, idea meetings, PEST analyses, and employee reviews. The output of these tools is reviewed and implemented during management review on a twice-yearly basis.

Testing Department

Clients interface with the Operations team (account management, ongoing testing support, scheduling, types of tests, results, concerns and questions, billing) and the development team (job analysis, customization). All customer issues are handled on a case-by-case basis. Standard response times are within 2 to 4 hours during business hours. Any problems reported are directed to the appropriate department and the appropriate actions will be taken to ensure resolution. Unresolved problems may be escalated to management in each relevant area.

ALTA's clients use language testing to make legally defensible, language proficiency-based hiring or pay decisions concerning current or prospective employees. ALTA has provided language testing for a wide



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range of commercial and non-profit organizations, as well as for government in the US at the Federal, State, and local levels.

At the Federal level, ALTA is approved by the U.S. Government for providing testing services with scores reported on the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale. ALTA has tested linguists for the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Homeland Security, the City of Los Angeles, and the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

In the private sector, ALTA is a certified provider of language testing services for a diverse range of agencies nationwide, including companies such as Humana, United Health Group, American Red Cross, Wells Fargo, Delta Airlines, United Airlines, American Airlines, and healthcare providers such as Kaiser and many others.

Worldwide, ALTA provides testing services with scores reported on the CEFR scale to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Many other corporate and agencies both nationwide and worldwide depend on ALTA to provide objective and reliable languages assessments for their workforce.

In 2021 alone, ALTA averaged a total of 6972 tests per month, including 4164 oral assessments and 994 writing assessments.

III. Types of Tests

A. General Listening and Speaking Assessments

This test is performed over the phone and consists of a series of questions designed to elicit the full range of the target language in order to identify *what* the candidates can do with the language through performance of various tasks (such as giving a description, talking about a hypothetical event, providing an opinion, etc.) as well as *how well* the candidates use and control the language. The candidates simply answer the questions presented, which are general in nature. There is no right or wrong answer to a question except where it pertains to demonstrating comprehension of the topic. The test does not last more than 30 minutes. At the end of the test, the candidates are instructed to hang up. The evaluator scores the performance based on the subcategories of communication, comprehension, grammar, and vocabulary, and an overall score is assigned.



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B. General Writing Assessments

This test is performed either on paper or online. When done on paper, the administrator or proctor will download it from the testing portal along with proctoring instructions. The test consists of several requests for a response in the target language. The written test requires the candidates to demonstrate *what* they can do with the language through performance of various tasks (writing a letter, giving an opinion, describing a rule or procedure) as well as *how well* they use and control the language. The candidates simply write their response to each question in the space provided. The test is one hour long. Candidates will receive a warning at 55 minutes. At the end of the test, it is submitted to ALTA for scoring. The evaluator scores the writing based on expression, understanding of the given topics, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling, and an overall score is assigned.

IV. Administration

ALTA's clients are given access to a secure account on the ALTA portal. All administrators and users of the ALTA portal will be able to:

- create candidate profiles (last name, first name, any other information pertinent to Williamson County).
- upload multiple candidates and test assignments at once using Microsoft Excel or another spreadsheet program.
- assign Listening and Speaking tests performed through interactive voice recognition (IVR).
- assign online Writing tests.
- follow the status of the tests (date taken, test in progress).
- see the results, print a copy of the test summary, or email a copy of the test summary.
- create reports according to various needs (per date, per language, per candidate, etc.).

Account administrators also have access to the settings of their account and will be able to:

- add and remove users.
- create test groups; these are sets of individual tests, which allows users to assign multiple tests to a candidate in a single step. For example, if a client typically administers a set of three tests (Listening & Speaking and Writing) in a specific language – or even in multiple languages – to new hires, then the test group will assign all selected tests to a new hire in one step.
- create subaccounts with specific users.
- add and remove results recipients.

Each subaccount has the possibility to be invoiced separately.



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Administrators and account users can choose:

- to have candidates take the test immediately on the site (instant test session), or
- to email a notification to candidates to take the test at their convenience. A time limit for the candidates to take their test is set up at the account level according to the client's needs (five days, 10 days, 30 days, etc.). Reminders are sent to candidates accordingly (for example, weekly for tests that expire after 30 days).

Fraud prevention:

- Candidates are required to agree to an honor statement, either over the phone for oral tests or by checking a box for the online tests.
- For additional fees, ALTA offers proctoring services through a third-party service, ProctorU. Using a webcam, a live proctor will monitor the candidates taking the oral IVR test over the phone, or the online writing test. A picture of the candidate is provided on the test summary.

V. Test Taker Experience

A. Listening and Speaking Test (IVR)

The Williamson County administrator will assign the test on ALTA's portal and will be given the choice to either have the test administered immediately on the site or to send a notification email to the candidate. The candidate will then call the phone number provided and will enter a unique code to access the test. They will be given instructions as well as sample/practice questions and answers to get familiar with the system. They will be asked to state their name and agree to an honor statement. The test will then start, with questions prompted automatically. The general Listening and Speaking test has 23 objectives, and each objective has between 10 and 50 questions. The ALTA system will randomly select one question per objective making each test unique to each candidate. Candidates will have some time to think about their response and then will be given an average of 40 seconds to answer. The test does not last more than 30 minutes. The test is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

B. Writing

The Williamson County administrator will assign the test on ALTA's portal and will be given the choice to have the test administered on paper or online, immediately on the site, or to send a notification email to the candidate. The candidate will then log into the ALTA portal to take the test. The general writing test has five (5) objectives, and each objective has between 10 and 20 questions. The ALTA system will



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randomly select one prompt per objective making each test unique to each candidate. The time allotted for the test is one (1) hour. The test is available 24 hours per day, seven days per week.

VI. Results

A. Scoring

ALTA's evaluators must all first meet the minimum qualification of being native speakers of the target language. For ALTA this means that the evaluator was born, raised, and educated at the university level in the target language culture.

Potential evaluators are first trained on ALTA's scoring criteria and are then required to rate actual evaluations. Scores (subcategory and overall) are reviewed against the original scores and discrepancies are discussed and resolved. The evaluator continues this training until scoring is provided accurately and consistency. Once the evaluators are approved to perform actual evaluations, their evaluations are pulled for score reviews using an independent evaluator to collect inter-rater reliability data and to ensure accuracy. Once accuracy has been established, ALTA moves to its standard quality assurance process. Ongoing training is also offered to ALTA's evaluators. These standardization – or “norming” – sessions are designed to ensure that raters continue to interpret the scoring criteria the same, and that their scoring does not become stricter or more lenient over time.

Evaluators determine the skill level of candidates in each subcategory according to ALTA's language testing protocol.

For listening and speaking, the subcategories are:

- Comprehension (scope, speed, structure)
- Communication (scope, speed, structure, accent)
- Grammar (structure, nouns, verbs)
- Vocabulary (scope)

For writing, the subcategories are:

- Comprehension (scope, structure)
- Expression (scope, structure, vocabulary)
- Mechanics (grammar, spelling, punctuation, diacritical marks)

ALTA's testing protocol follows the descriptors of the ALTA scale, a combination of the ACTFL scale (which, at the time of ALTA's development, focused only on lower levels) and the Interagency Language



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Roundtable (ILR) scale (which focused on the upper levels). The ALTA scale was created to cover the entire spectrum of language proficiency from ALTA 1 (total beginner) to ALTA 12, the equivalent of an educated speaker. All three scales have since undergone revision, and the current versions of the scales mirror each other to a great degree. ALTA's scale has been mapped to the current versions of the ILR and ACTFL scales as shown below:

ALTA Scale	Government (ILR) Scale	Academic (ACTFL) Scale	Description
12+	5	Native	Able to function as an educated native speaker.
12	4+	Distinguished	Able to function at near-native proficiency.
11	4	Distinguished	Able to function with sufficient structural accuracy and vocabulary to participate effectively in most formal and informal exchanges.
10	3+	Superior	Able to satisfy most work requirements and show some ability to communicate on concrete topics.
9	3	Superior	Able to satisfy routine social demands and limited work requirements.
8	2+	Advanced Plus	Able to satisfy most survival needs and some limited social demands.
7	2	Advanced	Able to satisfy some survival needs and some limited social demands.
6	1+	Intermediate-High	Able to satisfy basic survival needs and minimum courtesy requirements.
5	1	Intermediate - Low	Able to satisfy immediate needs with learned phrases.



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4	0+	Novice - High	Able to operate in only a very limited capacity.
3, 2, 1	0	Novice - Mid, Novice - Low	Unable to function in the spoken language.

ALTA scale from ALTA 1 to ALTA 12+ (13 levels)

ACTFL (American Council for Teaching Foreign Languages) scale from Novice Low to Native (10 levels)

ILR (Federal Government's Interagency Language Roundtable) from ILR 0 to ILR 5 (11 levels).

B. Results

Results are provided in one (1) business day for oral tests and two (2) business days for writing tests.

Results are available on the ALTA portal and are emailed to the list of recipients provided by Williamson County. It is ALTA's policy not to release results to test takers.

The test summary shows an overall score as well as standard comments according to the level reached in each category. These levels may also appear on the results.