

MEMO

DATE: 3/21/25

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Richelle Wilson, Deputy Director, REDI and Karen Sippel, Managing Director, MWBC

RE: Request for Procurement – Training Contractor 37 Oaks

Introduction

This memo is to provide justification regarding REDI procuring services from 37 Oaks as a sole source provider or other justified variance from the adopted Finance Policies and Procedures, which otherwise would require a request for proposal process to engage a vendor for over \$25,000. REDI previously hired 37 Oaks to provide an initial small-scale manufacturing cohort in the fall for \$12,100, and a visual marketing session with shop local members for MWBC. Now, REDI would like to engage 37 Oaks to provide training for the Bowie and Savage Mill shop local cohorts, and to provide additional small-scale manufacturing cohorts.

The Board adopted Finance Policies and Procedures provide that “[e]xceptions to the REDI procurement requirements may be made with approval of the CEO and Finance Committee, based upon a reasonable justification, which may include following best practice procurement rules applicable to the City of Rockville. Any exceptions should be documented in a memo to the file (in Files on the Go) stating the basis for the action taken.”

Variance from the RFP requirements was discussed with the Finance Committee at their March 11, 2025, meeting. The Finance Committee was generally in favor of allowing the variance, but wanted to have the full Board also review the request. The CEO recommends allowing the variance.

About 37 Oaks

37 Oaks is an industry-leading educational company with nearly a decade of experience working with thousands of entrepreneurs and economic development agencies nationwide. The company specializes in commerce growth strategies designed specifically for retail, e-commerce, storefront, and wholesale businesses.

37 Oaks recently completed a pilot program for REDI’s inaugural Small Scale Manufacturing cohort that received 5 out of 5 ratings from all participants. REDI and 37 Oaks are preparing to launch a second Small-Scale Manufacturing cohort.

Small-Scale Manufacturing Cohorts

In alignment with REDI's strategic focus on strengthening the small-scale manufacturing ecosystem—an approach shaped by insights from our collaboration with Recast City – REDI hired 37 Oaks to commence an early-stage small-scale manufacturing cohort in October 2024 for \$12,100. This was funded in part by a FY23 Placemaking Grant from Montgomery County Government. The program supported a cohort of nine (9) small-scale manufacturing businesses in enhancing their capacity for growth, market expansion, and long-term sustainability. The agreement with 37 Oaks included delivering six virtual training sessions (each up to two hours each), supplemental study halls, and virtual panel events featuring industry experts. Participants also received access to three 30-minute one-on-one coaching sessions and coursework that included lecture notes, pre-work assignments, and quizzes.

The course topics covered in the program included:

- Holiday Planning Workshop
- Turning Social Media into a Money-Making Machine
- Annual Planning Workshop
- Introduction to Assortment Planning
- Introduction to Retail Math
- Introduction to E-Commerce Marketing Strategy

Upon completing the program, participants who met all course requirements were awarded a three-month membership to the 37Oaks Growth Lab, providing continued access to mentorship and business development resources. Throughout the cohort, 37Oaks provided monthly reports to REDI detailing attendance and assignment completion. The program concluded in January 2025, with a formal graduation ceremony held on February 6, 2025.

This combination of training, counseling, and membership to the Growth Lab is unique, and successfully achieved REDI's goals in elevating and supporting small-scale manufacturing in Rockville and Montgomery County.

REDI was again awarded funding from Montgomery County Government for the FY24 Placemaking Grant in the amount of \$75,000. REDI would like to again engage 37 Oaks to provide additional cohorts with the unique training, counseling, and support for this industry sector. A cohort is planned to launch in May 2025, focusing on small-scale manufacturers who are more established and looking to scale. While the contract is still under negotiation, the proposed cost for conducting this cohort is \$21,000.

This three-month program is specifically designed for established businesses that have been in operation for five years or more and are positioned for strategic growth. The curriculum would focus on providing participants with a comprehensive understanding of how to scale their businesses by entering wholesale and e-commerce markets. The program is intended to help participants diversify their revenue streams and strengthen their long-term sustainability through

multi-channel sales strategies. If additional funding remains available, REDI would consider working with 37 Oaks on a third cohort.

MWBC Shop Local

MWBC seeks to identify an expert retail training provider to quickly level-up curriculum to meet the demands of evolving retail trends and the timing of the Shop Local Bowie and Shop Local Savage Mill cohorts. Based on research of other available training providers and REDI's positive experience with the Small-Scale Manufacturing cohort, MWBC believes that contracting with 37 Oaks is the most effective way to quickly create an 8-month retail-specific training program for business owners that includes live instruction, 1:1 coaching, applied learning, and collaboration opportunities.

After research, staff also believes 37 Oaks is a sole source provider for the specific services MWBC would like to provide to Shop Local participants at Bowie and Savage Mill. Please also see the sole source letter provided by the consultant attached at the end of this memo. This is anticipated to be a one-time engagement, as MWBC staff is developing curriculum for the shop local incubator. Hiring 37 Oaks provides additional time for staff to undertake this effort while still providing quality programming to current participants.

Criteria

Key criteria includes:

- Retail-specific topics design for business owners
- Live instruction
- Coaching/counseling sessions
- Applied learning
- Opportunities for cohort collaboration
- Customizable length
- Less than \$30,000

Please see the attachments below outlining available services and curriculum.

Research

Internet research resulted in very few options for engaging, interactive, and expert-led retail training curriculum designed for business owners. REDI also consulted our network to identify any potential competitors but was informed that there were no companies offering the same or similar services as 37Oaks. Most retail-specific training courses focus on upskilling retail employees, not small business owners. Many courses are only offered on-demand and are not designed to meet the needs of a custom cohort. Most also only provided content and quizzes or assignments, rather than live instruction, opportunities for Q&A, and applied assignments that truly test knowledge acquisition.

A sampling of the training programs include:

- SC Training’s course collection, [Retail Ready: Courses to Improve Employee Skills for Retail](#)
- MOHR Retail’s [Retail Store Leadership Online Training](#)
- Retail Learning Institute’s [Supermarket training](#)
- [NRF Foundation: Business of Retail](#)
- 37 Oaks’s [University Courses and Study Halls](#)

	SC Training	MOHR Retail	Retail Learning Institute	NRF Foundation	37 Oaks
Retail-specific content	X	X	X	X	X
Business owner focus					X
Live instruction		X		X (train the trainer)	X
Coaching					X
Applied learning					X
Collaboration					X
Custom length			X	X	X
Cost	free for up to 10 learners	\$995 per participant	\$12,000	\$65 per course	\$33,000

Program Overview

MWBC would like to include both the Bowie and Savage Mill cohorts in this pilot learning program to test its applicability to our market. The Savage Mill cohort (6 vendors) began in mid-March 2025 and the Bowie cohort will be finalized in late March 2025.

Pending approval from the REDI Board of Directors, training courses would begin during the week of April 14, 2025. An outline of courses and timing (which will be updated) are enclosed in the attachments below.

Budget

Proposed program cost: \$33,000

- \$18,000 paid by City of Bowie funding
- \$15,000 paid by FSC First funding (\$30,000 new and unrestricted)

Conclusion

Based on staff research and prior positive experience, it is recommended that the Board authorize REDI to contract for additional services for Shop Local and small-scale manufacturing training and support from 37 Oaks as described herein, especially as 37 Oaks has a unique set of services and expertise in delivering these kinds of trainings.

Attachments



Shop Local Technical Assistance Program Overview

Important Dates

- Program Approval: **March 19** (signed agreement + deposit)
- Final Cohort List: **March 26**
- Virtual Orientation: **April 15**
- 1st Class: **April 22**
- In-Person Graduation: **December 9**

Cohorts

- Business Stage: late startup\ early growth
- Up to 12 small business owners
 - Additional cohorts can be added at an additional cost.

Curriculum

- 8 months of curriculum (April - November)
- Tuesdays, 9:00am - 11:00 am EST
- Format
 - Virtual (led by 37 Oaks)
 - In-Person (led by REDI/ MWBC)
- 13- 37 Oaks University Courses + Study Halls
 - Topics
 - Strategy + Operations; Marketing + Branding; Finance
 - Distribution (Wholesale, E-commerce + Storefronts)
 - Average of two 37 Oaks University Courses + Study Halls/ Month
- 1:1 Coaching Sessions
 - 1-37 Oaks 1:1 Coaching Session/ Month
 - 1-MWBC 1:1 Coaching Session/ Month

37oaks.com

March 14, 2025



Shop Local Technical Assistance Curriculum Overview

- 9 - 37 Oaks University Live Webinar Courses
 - Strategy + operations; marketing + branding; finance and distribution (wholesale, e-commerce and storefronts).
 - Up to 2 hours each.
 - Most include course pre-work and/or quiz and course notes.
- 4 - 37 Oaks University Study Halls
 - Application workshops are between 60-90 minutes.
 - Many include an assignment and/or deliverable.
 - Include one elective, based on cohort's needs.
- 8 - 30-min 1:1 Coaching w/ Certified 37 Oaks Coach
 - 8 will also be provided by MWBC
- 8 months of 24/7 access to 8 - 37 Oaks University on-demand courses
- 15+ templates, assessments, checklists, resource guides, etc
- 2 In-person Learning + Networking Sessions hosted and managed by REDI/MWBC

Price:
\$23,000

37oaks.com

March 14, 2025



Shop Local Technical Assistance Course Overview

Tuesdays (9:00-11:00 am EST)	Description	Facilitator	Notes
April 15	Virtual Orientation	37 Oaks + MWBC	
April 22	Intro to Assortment Planning	37 Oaks	
April 29	Intro to Costing Goods	37 Oaks	
May 6	Intro to Retail Math	37 Oaks	
May 20	In-Person Learning + Networking	MWBC	Proposed Topic: local financial resources + service providers, access to capital, banks (business account).
June 3	Defining Your Unique Value	37 Oaks	
June 17	Defining Your Unique Value Study Hall	37 Oaks	
July 8	Intro to Marketing Strategy	37 Oaks	
July 22	Holiday Planning	37 Oaks	
Aug 5	Intro to E-commerce	37 Oaks	
Aug 19	Intro to E-commerce Study Hall	37 Oaks	
Sept 9	In-Person Learning + Networking	MWBC	Proposed Topic: branding, legal, social media, marketing.
Sept 23	Intro to Wholesale	37 Oaks	
Oct 7	Intro to Wholesale Study Hall	37 Oaks	
Oct 21	Intro to Storefronts	37 Oaks	
Nov 4	Elective	37 Oaks	We can determine this elective by mid-September.
Dec 9	In Person Graduation	MWBC	



February 28, 2025

37 Oaks Consulting

3231 S Halsted St #313
Chicago, IL 60608

To: Rockville Economic Development, Inc

Subject: Source Statement For Partnership Program

This statement outlines the collaboration between Rockville Economic Development, Inc. (REDI) and 37 Oaks to empower small businesses through the Shop Local Technical Assistance Program. Designed for late-stage startups and early-growth businesses, this eight-month initiative provides structured retail education, hands-on coaching, and growth strategies to strengthen operations and scale effectively.

As the lead educational partner, 37 Oaks brings nearly a decade of experience helping thousands of entrepreneurs nationwide. In 2024 alone, we provided over 260 hours of 37 Oaks University courses and delivered 613 one-on-one coaching sessions, equipping small businesses with the knowledge and tools needed to thrive in today's commerce landscape. Unlike traditional business education programs, 37 Oaks specializes in commerce growth strategies tailored specifically for retail, e-commerce, storefronts and wholesale distribution. Our curriculums bridge the gap between business education and real-world application, ensuring entrepreneurs can confidently implement what they learn.

Through this program, 37 Oaks delivers expert-designed coursework, study halls, and one-on-one coaching, while REDI supports local engagement, in-person sessions, and business community integration. Together, REDI and 37 Oaks are equipping business owners with the education, resources, and connections needed to expand their revenue streams, increase market presence, and build sustainable businesses in the Rockville community and beyond.

Best Regards,

Terrand Smith

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