# Request for Proposals:
# Retail Business Incubator Consulting Services

Huerfano County Solicitation #2023-06
August 28, 2023

## 1. Summary of Request

The Huerfano County Board of County Commissioners ("the County") is seeking proposals from qualified firms of retail and online sales consultants to provide technical assistance to program participants at the Wheelhouse, a retail business incubator and makerspace operated by Huerfano County Economic Development Inc. with support from Huerfano County and a U.S. Economic Development Administration grant. Delivery of the curriculum and technical assistance can be by multiple people and organizations in many formats, e.g. in-person and virtual, customized and generic, 1-1, and group sessions. Contractors are encouraged to submit proposals for all, or parts of the desired scope listed below.

## 2. Submission Information

Written submissions will be accepted until **Friday, September 29, 2023 at 4PM MT**. Any proposal received after that time will not be considered. Submitted materials should be emailed in PDF Format to **administrator@huerfano.us**.

## 3. Questions

Procedural and technical questions are to be submitted in writing to **Carl Young** at **administrator@huerfano.us**. Questions will be accepted until **Friday September 15, 2023 at 4PM MT**. A summary of questions and answers will be released according to the schedule set below.

## 4. Budget and Contracting

The total budget for this project is approximately $60,000 which must be expended no later December 31, 2025. This budget is for the entire scope of work and will be subdivided amongst the selected respondents.

The selected firm(s) are expected to start as soon as possible and are expected to provide both general workshops and one on one training to the approximately 24 companies that we expect to the incubator to serve. Contracts will be structured with an initial period not to exceed 12 months with extensions contingent on renewals and/or reviews.

## 5. Anticipated Timeline

Dates are approximations for the process steps and are subject to change.

| Selection Process | Date |
| --- | --- |
| **Request for Proposals Issued** | August 28, 2023 |
| **Questions may be presented prior to 4PM MT on this date.** | September 15, 2023 |
| **Questions and answers posted.** | September 18, 2023 |
| **Proposals due at 4PM MT** | September 29, 2023 |
| **Committee Review of Proposals.** | October 2, 2023 |

| Selection Process | Date |
|---|---|
| Notifications of Interviews. | October 6, 2023 |
| Interviews conducted. | Week of October 16, 2023 |
| Notification of selected finalist(s). | October 20, 2023 |
| Contract for Professional Services executed. | October 24, 2023 |

## 6.  Background
The Wheelhouse, a Business Incubator and Makerspace located in Walsenburg, CO, is a community economic development initiative led by Huerfano County Economic Development Inc. Funded by a grant from the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the Huerfano County Government, the Wheelhouse is supported by a number local, regional, state, and federal partners, and intends to encourage small business development, entrepreneurship, and innovation in the retail sector which will result in company formation, job creation, increased sales, and growth of the tax base. Through establishing a Pop-Up Retail Business Incubator, Huerfano County hopes to diversify the retail shopping market and fill market gaps with local, independently-owned businesses to facilitate the launch of new or early-stage retail businesses in Huerfano County.  The pop-up model seeks to add energy to downtown retail with exciting, changing, interactive experiences for customers.  Communities throughout the US are utilizing pop-up retail as a retail revitalization strategy. The activity it creates gets attention while the support and space to experiment offers an important bridge for startups to progress to permanent retail locations.

A retail business incubator is a program or facility that provides support and resources to new and emerging retail businesses. It is similar to a traditional business incubator, which provides assistance to startup companies but focuses specifically on retail businesses.

A retail business incubator may offer a variety of services and resources, including mentorship, business planning assistance, marketing support, access to capital, and physical retail space. The goal of a retail business incubator is to help new retail businesses overcome the challenges and obstacles associated with starting and growing a successful retail operation.

By providing a supportive and collaborative environment, retail business incubators aim to help entrepreneurs launch and scale their businesses more quickly and efficiently than they would be able to on their own. Additionally, a retail business incubator can help foster innovation and creativity within the retail industry by supporting new and diverse business ideas.

## 7.  Scope of Work
The selected firm(s) will have experience and provide consulting services in one or more of the following core areas: (1) Marketing and Branding; (2) Sales and Customer Service; (3) Operations; (4) Store Design and Layout; and (5) Retail Technologies.  Each of these core areas are expanded upon below with suggestions on the types of services the consultant would provide to incubator clients.  Interested parties are expected to provide their ideas on topics and methodology and may submit proposals to provide one or all of the services required.

**Marketing and Branding:**
Here are some examples of instruction that a retail business incubator or accelerator program might provide to help startups with marketing and branding:
1. Developing a brand identity: Startups should first develop a clear and consistent brand identity that reflects their values, mission, and target audience. This includes choosing a name, designing

a logo, and selecting color schemes and fonts that convey the desired message.
2. Understanding the target market: Startups need to understand their target market in order to create effective marketing campaigns. This includes identifying customer demographics, understanding their buying habits, and conducting market research to stay up-to-date on industry trends.
3. Creating a marketing strategy: Startups should develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that outlines the tactics they will use to reach their target audience, including social media advertising, email marketing, influencer partnerships, and more.
4. Leveraging social media: Social media is a powerful tool for retail businesses to reach their target audience. Startups should learn how to create effective social media content, engage with followers, and analyze metrics to determine what content is resonating with their audience.
5. Creating compelling product descriptions: Product descriptions are crucial for retail businesses, as they can help customers understand the features and benefits of the product. Startups should learn how to write engaging product descriptions that highlight the unique value proposition of their products.
6. Building a website: In today's digital age, having a website is essential for retail businesses. Startups should learn how to create a professional-looking website that is easy to navigate and optimized for search engines.
7. Using customer feedback to improve marketing efforts: Finally, startups should learn how to use customer feedback to improve their marketing efforts over time. This includes monitoring customer reviews, conducting surveys, and analyzing customer data to understand what marketing tactics are resonating with customers and which ones need improvement.

**Sales and Customer Service:**
Here are some examples of instruction that a retail business incubator or accelerator program might provide to help startups with sales and customer service:
1. Understanding customer needs: Startups should first understand their customers' needs and pain points in order to create an effective sales strategy. This includes identifying customer personas and understanding their buying behavior.
2. Developing a sales strategy: Startups should develop a comprehensive sales strategy that outlines their approach to selling their products or services, including identifying potential customers, defining their unique value proposition, and developing sales pitches.
3. Training sales staff: Startups should train their sales staff to be knowledgeable about their products or services, as well as how to effectively communicate with customers and close sales. This includes developing a training program that covers customer service skills, sales techniques, and product knowledge.
4. Providing excellent customer service: Retail businesses need to provide excellent customer service in order to retain customers and build a loyal following. Startups should learn how to create a positive customer experience through effective communication, timely and accurate responses to customer inquiries, and efficient order fulfillment.
5. Responding to customer complaints: Startups should learn how to effectively respond to customer complaints and address any issues that arise. This includes developing a customer complaint management system and providing staff with training on how to handle difficult customer interactions.
6. Analyzing sales data: Startups should analyze sales data on a regular basis to understand how their sales strategy is performing and identify areas for improvement. This includes tracking sales metrics like conversion rates, average order value, and customer retention rates.

7. Upselling and cross-selling: Finally, startups should learn how to upsell and cross-sell to customers in order to increase revenue. This includes identifying complementary products or services to offer customers and training staff on how to effectively pitch these products during the sales process.

**Operations:**

Here are some examples of instruction that a retail business incubator or accelerator program might provide to help startups with operations management:

1. Inventory management: Startups need to effectively manage their inventory in order to ensure they have the right products in stock at the right time. This includes forecasting demand, monitoring stock levels, and implementing inventory control processes.
2. Supply chain optimization: Startups should optimize their supply chain in order to minimize costs and improve efficiency. This includes identifying reliable suppliers, negotiating favorable pricing, and implementing effective logistics and transportation processes.
3. Retail technology: Retail technology can help startups improve efficiency and streamline their operations. This includes using point-of-sale (POS) systems to manage sales and inventory, implementing customer relationship management (CRM) software to track customer interactions, and using data analytics tools to analyze sales data.
4. Store design and layout: The design and layout of a retail store can have a significant impact on customer experience and sales. Startups should learn how to design a store that is easy to navigate, visually appealing, and optimized for sales.
5. Staff management: Startups need to effectively manage their staff in order to ensure they are delivering excellent customer service and contributing to overall business success. This includes developing a staffing plan, providing staff with training and support, and implementing performance management processes.
6. Managing finances: Startups need to manage their finances effectively in order to stay profitable and grow their business. This includes creating a budget, monitoring cash flow, and developing financial projections.
7. Sustainability and ethical considerations: Finally, startups should consider sustainability and ethical considerations when developing their operations management strategy. This includes reducing waste, implementing sustainable sourcing practices, and ensuring compliance with labor laws and other regulations.

**Store design and layout:**

Here are some examples of instruction and technical assistance that a retail business incubator or accelerator program might provide to help startups with store design and layout:

1. Understanding customer behavior: Startups should first understand how customers behave in retail spaces in order to design a store layout that is optimized for sales. This includes studying customer flow, understanding the impact of lighting and visual merchandising, and identifying areas for improvement.
2. Creating a store design plan: Startups should develop a comprehensive store design plan that takes into account their branding, product offerings, and target audience. This includes creating a floor plan that is easy to navigate, visually appealing, and optimized for sales.
3. Selecting fixtures and displays: Startups should choose fixtures and displays that complement their branding and highlight their products. This includes selecting materials, colors, and textures that reflect the brand identity, as well as choosing displays that effectively showcase products and drive sales.
4. Planning lighting and ambiance: Lighting and ambiance can have a significant impact on

customer experience and sales. Startups should learn how to plan lighting that highlights products and creates a welcoming atmosphere, as well as how to use music, scents, and other elements to create a sensory experience for customers.

5. Implementing store design and layout changes: Startups should learn how to effectively implement changes to their store design and layout in order to improve sales and customer experience. This includes developing a plan for implementing changes, communicating changes to staff, and training staff on how to effectively implement the new layout.

6. Visual merchandising: Visual merchandising is an important component of store design and layout. Startups should learn how to effectively use visual merchandising techniques to showcase products and drive sales. This includes creating visually appealing product displays, highlighting promotions and sales, and using signage effectively.

7. Technical assistance with store design software: Finally, startups may benefit from technical assistance with store design software in order to create detailed floor plans and renderings of their store layout. This includes providing training on how to use design software, as well as offering technical support for any issues that arise.

**Retail Technologies:**

There are several technologies that can be beneficial for a startup retail business. Here are some examples:

1. Point of Sale (POS) Systems: A reliable and efficient POS system is crucial for managing sales, inventory, and transactions. It can help streamline operations, track sales data, manage customer information, and provide insights into your business's performance.

2. E-commerce Platforms: An e-commerce platform allows you to sell your products online and reach a broader customer base. Platforms like Shopify, WooCommerce, or BigCommerce provide customizable online store templates, secure payment gateways, inventory management, and order fulfillment tools.

3. Inventory Management Systems: Inventory management systems help track and manage stock levels, reorder products, and optimize inventory turnover. These systems help prevent stockouts, reduce overstocking, and improve overall inventory accuracy.

4. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software: CRM software helps businesses manage customer interactions, track customer data, and improve customer relationships. It can assist with customer segmentation, personalized marketing campaigns, and tracking customer preferences and behaviors.

5. Analytics and Reporting Tools: Utilizing analytics and reporting tools can provide valuable insights into sales, customer behavior, and overall business performance. Tools like Google Analytics or specialized retail analytics platforms can help you make data-driven decisions to optimize your operations.

6. Mobile Payment Solutions: Offering mobile payment options, such as accepting payments through mobile wallets like Apple Pay or Google Pay, provides convenience for customers and can increase sales conversion rates.

7. Marketing Automation Tools: Marketing automation tools help streamline marketing efforts by automating tasks like email campaigns, social media scheduling, and customer segmentation. They can save time and ensure consistent and targeted messaging to customers.

8. Customer Feedback and Review Platforms: Implementing customer feedback and review platforms, such as online review sites or feedback collection tools, allows you to gather valuable insights, improve customer satisfaction, and manage your online reputation.

8. **Submittal Requirement:**

Written submissions for the supply of the services fully described herein will be accepted until the date set forth in the Anticipated Timeline above. Any proposal received after that time will not be considered.

Submissions should be no longer than 5 pages and include:
1. Cover Letter, which must include:
    a. A statement of interest for working with the County to complete the scope outlined above including a summary of key points describing the respondent's unique qualifications as they pertain to this particular scope;
    b. A brief overview of the history and structure of the firm including structure, time in business, number of employees, and other data to assist in characterization of the firm;
    c. The name, address, and daytime telephone number for contact persons to whom additional selection process requests should be communicated; and
    d. A disclosure of the name of any employee or official of Huerfano County who could be directly and personally benefited if the proposing firm is awarded a contract pursuant to this RFP. If there is nothing to disclose, the proposal shall so state.
2. Experience and Reputation
    a. Describe respondent's experience in the types of work likely to be performed;
    b. Describe the respondent's experience working with rural communities and particularly retail businesses located in rural and/or economically distressed communities;
    c. Describe 3 or 4 similar engagements performed by the respondent within the past five years; and
    d. Please provide contact information for engagements or projects listed. Letters of reference are also accepted.
3. Personnel and Qualifications
    a. Provide a listing of and resumes for the team lead and any others that would support the project with a summary of each team member's area of responsibilities, expertise, experience and qualifications for this work;
    b. Describe the availability and commitment of assigned team members to undertake the outlined work; and
    c. Provide an organizational chart of the project team (if applicable).
4. Understanding and Approach
    a. Describe the respondent's understanding of and approach to the scope of work including which of the core elements the respondent proposes to provide;
    b. Describe the respondent's proposed training methods and approach;
    c. Describe the respondent's approach to client service including onboarding process, communication methods and approaches, as well as availability to take on projects and answer questions; and
    d. Describe the respondent's capability and approach to meeting schedules and deadlines within budget.
5. Cost Proposal
    a. Identify all fees and costs associated with your proposal by line item;
    b. Identify a firm fixed fee for each of the core elements the respondent proposes to provide and a rate sheet with hourly rates for all personnel included in the proposal. The rate sheet may be used for change orders requested by the county;
    c. Include any yearly escalation factors at contract renewal; and
    d. Provide a schedule of other costs, not included above, for any additional services that you believe, based upon your professional experience, may be of value to the County

under specific circumstances.

Following the selection process, the proposal for the selected Respondent shall be made available for public review, except for any items that Respondent has requested, in writing, to remain confidential under applicable law.

9. **Selection Process**

Selection will be made through a four-step process. The scoring in the first two steps is cumulative. If it is determined that interviews are not to be held, the scoring will be based on the first step, Review of Proposals submitted. The process for selection and award of the Professional Contract for Services will be as follows:

| Step One | Review and scoring of Proposals submitted |
|---|---|
| Step Two | Interviews |
| Step Three | Selection of successful firm, negotiation of Professional Contract for Services |
| Step Four | County Commissioner approval of Professional Contract for Services |

**Step One: Review of Proposals**

Following an initial screening of the proposals, the committee will select what it considers the most highly qualified individuals or firms to provide the services outlined in the scope of services. Selection will be based on the evaluation criteria set forth below. The firms or individuals submitting proposals will be ranked, and the committee will then recommend the most qualified individual or firm.

The following selection criteria will be the basis for the ranking of most qualified Organization:

| Criteria | Points |
|---|---|
| Experience and Reputation | 25 Points |
| Personnel and Qualifications | 20 Points |
| Understanding and Approach | 25 Points |
| Reasonableness of Costs/Price Proposals | 20 Points |
| Overall Evaluation of Capabilities and Ability to Provide Required Services | 10 Points |
| **Total** | **100 Points** |

**Step Two: Interviews**
1. Interviews will be conducted for the purpose of determining which respondent is the most highly qualified to perform the scope of services; which respondent has the personnel best able to complete the scope of services; and which responds most fully understands and is able to perform the work envisioned by the County.
2. Key personnel from proposer to be assigned to the project are required to be present and participate in the interview.
3. Respondents are asked to give a presentation on their organization and proposal.  The Review Board will then ask any questions they have of the respondent.

**Step Three: Selection of Finalist(s) and Negotiation of Professional Contract for Services**
1. The County will negotiate with the selected finalist(s), whether individuals or firms, on a mutually agreeable payment arrangement and fee structure.
2. After the successful individual or firm is selected, the County will negotiate a final Professional Contract for Services.

**Step Four: County Commissioners Approval of Professional Contract for Services**

1. The successful respondent is encouraged to attend the Commissioners' meeting to answer any questions concerning the proposal, or the respondent's qualifications.
2. The County reserves the right to undertake or award supplemental or successor contracts for work related to this Contract.
3. This solicitation shall not be binding upon the County and respondent, and no services shall be performed under the terms of the proposal or the Professional Contract for Services until the Contract has been reduced to writing and approved by the County Commissioners.

## 10. <u>Selection and Contracting Provisions</u>
**Notifications**
The County will provide timely notifications in writing (letters and/or emails) of the following actions to individuals or firms responding to the Request for Proposal as follows:
- Selection of short-listed individuals or firms for interviews (if required);
- Individuals or Firms not short-listed;
- Selection of recommended individual or firm; and County Commissioner approval.

**Right to Reject**
The County reserves the right to waive informalities in the proposals or fees and to reject any and all proposals and re-advertise this solicitation at any time prior to County Commissioner approval of the recommended firm or individual and the negotiated professional contract for services if doing so would be in the public interest, as determined by the county in its sole discretion. The County reserves the right to award this solicitation to the individual or firm that best fits the requirements outlined in the request for proposals. The County reserves the right to waive any informality in any submittal and/or reject all proposals, and to accept the proposal that is in the best interest of the County.  The County further reserves the right to: (1) negotiate a final professional contract for services that is in the best interests of the county and the public; and (2) request any additional information county deems reasonably necessary to allow the County to evaluate, rank and select the most qualified respondent to perform the services described in this solicitation.

If the County and the selected individual or firm cannot agree on the contract, the negotiations will be terminated, and the County reserves the right to begin negotiations with the next highest ranked respondent.

**Procedure Requirements**
1. Any individual or firm failing to submit information in accordance with the procedures set forth herein may be considered non-responsive.
2. All costs incurred by individuals or firms choosing to participate in this process shall be borne by the proposing individual or firm.
3. All proposals submitted regarding this solicitation are the property of the County and will only be returned to the individual or firms if requested in writing to the County at the sole discretion of the County.
4. Late submittals shall not be accepted. It is the responsibility of the individual or firms to ensure that the proposal arrives at the Huerfano County Administrator's Office, prior to the date and time stated in this solicitation.

**Conflicts of Interest**
Any conflicts of interest whether real or perceived by the individual or firm submitting a proposal should be fully disclosed and explained within the proposal.