Managing the Next 100 Years of Growth

“You can’t manufacture momentum. Institutions either have it or they don’t, and RMU has it.” So says Dr. Chris Howard, President of Robert Morris University (RMU). The private college — which has been enriching minds for nearly a century — indeed bears testament to this quote. Founded in 1921 in Pittsburgh, RMU has steadily grown, recently expanding to a 230-acre campus in nearby Moon Township and eventually changing its name to honor Founding Father (and famed Pennsylvanian) Robert Morris. Their challenge: build the plan and infrastructure to sustainably grow their institution and inspire students through the next century.

THE PROBLEM

RMU was working with a largely decentralized sourcing setup. While its Operations team focused on large-spend sourcing, departments often did their own purchasing. 300 non-faculty staff spanning multiple departments, each relied on disparate, manual ways to run sourcing events. As a result, procurement had devolved into a disjointed, unmanageable tangle of processes.

To keep costs under control, and find new opportunities to improve the university’s ability to grow sustainably, the team sought to centralize sourcing activities, increase visibility and rigor, and improve the vendor vetting process. The real challenge was finding a single solution that everyone from university department heads to sourcing professionals could agree on and collaborate effectively within.

ENTER SCOUT

That’s where Scout comes in. The Ops team at Robert Morris made user experience, flexibility, and collaboration key success criteria, as university-wide adoption would be critical to centralizing dozens of disparate departments and sourcing processes. Says Sharon Silk, Assistant Director of Business Operations at RMU, “Scout was simple, user friendly, and easy to navigate. It was much easier than eSourcing tools I had used previously in a corporate or collegiate setting.”

Convinced that Scout could help drive more momentum behind sourcing activities, RMU got started. Implementation was easy - the team was up and sourcing in just a few days - and onboarding continues to be a simple process for each new team member. Today, RMU is using Scout across all their major categories, from utilities and maintenance to uniforms and manpower services.
The easiest way to build momentum is to eliminate friction. “Before, sourcing activities were very ad hoc and disjointed. Scout is a tool that makes our many purchasers engaged in the process all the way through.” - Sharon Silk, Assistant Director of Business Operations

THE SOLUTION
Today, departments across RMU use Scout to run their sourcing events — from RFI to RFQ to RFP. Using templates has streamlined and added rigor to the process. Adoption has been high; as Sharon says, “Teams find Scout easy to use and they don’t have to overthink it. Sourcing through Scout now gets everyone, regardless of department or role, on the same page and ensures supplier quality across the board.”

RMU has also used Scout’s Templates feature to its advantage. Notes Sharon, “By using Scout’s templates, teams have a formula for sourcing success at their fingertips. It removes the guesswork and improves quality across the board.”

THE RESULTS
Scout now provides a single, central source of truth for every department’s sourcing activities. This has made the process easier and more effective for everyone involved. Silk sums it up: “Scout allows everyone to run effective sourcing events and impact our bottom line, even if they’re not procurement experts. For our team, it has increased engagement across the business and elevated our role within RMU. Ultimately, that means that procurement is seen as more of a hindrance than a help.”

Even better, the RMU team has increased the competitiveness of the bidding process, with an increase in supplier participation exceeding 70%. With more bids and more supplier engagement, RMU has dramatically improved their ability to predict and manage costs.

It’s momentum like this that is keeping RMU — and its sourcing team — at the top of its game.