



FOR RELEASE

## Digital Main Street Ontario Program Key to Small Businesses Surviving and Thriving in Uncertain Times, says OBIAA in Progress Report

Toronto, May 12, 2020 – The Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) today released [Building Resilience for Small Business](#), their progress report on the innovative Digital Main Street Ontario program expansion. The report details how the program has reached more than 15,000 main street small businesses to help them strengthen their businesses through adopting digital technologies and e-commerce platforms.

The COVID-19 crisis has taken a tremendous toll on Ontario's economy, and main street small businesses are among the hardest hit. Digital Main Street has helped ensure that many of province's main street small businesses were ready to cope with the digital capabilities and tools needed to stay open and keep revenue flowing.

Rolled out in 2018 as an expansion of the Toronto Association of BIAs program with funding by the Government of Ontario and delivery by OBIAA, the Digital Main Street Ontario program is designed to help main street small businesses build greater resilience, create jobs and increase revenues as part of a broader effort to help communities revitalize their main streets.

"Main street small businesses are the backbone of the provincial economy. At the same time, our main streets and the businesses that sustain them are the heart of the social and cultural fabric of the communities we live in," says Kay Matthews, OBIAA's Executive Director. "COVID-19 is showing us the value of investing in their growth and resilience so they can better withstand crises. As our progress report shows, Digital Main Street does just that. We need to keep investing in this successful program to help even more main street small businesses in Ontario grow, create jobs and disaster-proof themselves."

"It's great to see so many small businesses in Ontario be able to strengthen their operations through the adoption of digital technology which is helping some of them continue to operate at this challenging time," said Ernie Hardeman, Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. "Our government is committed to supporting small businesses to improve their competitiveness and Digital Main Street is helping make this happen. As the economy re-opens, being connected will help small businesses recover from this outbreak stronger than ever."

With its exclusive ability to reach 315+ Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) supporting communities across the province, OBIAA is uniquely positioned to deliver the Digital Main Street Ontario program. And, as the progress report clearly demonstrates, the program is having a positive impact.

### Some report highlights:

- More than 15,000 businesses participated;
- More than 4,000 business owners registered for webinars, and almost 3,000 registered for workshops to learn about website development, social media, e-commerce, online advertising and digital marketing;
- More than 155 communities established Digital Service Squads to visit main street small business and provide assistance; AND

- More than 2,000 businesses received grants totalling in excess of \$5 million to invest in digital tools and platforms to help attract new customers, streamline internal processes and increase revenues.

The heart of the Digital Main Street program is its popular and successful Digital Service Squads. These squads employ trained specialists, many of whom are recent college and university graduates, to help businesses improve their online presence. The squads assist with a number of activities, including setting the businesses up on Google My Business, enhancing their social media and providing support for basic website and e-commerce set-up. Thousands of businesses benefitted from the Digital Service Squads, and another 100,000+ main street small businesses could participate should the program be renewed.

“I am proud of what we have accomplished in partnership with the Government of Ontario, municipalities and BIAs across the province, but there is still much more that we can and need to do,” added Matthews. “We must all continue to work together in the future to help even more small businesses build resilience and embrace the opportunities that a strong digital presence can provide to them and the main streets that define our communities.”

OBIAA’s final report will be released in the fall of this year. In the meantime, the progress report, along with a video and information about OBIAA’s vital contribution to the main streets of Ontario, can be found at

<https://obiaa.com/projects/digital-main-street/>

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#### **ABOUT the Ontario BIA Association**

OBIAA is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association supports and advocates on behalf of its members through the building and nurturing of strong relationships and partnerships. OBIAA is a leader in the development and sharing of information, tools, resources and best practices, and is the ONE voice on common issues. [obiaa.com](http://obiaa.com)

#### **ABOUT Digital Main Street**

Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads teams of street-level experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. The program was originally created by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and a group of strategic partners including Google, MasterCard, Microsoft and Shopify. The Province of Ontario expansion of Digital Main Street is funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and delivered by the Ontario BIA Association. The Ontario expansion is part of the government’s \$12 million Main Street Enhancement Initiative to create jobs and support communities across the province. For more information, please visit [digitalmainstreet.ca](http://digitalmainstreet.ca)

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