Digital Service Squad 2020 Grant Program FAQs

What is a Main Street?

Official Plans define a **Main Street** as the following:

A commercial street with strong pedestrian orientation, accessible to the adjacent community and containing a mix of uses (stores, community facilities, apartments, etc.).

Rural communities who have a commercial crossroads, may not follow the typical 'main street' definition, but they must have a commercially zoned main street area. (Highway Commercial)

Further, they are defined as "streets that offer some of the most significant opportunities in the city for intensification through more compact forms of development, a lively mix of uses and a pedestrian-friendly environment."

What is a Digital Service Squad and what do they do?

As part of the Digital Main Street Grant program, funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, partnered with the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), and administered by the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA), Digital Service Squads (DSS) are a **free resource** of trained digital technology specialists situated throughout Ontario who will deliver personalized, one-on-one assistance designed to help main street small businesses navigate new tools and maximize their return on investment.

These trained specialists meet with small businesses, at no cost, to help them complete an online assessment, and introduce them to online training modules to build their knowledge and skills. They can also assist with the development of their Digital Transformation Plan (DTP) and then help them apply for a one-time $2,500 grant to implement it. This one-on-one DSS assistance includes support for basic website set-up, Google My Business profiles, 360º photos, digital storefront set-up with e-commerce, creation or enhancement of social media presence, and much more. Under COVID-19 conditions however, these DSS members would provide outreach and one-on-one support through phone calls and video-based (Zoom) calls.

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

What is the grant for?

Setting up a Digital Service Squad takes time and money. The Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario has provided funding to help cover the costs to develop, train and implement these squads. The objectives of the Digital Service Squad Grant (DSSG) program:

Digital Knowledge

To provide main street small businesses with resources, training, and support for the adoption of digital technologies.

DSS Support

To provide individual BIAs or municipalities without a BIA, with contributions to facilitate a DSS formation within their city.

City-wide DSS Partnership

To provide opportunity for collaboration among existing BIAs, municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, or Small Enterprise Business Centres through the creation of a partnership to form a city-wide or regional DSS.

Who is eligible for the Digital Service Squad Grant (DSSG)?

A DSSG grant is open to applicants that meet the following requirements:

- Is a BIA located in Ontario or;
- Is a municipality, Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Enterprise Centre in an area where there are no BIAs present, and is located in Ontario or;
- Is an area where one of the following may apply on behalf of a collaborative partnership that includes: a BIA, a municipality, a Chamber of Commerce, and/or a Small Enterprise Centre with multiple BIAs.

Additional Criteria:

- Must have the **infrastructure** to administer the goals of the project.
- Must **submit** all costs, including all contracts and copies of original receipts, within 30 days of the grant agreement end date.
- Must **submit a summary** of all costs, less any applicable HST rebate or discount
- Must commit to completing all **required reporting** and all HubSpot data entry by stated due date.
- Must have support, in writing, from all (partner) areas being covered
- Preference will be given to applicants who intend to hire **university/college** students as their squad members.

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

NOTE: Applications will be assessed based on:
- The strength of implementation.
- The administrative infrastructure and ongoing management of the squads
- The financial controls to administer the grants.

All applicants must complete the DSS application template that provides details of the following:
- The eligible BIA or municipal catchment area
- The number of eligible businesses to be served,
- The number of potential hires (FT/PT)
- The project timeline
- Full budget breakdown

Can prior DSS grant recipients apply for this new round of funding?

Prior DSS grant recipients may be eligible to apply provided they meet one of the following requirements:
- the first DSS grant project is **complete**. This includes, but is not limited to, up-to-date and thorough HubSpot data entry for all business interactions and a completed DSS Final Report that has been submitted to the OBIAA office along with all supporting expenditure receipts; or
- the first project is not yet complete, but will be **expanded** to cover additional businesses and additional squad members to be hired; or
- the first project is not yet complete, but the applicant wishes to continue the program beyond the completion date. They must then submit a timeline for the final reporting of prior grant funds.

All other criteria noted above apply, PLUS prior DSS grant recipients **must** also include the following with their application:
- Number of business <u>served</u> in the **prior grant** program and indicate the number of **new** businesses estimated to be served under the new project
- The need to purchase new equipment, if required equipment was purchased as part of the prior grant program.

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

What is available through the grant?

- Exact funding amount per applicant is based on the number of qualified main street small businesses using a multiplier of $250 per eligible business.
- Grant minimum of $5,000 to a maximum of $150,000 to eligible applicants approved for DSS support.
- Maximum grants as follows (based on eligible main street small businesses in the catchment area):
  - To Under 100 businesses   maximum $25,000
  - 100 – 200 businesses   maximum $50,000
  - 201 – 300 businesses   maximum $75,000
  - 301 – 400 businesses   maximum $100,000
  - 401 – 500 businesses   maximum $125,000
  - 501 – 600 businesses   maximum $150,000
- Applicants must include the number of eligible businesses (potential reach) per application
- Flexibility exists for outlier areas that are not accurately represented by the criteria.

What can the grant be spent on?

The eligible costs that can be offset by the grant are staffing costs, equipment costs, marketing material, and travel expenses.

More specifically, eligible costs include the following and exclude applicable HST discount/rebate:

- **Equipment** (limited to $1,200 per squad member):
  - **Chromebook** or equivalent
  - **360-degree camera kit**
    - > Ricoh Theta S 360 Degree Camera or equivalent
    - > Anker Battery Pack or equivalent
    - > Tripod or equivalent
  - **Mobile Hot Spot** or equivalent up to a maximum of $200.00 (monthly service costs not included and are not eligible costs)

- **Marketing** (printing/distributing postcards/flyers promoting the service locally)
- **Travel** costs based on the posted provincial mileage rate (only applicable to outlier areas and applicants who cover multiple cities)
- **Cell phone** costs for squad members ($50/month maximum)
- **Zoom** charges
- **Squad Member Salary**/Wages/Contract Fees
  - > Preference to graduate or undergraduate students

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

What costs are <u>not</u> eligible?

The eligible costs that can be offset by the grant are staffing costs, equipment costs, marketing material, and travel expenses.

- Unnecessary or excessive equipment
- Administrative costs
- Repayment of other loans, past debts, software, repair of existing equipment
- Existing staff salary – i.e. paying a current full-time member of your team to execute the role of a Digital Service Squad team member
- Costs of land, building or vehicle purchase
- Costs of intangible assets such a goodwill, whether capitalized or expensed
- Depreciation or amortization expenses
- Interest on invested capital, bonds, or debentures
- Bond discount
- Monthly mortgage, loan and rent payments
- Refinancing of an existing debt
- Losses on investments, bad debts, and any other debts

- Fines or penalties
- Costs related to litigation
- Fees for administrators including payments to any member or officer of the Recipient's Board of Directors
- Opportunity costs
- Hospitality and entertainment costs
- Franchise fees and/or franchise license costs
- Lobbyist fees
- New capital expenditures
- 3rd party webinar costs
- Video production costs
- Retroactive or in-progress costs – i.e., costs for any work completed or started before the grant agreement date
- Website for the BIA – no EXCEPTIONS

How do we apply?

Applications for DSSG begin on July 1, 2020 and will continue to be accepted until October 31, 2020. For entities applying for a grant, the process is as follows:

1 Go to **www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants/** and complete an online profile.

2 Complete an application form to include:
- Organizational structure and define who will be responsible for the administration of the contribution funds, along with applicable contact info.
    - Include details of any partnership formed for the purposes of executing the grant and copies of any applicable partnership agreements or Memoranda of Understanding
- Describe the geographic area including the number of BIAs (if applicable)
- Number of eligible businesses to be served

- An action plan to include a timeline for:
    - executing the project within the designated area
    - hiring and training DSS members
    - hosting DSS launch event/informational sessions for promoting DSS members, if applicable
    - issuing press release, if applicable
    - purchasing equipment, if applicable
    - partnership informational sessions for promoting the squad services in the area
- Any academic partnerships who will assist with potential student hires
- A detailed budget to include a narrative on how the funds will be used

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

How long does it take for a DSSG application to be reviewed/approved?

Once submitted, OBIAA will review the application to ensure all requirements are met. The Grants Manager will follow-up with the applicant if there are questions about the application. This review process should take approximately five (5) business days **Once the final review is completed, OBIAA will:**

- Contact the applicant by email and inform them they are approved
- Review all conditions of the contribution with the applicant, including disclosure of information to the Federal Government

- Issue a DSSG agreement that <u>must be signed within five (5) business days</u>
- **NOTE:** work can begin and costs can be incurred once the DSS Grant agreement is signed back.

When will we receive the grant funds?

Upon receipt of the signed agreement, OBIAA will contact the applicant to verify method of payment: EFT, e-Transfer, or cheque. Payment will be issued within one week.

What other responsibilities should we be aware of under the DSSG agreement?

All requirements will be detailed in the DSSG agreement, but approved applicants should pay particular attention to the following reporting requirements:

- All applicants **must use the HubSpot CRM to track all businesses contacted and served** within the project period
- All projects and reporting must be completed no later than February 28th, 2021
- All approved applicants must submit copies of all original receipts to support expenditures as outlined in their budget by the due date in their agreement
- All receipts should be net of any applicable HST discount or rebate
- A summary sheet detailing the total of all receipts (less HST) must be included
- Any budget shortfalls are payable and must be returned to OBIAA upon final reconciliation of the budget.

Is there a job description for a Digital Service Squad member?

Yes. OBIAA can provide a generic job description for a DSS member that each BIA/municipality is free to modify depending on the responsibilities you want to assign to your squad member(s) and your overall expectations of the role. The job description is available to download from the Campaign-in-a-Box page of the OBIAA website. Local health guidelines allowing, the expectation is for squad members to go door-to-door to introduce themselves and to better serve the local businesses one-on-one. The job description does note the possibility of working remotely during COVID-19.

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

Are there guidelines for hiring a DSS member and will training be provided?

Yes and yes. Once you are ready to begin the hiring process and to make sure you are on the right track, OBIAA will make a virtual introduction to our DSS team leader/trainer. She can guide you through the DSS hiring and squad member on-boarding.

There is mandatory DSS training once you have your squad member(s) in place. DSS members have the option of doing the training via a half-day LIVE webinar or travelling to Toronto for an in-person session. Given current COVID-19 restrictions, it is likely that most training will take place remotely via webinar.

DSS training webinars are usually scheduled every Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and ideally, should be scheduled two (2) weeks in advance. The "Kick off DSS training" is not on hard skills – we share best practices and procedures that have been working well over the last four years. It will provide a comprehensive overview of the Digital Service Squad conduct, the Digital Service Squad Toolkit, Digital Main Street best practices (including COVID-19 and other safety precautions), and the daily HubSpot reporting requirements. We have several different DSS teams across Ontario, and we need to ensure that all DSS members perform consistently, but will allow for local adjustments as required. **NOTE:** All DSS Administrators must take the DSS mandatory training alongside their DSS member(s)

Is there any marketing support material available for our DSS members?

Yes. To help your DSS member(s) better serve your local businesses and promote the Digital Transformation Grant, OBIAA has developed a set of marketing tools and handouts, collectively called the Campaign-in-a-Box (CIAB). Some handouts are designed to be a template that you can customize with your local messaging and contact details. These digital/downloadable pieces can be found at https://obiaa.com/projects/digital-main-street-2/campaign-in-a-box/

Also, in development is a "How to Apply" video that can be downloaded and posted to your website. It is a handy tool for your DSS members, designed to take Digital Transformation Grant applicants through the step-by-step process of applying for the grant. It will be posted on CIAB page in late August 2020.

Can DSS Grant funds be used to build a marketplace website?

No. Squad members can help the individual businesses develop a better presence on these marketplace sites, but a squad member's time cannot be used to build the marketplace website. The Digital Service Squad's work is to help businesses; this is not a direct to BIA grant.

DSSG 2020 Program FAQs *Continued*

Can we re-hire the same DSS member we used last time?

Yes, provided they are not an existing staff member. DSS members must be NET NEW HIRES. The only exception to this requirement is in situations where a current part-time staff member may be increased to full-time to take on DSS responsibilities, but wages must be tracked separately. If it is not possible to source university/college graduates/undergraduates as DSS members, contracting a third-party tech company is allowed, but all new DSS members must participate in the mandatory DSS training.

Is there an easy way for a business to determine which Digital Main Street program (ShopHERE, Digital Main Street Ontario Grants, Future Proofing) to apply for or can they apply for all three?

The Three Programs Available

Digital Transformation Grants	A program that provides businesses with grant funding for digital transformation. Good for any business that meets the eligibility criteria and is looking for financial support to implement transformation.
ShopHERE powered by Google	A program that provides independent small businesses and artists with a quick, easy, and no-cost way to get selling online right away. If a business is looking for a transactional website and to sell on Shopify, this is a good fit.
Future Proofing	A program delivered in partnership with Communitech and Invest Ottawa that helps businesses identify new markets, pivot their business model, and develop and implement a deep digital transformation plan. More information to follow in the coming weeks.

Important Note:

All programs are independent of each other, albeit very complementary. There is nothing prohibiting a business from going through all three programs, if they qualify, and there is no specific order in which a business needs to approach the programs.

How can I learn more?

Visit **digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants** for more information on timing and instructions for applying for Digital Transformation Grant.