



FOR RELEASE

## Digital Main Street Ontario Second Expansion Vital to Small Businesses as COVID-19 Continues to Put Pressure On, Says New Progress Report

Toronto, October 21, 2020 – The Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) today, in partnership with the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Area's (TABIA), has released the October 2020 [Digital Main Street Progress Report: A Hand Up for Small Business](#), in part to celebrate Small Business Week and to highlight the continuing success of Digital Main Street Ontario in helping businesses survive the ongoing pandemic by adopting digital technologies and e-commerce.

The report looks at the months since March 2020 and how Digital Main Street Ontario is contributing to the economic recovery of the province's main street small businesses. The program, created by TABIA, was first expanded as a result of funding provided by the Government of Ontario through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs in 2018. This successful initiative was subsequently extended in June 2020 by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and Ontario's Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The DMS Ontario grant program for main street small businesses is administrated by the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA).

*"COVID-19 has underscored the importance for businesses to be able to pivot and adapt quickly in a rapidly changing marketplace,"* said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. *"The innovative tools, technologies and supports offered through the Digital Main Street Grant run by the OBIAA are helping Ontario businesses adjust to the new realities of doing business during the pandemic and moving into the next phase of our economic recovery."*

*"As the impacts of the pandemic continue to play out on Ontario's economy, we're seeing that our efforts to support main streets are working,"* said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. *"Small businesses are taking advantage of the Digital Main Street program which FedDev Ontario helped to expand with an investment of \$42.5 million in the wake of COVID-19. These businesses are now finding ways to stay open, do business online, become better-equipped for the future, and build resilience to come back stronger than ever."*

*"Helping main street small businesses recover from the impacts of COVID-19 is truly a team effort. We commend OBIAA for their commitment to providing the tools and training necessary for businesses to create and maintain an online presence,"* said Prabmeet Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. *"The Digital Main Street Grant has been instrumental in helping small businesses adopt new technologies, embrace digital marketing and leverage opportunities to expand their reach to new customers and markets. These tools will assist them throughout the pandemic and help them seize even greater opportunities in the future."*

The pandemic has hit Ontario's main street small businesses the hardest. Digital Main Street had and continues to have a profound impact on the ability of the 15,000 participating businesses to survive and even

thrive, and this report looks at how businesses were better positioned to respond to the crisis as a result of DMS training, grants and support. Through the 2020 expansion, Digital Main Street continues to help ensure many of the province's main street small businesses will continue to successfully navigate the pandemic with the digital capabilities and tools needed to stay open and keep revenue flowing.

*"Main street small businesses are the backbone of Ontario's economy. However, over the past seven months, the pandemic has clearly illustrated how vulnerable these businesses truly are,"* said Kay Matthews, OBIAA's Executive Director. *"The significant investments that our federal and provincial governments have made in extending Digital Main Street Ontario are critical to helping these businesses increase their resilience, reduce their risk, and safely re-open and remain open. As our progress report demonstrates, Digital Main Street continues to be a highly successful program, providing the knowledge transfer, resources, and support necessary for main street small businesses to better position themselves for future success."*

*"It's wonderful to see the number of small businesses in Ontario that have been able to strengthen their operations during this challenging time through the adoption of digital technology,"* 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."*

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

#### **Some report highlights:**

- 70% of participating small businesses responding to OBIAA's survey said they were better positioned to withstand the pandemic because of DMS.
- 63% of participating small businesses responding to OBIAA's survey were able to continue generating online revenue through the pandemic.
- FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT together have made another \$9.6 million in Digital Transformation Grants available to individual main street small businesses since June 2020.
- Another \$3.35 million has been made available to communities for Digital Service Squads.
- 1,285 new applications for Digital Transformation Grants were received by the end of August 2020.

Digital Service Squads are fundamental to Digital Main Street's design and success, with trained specialists who meet with small businesses, at no cost, to help them improve their online presence. The squads assist with a number of activities, including developing a Google My Business profile, enhancing their social media presence and providing support for basic website and e-commerce set-up. Squads will also assist qualified small businesses through the application process for a \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grant, which includes an online assessment, online training modules and the development of a Digital Transformation Plan (DTP).

The progress report and more information about Digital Main Street's vital contribution to the main streets of Ontario can be found at <https://obiaa.com/projects/digital-main-street/>

## **ABOUT OBIAA**

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.

## **ABOUT TABIA**

The Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) is a non-profit umbrella organization working with the 84 Business Improvement Areas within the City of Toronto, who in turn represent more than 70,000 business and property owners.

## **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 in 2016 by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and is supported by a group of strategic partners. For a list of partners and for more information, please visit [digitalmainstreet.ca](http://digitalmainstreet.ca).

## **ABOUT Digital Main Street Ontario**

Digital Main Street was expanded across all of Ontario in 2018 with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through the \$38 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative. It has been further extended through funding from FedDev Ontario and the Ontario Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The new round of funding includes \$42.5 million from the Government of Canada's [Regional Relief and Recovery Fund](#), a national recovery initiative delivered by Canada's regional development agencies. With \$7.45 million from Ontario, this combined federal and provincial project will strengthen Ontario's economic capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship and collaboration, and will promote the development of a strong and diversified Ontario economy. For more information, please visit [digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants](http://digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants)

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