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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OBIAA Releases New Digital Main Street Ontario Grants Program Report: More than 14,000 Small Businesses Received Assistance

Funding from FedDev Ontario and Province Vital to Small Business Pandemic Survival

Toronto, May 11, 2021 – Since the pandemic began in Ontario in March 2020, the main street small businesses that anchor our communities have suffered lockdowns and closures. To survive, these businesses have had to turn to digital and online solutions for marketing, e-commerce and back-end operations. Digital Main Street, administered to main street small businesses by the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) and funded through the Government of Canada's [Regional Relief and Recovery Fund \(RRRF\)](#) and the Government of Ontario's Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Job Creation, was a critical link to providing grants, training and support to help with their digital adoption.

OBIAA is releasing this report, *Digital Main Street: Keeping Small Businesses Connected*, and an accompanying [video](#), to shine a spotlight on the success of **Digital Main Street Ontario Grants Program** and some of the businesses that have not only survived but flourished during the pandemic, thanks to this innovative program. Since June 2020, OBIAA has distributed more than 4,000 Digital Transformation Grants worth \$10 million and 87 Digital Service Squad Grants worth \$4.2 million to 255 communities. In addition, the program has assisted more than 14,000 main street small businesses with advice, training and resources.

Digital Main Street's grant program was extended in June 2020 thanks to an investment of \$42.5 million from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and \$7.45 million from the Ministry for Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT). The almost \$50-million investment helped small businesses across Ontario enhance their operations to include online business models, provide new revenue streams and become more resilient and competitive as the economy recovers. The Digital Main Street suite of programs includes ShopHERE, Future Proof and the Ontario Grants Program, the latter administered by OBIAA.

"Small businesses are the backbone of our economy, a source of local jobs – and local pride," said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. "With Government of Canada support, thousands of entrepreneurs across Ontario have adopted and expanded their digital presence, strengthening their customer connections as a result. We are so proud to see the incredible impact OBIAA and its DMS partners are having on small businesses in the region, setting them up for success in the future digital economy."

"COVID-19 has underscored the importance for businesses to be able to pivot and adapt quickly in a rapidly changing marketplace," added Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. "The innovative tools, technologies and grants offered through Digital Main Street and administered by OBIAA,

helped Ontario businesses adjust to the new realities of doing business during the pandemic and our economic recovery.”

All businesses have felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but main street small businesses have felt the negative effects much more. Digital Main Street has had an incredible ability to help keep these businesses operating and position them to participate in the economic recovery.

“*Digital Main Street: Keeping Small Businesses Connected* illustrates the power of Digital Main Street to support small businesses as they navigate the storm that the pandemic has brought down on our provincial economy and our vulnerable downtown cores,” said Kay Matthews, OBIAA’s Executive Director. “Main street and the small businesses that sustain it are the very heart of our communities and our economy. We are thrilled that our federal and provincial governments have recognized the importance of the DMS program to this vulnerable business sector. Their significant investments have helped these small businesses increase their resilience, reduce their risk and prepare for an increasingly digital world. As our report demonstrates, Digital Main Street’s Ontario Grants Program 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.”

With its exclusive ability to reach 315+ Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) supporting communities across the province, OBIAA is uniquely positioned to partner with the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA), FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT to deliver the Digital Main Street Ontario Grants Program to main street small businesses across the province.

Some report highlights:

- 91% of participating small businesses said they were more resilient.
- 67% of participating small businesses were women-owned.
- 10% of participating small businesses were owned by new Canadians.
- More than 9,000 businesses participated in various DMS training on topics such as digital marketing, e-commerce and back-end systems.

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/>.

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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 85 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 a program that helps main street businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, and our Digital Service Squad, a team of street-level team members who help main street businesses grow and manage their operations through technology.

Digital Main Street was created by the Toronto Association on Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) with direct support from the City of Toronto. DMS is also supported by a group of strategic business partners, including Google, Mastercard, Shopify, Microsoft, Facebook, Intuit QuickBooks, Square, Lightspeed and Yellow Pages. A [\\$42.5 million investment from FedDev Ontario](#) and an additional \$7.45 million from the Government of Ontario brought together the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas, Communitech, Invest Ottawa and the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association to expand the Digital Main Street Platform in order to support more businesses to go digital as a response to the impacts of COVID-19.

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