

## OBIAA 2023 AWARDS SUBMISSION

<b>Contact Name:</b> Vicki Smith	<b>Pillar &amp; Category:</b> COVID-19 Response and Recovery
<b>BIA/Organization:</b> Downtown London	<b>Time period:</b> November/December 2022
<b>Entry title:</b> Holiday Window Contest	
<b>Project description:</b> <i>To create a vibrant and festive downtown atmosphere through decorated storefront windows in order to draw people throughout the downtown. This takes advantage of the people already here for other holiday events as our downtown reopens after 2 years of constant hardship and shut downs.</i>	

### NEED OR OPPORTUNITY

London is one of the fastest growing cities and urban centers in Canada, and Downtown London is the beating heart of the Forest City. It encompasses an important economic and cultural asset, whose health and vitality are crucial to the overall success of the city of London. It is also the center of the community's cultural, recreational, and social life, featuring a breathtaking array of sensory experiences, from top-flight restaurants and cafes to evocative galleries and an expansive live music scene. Centerpieces for the Downtown London experience include significant green spaces at the Thames River and Victoria Park, major venues including Budweiser Gardens, RBC Place, The Grand Theatre, Covent Garden Market, London Music Hall, the Central Library, and Museum London. Downtown London sponsors and partners with festival organizers to attract major downtown festivals including Sunfest, Rock the Park and the Home County Music and Art Festival. The built heritage of Downtown London continues to be honoured and celebrated.

The district is a draw for tens of thousands of visitors from far afield, as well as a focal point for those living in the suburbs or smaller communities within the region. Downtown London is the catalyst and connector for a shared community vision of London's downtown. The downtown consists of over 1,400 businesses, an estimated 7,900 residents, and another 76,000 residents within a 3-kilometer radius.

To support all of our businesses, residents, and visitors it is critical that we create a welcoming and vibrant downtown. Given our large geographical size (84 blocks), it can be challenging to implement new projects that will benefit the whole downtown. Like all downtowns, COVID had a devastating impact on foot traffic and businesses in our core area. Pre-pandemic office workers contributed enormously to the success of businesses in downtown and to the vibrancy that made this area special. Although some office workers are returning to physical buildings, we recognize that there may not be a full return to 100% of employees working in offices five days a week. This combined with 2 years of Christmas season closures due to COVID-19 staff wanted to bring the prime shopping and entertainment season of our members back as strong as possible. Creating a vibrant area includes seasonal window displays through the entire district. A common activity during the Christmas season is to visit Victoria Park to enjoy the Christmas lights and displays. Downtown London's goal was to pull the audience that was already visiting the downtown to other areas of the downtown by having a large group of dynamic window displays to enjoy outside of the park. Getting an audience in front of businesses creates a potential shopper for those businesses to be able to entice to purchase.

### AUDIENCE

Downtown London's main audience target was BIA businesses. To increase the number of downtown businesses participating in creating vibrant Christmas window displays, and in the Holiday Window Contest initiative we knew that we needed to have a hook that would make our businesses want to participate in the contest. Throughout COVID we had learned how much our businesses appreciated our various recovery grants that we were able to provide them. During our annual member survey, the Recovery Grant program was rated in the top few of our members' preferred

programs that Downtown London provided. We were able to tie in a Holiday Window Grant valued at \$500 per grant to increase the participation by our members in the Holiday Window Contest. Downtown London also provided prizes for the 3 businesses with the highest number of votes from the public. Providing prizes for the winning businesses allows the businesses to be rewarded with the grant prior to decorating their windows and then they can be rewarded after by giving bragging rights as well as monetary awards for the windows that the public votes as being the best.

With our downtown businesses being our main target, the secondary target was automatically created, that being the visitors frequenting the downtown and to make them aware of the diverse number of businesses within the BIA that they could visit to shop, dine, or enjoy various personal services. Dynamic, festive windows allow for visitors enjoying the Christmas events within the downtown to have further reason to stay and frequent the businesses.

## GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

Downtown London's overall vision spun out of one of our goals from the Downtown London Strategic Plan. To create a welcoming, vibrant and festive location for businesses, residents, and visitors to walk and enjoy the holiday windows and atmosphere of the downtown. In order to achieve this, we had 3 measurable objectives.

- 1) Have at least 30 businesses sign up for the Holiday Window Contest by the deadline of December 1, 2022
- 2) Increase the number of people that viewed the holiday windows compared to 2021. This was tracked by clicks on the Holiday Window Contest webpage as well as the number of votes cast for the windows
- 3) Increase the foot traffic throughout the downtown. This was tracked through Downtown for the Holidays City of London footcount tracking system.

## IMPLEMENTATION

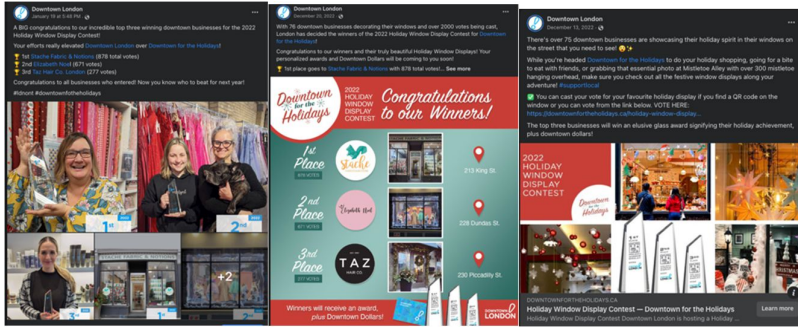
- Holiday Window Grant (used to create participation in the Holiday Window Contest).
  - o This was accomplished through newsletters sending out the grant information package to our membership as well as having our part-time student visit each storefront to explain the grant.
  - o Downtown London began promoting this at the end of October
  - o Downtown London backdated the eligibility of expenses to January 1, 2022 in order to allow for any related expenses that businesses had already made. We also made the end date for eligible expenses December 1, 2022, in order to make businesses have the supplies to decorate their windows prior to the start of December. This gave members a longer time frame for windows to be decorated.
  - o The funding for the Downtown London Holiday Window Grant was made available through a joint effort with the City of London and Downtown London. \$87,000 was given to Downtown London through the London Community Recovery Network's Out and About fund. The City provided funds to the Downtown London BIA to award to businesses and promote downtown workers to get 'Out and About'. \$30,000 of this money was budgeted for the Holiday Window Grant. \$1,000 was budgeted for administrative purposes such as staffing and processing of grants and \$29,000 was budgeted for the actual grants. \$30,000 was the amount chosen for this contest as that is the approval amount available for our Executive Director that does not have to have a motion from the Board. This amount is determined in our Purchasing Policy.
  - o The grant form has been re-worked through the 12 different grant programs that we have launched since the beginning of COVID to help our businesses get through and now recover from the impacts of the shutdowns. The form is as basic and easy to fill out as we can make it in order to simplify the process of applying. All we require is the name and location of the business, the name of the person applying, the banking information of the business, copies of receipts for purchases and pictures of the work that the receipts apply to (in this case a decorated Christmas window)
- Holiday Window Contest
  - o Launched this contest to our members through the Holiday Window Grant at the end of October, as participation in the grant automatically made members part of the holiday window contest.

- Webpage on downtownlondon.ca website was created which had holiday window picture/business name/address listed with a 'vote now' button underneath allowing people to vote electronically
- Put stickers with Holiday Window information and QR codes in each of the participating windows so that people could vote for their window while they were walking by
- Prior to giving out the funding for the grant merchants had to supply a picture of their completed window. These pictures were immediately uploaded to our website Holiday Window Contest page.
- Promoted the holiday window contest to voters in a few different ways
  - Each member was given postcard size cards with the holiday window contest information on them to give out to their patrons
  - Promoted the contest on our social media pages to encourage votes
  - Members were encouraged to promote the contest on their social media pages as well, in order to encourage votes.
  - Began promoting the contest through our social media in early December
- Funding for the Holiday Window Contest was provided through the London Community Recovery Network's Out and About fund. The budget for the contest was \$2250 (separate from the grant budget). This included \$500 in social media promotion and \$1750 for the contest winners - \$1000 in Downtown London gift cards for 1<sup>st</sup> place, \$500 in Downtown London gift cards for 2<sup>nd</sup> place, and \$250 in Downtown London gift cards for 3<sup>rd</sup> place.
- The overall budget for the two aspects of the Holiday Window Contest (the preceding grant and the contest itself) was \$32,250.
- The innovative aspect of this contest was the fact that we tied participation of the contest to a grant. This allowed for an increase in participation as for businesses to receive the funding they had to also agree to be part of the contest, which helped with our over-arching goal of increasing the vibrancy of the downtown over the holiday season. The tying of the grant to the contest also helped us overcome our largest issue, which is business engagement and participation. By tying it to the grant, there is a win-win situation. Downtown London is achieving the impact of many windows being decorated throughout the entire downtown and the businesses are receiving funding for their participation as well as marketing and promotional support.

## RESULTS

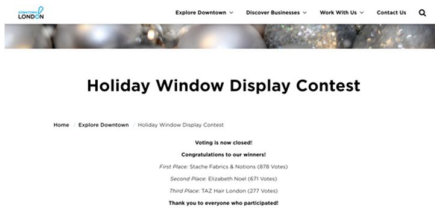
- Goal # 1
  - Goal was to get 25 participating businesses – achieved 77 participating businesses (51 of which took advantage of the grant – provided \$23,621)
- Goal #2
  - Received almost 2500 votes for the businesses
  - Number of webpage visits over 2500 page visits
- Goal #3
  - Benefits to businesses were to increase awareness of the businesses in the area, increase foot traffic to the businesses. We know that 266 people scanned the QR codes that were placed in each participating window. City of London also tracked individual visits to the downtown over the month of December and over 100,000 people came to the downtown in December
- Other notable results:
  - Winners able to visit other local businesses to use the DTL gift cards totally \$1,750, so spread the wealth back into the community

Sample of social media posts

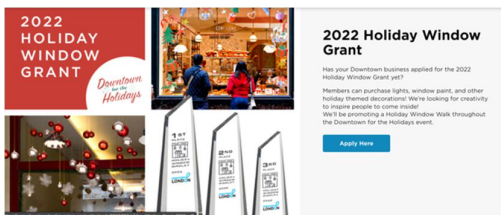


3 posts had 14,190 views and 712 likes.

[Link](#) to the Holiday Window Contest website page



Holiday Window Grant [form](#)



Sample of Holiday Window QR code

