



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Advancing Digital Horizons for Small Business

Digital Main Street Celebrates Over 15,000 Grants over Five Years

October 25, 2023: Toronto, ON. The Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA), in partnership with the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), today announced a milestone of delivering **over 15,000 Digital Main Street (DMS) Digital Transformation Grants worth more than \$37 million** to brick-and-mortar small businesses across Ontario over the last five years. Since October 2018, the program has played a pivotal role in advancing the adoption of digital technologies, driving economic growth, and empowering small businesses to thrive in the digital era. What began as a program focused on main street small businesses has since expanded its reach to include businesses covering a variety of industry sectors and located in a multitude of different communities, particularly those in northern and rural Ontario.

Over the past five years, the DMS Ontario Grants Program (OGP) has empowered businesses to tap into digital tools, online presence, and e-commerce. The program was originally funded by the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and, beginning in 2020, the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade. Additional funding, in 2020, was also provided by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. To date, the combined funding of \$74 million has helped over 62,000 small businesses embrace digital tools and technology, work more efficiently, and reach new customers in new markets in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

"Reflecting on five years of the Ontario Grants Program, we revisit Digital Main Street's 2014 inception, spurred by local small business owners facing digital hurdles. Their foresight, along with the government's recognition of its importance, led to the Ontario Grants Program, enhancing Digital Main Street's early success across Ontario. In an era of continuous digital evolution, it's vital to provide small businesses with continued support, education, and help protecting themselves online," said John Kiru, Executive Director, TABIA & Founder, Digital Main Street. He added "the transition from traditional brick-and-mortar to a more resilient bricks-and-clicks model is crucial now more than ever. We at Digital Main Street remain committed to championing this digital transition".

As we celebrate this milestone during Small Business Month, highlighting success stories offer insights and inspiration to others looking to advance their business in their digital journey.

"Digital Main Street was a big help to our business. The program provided us with access to a range of valuable resources, from website development to social media management and SEO. The DMS team was always available to answer our questions and provide guidance. Overall, Digital Main Street has been instrumental in our digital marketing success. We highly recommend the program to any small

business looking to improve their online presence and reach more customers." Daisy Situ – Daan Go Cake Lab – Toronto.

The three foundational components of the DMS program include: a \$2,500 Digital Transformation Grant (DTG) to qualified brick-and-mortar small businesses; and a Digital Service Squad (DSS) Grant program funding qualified organizations to hire ‘hands-on’ digital technology specialists. This is paired with direct knowledge transfer through the DMS digital assessment and an online training academy, and ongoing in-person workshops/webinar training. Milestones achieved over the last five years include:

- **DTG:** distributed over 15,000 - \$2,500 grants – a \$37.9 million investment;
- **DSS Grant:** funded 326 grants throughout 229 municipalities across the province – a \$17.8 million investment – and generated 815 jobs to support 62,428 brick-and-mortar small businesses;
- **DMS training:** 26,001 business owners participated in online training; 17,868 participated in webinar training; and 2,086 participated in in-person workshops.

To mark these important milestones, OBIAA has developed an [anniversary video](#) featuring some of the most recent DTG recipients, detailing their journey through the program and the successful outcomes of their digital transformation. Complementing the video is the [DMS By the Numbers brief](#), a booklet highlighting the DMS Ontario Grants Program and its impact on small businesses over the past five years. The video and brief are both available on the [OBIAA website](#).

“Small businesses are the backbone of our economy and they keep our local communities vital,” said Kay Matthews, Executive Director of OBIAA. “The Digital Main Street Ontario Grants Program has proven to be a measurable and invaluable resource. As long as there are small businesses opening, growing and expanding, and new digital technologies being developed, the opportunity remains in providing assistance to transform them. Today, OBIAA celebrates the success of the program over the past five years and stands ready to equip even more small businesses with the knowledge, resources, and training to strengthen and secure their online presence for success in the future.”

As we mark these accomplishments, Digital Main Street and the Ontario Grants Program remains committed to supporting brick-and-mortar small businesses on their digital transformation journey. With emerging technologies and changing consumer behaviours, the program continues to advance digital horizons and provide innovative solutions to meet the evolving needs of small businesses throughout the province and beyond.



ABOUT OBIAA

OBIAA is the network that represents unique and vibrant BIAs across Ontario. The Association, incorporated in 2001, 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.

www.obiaa.com

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. www.toronto-bia.com

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 of 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, Square, Intuit QuickBooks, Shopify, eBay, Meta, and Canada Post. The program is delivered pan-Canada in support of small business thanks to the support of all three levels of government. www.digitalmainstreet.ca

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