



March 22, 2024

Associate Minister Nina Tangri
Associate Ministry - Small Business
Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
19th Floor
56 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

To Nina Tangri, Associate Minister, Small Business and Victor Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade:

Thank you for your letter of February 28, 2024, informing OBIAA about the decision to wind down the Ontario Grants Program part of Digital Main Street.

In just five short years, the Ontario Grants Program extension of Digital Main Street, as delivered by OBIAA, has proven itself as an indispensable asset in fostering the growth and resilience of small businesses across Ontario. Since its inception, the program has provided critical support and resources to business owners, equipping them with the digital tools and knowledge necessary to thrive in an increasingly digital marketplace.

As acknowledged by you in your letter, the Ontario Grants Program, as delivered by OBIAA, played a pivotal role in fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, driving job creation and serving as a catalyst for social and economic development in communities large and small across Ontario. While originally funded by the Government of Ontario through the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs beginning in 2017, it indeed became a critical lifeline for small business at the beginning of 2020 when the Federal Ministry of Economic Development (FEDDevON) and the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) re-funded the Ontario Grants Program for an additional year. Fast forward to 2024, we will continue to be grateful for how this program has contributed to the overall economic prosperity of our province with subsequent funding by MEDJCT. With the support of our partners, OBIAA has distributed more than **16,700** micro-grants of **\$2,500** to small businesses across the Province of Ontario, a **\$41.7** million investment.

The magic behind the Digital Main Street program, as developed by the Toronto Association of BIAs was, *and is*, the Digital Service Squad (DSS). This portion of the program recognized the critical need of small businesses: personalized assistance. Since 2018, the Ontario Grants Program funded **326** DSS grants throughout **229** municipalities across the province, over **82,000** businesses received invaluable one-on-one personal support. This \$18.7 million investment, from the province generated 840 jobs directly aiding brick-and-mortar small businesses. Sadly, the Federal Government's CDAP initiative, lacks this crucial element, not recognizing small businesses need personalized support.

**A BIA IS INTEGRAL TO ADVANCING A DISTINCT, LIVABLE,
VIBRANT AND RESILIENT BUSINESS DISTRICT WITHIN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY.**

Of special note, many of our squad members were given a first job opportunity through this program, which in many cases catapulted them into full-time positions with Municipalities, BIAs and in digital technology sectors. This was an unexpected, but fantastic, outcome.


The other key component of the Ontario Grants Program was the comprehensive training it offered, both online and in person. **26,000** business owners participated in online training, **18,000** participate in webinar training, and a further **2,300** took advantage of in-person workshops further enhancing their skills and knowledge. Together with our training partner, OBIAA delivered **314** workshops, **198** live online and **116** in person, which upskilled **26,000** small businesses. That's an amazing **5.8%** of all small businesses in the province! Put another way, **1 out of every 20 small businesses in Ontario attended a workshop through the Ontario Grants program.**

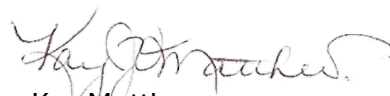
We are grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with MEDJCT, we commend all the passionate and professional staff who supported the project, staff from MEDJCT, DMS and our own OBIAA team who worked tirelessly on this project, demonstrating dedication and commitment to its success.

OBIAA believes our commercial cores play a **vital** role in shaping the economic landscape of Ontario, whether they are main streets, uptowns or downtowns. We are committed to supporting our BIAs and small businesses all across the province as they are essential economic and social centres. We accept your invitation to collaborate on future projects and will be reaching out to you in the future to discuss potential opportunities for partnership.

Thank you both Minister Fedeli and Tangri for your confidence in OBIAA's mission. We believe that OBIAA is a critical partner to the Government of Ontario and will certainly welcome the opportunity to explore potential opportunities to further support for our communities.

Sincerely,


Doug Sams
President


Kay Matthews
Executive Director