



In just five short years, the Ontario Grants Program extension of Digital Main Street (DMS), as administered 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. We are grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with the Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) and commend all the passionate and professional staff who supported the project. The dedication and commitment of the staff from MEDJCT, DMS and OBIAA have been instrumental in the success of this initiative.

Kay Matthews | Executive Director- OBIAA

# A DIGITAL SUCCESS STORY

## Conquering the Challenge

The challenges facing small businesses, particularly on Ontario's main streets, have been compounded by various factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid evolution of digital technology. In response to the current economic climate, comprehensive support is essential to help these businesses adapt, survive, and thrive in an ever-changing online landscape.

**The Digital Main Street (DMS) Ontario Grants Program (OGP), administered by the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA), in partnership with the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), has significantly influenced Ontario's economic landscape since its establishment in 2017.** Originally funded by the Government of Ontario, it garnered additional support from the Federal Government in 2020, and continued to flourish under subsequent provincial funding. Through effective partnerships and dedicated efforts, the program has played a crucial role in fostering digital transformation among brick-and-mortar small businesses.

The mission of DMS is to empower small businesses to expand by adopting digital tools and technologies, seamlessly integrating their in-store and online sales, operations, and customer interactions, in a safe and secure environment.

The OGP's multi-faceted program has delivered resources through the Digital Transformation Grant, education via an online assessment, online learning programs, webinars, and in-person workshops, as well as support through its Digital Service Squad (DSS) program. This approach offered multiple touchpoints for small business owners,

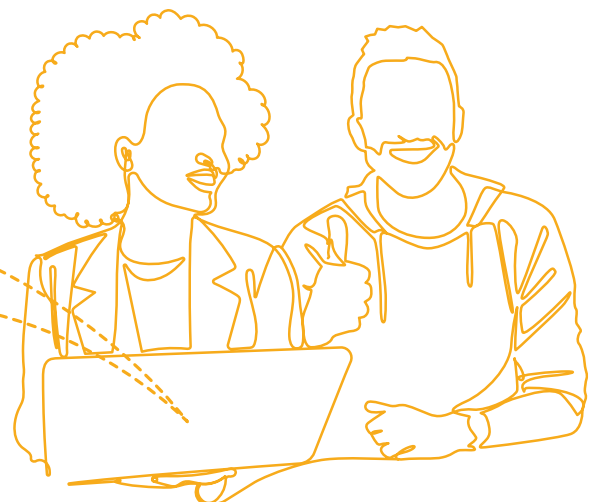
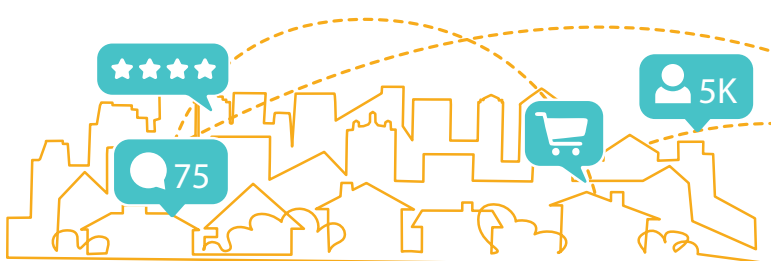
providing a holistic experience and offering various avenues to enhance their digital adoption and increase their technology efficiency.

The DSS members offered personalized one-to-one assistance to small business owners, and have been instrumental in the program's success. Many of them found their first job opportunities through the program, subsequently advancing into full-time positions in various sectors, including municipalities, Business Improvement Areas, and information technology.

As we reflect on the achievements of the DMS OGP, it is evident that its impact extends far beyond the realm of online transformation. **The program has not only equipped small businesses with the tools and knowledge needed to navigate the digital landscape, but has also cultivated a spirit of community resilience and adaptability.** Through the collaborative efforts of stakeholders, including government agencies, industry associations, and local business communities, the program has demonstrated the power of collective action in overcoming challenges and driving sustainable growth.

**Looking ahead, it is essential to build upon the foundation laid by the DMS initiative and further enhance support mechanisms for small businesses across Ontario.** This entails continued investment in digital literacy programs, innovative solutions, and collaborative partnerships to ensure that businesses remain agile and competitive in an ever-evolving marketplace. By fostering a culture of innovation and inclusivity, we can empower small businesses to not only survive, but thrive in the digital era, thereby bolstering the economic vitality of our communities for generations to come.

In just six years, the DMS Ontario Grants Program, has made a significant impact on small businesses. **It exemplifies the importance of local support and local experience in fostering local growth and economic transformation for small businesses across the province.**



# BY THE NUMBERS as of March 31, 2024

## Total Government Investment

IN THE ONTARIO GRANTS PROGRAM

# \$74,116,500

(2018-2024)

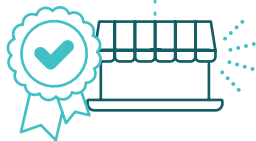
### DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION GRANTS

TOTAL # GRANTS AWARDED

## 16,759

TOTAL \$ VALUE OF GRANTS

## \$41,872,293



### DIGITAL SERVICE SQUAD GRANTS

TOTAL \$ VALUE OF GRANTS

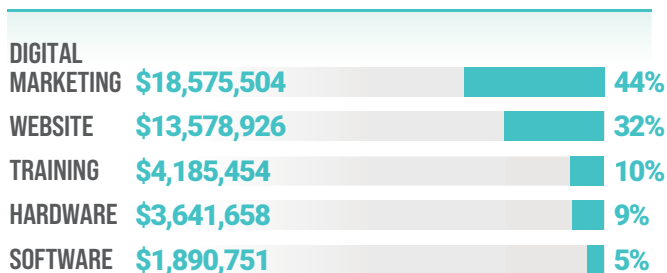
## 18,624,389

TOTAL # OF GRANTS ISSUED

## 326 to 144 organizations



### USE OF FUNDS



BIAs:	65
SBECs:	39
MUNICIPALITIES:	30
CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE/BOARDS OF TRADE:	10

MUNICIPALITIES SERVED:	BUSINESSES SERVED:	JOBS CREATED:
229	70,808	815 (generated)

### TRAINING



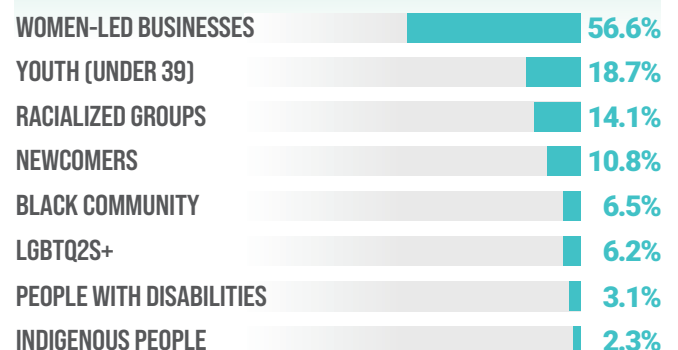
# BUSINESSES COMPLETED DMS ONLINE TRAINING: **26,591**

TOTAL # OF HOURS ONLINE: **98,491**

# BUSINESSES ATTENDED IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS: **2,291**  
(# OF WORKSHOPS HELD = 116)

# BUSINESSES ATTENDED IN-HOUSE WEBINARS: **18,935**  
(# OF WEBINARS HELD = 196)

### SOCIO DEMOGRAPHICS



# LOCAL Success In Every Sip

## How Rose N Crantz Brewed a Winning Launch

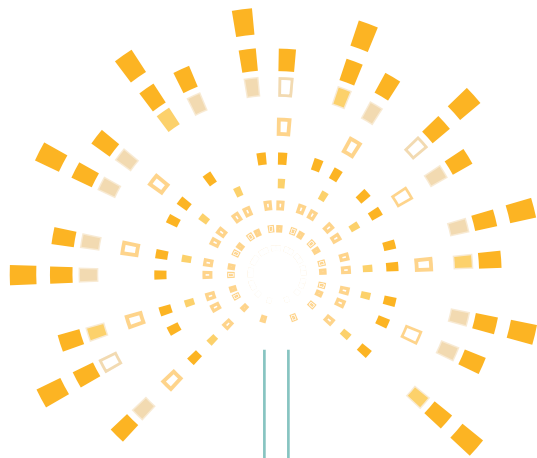
When Jamie Nichols moved back to Thunder Bay, he noticed a gap in the local food and beverage industry: the absence of specialty coffee roasters. Nichols decided to fill the gap himself and opened Rose N Crantz Roasting Co., a coffee shop and specialty roastery, but had another innovative trick up his sleeve for the city's coffee lovers to enjoy. He just needed help getting the word out.



**“Without all the different components of the Digital Transformation Grant, I don't know if we would have been able to launch [Boreal Brew] as successfully as we did.”**



**To read further on his digital transformation success, scan the QR code.**



**“In order to pivot our business and survive the negative impact that our business went through during COVID-19. Without the support to build a website, create an e-commerce experience for our customers to buy our product, we would not have survived and stayed open for business.”**

**Sharon Bailey | SAB Fruit Cake > Mississauga, ON**

**“Thanks to the DMS program grant, we've been able to revolutionize our online presence and bolster our social engagement. These enhancements have catapulted us to the forefront of the hockey training and adult league scene, ensuring our competitiveness and leadership in the industry. Our revamped website and amplified social activities are testaments to the transformative impact of the DMS program on our organization.”**

**Bob Russell | Russell Hockey Enterprises Ltd. > Bradford, ON**



After another successful round of Digital Transformation funding, we reflect on the initial vision that led to the establishment of Digital Main Street. This vision, born from the challenges local entrepreneurs shared that they were facing in adapting to the digital landscape, and recognized by the government, was the catalyst for the Digital Transformation and Digital Service Squad grants. This initiative has significantly propelled the growth of Digital Main Street throughout Ontario. With the digital landscape continually evolving, it is imperative that we keep providing our small businesses with the necessary support, education, and resources to maintain a secure online presence, and ensure they and their clients are protected.

**John Kiru | Executive Director – TABIA | Founder – Digital Main Street**

**DIGITAL  
MAIN ST.**

**digitalmainstreet.ca**