



OBIAA partners on Digital Main Street Ontario expansion with investments from the Federal and Provincial Governments

TORONTO, June 11, 2020 — Thanks to renewed investment in the Ontario Digital Main Street (DMS) program, even more of the province's main street small businesses will be able to take full advantage of digital technologies and e-commerce platforms to increase their revenues and create jobs. The Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA), in partnership with the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), today announced that additional funding from the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario) and the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade (MEDJCT) will allow them to expand the successful DMS program to more businesses in the province.

OBIAA is once again uniquely placed to work with TABIA, the Province of Ontario and now FedDev Ontario to deliver the DMS program across the province, leveraging its network of more than 315 Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) to support communities and their main street businesses right across the province. With a \$42.5 million investment from FedDev Ontario and \$7.45 million from the Government of Ontario, this expansion of Digital Main Street will support more than 21,900 main street business across Ontario to become more resilient and competitive as the economy recovers. Other organizations involved in the partnership include Communitech, Invest Ottawa and the Toronto Board of Trade. OBIAA will be directly responsible for deploying \$15.8 million to assist traditional main street small businesses.

"As local economies across Ontario reopen, we're focused on ensuring that our main streets don't just survive, but thrive," said the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Economic Development and Official Languages and Minister responsible for Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario. *"These businesses are the backbone of our economy, a source of local jobs – and local pride. Thanks to the expanded Digital Main Street platform, they'll be able to expand their offerings and take advantage of more and more people shopping online. Our message to Ontario's small businesses, and those whose livelihoods rely on them, is clear: we're working with you to support good jobs and help our economy come back stronger than ever."*

Main street small businesses manage their operations with limited time, funds, and knowledge of digital tools and techniques. This challenges their ability to seize the opportunities that the new online business environment presents. Today, digital capabilities are *the* key component businesses need to succeed in an increasingly competitive, global, and volatile environment. The DMS program is a smart, efficient way to help businesses adopt and expand their digital capabilities in ways that are realistic, actionable, and effective.

The DMS program is based on three important components: 1) knowledge transfer through training and assessments; 2) resources including Digital Transformation Grants and 3) support through Digital Service Squads. Fundamental to the program's design is the Digital Service Squad. BIAs, municipalities, and Chambers will be able to apply for grants to hire and train Digital Service Squad (DSS) members. These trained specialists meet with small businesses, at no cost, help them complete an online assessment, and introduce them to online training modules to build their knowledge and skills. They can also assist with the development of their Digital Transformation Plan (DTP) and then help them apply for a one-time \$2,500 grant to implement it. This one-on-one

DSS assistance includes support for basic website set-up, Google My Business profiles, 360° photos, digital storefront set-up with e-commerce, creation, or enhancement of social media presence, and much more.

Businesses receiving DMS grants can apply the funds in a variety of ways, including optimizing websites for search, setting up e-commerce platforms, back-office solutions, social media advertising, and creating customer databases. As we have learned in recent weeks, businesses best able to survive the COVID-19 shutdown were those that had made investments in e-commerce capabilities, remote-working technologies, and customer relationship tools. By improving their ability to work online, as well as to reach and sell to customers online, businesses were able to continue earning revenue, keep customer relationships intact, and maintain ties with suppliers.

“Ontario’s small businesses are the backbone of our economy, and their recovery is critical to Ontario’s recovery,” said Prabmeet Sarkaria, Associate Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction. *“As thousands of small businesses across the province closed their doors and halted business during the COVID-19 outbreak, many struggled to shift sales or services online. I am very pleased that, together with Minister Joly and our federal partners, we are providing small businesses with the tools they need to recover and flourish as Ontario reopens.”*

The first phase of the Ontario-wide DMS expansion, funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, that began in October of 2018 demonstrated the effectiveness of the DMS design and OBIAA’s ability to deploy. Through the 18-month expansion, Digital Main Street Ontario reached over 15,000 businesses in 341 communities and provided \$2,500 grants to more than 2,100 small businesses for a total of \$5.4 million and \$10,000 Digital Service Squad grants to more than 100 Ontario communities for a total of \$2.66 million.

“OBIAA commends FedDev Ontario for this sound investment in our main streets. We look forward to expanding the already successful Digital Main Street program, as created and managed by TABIA. Our main street small businesses have been severely impacted over the past many weeks. Together we will begin the task of recovery with direct support to main street small businesses through Digital Service Squads and Digital Transformation Grants,” said Kay Matthews, Executive Director OBIAA.

This additional investment by the federal and provincial governments to support main street small businesses will be vital as Ontario begins the work of economic recovery. By helping to promote economic growth and creating jobs, DMS will contribute to the critical work of helping our local communities thrive.

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ABOUT the Ontario BIA Association

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. obiaa.com

ABOUT Digital Main Street

Digital Main Street is an innovative program designed to help main street small businesses achieve digital transformation. The program is built around an online learning platform, structured training programs, grants and Digital Service Squads teams of street-level experts that help main street small businesses manage and grow their operations through technology adoption. The program was originally created by the Toronto

Association of BIAs (TABIA) and a group of strategic partners including Google, MasterCard, Microsoft, and Shopify. For more information, please visit digitalmainstreet.ca.

ABOUT Ontario Digital Main Street

The Ontario expansion of Digital Main Street was first funded by the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs through the \$38 million Main Street Revitalization Initiative. The second round is a pan-Ontario collaboration funded through FedDev Ontario and MEDJCT and delivered by the Ontario BIA Association. This new round of funding is part of a \$57.6 million Regional Relief and Recovery Fund, a combined Federal/Provincial project to strengthen Ontario's economic capacity for innovation, entrepreneurship, and collaboration, and to promote the development of a strong and diversified Ontario economy. For more information, please visit digitalmainstreet.ca/ontario .

For more information about OBIAA's vital contribution to the main streets of Ontario, can be found at <https://obiaa.com/projects/digital-main-street-phase-2/>

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