

DIGITAL MAIN STREET BACKGROUNDER

Helping Main Street Businesses Grow BY ADOPTING DIGITAL TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES.

Vibrant main streets help attract visitors, create jobs and increase the competitiveness of small businesses, which are the backbone of small rural communities. In order to compete, small businesses must increasingly look at how they can promote, sell and do business in the online world, including running their back-office business processes and increasing their overall productivity through the use of digital tools.

To help Ontario's main street small businesses enhance their digital capabilities and online presence, the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA) and Ontario's Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs have partnered on a \$12 million initiative over two years.

Part of the province's Main Street Enhancement Fund, the Digital Main Street Initiative was first launched by the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA) and the City of Toronto in June 2016. OBIAA is thrilled to be administering this program across the rest of Ontario by building on the Toronto-based program and expanding the services for small business across the province. Some of the core services include:

- **Access to Support:** provides access to basic digital services, including vetted lists of vendors who can identify technologies and tools businesses need to be digitally ready, including assessments, articles, best practices, etc.
- **Digital Training** (online and in-person): offers specific digital technologies or strategies, including e-commerce, social media and website development.
- **Digital Service Squad Program:** provides one-on-one assistance and digital assessments by highly trained teams who can come into businesses to offer services and recommendations, including activating free and easy to use tools.
- **Digital Transformation Training and Grants Program:** provides grants of up to \$2,500 to help businesses strategically adopt technology and meet their digital goals.

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Digital Main Street Grants Program

Thanks to the Province of Ontario and the Ontario BIA Association, Digital Main Street is offering two types of grants to help small main street businesses across Ontario strengthen their digital and online capabilities:

Digital Transformation Grant: Every business that wants to participate in the grant must first take an online assessment of their current technology use. Based on the assessment, the business will then develop their Digital Transformation Plan. This plan will identify their goals and which technologies need implementing to achieve those goals. To help put the plan into action, the business can then apply for a one-time grant to help with the costs of adopting the required technology. There are 2,000 available grants of \$2,500 per business.

Digital Service Squad Grant: Digital Service Squads are digital technology specialists in an area or region of Ontario who will deliver one-on-one assistance to small main street businesses. Digital Service Squads can be set up by BIAs, Municipalities, Chambers of Commerce or Small Business Enterprise Centres, or these groups can come together to form partnerships. There are 300 available Digital Service Squad Grants of \$10,000 each.

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