

Digital Service Squad 2020 Grant Program FAQs

What is a Main Street?

Official Plan's define a Main Street as the following:

A commercial street with strong pedestrian orientation, accessible to the adjacent community and containing a mix of uses (stores, community facilities, apartments, etc.).

Rural communities who have a commercial crossroads, may not follow the typical 'main street' definition, but they must have a commercially zoned main street area. (Highway Commercial)

Further, they are defined as "streets that offer some of the most significant opportunities in the city for intensification through more compact forms of development, a lively mix of uses and a pedestrian-friendly environment."

What is a Digital Service Squad and what do they do?

As part of the Digital Main Street Grant program, funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario, partnered with the Toronto Association of BIAs (TABIA), and administered by the Ontario BIA Association (OBIAA), Digital Service Squads (DSS) are a free resource of trained digital technology specialists situated throughout Ontario who will deliver personalized, one-on-one assistance designed to help small main street businesses navigate new tools and maximize their return on investment.

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.

What is the grant for?

Setting up a Digital Service Squad takes time and money. The Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario has provided funding to help cover the costs to develop, train and implement these squads. The objectives of the Digital Service Squad Grant (DSSG) program:

- To provide main street small businesses with resources, training, and support for the adoption of digital technologies.
- To provide individual BIAs or municipalities without a BIA, with contributions to facilitate a DSS formation within their city.
- To provide opportunity for collaboration among existing BIAs, municipalities, Chambers of Commerce, or Small Enterprise Business Centres through the creation of a partnership to form a city-wide or regional DSS.

Who is eligible for the Digital Service Squad Grant (DSSG)?

A DSSG grant is open to applicants that meet the following requirements:

- Is a local BIA located in Ontario and/or;
- Is a municipality, Chamber of Commerce or Small Business Enterprise Centre in an area where there are no BIAs present, and is located in Ontario and/or;

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- Is an area where one of the following may apply on behalf of a collaborative partnership that includes: a BIA, a municipality, a Chamber of Commerce, and/or a Small Enterprise Centre with multiple BIAs.

Additional Criteria:

- Must have the **infrastructure** to administer the goals of the project.
- Must **submit** all costs, including all contracts and copies of original receipts, within 30 days of the grant agreement end date.
- Must submit a summary of all costs be less any applicable HST rebate or discount
- Must commit to completing all required reporting and all HubSpot data entry by stated due date.
- Preference will be given to applicants who intend to hire university/college students as their squad members.

NOTE: Applications will be assessed based on:

- The strength of implementation.
- The administrative infrastructure and ongoing management of the squads
- The financial controls to administer the grants.

All applicants must complete the DSS application template that provides details of the following:

- The eligible BIA or municipal catchment area
- The number of eligible businesses to be served,
- The number of potential hires (FT/PT)
- The project timeline
- Full budget breakdown

Can prior DSS grant recipients apply for this new round of funding?

Prior DSS grant recipients **may** be eligible to apply provided they meet one of the following requirements:

- the first DSS grant project is complete. This includes, but is not limited to up-to-date and thorough HubSpot data entry for all business interactions and a completed DSS Final Report has been submitted to the OBIAA office along with all supporting expenditure receipts; or
- the first project is not yet complete, but will be expanded to cover additional businesses and additional squad members to be hired; or
- the first project is not yet complete, but the applicant wishes to continue the program beyond the completion date. They must then submit a timeline for the final reporting of prior grant funds

All other criteria noted above apply, PLUS prior DSS grant recipients **must** also include the following with their application:

- Number of business served in the prior grant program and indicate the number of new businesses estimated to be served under the new project
- The need to purchase new equipment, if required equipment was purchased as part of the prior grant program.

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What is available through the grant?

- Exact funding amount per applicant is based on the number of qualified main street small businesses and use of a multiplier of \$250 per eligible business.
- Grant minimum of \$5,000 to a maximum of \$150,000 to eligible applicants approved for DSS support.
- Maximum grants as follows (based on eligible main street small businesses in the catchment area):
 - Under 100 businesses maximum \$25,000
 - 100 – 200 businesses maximum \$50,000
 - 201 – 300 businesses maximum \$75,000
 - 301 – 400 businesses maximum \$100,000
 - 401 – 500 businesses maximum \$125,000
 - 501 – 600 businesses maximum \$150,000
- Applicants must include the number of eligible businesses (potential reach) per application
- Flexibility exists for outlier areas that are not accurately represented by the criteria.

What can the grant be spent on?

The eligible costs that can be offset by the grant are staffing costs, equipment costs, marketing material, and travel expenses

More specifically, eligible costs include the following and exclude applicable HST discount/rebate:

- Eligible costs include the following:
 - Equipment limited to \$1,200 (per squad member)
 - [Chromebook](#) or equivalent
 - 360-degree camera kit
 - [Ricoh Theta S 360 Degree Camera](#) or equivalent
 - [Anker Battery Pack](#) or equivalent
 - [Tripod](#) or equivalent
 - [Mobile Hot Spot](#) or equivalent up to a maximum of \$200.00 (monthly service costs not included and are not eligible costs)
 - Marketing (printing/distributing postcards/flyers promoting the service locally)
 - Travel costs based on the posted provincial mileage rate (only applicable to outlier areas and applicants who cover multiple cities)
 - Cell phone costs for squad members (\$50/month maximum)
 - PPE (if necessary)
 - Zoom charges
 - Squad Member Salary/Wages/Contract Fees
 - Preference to graduate or undergraduate students

What are non-eligible expenses?

Ineligible costs those deemed unnecessary or excessive and include, but are not limited to the following:

- Unnecessary or excessive equipment
- Administrative costs
- Repayment of other loans, past debts, software, repair of existing equipment
- Existing staff salary – i.e. paying a current full-time member of your team to execute the role of a Digital Service Squad team member

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- Costs of land, building or vehicle purchase
- Costs of intangible assets such as goodwill, whether capitalized or expensed
- Depreciation or amortization expenses
- Interest on invested capital, bonds, or debentures
- Bond discount
- Monthly mortgage, loan and rent payments
- Refinancing of an existing debt
- Losses on investments, bad debts, and any other debts
- Fines or penalties
- Costs related to litigation
- Fees for administrators including payments to any member or officer of the Recipient's Board of Directors
- Opportunity costs
- Hospitality and entertainment costs
- Franchise fees and/or franchise license costs
- Lobbyist fees
- New capital expenditures

How do we apply?

Applications for DSSG begin on July 1, 2020 and will continue to be accepted until October 31, 2020. For entities applying for a grant, the process is as follows:

1. Go to www.digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants/ and complete an online profile.
2. Complete an application form to include:
 - Organizational structure and define who will be responsible for the administration of the contribution funds, along with applicable contact info.
 - Include details of any partnership formed for the purpose of executing the grant and copies of any applicable partnership agreements or Memoranda of Understanding
 - Describe the geographic area including the number of BIAs (if applicable)
 - Number of eligible businesses to be served
 - An action plan to include a timeline for:
 - executing the project within the designated area
 - hiring and training DSS members
 - hosting DSS launch event/informational sessions for promoting DSS members, if applicable
 - issuing press release, if applicable
 - purchasing equipment, if applicable
 - partnership informational sessions for promoting the squad services in the area
 - Any academic partnerships who will assist with potential student hires
 - A detailed budget to include a narrative on how the funds will be used

How long does it take for a DSSG application to be reviewed/approved?

Once submitted, OBIAA will review the application to ensure all requirements are met. The Grants Manager will follow-up with the applicant if there are questions about the application. This review process should take approximately five (5) business days.

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Once the final review is completed, OBIAA will:

- Contact the applicant by email and inform them they are approved
- Review all conditions of the contribution with the applicant, including disclosure of information to the Federal Government
- Issue a DSSG agreement that must be signed within five (5) business days

When will we receive the grant funds?

Upon receipt of the signed agreement, OBIAA will contact the applicant to verify method of payment: EFT, e-Transfer, or cheque. Payment will be issued within one week.

What other responsibilities should we be aware of under the DSSG agreement?

All requirements will be detailed in the DSSG agreement, but approved applicants should pay particular attention to the following reporting requirements:

- All applicants **must use the HubSpot CRM to track all businesses contacted and served** within the project period
- All projects and reporting must be completed no later than February 28th, 2021
- All approved applicants must submit copies of all original receipts to support expenditures as outlined in their budget by the due date in their agreement
- All receipts should be net of any applicable HST discount or rebate
- Any budget shortfalls are payable and must be returned to OBIAA upon final reconciliation of the budget.

Is there a job description for a Digital Service Squad member?

OBIAA can provide a generic job description for a DSS member that each BIA/municipality is free to modify depending on the responsibilities you want to assign to your squad member(s) and your overall expectations of the role. While the expectation is for squad members to go door-to-door to introduce themselves and to better serve the local businesses, the job description does note the possibility of working remotely during COVID-19.

Are there guidelines for hiring a DSS member and will training be provided?

Once you are ready to begin the hiring process and to make sure you are on the right track, OBIAA will make a virtual introduction to our DSS team leader/trainer. She can guide you through the DSS hiring and squad member on-boarding.

There is mandatory DSS training once you have your squad member(s) in place. DSS members have the option of doing the training via a half-day LIVE webinar or making the trek to Toronto to do it in-person. Given current COVID-19 restrictions, it is likely that most training will take place remotely via webinar.

DSS training webinars are usually scheduled every Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and ideally, should be scheduled two (2) weeks in advance. The “Kick off DSS training” is not on hard skills – we share best practices and procedures that have been working well over the last four years. It will provide a comprehensive overview of the Digital Service Squad conduct, the Digital Service Squad Toolkit, Digital Main Street best practices (including COVID-19 and other safety precautions), and the daily HubSpot reporting requirements. We will have several different DSS teams across Ontario, and we need to ensure that all DSS members perform consistently, but will allow for local adjustments as required.

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If location and COVID-19 restrictions are reduced to allow for door-to-door visits, will OBIAA be providing a supply of PPE?

Once you have hired your DSS member(s) and if local health and safety guidelines allow for door-to-door visits, OBIAA will ship an initial supply of PPE masks to your location. Beyond the initial supply, each BIA/municipality will be responsible for equipping their DSS members with the necessary PPE.

Is there any marketing support material available for our DSS members?

To help your DSS member(s) better serve your local businesses and promote the Digital Transformation Grant, OBIAA has developed a set of marketing tools and handouts, collectively called the Campaign-in-a-Box (CIAB). Some handouts are designed to be a template that you can customize with your local messaging and contact details. These digital/downloadable pieces are still being finalized and once completed, can be found at <https://obiaa.com/projects/digital-main-street-phase-2/campaign-in-a-box/>

Also, in development is a “How to Apply” video that can be downloaded and posted to your website. It is a handy tool for your DSS members, designed to take Digital Transformation Grant applicants through the step-by-step process of applying for the grant. It will be posted on CIAB page in early July 2020.

Is there an easy way for a business to determine which Digital Main Street program (ShopHERE, Digital Main Street Ontario Grants, Future Proofing) to apply for or can they apply for all three?

- *Digital Transformation Grants*
A program that provides businesses with grant funding for digital transformation
Good for any business that meets the eligibility criteria and is looking for financial support to implement transformation.
- *ShopHERE powered by Google*
A program that provides independent small businesses and artists with a quick, easy, and no-cost way to get selling online right away. If a business is looking for a transactional website and to sell on Shopify, this is a good fit
- *Future Proofing*
A program delivered in partnership with Communitech and Invest Ottawa that helps businesses identify new markets, pivot their business model, and develop and implement a deep digital transformation plan. More information to follow in the coming weeks.

IMPORTANT TO NOTE: All programs are independent of each other, albeit very complementary. There is nothing prohibiting a business from going through all three programs if they qualify and there is no specific order in which a business needs to approach the programs.

How can I learn more?

Visit digitalmainstreet.ca/ontariogrants/ for more information on timing and instructions for applying for Digital Service Squad Grants.