



Council Report

Report Number:	ED2022-042
Meeting Date:	July 19, 2022
Title:	OBIAA Digital Service Squad Grant Agreement
Description:	Request to sign agreement related to the Digital Service Squad program
Author and Title:	Carlie Arbour, Economic Development Officer - Community

Recommendations:

That Report ED2022-042, **OBIAA Digital Service Squad Grant Agreement**, be received; and

That the Mayor and Clerk, following a review of the agreement to the satisfaction of the City Solicitor, be authorised to execute the agreement with the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) relating to the delivery of the Digital Service Squad.

Department Head: _____

Financial/Legal/HR/Other: _____

Chief Administrative Officer: _____

Background:

In 2019, Digital Main Street and the Ontario Business Improvement Area Association (OBIAA) launched the Digital Service Squad grant program across Ontario. The program provides training, advisory support and funds to hire local Digital Service Squad members across Ontario. These Squads, once in place, focus on assisting small businesses to adopt technology such as website set-up, Google Business Profiles, 360° photos, digital storefront set-up with e-commerce, creation or enhancement of social media presence, and more.

This is the fourth round of funding released for Digital Service Squads in Ontario. The municipality has been involved in bringing this program to Kawartha Lakes businesses since its inception.

Previous Digital Service Squad programs

- Digital Service Squad 1.0: November 2019 – September 2020
- Digital Service Squad 2.0: November 2020 – June 2021
- Digital Service Squad 3.0: September 2021 – March 2022

This release of funding (4.0) is a longer term agreement, extending until March 2024. Due to the longer term of the program, the amount of grant funding is larger, and thus requires Council approval.

This report requests that Council enter into agreement with OBIAA to execute the approved Digital Main Street Digital Service Squad program in Kawartha Lakes.

Rationale:

The Digital Main Street Digital Service Squad program is 100% funding by OBIAA and the City has been approved for funding of \$108,972.63. The past two and a half years have shown that an online presence has never been more vital. Businesses who were able to pivot and expand their online offerings during the provincial shutdowns were able to stay connected with their customers and sell their goods and services more effectively than businesses who did not have an online presence.

Since 2019, Kawartha Lakes Digital Service Squads have served over 290 businesses, providing advisory support for online technologies. Hosting 23 online webinar sessions with 172 participants, building new websites, social media pages and answering countless questions from local businesses as they navigate the transformation.

The Squad has helped 47 local businesses access Digital Transformation Grants. Each business received \$2,500 in grant funding towards their transformation (totalling \$117,500 in Kawartha Lakes), with the Squad acting as a local expert helping them maximize their grant funds.

Squad 4.0 Funding

The approved Digital Service Squad 4.0 funding allows for a Squad to be in place until March 2024, the longest term to date. The Digital Service Squad will focus on increasing businesses' digital proficiency, including training, conducting an online assessment and building out a digital transformation plan, increase online presence via google, social media and website optimization and ecommerce integration.

The City of Kawartha Lakes Signing Authority By-law 2016-009 requires Council approval to sign the Digital Service Squad Agreement:

- 6.11 A contract or agreement that has an aggregate value greater than \$100,000.00 requires a report to Council and by-law to authorize the execution of the agreement.

Other Alternatives Considered:

The Digital Service Squad program provides the opportunity to strengthen the online presence of our local business community, allowing them to reach a broader customer base. As the program is 100% funded, municipal costs to administer the program funding agreements are covered.

An external organization could apply for the funding and hold the agreement. However, due to the municipality's experience managing the program, and associated staff resources, it is recommended that the program is best served if led by the City. As such, no alternatives have been considered.

Alignment to Strategic Priorities

Digital Service Squad program supports the 2020-2023 Kawartha Lakes Strategic Plan priority:

- A Vibrant and Growing Economy

The program is a business development program that works with business owners and operators to increase their digital proficiency, and expand their online presence allowing them to access a broader range of customers.

Financial/Operation Impacts:

City of Kawartha Lakes was approved for funding of \$108,972.63. The Digital Service Squad is a fully funded program with no implication to the tax base.

Consultations:

Lindsay Downtown BIA
Fenelon Falls and District Chamber of Commerce
Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce
Bobcaygeon and Area Chamber of Commerce

Attachments:

N/A

Department Head email: rholy@kawarthalakes.ca

Department Head: Richard Holy, Director of Development Services