Digital Main Street Lab

WE·tech
ALLIANCE

Program Concept

The Digital Main Street Lab leverages relationships between technology companies and communities to pilot innovations that encourage transformational change along main street. Ideal pilot projects are ready to launch in a community now and are scalable to other businesses and communities. Projects need not target challenges that have arisen due to Covid-19 but must be able to execute under current Covid-19 safety protocols.

Technology companies gain the opportunity to iterate a new or existing product offering with a main street sector partner which helps provide 'social proof' on the potential effectiveness of their solution. Communities gain new approaches to tackle intractable sector-wide problems. Projects typically generate positive PR as a good news story.

DMS support involves project advice, introductions, expertise, and funding. We are able to fund up to $25,000 to pilot solutions to main street challenges. Pilot projects must include a community partnership with a confirmed pilot location to receive funding.

At the core of this project is the need to bring immediate and lasting improvements to our neighbourhood businesses, ensuring not only their survival, but foster an environment for them to thrive in a rapidly changing landscape. By launching throughout localized communities, tech companies gain access to real time feedback from small businesses and effective solutions can be shared though out the province.

Digital Main Street will be hosting an information session on September 9 2020 at 11am. Register Here.

Program Criteria

Pilot projects proposed under the Digital Main Street Lab must adhere to the following criteria:

Must include one of the following partners – a BIA, SBEC, chamber, municipality, or RIC. Digital Main Street may be able to extend introductions between interested technology companies and appropriate partners, however, due to time restrictions for execution, a strong preference will be shown to companies who have independently fostered these partnerships

Must have an identified end-user collaborator (ie a BIA, RIC or group of main street businesses).

Pilot must be applicable and scalable to other businesses, events, and main street communities.

Must safely help enable the economic viability of main street.

Approved funding will be paid to the partner not-for-profit or municipality for its use to fund the pilot project. Funds can be used to purchase technology and/or hire staff/consultants to implement the proposed pilot project.

Additional Program Resources

In addition to receiving funding, successful pilot projects would also have the option to leverage the following additional resources:

- Student Teams – pilot projects can use one of the Digital Service Squad teams to assist with implementation. The team could be used to engage with local businesses on the pilot project, assist with marketing, or refining the technology for the pilot's local requirements.
- Project Advice – pilot projects can leverage their local RIC (if not already a partner) to get further insight and ideas into their plans.
- Pilot Marketing – pilot projects will be profiled as case studies and shared on the Digital Main Street website and distributed via program partners.

Pilot Project Examples

The following are examples of potential pilot projects:

- Traffic Mapping – piloting of platforms that track people traffic along main street (see - https://digitalmainstreet.ca/case-study/peopleflow-pilot-keep-tabs-on-returning-shoppers-in-bloor-west-village/).
- Digital Market Research – piloting of platforms to do digital market research in BIAs to determine market needs (see - https://potloc.com/).
- Community Data Mapping – piloting of platforms to analyse local business and demographic data (see - https://urbanlogiq.com/).
- Community App – testing of a community app that supports local businesses, such as those focused on health and safety, or marketing.
- Digital Marketplace – piloting ways to do community marketplaces (see - https://digitalmainstreet.ca/case-study/bellevilles-downtown-district-goes-digital-amidst-coronavirus/).

Planned Program Timelines

- Program Launch and Applications Open – third week of August
  - Rolling application approvals with first applications being approved by September 1st, 2020.
- Applications Close – October 31st, 2020
- Pilot Project Final Reports – March 1st, 2021