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Province unveils support for small businesses impacted by pandemic

Written By JESSICA LAURENZA

On February 2, Ontario's Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries held a virtual seminar to debrief municipalities in Durham, York and Headwaters about available grants and support for local small businesses who have been affected by COVID-19.

The Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture, explains that her sectors ?were first hit during the pandemic, they were hit the deepest, and they'll take the longest time to recover.?

Debby Jewell, Director of the Ministry's Investment and Development Office, summarized sector-specific supports implemented by the province. The Community Building Fund delivered by the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF), is investing $100 million over two years to support community tourism, cultural and sport organizations who are experiencing significant financial pressures due to the pandemic.

The first stream of this grant supports local tourism and heritage such as museums, theatres, fairs and cultural institutions to help them sustain short-term operations and develop new experiences for guests when these activities resume.

The second stream of the OTF grant is designated to not-for-profit sport and recreation organizations to invest in infrastructure renovation in order to meet community needs while adhering to public health and safety measures.

Jewell also presented the Emergency Support for Core Arts Organizations, delivered by the Ontario Arts Council; this is a one-time emergency fund of $25 million for Ontario's arts institutions to help cover operation losses incurred from COVID-19. This funding will help organizations prepare for a time when they can fully reopen facilities and resume full programming.

Assistant Deputy Minister of Finance, Tim Schuurman, explained the new small business grant available to any eligible small business who experienced a 20% revenue decline or more in the past year as a result of the government shutdown.

?The new grant is over and above other existing provincial programs like property tax and energy rebates or the other federal business supports,? Schuurman explains.

Ontario will offer one-time grants of a minimum of $10,000 up to $20,000 measured by comparing the monthly revenues of April 2020 with April 2019. If you have a seasonal business or April monthly comparisons are not possible, there are other revenue comparators used to determine eligibility.

The funding application launched February 2 and can be accessed on ontario.ca's homepage under ?supports we're providing small businesses.'

Ontario's Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, Michael Tibollo, notes that ?well it may seem a little odd to have me on the call, we have to remember that mental health is an incredibly important aspect of recovery. We always say you can't have physical health without mental health but I don't think you can have financial health either.?

He advises those struggling with COVID-19 measures to look at the virtual resources provided at ontario.ca/mentalhealth.