



Committee Report

To: Warden Janice Jackson
Members of the Planning and Development Committee

From: Jill Roote
Manager of Economic Development

Date: December 17, 2020

Re: Ontario Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network

Staff Recommendation:

That the Manager of Economic Development, be authorized to sign a funding agreement with the Business Advisory Centre Durham Inc. on behalf of Bruce County, to deliver the Ontario Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network.

Background:

The Small Business Enterprise Centre (SBEC) program is comprised of the Core Initiative, the Starter Company Plus Initiative and the Summer Company Initiative. The Province has established the SBEC Program to provide entrepreneurs with guidance, business training, events, one-on-one coaching, and mentoring to entrepreneurs and youth. The Starter Company and Summer Company Initiatives provide micro-financing to individuals including adults and youth to start, expand, or purchase a small business in Ontario. The Planning and Development division operates the SBEC program via Business to Bruce. The current funding for the program began on April 1, 2019 and will continue until March 31, 2022.

The Bruce County SBEC is one of 47 Small Business Enterprise Centres in Ontario funded by the Province. In May 2020, the network of centres collectively developed and submitted a business proposal in response to the provincial government's call for proposal for the Ontario Together Fund. This fund supports Ontario's response to the COVID-19 recovery. The Province approved the proposal in September to create the "Ontario Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network" program.

Summary:

The "Ontario Small Business COVID-19 Recovery Network" is a \$2.04 million project that will enhance the capacity of all SBECs across the Province to expand their services, supporting small businesses across Ontario. The project will build a centralized portal where businesses can access online training, guidance, support, and advisory services for business recovery through one website. Service deliverables of this centralized portal include financial, digital literacy and business skills training, online webinars, connect businesses with mentors and industry experts, provide information on government programs and assist in building business

continuity plans, understanding digital business transformation and automation of business processes, systems and models. Through this network, up to 75,000 small businesses in Ontario can be reached. This funding will provide small businesses with free financial advice and online training to help them make informed financial decisions and navigate the unprecedented economic circumstances due to COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Entrepreneurship and innovation contribute to the economic growth in the community. This network will create one door for Ontario small businesses and create efficiencies across the network thereby improving productivity and impacting small businesses ability to access timely information and support at their convenience.

Financial/Staffing/Legal/IT Considerations:

This project is funded by the Province in an agreement with and administered by the Business Advisory Centre Durham (BACD), a registered non-profit. BACD will enter into agreements with 47 SBECs and flow grant funding to each of the SBECs enabling them to hire a Virtual Service Advisor to provide support to small businesses.

The role of the Virtual Service Advisor is to:

- Help businesses to pivot their services and adjust to the effects of COVID-19
- Provide information on government programs and assist in preparing applications
- Assist in building business continuity plans and understanding digital business transformation
- Assist in automation of business processes, systems and models
- Connect businesses with mentors and professionals
- Connect businesses with industry experts in their sector

The funding provides for a temporary contract position whose sole role is to execute the virtual assistant.

Each of the 47 Small Business Enterprise Centres throughout the Province will receive \$32,000 to hire and train a Virtual Service Advisor. The period of the program is October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021. Collectively the 47 Small Business Enterprise Centres will contribute to the success of the project.

There are no budgetary financial impacts other than existing staff resources to coordinate the program. There are no legal considerations. IT may be consulted in consideration of the intended virtual format.

Interdepartmental Consultation:

None

Link to Strategic Goals and Elements:

Goal #7: Stimulate and reward innovation and economic development
Element B - Develop a single tier information portal - connect with innovations and new business

Report Author:

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Economic Development Officer, Planning and Development

Departmental Approval:

Jill Roote
Manager of Economic Development

Approved for Submission:

Sandra Datars Bere
Chief Administrative Officer