



Support **SMALL BUSINESS**

Big dreams, small budget: Tap into these free resources

By Liz Beddall

So, you've set your sights on small business ownership. The idea is there, as well as the drive and spirit, yet the knowledge and tools you need to get that business off the ground seem unattainable within your limited budget. Before you panic, or shelve that formidable idea, there are a few steps you can take toward building your small business that won't cost a penny.

GET BY WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM YOUR CITY

The emergence of new business is an attractive prospect for any district, township or city. Being that as it may, it's not uncommon for these regions to offer open-access resources to locals that might help them push their dreams forward. The City of Toronto, as one example, is currently offering a free 10-module webinar series called Starting Your Business 101 Online Training — available on its website. The City of Ottawa's Invest Ottawa platform, as another example, offers a range of small business online workshops and boot camps free of charge, including a summer training program for students with a standout business idea.

SUCCESS STARTS AT THE CENTRE

With more than 50 locations scattered across the province, Ontario's Small Business Centres (SBCs) are a veritable gold mine

for anyone thinking of embarking on a new business venture. A quick sweep of the organization's website will arm any visitor with an array of tools, including a library of free e-learning modules, with titles ranging from Assessing Business Readiness to Record Keeping to Social Media. What's more, these centres, funded for more than 30 years through the Province of Ontario, actively connect entrepreneurs with experienced advisers who can provide one-on-one confidential small business advisory services. Each centre has its own unique offerings, so contact the one nearest you for more information.

A SMALL BUSINESS WISH, GRANTED

Anyone who's ventured down an entrepreneurial path knows that a loan is a momentary win, whereas a grant is a game-changer. In the world of small business, grants are typically tailored toward a specific set of applicants, such as a grant program intended for those who will work on clean tech or smart cities initiatives, another allotted for Indigenous entrepreneurs in Northern Ontario. A great place to start is the Ontario Business Grants website, which breaks down available grants in the province by audience, city and purpose of funding.

A SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

It takes a strong person to start a small business — and in

many cases, getting the idea up and running can be a solitary, even lonely, effort. It is for this very reason that strong communities of support naturally emerge in the small business space. In the online world, that means hundreds, if not thousands, of chat rooms, Facebook groups and forums that have been specifically established so that small business owners can exchange information, share ideas and show support. A few examples of many would include Small Business Ontario, a Facebook group where 7000-plus creative entrepreneurs and small business owners ask questions and get tips and tricks, and the Canada Small Business subreddit hub where topics related to Canadian entrepreneurs and their businesses are openly discussed.

FROM COFFEE TO CONFIDENCE

Admittedly this one won't be entirely free — but if you're willing to spend a few bucks on a cup of joe then this might be the most fruitful move toward starting your own business. Reach out to someone, or multiple people, whose success in small business has inspired you and ask if you might take them out for a coffee. Be clear that you have great respect for their accomplishments in small business, and as an aspiring entrepreneur you'd be grateful to know if they have any tips or advice they're willing to share.

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