

Vaughan Business Resilience Plan, 2020-23

Projects and Programs Underway

Prepared by Economic and Cultural Development (ECD)

1. Digital Boost: Small Business Resilience Program (June 2020 – September 2020)

For Small Business, Adoption of Digital Tools Is More Important than Ever

The Digital Boost: Small Business Resilience Program is a training and mentorship program to help bricks and mortar businesses become bricks and clicks businesses. Reaching clients through digital platforms, selling through e-commerce, and managing inventory and payments online is critical to remain operational when public health concerns limit face-to-face contact.

From Bricks and Mortar to Bricks and Clicks

This program was developed as small businesses have been significantly impacted by COVID-19, which has mandated the closures of many storefronts. Training, through webinars, for local small business owners will cover topics like digital marketing strategies, launching or improving an e-commerce store, developing new product lines or services, developing new revenue models, and financial resilience.

Pivoting Existing Programs to Best Serve our Community

Participants will have the opportunity to apply for a \$3,500 provincial grant through Start Company Plus to implement their new business strategies. Not all program participants will receive a provincial grant, but all are eligible to participate in training.

Overwhelming Demand Validates the Program's Need

ECD closed registration for the first cohort of Digital Boost with 196 business owners registered. 31% of registrants do not currently use digital marketing strategies to promote their businesses and more than 77% experience lack of information and skills as main challenges in working to deploy digital marketing tactics. This program will address those knowledge gaps and produce more resilient businesses.

2. Vaughan InSpirit Cultural Festival Delivered Completely Online (May 2020)

People craved connection to community despite social distancing during COVID. ECD brought local community groups together online to celebrate our culture.

Vaughan InSpirit Festival 2020 was the City's first newly digitized cultural festival recognizing the month of May as Asian Heritage Month in Ontario. The event included 5 community partners who provided 10 scheduled activations throughout the month of May. They included: cultural musical performances by local musicians, tai chi workshops and holistic yoga with community pet owners. Vaughan InSpirit Festival 2020 engaged nearly 600 participants and communications efforts resulted in over 24,000 impressions and 500 social media engagements.

3. International Outreach: Business Retention and Expansion (Launching August 2020)

COVID-19 has halted international travel, but international business development continues

ECD has maintained international business development activities. In lieu of participating in international mission during COVID-19, ECD will launch a Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program focused on internationally owned subsidiaries in Vaughan.

COVID-19 presents an opportunity to better understand Vaughan's international business clusters

ECD will identify trends and characteristics amongst Vaughan's foreign owned businesses to better understand our strengths and opportunities for future international attraction. With a better understanding of the international linkages to companies in Vaughan, the City will be better placed to strategically plan future attraction of international businesses.

An internationally focused BRE program will further strengthen Vaughan's international ties

Focusing on ten to fifteen companies to contact and have in-depth discussions, the BRE program will:

- See international outreach to head offices in other countries
- Virtual visits to local offices
- Develop international market champions of Vaughan who can be contacted in future attraction activities

The result of BRE program will lay the groundwork for future outbound mission participation no earlier than 2021. The Vaughan Chamber and Toronto Global will play important roles in helping to strengthen relationships and identify future opportunities.

4. Visitvaughan.ca (Launched Spring 2020)

Vaughan's attractions have lots to offer from home. Its important to offer visitors the opportunity to connect to Vaughan's cultural and tourism amenities.

While COVID-19 persists, Vaughan's attractions have a lot to offer. They can provide visitors a break from the stress and challenges of COVID.

Vaughan's attractions are also the best tool we have at our disposal to preserve, grow, and share Vaughan's culture.

ECD is sharing Vaughan's local attractions, allowing them to remain top of mind for once social distancing is lifted.

Economic and Cultural Development (ECD) launched the visitvaughan.ca visitor website that offers exploration of all there is to see and do in Vaughan from the safety and comfort of home during the global COVID-19 pandemic. [Visitvaughan.ca](https://www.visitvaughan.ca) was developed by the Tourism Vaughan Corporation (TVC), Vaughan's destination marketing organization, in partnership with Central Counties Tourism (CCT) – the City's regional tourism organization.

The "explore online now, visit later" platform features virtual, interactive content ranging from museum tours, art galleries, cooking lessons, educational tools, roller-coaster rides and more, ensuring visitors don't miss a thing while enjoying the city from home.

Residents of Vaughan are also encouraged to use the new tourism site as a tool when they can host families and friends who are from out of town.

5. Activate!Vaughan Health Innovation Challenge (Fall 2020)

COVID-19 is demanding innovation from our healthcare system. ECD is a key catalyst for this innovation community.

In partnership with the Mackenzie Innovation Institute (Mi2) and Mackenzie Health, SE Health, ventureLAB, and Sterling Industries, the *Activate!Vaughan* Health Innovation Challenge will identify and



accelerate innovative healthcare solutions in Vaughan, and will catalyze Vaughan as a hub for health tech innovation.

Entrepreneurs are leading innovators who can push healthcare forward.

Through *Activate!Vaughan* programming, SBE will provide entrepreneurs with access to co-creation opportunities with leading healthcare organizations, mentorship from experts within the healthcare and health tech sectors, accelerator programming to support them in bringing their innovations to market, and the opportunity to receive provincial grant funding to grow their businesses.

Activate!Vaughan is a problem-centered innovation program that will impact the local capacity to respond to future health crises.

Beginning in September 2020, the Health Innovation Challenge will invite entrepreneurs to present solutions to four problem statements presented by the Mackenzie Innovation Institute, SE Health and Sterling Industries. These problem statements identify opportunities for innovation in Ontario's healthcare sector, with particular focus on telehealth technology and medical devices. The solutions developed through the *Activate!Vaughan* program have the potential to positively impact the local capacity to respond to pandemic events, such as COVID-19, particularly by enabling citizens to access health care remotely, or by developing medical devices which will help minimize the spread of viruses in clinical environments.

6. York Region COVID-19 Supply Chain Impact Study (Fall 2020 – Summer 2021)

COVID-19 revealed vulnerabilities in global supply-chains. Understanding Vaughan's specific supply-chain challenges is important.

In response to significant supply chain disruptions caused by the outbreak of COVID-19, the ECD has approached York Region, municipalities and other stakeholders to explore the opportunity for a comprehensive regional supply chain impact study.

ECD will develop a plan to build resilience into our manufacturing and supply-chain logistics sectors.

The goal of this study is to identify supply chain risks and opportunities in the core manufacturing industry and to develop a set of practical recommendations to build a responsive, diversified and resilient supply chain network in the event of future economic emergencies. ECD staff are currently working with regional and municipal partners to finalize the scope of work. The study is estimated to begin in the 4th quarter of 2020.