Rural Oxford
Economic Development

PEOPLE • PROXIMITY • PROSPERITY

2025 Work Plan

Business Retention & Expansion

- Outreach Visits with Tourism & Agri-Business Sectors
- "Discover Rural Oxford" at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show
- Shop Local Gift Card Program
- Tourism Innovation Grant

Workforce Development

- Oxford County Career Expo
- Promote WorkinOxford.ca
- Manage the Oxford County Job Board Facebook Group (13,000+ Members)

Awareness & Promotion

- Rural Downtown Project
- Support Rural Chambers
- Monthly Business Feature & Digital Newsletter
- ROEDC Billboard Redesign
- SIAL Food Trade Show

Collective Strength

- Oxford County Economic Development Forum
- Collaborate/Promote Local & Regional Partner Initiatives
- Attend & Learn at Conferences (EDCO, EDAC, Agri-Food Forum)

ruraloxford.ca

Mid-September to Mid- November 2024
Economic Development Activity

Business Support:

a. General Business/Marketing Support Interactions: 25
b. Expansion, Location & Development Conversations: 4
c. Business Visits: 22
d. Events Attended: 7

Expansion, Location & Development Conversations by Industry:

Food Processing, Retail/Commercial, Farm Equipment Sales, Agri-Business

Events Attended:

Oxford Connection FAM Tour; Community Futures Oxford's Breakfast Seminar: AI and Digital Marketing Tools; Small Business Centre's "Networking with Purpose" Bridges to Better Business Event; Municipal Agriculture Economic Development & Planning Forum; WOWC Municipal West Conference; Don MacLeod's Retirement Gathering; Fanshawe Agri-Business Management Program (Guest Speaker)

Projects & Partner Collaboration:

a. 5 NEW Stories added to our Newsroom: https://ruraloxford.ca/news
   - Beekist Growers – A New Twist on an Old Tradition; The Butcher Block – Local Sourcing & Community Support; Discover Rural Oxford Exhibit – a First-Year Success, OFA's Seizing Opportunities to Grow Ontario's Local Agri-Products Sector; Sunova Implement – Offering Solutions

b. Business Outreach Meetings (25 of 25)
   - 2024 Manufacturing & Agri-Food Business outreach visits completed
   - Some visits have been coordinated with MEDJCT, OMAFA & FedDev reps
   - Follow-up survey being sent to company with business resources

c. Tourism Oxford's Your Next Stop – Marketing Program
   - Visited 5 Blandford-Blenheim businesses on the "Rural Ramble" Tour
   - Visited 4 Norwich businesses on the "Gravel Travel" Tour
   - Visited 8 South-West Oxford businesses on the "Southern Slowdown" Tour
   - Generated content for 17 videos to promote local business across ROEDC digital media channels

d. "Discover Rural Oxford" at Canada's Outdoor Farm Show (COFS)
   - Debrief meeting to review participant/volunteer feedback and lessons learned
   - Submitted final report and expenses to RED Fund Administration
   - Next Steps: Plan the 2025 "Discover Rural Oxford" event next spring

e. Shop Local Gift Card Program – Research Phase
   - Received 54 business responses to the digital survey (see attached)
   - Received 2 positive recommendations from existing BIA's who have deployed this specific program as well as program comparator information
   - Received generally favourable support of the concept of a county-wide collaboration from Tourism Oxford, Ingersoll BIA, Woodstock BIA, Tillsonburg BIA, Tavistock Chamber, Norwich Chamber, Small Business Centre, Community Futures Oxford, Ingersoll Economic Development, Tillsonburg Economic Development and Woodstock Economic Development – partners await additional information shared in next steps

   - Next Steps: Meet with area BIA's to discuss HR capacity, cost-sharing options, identify desired project outcomes and needs for successful program delivery; Support Ingersoll BIA in drafting a detailed project proposal with budget; Support Ingersoll BIA in presenting a detailed collaborative project to community partners to address outstanding questions, secure sponsors and financial commitments; Support Ingersoll BIA in writing a Community Economic Development grant application to Community Futures Oxford; If all community partners confirm support for the initiative, determine reasonable ROEDC resource allocation, ensuring rural businesses benefit from this 3-year collaborative effort

Governance & Administration:

   - K. Deprest has ROEDC Purchasing Card available
   - November 29th Board Meeting preparations
   - Draft 2025 work plan started
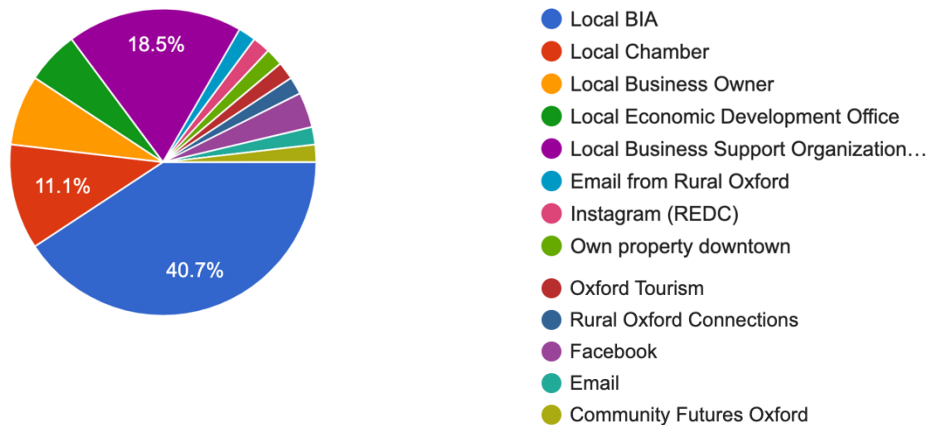
Downtown Gift Card Program Business Survey

📣 Local BIA's and support organizations across Oxford County are conducting market research to identify the business community's interest in a county-wide 'Shop Local' Gift Card Program. Your participation will help to determine next steps. Please take this 2-min survey and tell us what you think about this 'Shop Local' program idea using this link:
https://forms.gle/p9xkce4DdUrzYnqd6

Ingersoll BIA & Rural Oxford Economic Development Corporation launched this digital survey in October 2024 via digital newsletter and social media channels. **54 responses were received.**
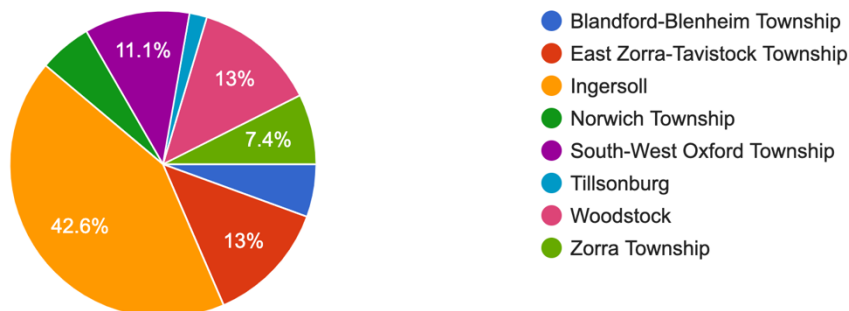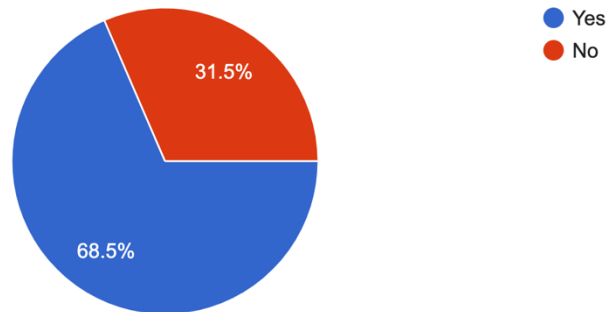
How did you hear about this survey?
54 responses

- 🔵 Local BIA
- 🔴 Local Chamber
- 🟠 Local Business Owner
- 🟢 Local Economic Development Office
- 🟣 Local Business Support Organization…
- 🔵 Email from Rural Oxford
- 🌸 Instagram (REDC)
- 🟢 Own property downtown
- 🔴 Oxford Tourism
- 🔵 Rural Oxford Connections
- 🟣 Facebook
- 🔵 Email
- 🟡 Community Futures Oxford

Where is your business located?
54 responses

- 🔵 Blandford-Blenheim Township
- 🔴 East Zorra-Tavistock Township
- 🟠 Ingersoll
- 🟢 Norwich Township
- 🟣 South-West Oxford Township
- 🔵 Tillsonburg
- 🌸 Woodstock
- 🟢 Zorra Township

Would your business sign up for a Downtown Gift Card program?

54 responses

- ● Yes
- ● No

31.5%

68.5%

If you answered "yes" above, please indicate why:

35 responses

It would drive more sales

To promote it

The more businesses that participate the better this program will work. I would not do it if there were just a handful of retailers.

Shopping local is important to our economy and it will help to get my name out there a bit more.

Another way to sparkle local shopping interest and if it's easy to redeem why not!

Encourage shopping local

Keeps money local, easier to redeem than BIA bucks

We love anything supporting and promoting shopping with local businesses

Keep people shopping in community. Supporting local

I think it is a great way to get more people shopping locally

Our business is all about local and anything we can do to support buying local we will do.

It encourages to support local and support our community.

Seems like easy fit with little to no effort

I feel payment will be more firster

To help support small businesses including mine!

I think it is a great way to promote Ingersoll and Oxford County

Good incentive to keep spending local

Great incentive for community members to keep their dollars within the community!

I think it is a great program to support small independent businesses

I dont see any downside

We like to try new ideas.

Good for business to be involved if the other stores in the area are.

great opportunity to generate sales and attract new customers

Helps promote business and keeps things local

I think it's a great idea to promote local business off the beaten path of downtown.

Supporting local

I want to divert online spending into the economy

This seems like a great initiative to get people shopping local, having a physical gift card guarantees spending. I also like that it could be bought as a gift and that person has the option on many businesses to spend at and now just 1, making this a great gift to buy for co-workers or other people you may not know to well.

Saves in having to administer our own gift card program

because i would like to expand my horizon and my wings to try out new things

I appreciate the Shop Local aspect of the program and would love to keep Ingersoll shopping located in Ingersoll vs. online.

We believe it is important to the economic growth of Ingersoll.
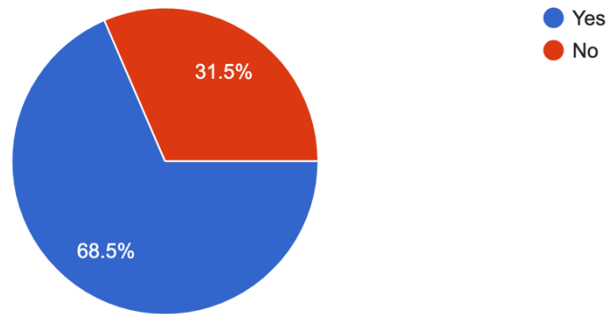
Our business would be interested but so far we have not been included in the "downtown area"

I think any initiative that helps promote local businesses is a good idea and we'd be proud to help support it.

We enjoy supporting local programs

Would your business sign up for a Downtown Gift Card program?
54 responses

- Yes
- No

31.5%

68.5%

If you answered "no" above, please indicate why:
17 responses

The product (Hotel) is under renovation and after the renovation we will be engaging with program

No advantage as we already accept credit cards, and largely our customers are all across Canada and we do not have walk in traffic

No benefit

I'm a cash only business

My business is a part time/on the side business, so I wouldn't want to add any confusion or extra work for myself. But I love the concept and think it would be great for bigger businesses.

Our business is insurance and investments and not the sort of business that can give out a gift card unfortunatly

Not something I could technically make work with my business' payment

N/A

I am leaving SWOX in the Spring to move North

We only deal in CASH$$$$

We sell insurance and our regulatory board doesn't allow for gift cards off premiums.

We are a Financial Institution the program wouldn't apply. But personally, I am interested

My business does not offer services that can utilize a downtown gift card program.

Would not apply at a bank

We don't take credit cards

It would not work for my business.

The company I work for isn't a retail store but rather a newspaper chain. I do support the program and we would promote it.

Would you be willing to help promote the program? This could include collaborating with other businesses, website and social media marketing, signage at physical location, etc.
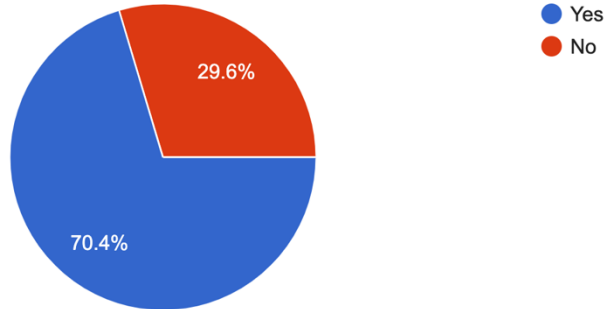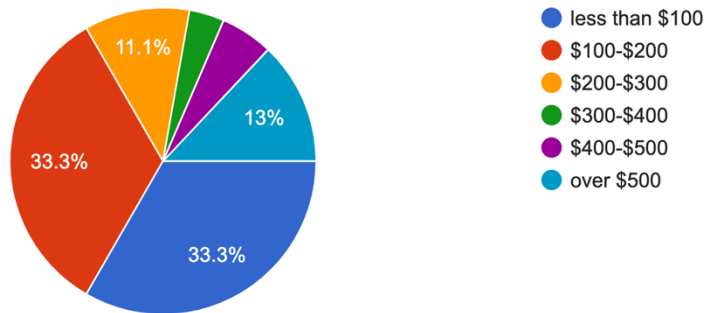54 responses

Legend:
- Yes
- No

16.7%

83.3%
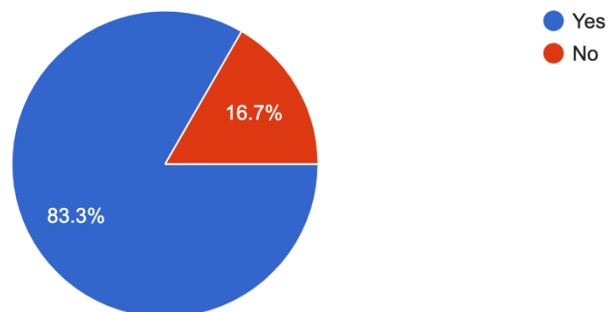
Would you be willing to help promote digital Gift Card sales to your businesses patrons?
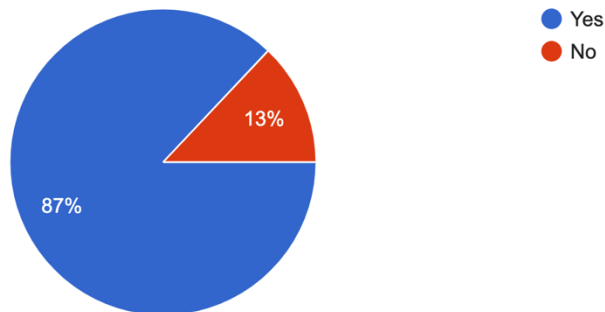54 responses

- Yes
- No

29.6%

70.4%

As a local resident or local business owner, how much per year approximately do you personally spend on purchasing local gift cards?
54 responses

- less than $100
- $100-$200
- $200-$300
- $300-$400
- $400-$500
- over $500

11.1%

13%

33.3%

33.3%

Would you be willing to redirect your annual Gift Card spend to help a local business in Oxford County?
54 responses

- Yes
- No

13%

87%

What questions or comments do you have about this 'Shop Local' program?

26 responses

How can small vendors, like at farmers' markets, also participate if they do not have online sales mechanisms.

No questions

what are the processing fees for the retailer as all visa translations have fees

Its a fantastic program to build the relationship with local which definitely engage all stake holders.

We should find out the interest in the community before implementing as they are who will be purchasing

Great idea

I would be interested in hearing more about the programs details

Shop Local is important and I do in personal life, however I think there are better ways of getting the word out

I will be very happy to see the and influence it will have with good and services payment.

Great idea! Just not in digital format because alot of businesses don't have or use debit machines because of the costs

I love the initiative to promote shopping local more, I just don't know if I would use this but I am interested!

None at the moment. Just lets make it happen

I think we should narrow the scope to each individual town. I think ingersoll should promote a digital gift card for Ingersoll, rather than Oxford county. Keep it small

We would love to participate in this initiative!

None

What is the timeline for this program?

Small business really take a hit with the price of digital money.

what's my cost to do this program

Will the cards look like regular pre-paid visas or will they be decorated for Oxford County?

This is a great idea. On their work anniversaries, we give our employees their choice of a $50 gift card to a number of places. We can include this in that program. It would open up the reward to a lot more places without any more administrative work for us. We already do it for North Perth chamber's dollars in Listowel.

how long will this program last?

Local should include more than downtown

I would assume this VISA GC is reloadable? Would be interested in seeing how many store participate, the ease of purchasing and if the balance on the card is easy to see on a website or even over the phone.

My business is not geographically focused specifically on Oxford County. So when gift cards are purchased, it is from companies that the gift card can be utilized province wide.

What about the cards that don't get used? Then who gets the money for the card purchase?
It is a good idea however programs like this can be hard to administer. Success would largely depend on how many and range of businesses that participate I suspect. For example - Canadian Tire vs a small specialty store.

I think it's a great idea