

[Home](#) / [Activator Program](#) / [Success Stories](#) / Downtown Brampton's diversity is reflect...



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Downtown Brampton's diversity is reflected in a new community-driven art and event series

Ask a resident of Brampton and they'll tell you their city's heart lies at the intersection of Queen Main streets. Visitors and locals alike frequent this historic downtown junction—commonly known as the “Four Corners”—to access its GO transit hub, visit cultural institutions like Garden Square and The Rose and patronize over 300 independent businesses that line its streetscapes.

While the Four Corners area is rich in history and opportunity, Brampton's core experienced a decline in social and shopping activity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Plus, an upcoming infrastructure repair project is scheduled to impact downtown traffic for the next few years.

“There is a lot of appetite from Bramptonians to spend time in their downtown, but they aren't always offered opportunities or spaces,” notes Amanda O'Rourke, Executive Director of 8 80 Cities.

Enter Activate Downtown Brampton, an ambitious project that creates inclusive, accessible and thoughtfully programmed public spaces to entice Bramptonians to explore the core of their city throughout the summer and fall of 2022. A partnership between 8 80 Cities, the City of Brampton and the Downtown Brampton Business Improvement Area, the project is supported by \$223,650 from the Government of Canada, through the [Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario](#) (FedDev Ontario). Activate Downtown Brampton received this funding as part of the My Main Street Community Activator program, administered by the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI).

“We want to offer programming that reflects their communities, that spurs long-term engagement in the area, and that injects more vibrancy to support local businesses,” says O'Rourke.

Under the guidance of local community members, the three organizational partners have been transforming underused public spaces with bold laneway installations, compelling cultural programming and frequent musical showcases that celebrate Brampton's rich cultural diversity. “We were really intentional about building collaboration with community,” says O'Rourke. “We wanted to make sure that we weren't just reaching the same folks that are usually reached by activations.”

Brampton residents represent 234 ethnic origins, speak 89 different languages and together compose the fourth-largest visible minority population in Canada. Any successful endeavour had to be grounded in an understanding of their unique local histories, desires and insights.

“For communities who have often been left out of past downtown revitalization projects, people might come in and assume that there is a scarcity of resources in an area,” says 8 80 Project Manager, Jiya Benni. “But when you involve the community and start to map the existing assets, you’ll find that there’s a lot that they want to do and have the ability to do, and it’s just a matter of giving them a path.”

To create this path for Bramptonians, the partners formed a paid advisory committee from groups who had not been well-served by previous projects—such as racialized communities, youth and people with disabilities. Committee members provided specific recommendations for programming and conducted outreach among their communities.

Thanks to their insights and community connections, Activate Downtown Brampton’s offerings now include free activities such as dementia-friendly workshops, spoken word artists from the area’s Black and Caribbean community and pavement painting from local artists—with many more activities on the horizon.

Throughout the summer, hundreds of residents from across the city visited Four Corners to enjoy pop-up markets, chess tournaments, movie showings, concerts and awareness-raising discussions on mental health. Particularly popular events included a Salsa Dance Party and a “Flavours and Vibes” all-day festival that featured live music, delicious food and local vendors.

“For placemaking projects, more collaboration is always better,” says Benni. “It’s sometimes more complicated, but the end result is always stronger, more successful and more representative of community needs.”

Photo Credit: Suzy Godefroy, Downtown Brampton BIA

“Community members partake in a drumming circle and wellness market in the newly transformed Vivian Lane.”

PARTNERS

My Main Street is a partnership between the Economic Developers Council of Ontario and the Canadian



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