

WHITE PAPER

How BIAs Can Help Toronto Break into the World's Top 10 Cities



tabia Toronto Association of
Business Improvement Areas

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John Kiru, TABIA CEO

www.toronto-bia.com



Chinatown BIA



Visitors may come for the skyline, but **they fall in love with the neighbourhood streets.**

- John Kiru, TABIA CEO

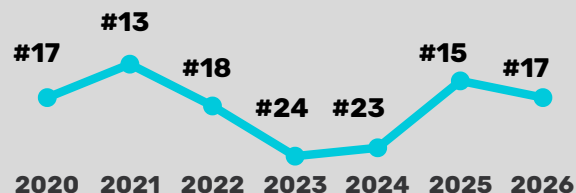
From good to great, from great to unforgettable: the next chapter in Toronto's global story starts on our main streets.

Toronto has once again been named one of the World's Best Cities – landing at #17 in Resonance Consultancy's 2026 World's Best Cities report. That's a respectable finish, but let's be honest: we're not a city that settles for "pretty good."

Toronto has climbed higher before, to #13 in 2021, and the question now is: what will it take to crack the Top 10?

Since 2020, our rankings have told a story that's as much about resilience as it is about ambition.

Toronto Ranking on Best Cities Report



Source: Resonance Consultancy's World's Best Cities Reports

We've had our ups and downs, but we're moving in the right direction again, like the development of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT.

The challenge now is to turn recovery into momentum. And that starts with not only skyscrapers, megaprojects and big events, but with something far more human: how people feel about living, working, and visiting here.

Where We Stand: The Heart of the Matter

Toronto performs well on almost every metric that matters, except the ones that make you smile.

Here's where we land in Resonance's 2026 World's Best Cities report:

- **Livability: #14** – solid. People feel safe, educated, and generally pleased to be here (when they're not stuck on the Gardiner).
- **Prosperity: #15** – not bad. We've got talent, innovation, and growth, though small businesses still face big-city costs.
- **Lovability: #29** – oof. This one stings.

"Lovability" is the emotional metric; the measure of how a city makes people feel. It's about culture, nightlife, creativity, friendliness, and that intangible joy of being somewhere alive and interesting.

Toronto has world-class brains and brawn, but to rise into the Top 10, we need to flex our heart. And that's where the 85 Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) come in, because they're the ones turning streets into destinations, and storefronts into smiles.



Wexford Heights BIA

The BIA Advantage: Turning Livability into Lovability

Toronto is famously a city of neighborhoods. Ask ten Torontonians where they live, and you'll get twelve answers: Parkdale, the Junction, Leslieville, "technically the Annex but with Rosedale energy."

This mosaic is what makes Toronto magnetic. And the caretakers of that mosaic are our BIAs, the local champions behind the murals, the festivals, the café patios, and the shops that make each neighborhood distinct.



Korea Town BIA



Little Portugal BIA

To move up the global rankings, Toronto needs to double down on what BIAs already do best:

1. Make everyday experiences memorable.

Lovability starts with small moments – the lights strung across a laneway, the street musician on Queen West, the smell of jerk chicken or souvlaki drifting through a summer festival. BIAs create the canvas where life feels special.

2. Tell better stories, digitally.

Programs like Digital Main Street don't just modernize small businesses – they turn local pride into shareable stories. A charming café in the Junction or a boutique in Leslieville can now be discovered by someone in Tokyo.

3. Keep main streets human.

In partnership with SuccessionMatching, the Toronto Association of Business Improvement Areas (TABIA) is helping retiring business owners find the next generation of dreamers, ensuring those “only in Toronto” places stay alive. It's how the city keeps its indie character instead of drifting toward generic.

4. Turn big moments into citywide celebrations.

FIFA 2026 is a global invitation. Every BIA has a role to play – from themed street parties to local fan zones and late-night dining. Imagine Little Italy, Chinatown, and Danforth Avenue all alive with the energy of the world.



City Place Fort York BIA

Where the Work Lies: Lovability Is the New Competitive Edge

Livability and prosperity are necessary, but lovability is magnetic.

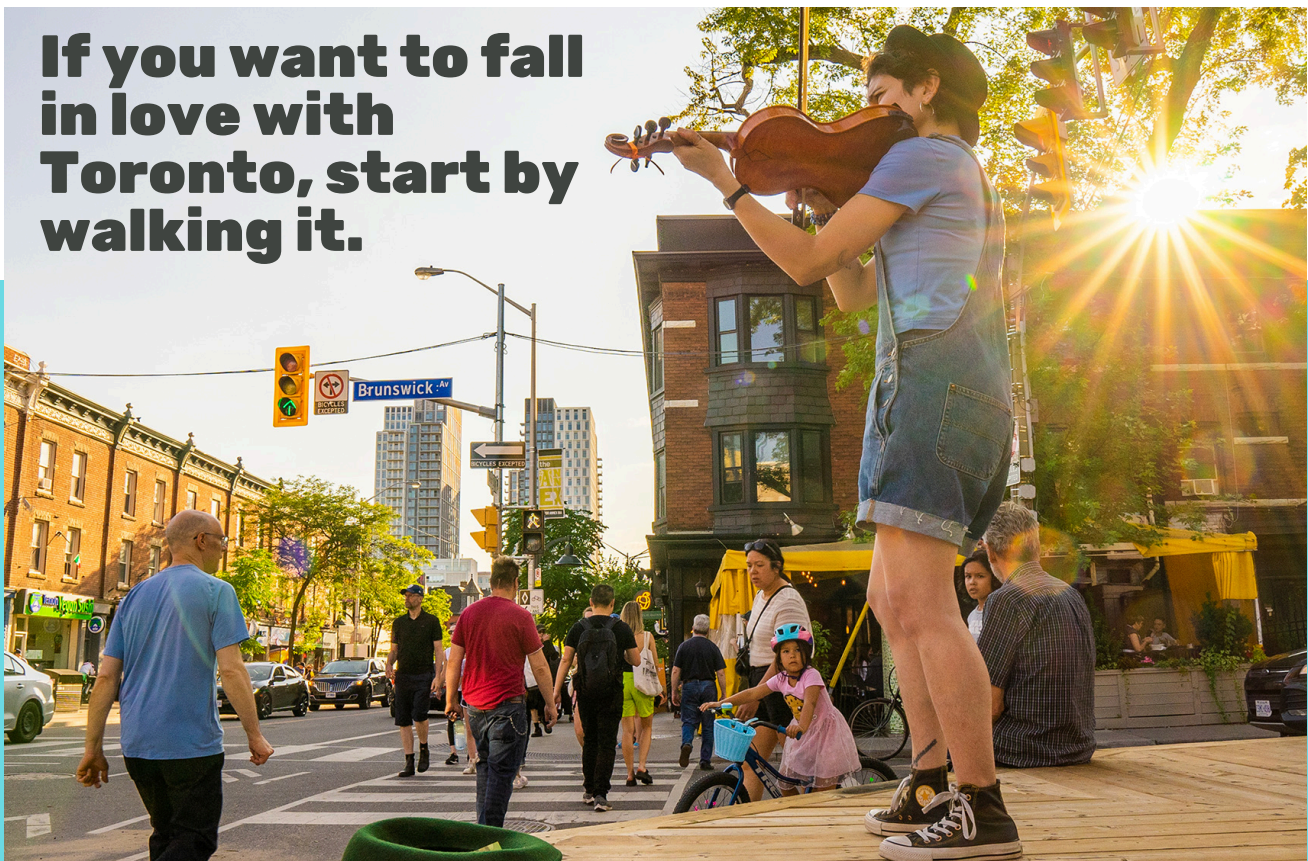
It's what makes people book a trip, stay another day, or tell friends they have to visit. And Toronto has everything it needs, it just needs to turn up the volume.

Here's the truth: our city can feel a little restrained. We're polite to a fault. But global cities that soar - think Paris, Barcelona, Tokyo, or Dubai - have found ways to celebrate their character loudly and proudly.

Toronto's edge is its authenticity: the street festivals, the small galleries, the late-night eats, the spontaneous joy of summer patios opening after a long winter. It's the feeling that everyone belongs and every main street tells a story.

BIAs are the curators of that feeling. They manage the sidewalks, banners, benches, murals, and festivals that collectively form Toronto's emotional map. Supporting them isn't just good local policy, it's global brand strategy.

If you want to fall in love with Toronto, start by walking it.



How We Get There: A City That Feels as Good as It Looks

To climb into the Top 10, Toronto needs a vision that connects its big city ambitions with its neighborhood soul. That means:

- A citywide Lovability Strategy that treats culture, placemaking, and local events as engines of global competitiveness.
- Partnerships with BIAs to scale up neighborhood activations from festivals to pop-ups to creative wayfinding. We need to see more festivals return and expand, not be limited by growing costs of event administration.
- Policy alignment around affordability, safety, and transit that keeps main streets thriving and accessible.
- Strategic storytelling to capture Toronto's energy through the voices of its entrepreneurs, artists, BIAs and other local champions.

Because the truth is: people don't fall in love with cities for their GDP. They fall in love with how they feel walking down the street, and Toronto's streets are ready to create an urban fairytale.



Cabbagetown BIA

Toronto's Next Leap

Toronto's path from #17 to the Top 10 isn't a mystery, it's a mindset. It's about combining big vision with local magic. It's about creating a city that's easy to live in, exciting to visit, and impossible to forget.

Our BIAs already hold the blueprint. They are where Toronto's talent meets its heart, where innovation, inclusion, and creativity come to life block by block. So, as Toronto and the world looks ahead to FIFA 2026 and beyond, Toronto's challenge, and its opportunity, is clear: to showcase a city the world doesn't just admire, but adores.



The Junction BIA



Toronto doesn't need to reinvent itself to reach the Top 10. **It just needs to fall in love with itself again, and invite everyone else to do the same.**

- John Kiru, TABIA CEO