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Maryland Launches Comprehensive Cannabis Equity Ecosystem with CEO Accelerator Program

Building on established foundation of support, first-in-the-nation approach delivers comprehensive support to transform social equity licensees into economic engines for communities

BALTIMORE, MD (June 24, 2025) - The Maryland Office of Social Equity (OSE) today announced the launch of the state's comprehensive cannabis equity ecosystem, a first-in-the-nation approach designed to transform social equity licensees into thriving businesses that create jobs and build community wealth.

Building on Maryland's established foundation of cannabis equity support, this ecosystem represents the state's continued commitment to expanding equity in the industry.

"Our mission demands more than issuing licenses -- it requires advocacy that turns policy into practice," said **Office of Social Equity Executive Director Audrey Johnson**. "Maryland is building an ecosystem that helps licensees move from opportunity to operation -- tackling the real barriers to launching sustainable businesses. This is how we translate equity into jobs, ownership, and long-term prosperity."

The Office of Social Equity's CEO Accelerator Program: Cornerstone of Maryland's Cannabis Equity Ecosystem

At the center of this ecosystem is the Office of Social Equity's CEO Accelerator Program, a comprehensive business development initiative featuring two complementary components designed specifically for Maryland's social equity licensees:

- **NuProject 'Cannabis Technical Financial Assistance Program':** An intensive bootcamp led by Jeannette Ward, a former Coca-Cola executive who has directed

millions in funding to historically excluded cannabis entrepreneurs. The program equips participants with investor-ready business plans, financials, and compelling pitch decks.

"By focusing on financial knowledge and investor readiness, we're addressing one of the most significant barriers facing new cannabis entrepreneurs," said **Jeannette Ward of NuProject**.

"This partnership with the Office of Social Equity creates a critical support system these businesses need to move from license to launch, creating economic opportunities in communities that have historically been excluded."

- **Coppin State University Partnership:** A curated cannabis-focused business development track with flexible delivery models, technical assistance, and personalized mentorship through the Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship.

"The Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship at Coppin State University is proud to partner with the Office of Social Equity on the CEO Accelerator program," said **Dr. Ron Williams, Founding Director of the Center for Strategic Entrepreneurship at Coppin State University**. "This collaboration represents our commitment to providing comprehensive entrepreneurial education that meets emerging industries where they are. By combining foundational business training with cannabis-specific expertise, we're helping ensure that Maryland's cannabis sector reflects the entrepreneurial potential of our communities."

Comprehensive Support from Concept to Launch

The ecosystem includes strategically sequenced components to support entrepreneurs at every stage:

- **Trailblazers Series (Launched January 2025)** - An exclusive series for Maryland's social equity cannabis licensees, featuring insights from successful minority cannabis entrepreneurs nationwide.
- **Regional Open Houses (Launched April 2025)** - In-person convenings held with social equity licensees across all Maryland regions designed to build peer connections and regional business networks.
- **Cannabis Business Masterclass Series (Launched April 2025)** - A 28.5-hour curriculum led by subject matter experts, focused on business fundamentals.
- **CEO Accelerator Programs (May-November 2025)** - Intensive business development through NuProject and Coppin State University partnerships.
- **From Seed to Success: A Cannabis Business Vendor Fair (June 6, 2025)** - A strategic event connecting social equity licensees with vetted service providers.
- **Cannabis Business Assistance Fund (CBAF 4) | June 2025** - Milestone-based grants supporting operational readiness, coordinated by Maryland Department of Commerce.
- **Social Equity Partnership Grant Program (Coming Soon)** – A new initiative to foster meaningful partnerships between operational cannabis licensees and social equity licensees. Qualifying partnerships include those that provide training, mentorship, or shared commercial space/equipment to a social equity licensee.

"This ecosystem approach directly advances Governor Moore's vision of economic empowerment and entrepreneurship for all Marylanders," said **Johnson**. "By building a comprehensive support infrastructure, we're ensuring that these businesses aren't just licensed—they're equipped to become economic engines in communities that have historically been excluded from opportunities in regulated industries."

Success will be measured through established benchmarks for each program component. OSE tracks metrics like program completion rates, capital raised, partnerships formed, businesses opening and business sustainability for program components.

This comprehensive framework ensures accountability and continuous improvement while demonstrating the tangible impact of Maryland's investment in cannabis equity.

By supporting the 191 social equity licensees awarded to date, this approach is expected to generate significant job creation - cannabis businesses create direct employment (dispensary staff, cultivation teams, processing workers) plus indirect employment (security, waste management, professional services) - and position Maryland as a national model for transforming cannabis policy into community prosperity.

The Office of Social Equity's ecosystem will continue expanding throughout 2025, with additional components launching to support licensees through each critical stage from concept to operational launch.

About the Office of Social Equity: The Office of Social Equity ensures diverse participation in Maryland's cannabis market, provides resources and support for social equity applicants and licensees, and addresses the impact of past cannabis prohibition on communities through strategic programming, technical assistance, and community engagement.

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