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Office of Cannabis  
Management

**20  
25**

# **NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF CANNABIS MANAGEMENT**

# **CHIEF EQUITY OFFICER ANNUAL REPORT**

[CANNABIS.NY.GOV/EQUITY](https://cannabis.ny.gov/equity)

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## Letter from the Chief Equity Officer

### To the Cannabis Control Board, the New York State Legislature and Cannabis Market:

It is my privilege to provide you with the Chief Equity Officer Annual Report 2025. This document seeks to capture the full breadth of efforts—now, new, and next—across the Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) designed to advance equitable practices and outcomes in the cannabis market. Despite the many challenges faced this year, the Social and Economic Equity (SEE) Team successfully delivered tailored programs that embodied strategic spirit of the current SEE Plan. Through these efforts, OCM provided financial and operational resources to SEE and Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary (CAURD) licensees, fostered collaboration with community partners, and laid the cornerstones for creating a robust and inclusive cannabis market.

More importantly, the SEE Team and other teams within OCM used 2025 as a year to reflect. We took this as an opportunity to listen to the market and communities across New York State (NYS) so that we could begin to better understand the story behind the numbers. This information led to the development of a refined social and economic equity framework that is both responsive and aligned to the intent of the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA). Additionally, we adopted a stricter practice of using community and market feedback and knowledge to inform our actions. As a principle, equity is meant to create space for the voice and needs of those furthest removed from access. When we co-create solutions with those on the economic and social periphery in mind, everyone benefits.

We carry the energy of this guiding principle into 2026 and beyond.

Along with a new framework, this report offers a glimpse into new and expanded programs that are intended to become perennial fixtures for OCM and the SEE Team. To create a truly equitable market rooted in fairness and healthy competition, equity stakeholders and communities disproportionately impacted by cannabis prohibition require well-funded, sustained programs and consistent agency practices that directly address the challenges they face as market stakeholders. Moreover, these programs and practices do not exist in a “equity” vacuum. They are designed to provoke inter- and intra- agency cooperative action across NYS, as well as collaboration with unique “nontraditional” partners.

NYS equity programs remain the vanguard for cannabis in the nation, and yet we still have room to grow stronger. As in previous years, we have surpassed the statutory goal for SEE licensure, and those businesses continue to shape the market. However, this market is ever-changing and new challenges are emerging. Going into 2026, I hope that this report serves as a clarion call to do more. To be more adaptive, innovative, and, above all, courageous in our effort to build a truly equitable NYS Cannabis Market.

Lastly, I want to express how deeply honored I am to be entrusted with leading this work alongside the dedicated and spirited advocates collectively known as the SEE Team. You are indefatigable in your pursuit of justice and a constant inspiration. And to the broader OCM community, thank you for being just as zealous about advancing equity. I am buoyed by your commitment. This work is never the responsibility of one person or one team. It belongs to all of us.

Onward,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Simone Washington".

L. Simone Washington  
Chief Equity Officer

## Executive Summary

### Purpose of the Report

This report serves to update New Yorkers and the wider public on the implementation of the New York Social and Economic Equity Plan (NYSEE Plan), which was released on May 11, 2023. It details the Office of Cannabis Management’s (OCM) many initiatives and progresses, led by Chief Equity Officer (CEqO), L. Simone Washington, and the Social and Economic Equity (SEE) Team, and is also one of many avenues by which OCM holds itself accountable—first to the agency’s equity mission and second to OCM’s community of stakeholders.

### Key Highlights

#### 2025 SEE By the Numbers



As of December 2025,  
**55% of adult-use licenses**  
are held by SEE licensees.

#### Licensure

- As of November 30th, 2025, 55% of all adult-use licenses were held by SEE businesses. SEE Licenses fall into the following categories: Women-Owned businesses (57%), Minority-Owned businesses (50%), Distressed Farmers (7%), Service-Disabled Veterans (7%), CDI (Communities Disproportionately Impacted) owned businesses (15%).
- SEE Licenses by license-type: Adult-Use Retail Dispensary (77%), Adult-Use Microbusiness (58%), Adult-Use Distributors (44%), Adult-Use Processors (47%), Adult-Use Cultivators (40%).

#### True Party of Interest Demographics Among Adult-Use Licensees

- True Parties of Interest (TPI) identified as of November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025, are as follows: White (55%), Black or African American (16%), Asian (10%), Hispanic or Latino (3%), Indigenous (1%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (1%), “Other” or did not disclose (17%).
- 65% of TPIs identified as male, 28% as female, and 8% did not disclose.

## SEE Across New York State

- Share of SEE licensees across the 10 designated Empire State Development (ESD) Regions outside of New York City is as follows: Capital District (54%), Central NY (42%), Finger Lakes (53%), Long Island (49%), Mid-Hudson (57%), Mohawk Valley (53%), North Country (44%), New York City (72%) Southern Tier (46%), Western NY (56%)
- Share of SEE licensees across New York City's Five boroughs is as follows: Bronx (83%), Brooklyn (71%), Manhattan (67%), Queens (77%), Staten Island (53%).

## Technical Assistance & Resources


In 2025, the SEE Team led the following four initiatives designed to provide financial and technical assistance to SEE and Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary (CAURD) licensees:

### Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary Grant Program

- \$5 million initiative designed to help licensed CAURDs cover critical startup costs
- 159 total awardees with an average grant of \$30,000
- Conducted a total of eight site visits in two regions—Western New York and New York City—to assess the impact of grant awards and build relationships with licensees

### Technical Assistance Providers Grant

- Created to engage nonprofits, community-based organizations, and educational institutions across the state in assisting SEE applicants through New York State's (NYS) complex cannabis licensing process
- Has evolved to include compliance and regulatory guidance, business development, license renewal guidance, and early-stage operational support for new licensees
- \$574,849 allocated across eight Technical Assistance Providers (TAP)
- Grant contracts are still active and 25% of the TAPs have fully exhausted their full grant amount to date
- Grant deadline extended through March 2026, ensuring that equity-owned businesses receive sustained, high-quality support from trusted community organizations



# \$5M

GRANT FUNDING AWARDED  
TO HELP LICENSED CAURDS COVER  
CRITICAL STARTUP COSTS

# 159

CAURD LICENSEES  
RECEIVED GRANTS AVERAGING

# \$30K

EACH

# \$574,849

AWARDED TO EIGHT ORGANIZATIONS  
THROUGH TAP GRANTS FOR EXPERT GUIDANCE  
AND SUPPORT ACROSS NEW YORK STATE

PROVIDING UP TO

# \$75K

EACH ORGANIZATION

### Microbusiness Pro-forma Tool

- A no-cost, comprehensive, financial model encompassing revenue, operating costs, capital expenditures, and working capital considerations for eligible microbusinesses
- Educational videos from the financial advisory firm are available for reference

### Cannabis Hub and Incubation Program Academy

- Provides educational resources to all licensees
- Seven webinars held in Spring 2025
- 200+ licensees registered to attend live sessions, and 40+ licensees requested the video recordings of these webinars

### Cannabis Banking Directory

- Currently includes 20 participating financial institutions and was introduced to more than 27,000 stakeholders statewide including licensees, applicants, and municipalities through a comprehensive email campaign
- OCM promoted the launch through targeted social media outreach, increasing visibility and encouraging industry engagement

## Community Engagement

In 2025, the SEE Team led or participated in the following community engagement efforts:

### Veteran's Taskforce

- The Service-Disable Veteran-Owned Business (SDVOB) Taskforce convened four times in 2025 to coordinate internal and interagency efforts related to Veteran participation in NYS's cannabis programs.
- In December, taskforce representatives participated in the 2025 Veterans in Economic Transition Conference (VETCON) in Albany, where informational materials were shared and general questions were addressed regarding the Medical Cannabis Program, licensing pathways, SDVOB considerations in representation, and workforce resources.
- In November, OCM collaboration with the New York City Department of Veterans' Services (NYC-DVS) hosted *Bridging Service to Enterprise: Veteran Pathways in the New York Cannabis Industry* a webinar focused on connecting Veterans to information on workforce pathways within the regulated cannabis industry.

### Technical Assistance and Incubator Survey

- Collected information about what types of cannabis-related education, training, incubation (both online and in-person), and shared resources currently exist across NYS.
- 384 responses, of which 56% were licensees, 30% assist with regulatory compliance, 26% assist with navigating the licensing process, and 21% assist with financial literacy.
- 33% have shared spaces to host in-person incubation or mentorship programming.
- 35% of respondents currently offer virtual trainings, courses, or educational modules for licensees or applicants.
- When asked what additional support would help strengthen or expand these programs, funding was the top request (approximately 75%), followed by partnerships (40%), and training materials (25%).

## 2025 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility

As part of the expanded duties of the CEqO, OCM reinvigorated its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) efforts which are bifurcated into functions, *Organizational DEIA* and *Operationalizing Equity*.

## Organizational DEIA

- The OCM Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging (DEIAB) Committee redeveloped its mission and vision statements and expanded its reach across the agency.
- The Committee continued its collaboration with the Governor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion by participating in the **2025 New York State Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Workforce Symposium** on October 9, 2025.

## Operationalizing Equity

- To ensure that an equity lens is applied across the agency, OCM engaged the Government Alliance on Racial Equity to provide staff trainings and coaching support to executive leadership through 2026.
- Additionally, OCM created the role of DEIA Director who will be responsible for developing an agency-wide DEIA strategy and measurement framework to enhance internal operations and resource allocation and track progress against stated goals.

## Introduction

The Office of Cannabis Management (OCM), in partnership with the Cannabis Control Board, is committed to building an equitable and economically resilient cannabis industry. This is an agency-wide effort, in collaboration with the cannabis community and OCM's partners across the state. Social and economic equity are the OCM's lodestars, informing agency priorities, perspectives, and analyses.

This 2025 report serves to update New Yorkers and the wider public on the implementation of the New York Social and Economic Equity Plan (NYSEE Plan), which was released on May 11, 2023. This report details OCM's many initiatives and progresses, led by Chief Equity Officer (CEqO), L. Simone Washington, and the Social and Economic Equity (SEE) Team, and is also one of many avenues by which OCM holds itself accountable—first to the agency's equity mission and second to OCM's community of stakeholders.

The SEE Team works each day to foster equity-driven outcomes in New York State's (NYS) cannabis industry. Over the past year, the Team has conducted research, engaged with community members, provided regulatory oversight, and developed programs to further economic development, policy research, small business support, and business incubation.

## I: SEE By the Numbers

### SEE Composition

§ 87(2) of the NYS Cannabis Law establishes a goal to award 50% of adult-use cannabis licenses to SEE applicants. As a matter of organizational practice, the SEE Team plays an integral role in safeguarding equity all stages of the licensing process. The Team provides technical assistance, educational outreach and other resources designed to lower barriers to licensure and ensure compliance with the law and OCM regulations.



As of November 2025,  
**55% of adult-use licenses**  
are held by SEE licensees.

SEE participation remains central to NYS's adult-use market structure. As of November 30, 2025, **55% of all adult-use licenses were held by SEE businesses**, meeting the program's statutory goal of maintaining majority participation from equity applicants. Representation varies by license type, with the highest shares in adult-use retail dispensary (77%) and adult-use microbusiness (58%).

Among SEE licensees, Women-Owned businesses account for 57% and Minority-Owned businesses account for 50% of total participation. Other categories, including Distressed Farmers, Service-Disabled Veterans, and CDI owned businesses (Communities Disproportionately Impacted), continue to maintain a meaningful presence, underscoring NYS's commitment to a diverse and inclusive market foundation.

**57%**

WOMEN-OWNED  
BUSINESS (WOB)

**50%**

MINORITY-OWNED  
BUSINESS (MOB)

**7%**

DISTRESSED FARMER  
(DF)

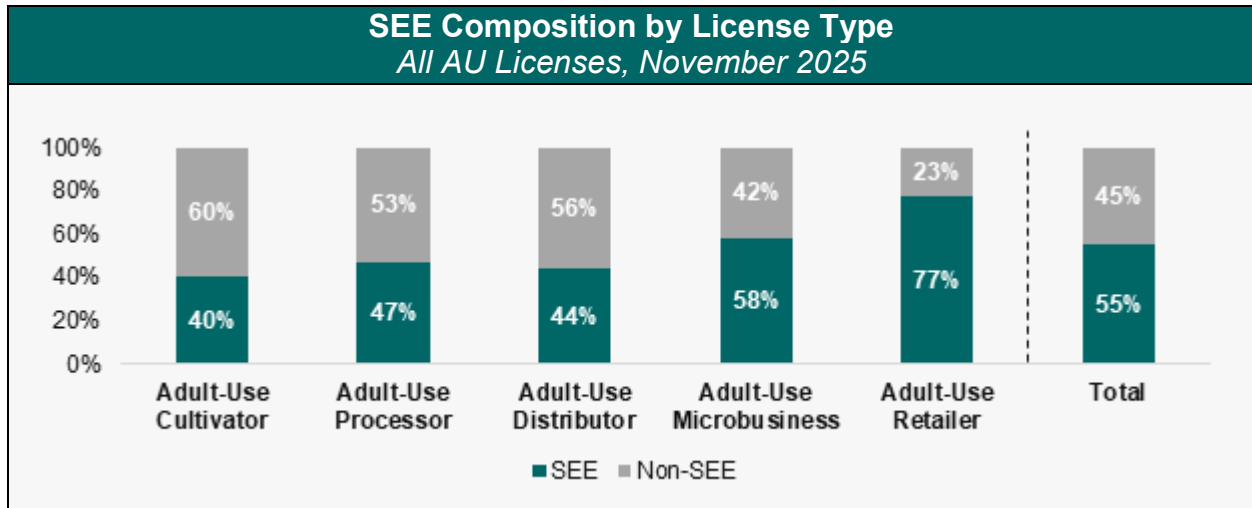
**7%**

SERVICE-DISABLED VETERAN  
OWNED BUSINESS (SDVOB)

**15%**

INDIVIDUAL FROM A COMMUNITY  
DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED (CDI)

**Table 1: SEE Composition by Adult-Use License Type as of Nov 2025**



**Table 2: License Type Composition by SEE Category as of Nov 2025**

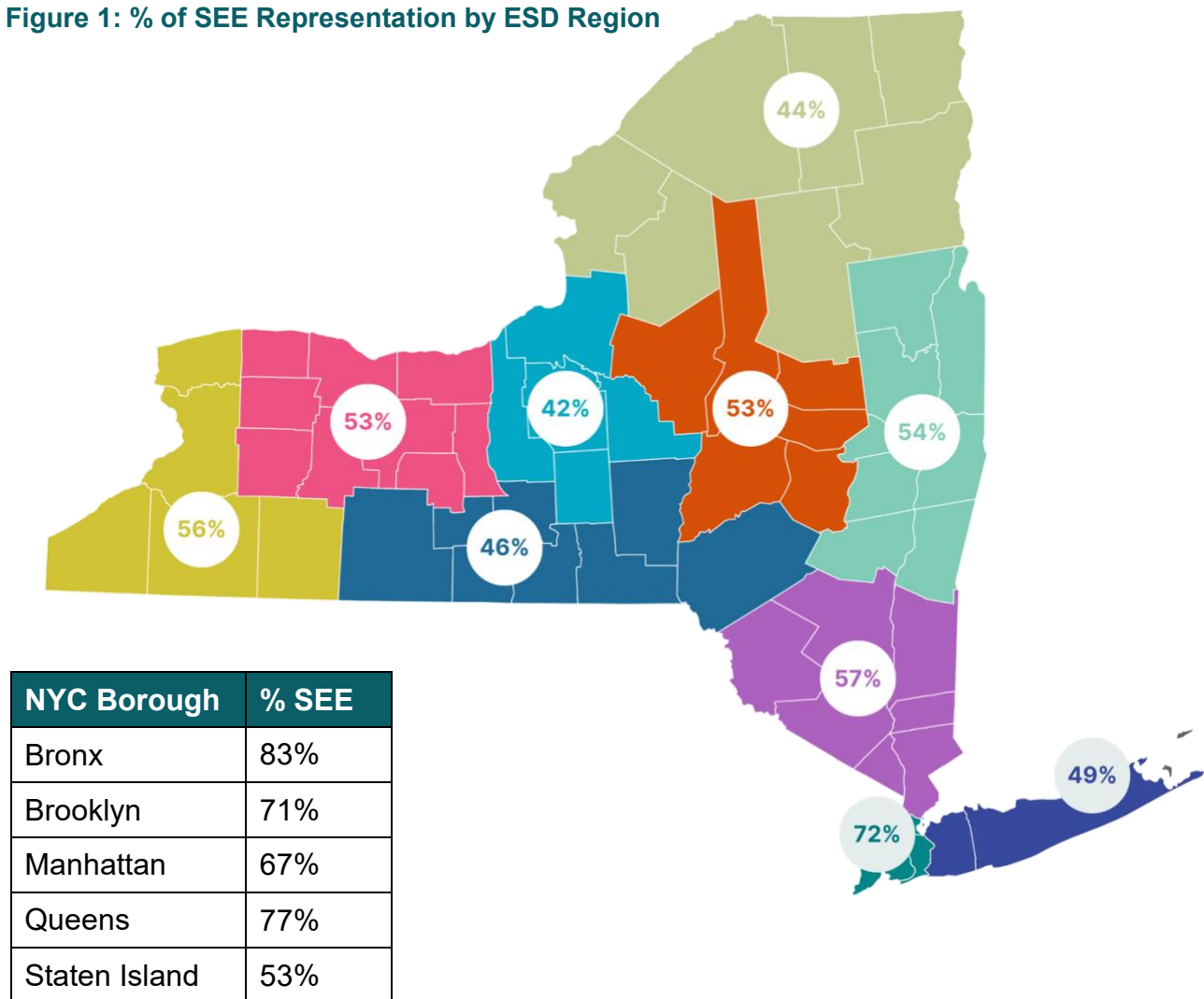
SEE Category*	Adult-Use Cultivator	Adult-Use Processor	Adult-Use Distributor	Adult-Use Retailer	Adult-Use Micro	Total
Minority-Owned Business	32%	52%	40%	61%	39%	50%
Women-Owned Business	52%	54%	61%	60%	57%	57%
Distressed Farmer	23%	7%	15%	0%	8%	7%
Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business	10%	4%	4%	7%	13%	7%
CDI Business	14%	19%	11%	14%	14%	15%

\*Licensees can belong to multiple categories.

### SEE Representation by Region

Equity licensees in the adult-use retail space are fully represented across NYS’s Empire State Development (ESD) Regions, with the highest concentration located in the New York City region. This distribution is reflective of proximity to OCM presence—Buffalo, Albany and New York City—and may signal a need for heightened engagement outside of those regions. Additionally, OCM should track the regional presence of other license types for accurate reporting of SEE representation.

Figure 1: % of SEE Representation by ESD Region



### True Party of Interest Demographics

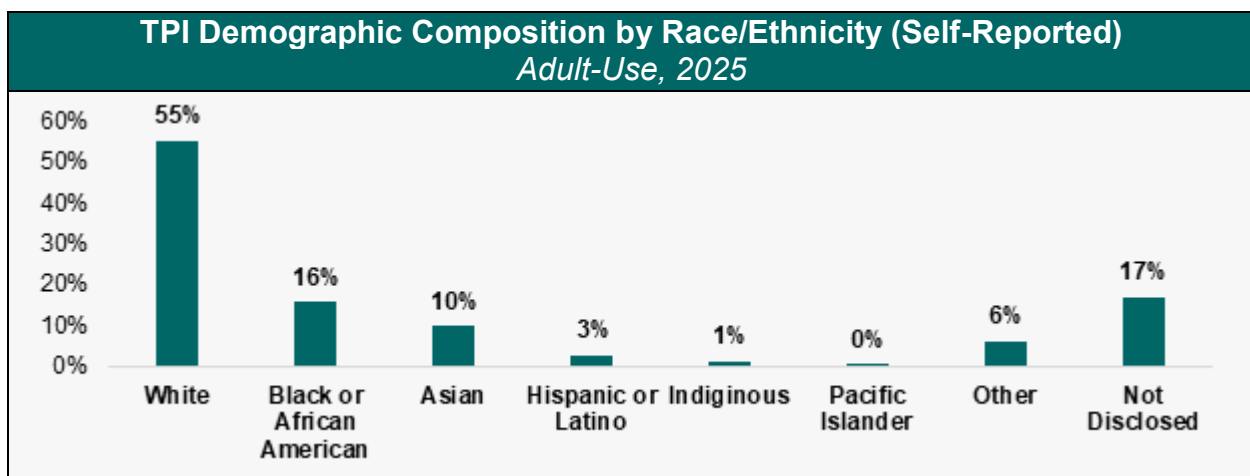
As a statutory requirement, SEE applicants and licensees must maintain sole control of the business (9 NYCRR § 121.2). Sole control ensures that SEE licensees are legitimate in their status and operations, thus ensuring equity across the market. SEE-qualifying individual(s) must prove that they have real, substantial, and continuing

ownership of at least 51% equity share in the business and can exercise the authority to materially influence day-to-day business decisions.

NYS’s adult-use cannabis industry is designed as a two-tier market consisting of a supply tier and a retail tier. Under this design, for example, operators must choose licenses in either tier, with few exceptions. The True Party of Interest (TPI) framework protects the integrity of this two-tier structure and establishes procedures for monitoring and enforcing ownership restrictions (9 NYCRR § 118.1(a) (105)). TPIs are persons and entities with a direct or indirect stake in a license. Other TPI regulations require licensees to provide periodic reports on ownership arrangements, management-service agreements, any changes in ownership or sales of equity, and vendor contracts, as well as conduct regular compliance inspections and financial audits. These regulations provide visibility into the market and protect the ownership interests of an industry built by small businesses.

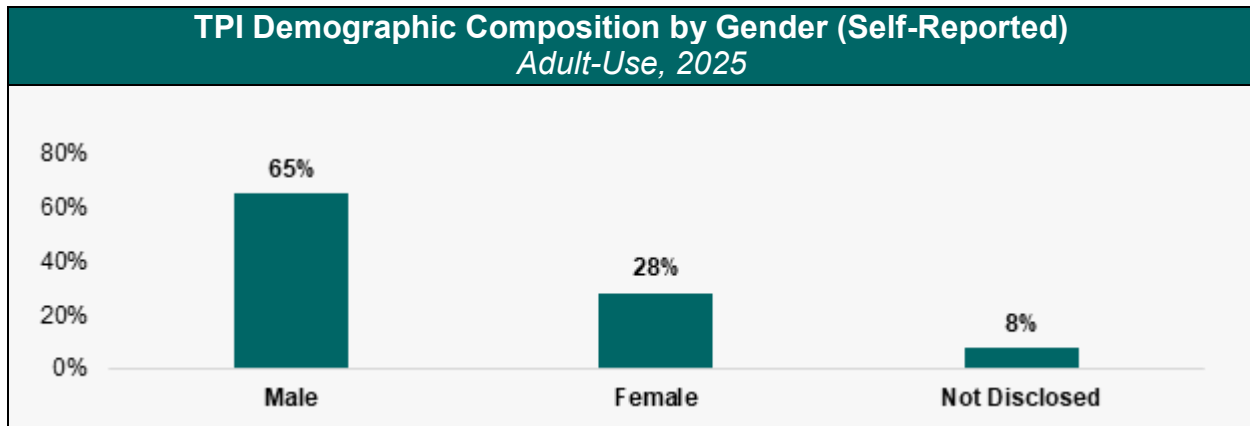
In 2025, 55% of TPIs identified as White, followed by 16% identifying as Black or African American, 10% as Asian, and 3% as Hispanic or Latino, with smaller shares represented across Indigenous, Pacific Islander, and multiracial categories. Roughly 17% selected “Other” or did not disclose. Gender reporting show 65% of TPIs identifying as male, 28% as female, and 8% not disclosing. While these data highlight persistent imbalances in market representation, they also establish a clear and actionable baseline from which the state can track progress as equity programs and broader market stabilization create new entry pathways for a more diverse set of entrepreneurs and owners.

**Table 3: TPI Demographic Composition by Race/Ethnicity (Self-Reported), 2025**



\*TPIs can select multiple categories, allowing totals to add up to > 100%.

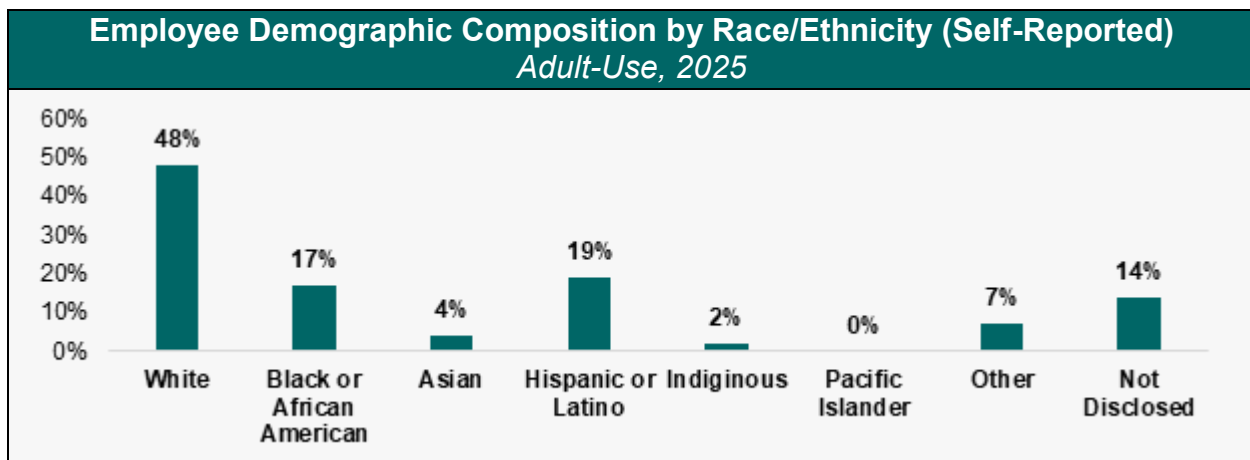
**Table 4: TPI Demographic Composition by Gender (Self-Reported), 2025**



**Employee Demographics (Adult-Use and Medical)**

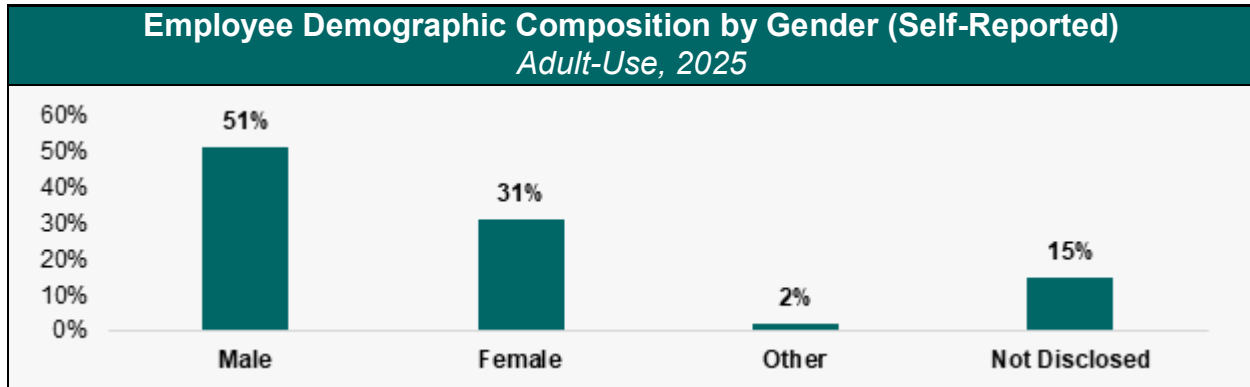
Employee demographic data collected through Responsible Workforce Training attestations provide an early view into who is participating in the adult-use and medical cannabis workforce across NYS. In 2025, 48% of employees identified as White, while 19% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 17% as Black or African American, 4% as Asian, and 2% as Indigenous, with Pacific Islander representation near zero. An additional 7% selected “Other” and 14% did not disclose their race or ethnicity. Gender reporting showed 51% of employees identifying as male, 31% as female, 2% as another gender identity, and 15% declining to disclose. While these data reflect variation in reporting completeness across employers, they nonetheless offer a meaningful snapshot of the current workforce.

**Table 5: Adult-Use Employee Demographic Composition by Race/Ethnicity, 2025**



\*Employees can select multiple categories, allowing totals to add up to > 100%.

**Table 6: Adult-Use Employee Demographic Composition by Gender, 2025**



**Licensure-to-Opening Timeline (Adult-Use Retail)**

The time between licensure and store openings illustrates whether disadvantaged groups face additional barriers to launch. As of November 30, 2025, SEE licensees have taken the longest on average to open (214 days) compared to all other licensees (192 days), indicating that SEE licensees may face additional structural or financial barriers to becoming operational. Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary (CAURD) operators opened the fastest, averaging (73 days). This can largely be explained by the CAURD licensure process which requires all CAURD to receive a provisional license prior to receiving their final license. This twostep process speeds up the opening timeline after the final license is issued.

Across license cohorts, a smaller share of 2024 and 2025 licensees have opened stores compared with earlier years, reflecting the time needed to complete buildouts. As of November 30, 2025, 88% of CAURD retailers are open and, while lower than CAURD, SEE licensees (49%) and all other operators (38%) are largely at parity.

**Table 7: Days from Licensure to Store Opening by Store Type as of Nov 2025**

Days from Licensure to Store Opening by Store Type Open Retail Licensees, Program-to-Date (November 2025)				
Store Type	Average	25 <sup>th</sup> Percentile	Median	75 <sup>th</sup> Percentile
CAURD	73.4	14.0	31.0	89.8
SEE	214.4	106.5	192.0	308.8
All Others	192.1	94.0	165.0	272.0

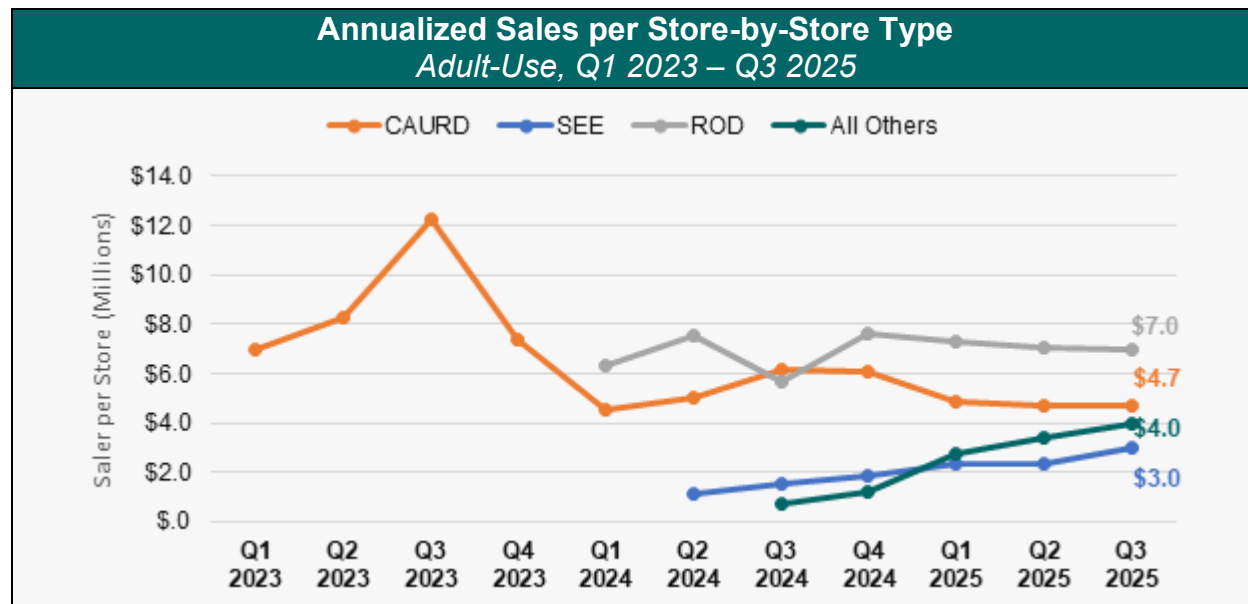
**Table 8: % Licensees Currently Open by Licensed Year by Store Type as of Nov 2025**

<b>% Licensees Currently Open by Licensed Year by Store Type</b> <i>Retail Licensees, Program-to-Date (November 2025)</i>				
<b>Store Type</b>	<b>2023 Cohorts</b>	<b>2024 Cohorts</b>	<b>2025 Cohorts</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>CAURD</b>	100%	93%	71%	88%
<b>SEE</b>	N/A	65%	23%	49%
<b>All Others</b>	N/A	54%	24%	38%

**Sales per Store (Adult-Use Retail)**

Quarterly sales per store show clear differentiation by store type. While most store types saw their sales per store grow over time, there are significant differences in performance. In Q3 2025, Registered Organization’s Adult-Use Dispensaries (ROD) report the highest annualized sales per store at \$7.0M, followed by CAURD at \$4.7M, SEE licensees at \$3.0M, and all others at \$4.0M. These differences reflect a mix of timing of entry, operational scale and market maturity.

**Table 9: Annualized Adult-Use Sales per Store-by-Store Type, Q1 ‘23 – Q3 ‘25**



**Market Concentration (Adult-Use Retail)**

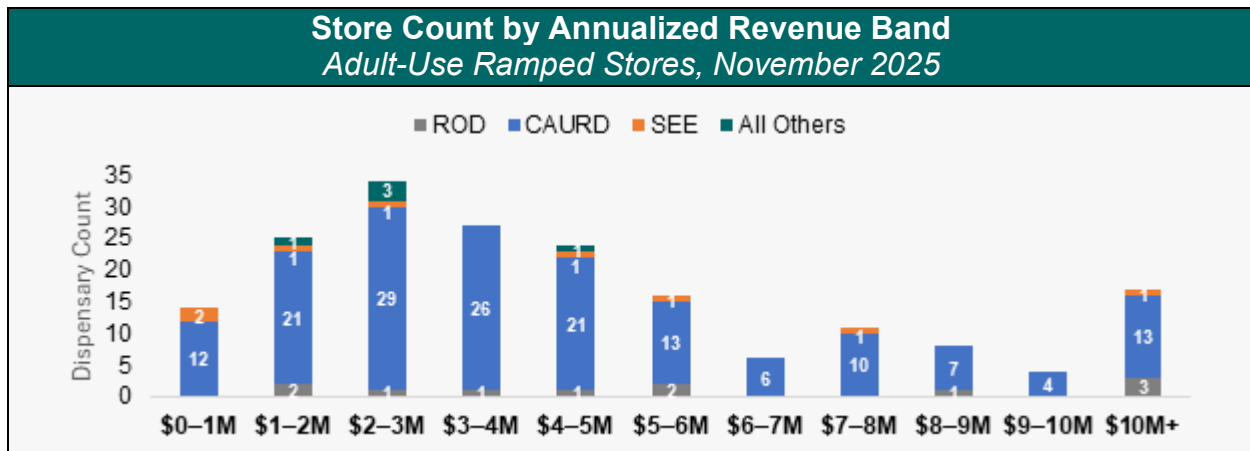
Store-level revenue data show a wide distribution of performance across NYS’s adult-use market. Most ramped stores report annualized sales between \$1 million and \$5 million, with a smaller number exceeding \$10 million. Both SEE and non-SEE operators

are represented across all revenue bands, indicating broad participation as the market matures.

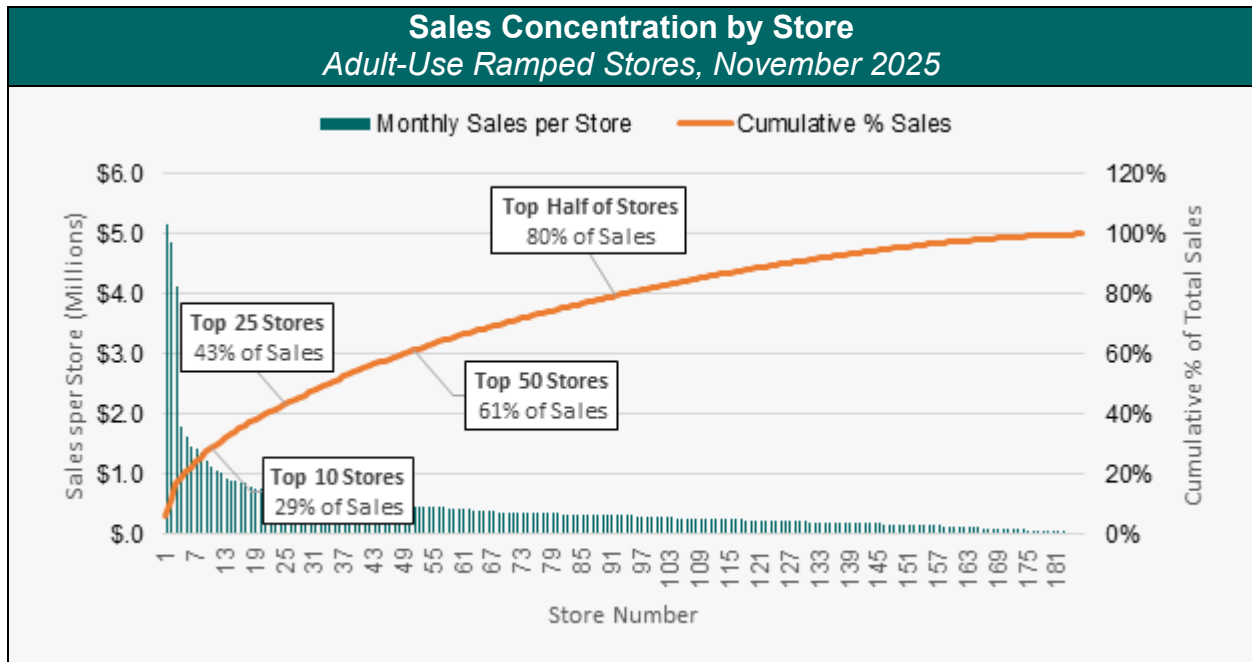
Sales remain concentrated among a limited number of high-performing locations. As of November 30, 2025, the top 10 stores account for 29% of statewide sales, the top 25 for 43%, and the top 50 for nearly 61%. The upper half of all operating stores generate about 80% of total sales, reflecting early advantages in location, brand presence, and operational scale.

As more retailers have opened, overall market coverage has expanded while individual store volumes have normalized. Average monthly sales per store for top performers (75<sup>th</sup> percentile) have declined from early peaks driven by limited competition but have since stabilized as new entrants increased consumer access statewide.

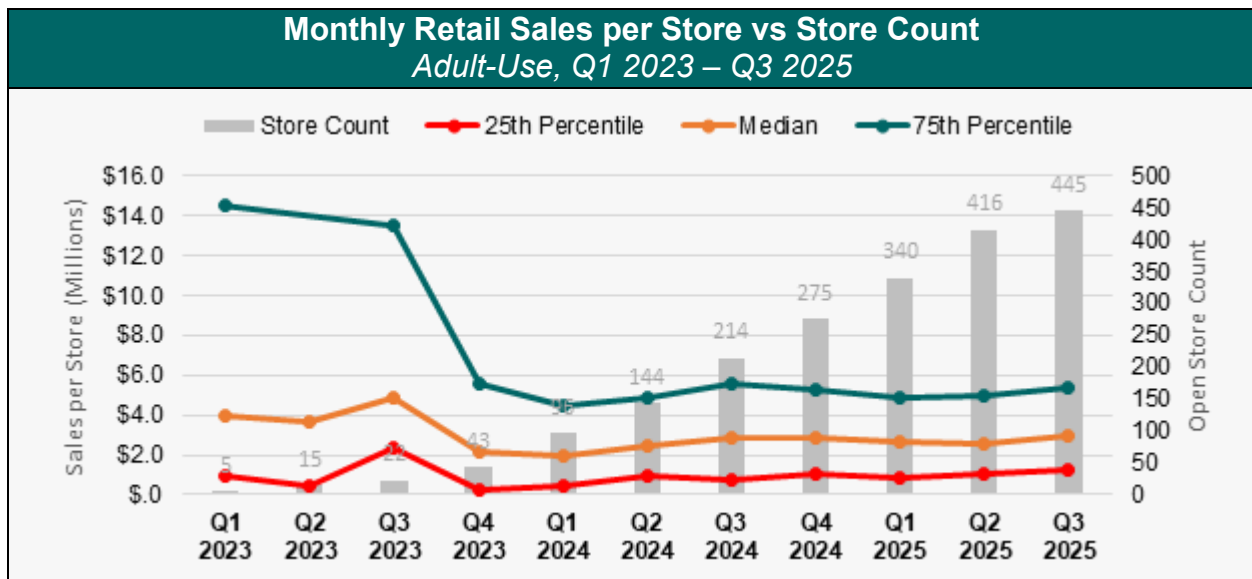
**Table 10: Adult-Use Store Count by Annualized Revenue Band as of Nov 2025**



**Table 11: Adult-Use Sales Concentration by Store as of Nov 2025**



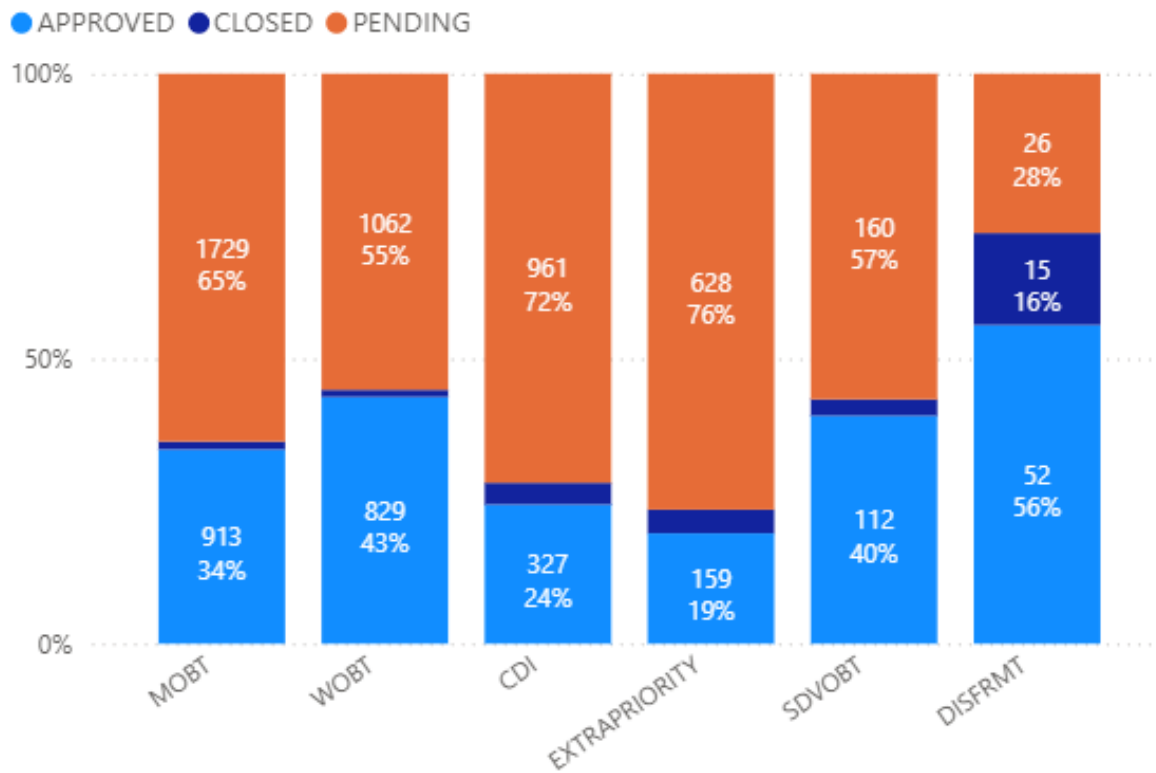
**Table 12: Monthly Adult-Use Retail Sales per Store vs Store Count, Q1 '23 – Q3 '25**



## Licensing Overview of SEE Applications by Type

The graphic below demonstrates the number of SEE applications by type, categorized by whether the applicant was approved for licensure (Approved), rejected, voided, or withdrawn (Closed), or still pending under OCM review (Pending).

**Figure 2: SEE Applications by SEE Type & SEE Status**



Note: MOBt=Minority-Owned Business; WOBT=Woman-Owned Business; CDI= Communities Disproportionately Impacted Business; EXTRAPRIORITY= Applicants who meet all of the following: 1.Is a member of a CDI; 2.Has an income lower than eighty percent (80%) of the median income of the county in which the applicant resides; and 3. Was convicted of a cannabis-related offense prior to March 31, 2021, or had a parent, guardian, child, spouse, or dependent, or was a dependent of an individual who, prior to March 31, 2021, was convicted of a cannabis-related offense; SDVOBT=Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business; DISFRMT=Distressed Farmer-Owned Business.

## II: Programmatic Progress for 2025

### Technical Assistance & Resources

In 2025, the SEE Team launched and expanded the following initiatives designed to provide equity applicants and licensees with targeted support to launch and sustain their businesses.



OCM launched the CAURD Grant Program in partnership with Empire State Development. The **\$5 million** grant program helps cover startup costs for dispensaries providing grants **up to \$30,000** to **159** awardees.

OCM launched the **Conditional Adult-Use Retail Dispensary Grant Program** in partnership with ESD in March 2025. The \$5 million initiative provided financial support to CAURD licensees to critical startup costs. The initiative provided grants of up to \$30,000 per awardee, to 159 licensees across all Regional Economic Development Corporation regions. The funds were used to cover eligible expenses such as commercial rent, security equipment, and regulatory compliance improvements.



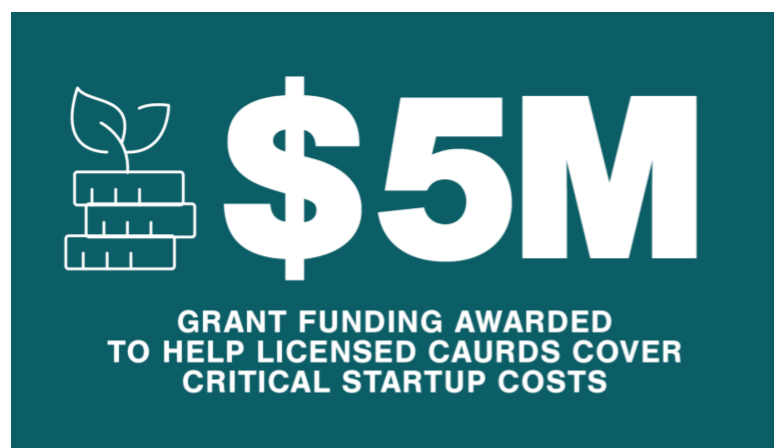
To measure impact and collect data to inform a second round of funding in 2026, the SEE team conducted follow up interviews and surveys with CAURD grant awardees. In addition to informing another round of grants, these post-grant interviews helped the team understand the qualitative effect of funding beyond the reporting provided by the grant administrator. Awardees indicated that the grant proved essential in stabilizing early CAURD licensee operations, enabling licensees to cover critical expenses such as inventory, Point-of-Sale systems, rent, overdue payments and loan obligations—various purchases that many licensees said they could not have managed without this funding.


While most licensees communicated that a larger funding amount was necessary to ensure CAURDs have a chance to thrive in the market that they share with multistate operators and large multi-investor companies, awardees reported that this initiative created meaningful equity by giving all operators a baseline level of operational stability regardless of market conditions or financial constraints. It also strengthened trust and engagement between CAURDs and OCM, with many noting the grant made them feel directly supported by the agency. Through follow-up calls with more than half of the grant’s awardees, the SEE Team gained deeper insight into field conditions, improved communication, and reinforced the importance of keeping this program within OCM to ensure continued equitable implementation and responsive support.



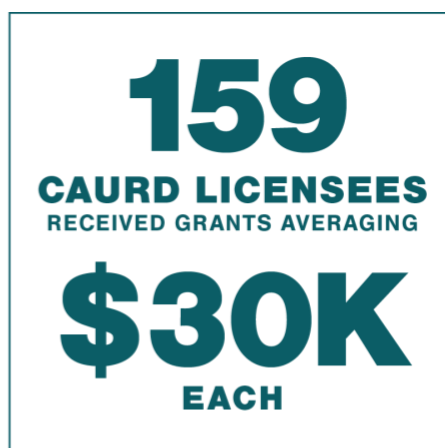
In addition to direct grant support to licensees, OCM provided grants to technical assistance providers to support equity applicants through its **Technical Assistance Providers Grant Program**. The initiative was created to coordinate efforts among nonprofits, community-based organizations, and educational institutions to provide regulatory guidance to equity applicants navigating NYS's complex cannabis licensing process. In addition to licensing support for applicants, the providers also assisted applicants with compliance, business development, and early-stage operational support for new licensees.

The partnerships formed through this initiative will remain active through the program's extended grant deadline of March 2026, ensuring that SEE-licensed businesses receive sustained, high-quality support from trusted community organizations. To date, OCM has served 191 applicants and 70 licensees, with the majority of the support focused on application assistance, business and financial planning, compliance support, and TPI disclosure assistance.



 **\$5M**

GRANT FUNDING AWARDED  
TO HELP LICENSED CAURDS COVER  
CRITICAL STARTUP COSTS



**159**  
CAURD LICENSEES  
RECEIVED GRANTS AVERAGING  
**\$30K**  
EACH



**\$574,849**

AWARDED TO EIGHT ORGANIZATIONS  
THROUGH TAP GRANTS FOR EXPERT GUIDANCE  
AND SUPPORT ACROSS NEW YORK STATE



PROVIDING UP TO  
**\$75K**  
EACH ORGANIZATION

In addition to grant funded support, OCM launched a **Microbusiness Pro Forma Tool** to help drive business sustainability and profitability for microbusiness licensees. Created in partnership with a financial advisory firm, the pro forma template is a comprehensive, driver-based financial model that encompasses revenue, operating costs, capital expenditures, and working capital considerations. Microbusiness

licensees will have access to a detailed assumptions page where they can easily update and input assumptions to manage their financial operations effectively. The tool, along with educational reference videos, are currently available on the OCM's website at no cost to licensees.

In accordance with the Marijuana Regulation and Taxation Act (MRTA), the SEE Team also offered educational resources through its **Cannabis Hub and Incubation Program (CHIP) Academy**. Open to all licensees, CHIP Academy provided targeted educational programs and training modules designed to assist with navigating post-licensure business development. The Spring 2025 series included seven webinars, with more than 200 licensees registered for the live sessions and more than 40 licensees who requested the webinar recordings. The highest attended webinar hosted 116 licensees. This session provided retail licensees information about how to prepare for seed-to-sale integration.

In February 2025, OCM launched its **Cannabis Banking Directory**. As part of ongoing efforts to bridge gaps between cannabis operators and financial service providers, this resource helps licensed cannabis businesses identify financial institutions offering cannabis-specific services. To date, there are 20 financial institutions listed, and the directory continues to expand financial access for SEE businesses.

To increase broader awareness, the Directory was shared with more than 27,000 stakeholders across NYS, reaching licensees, applicants, municipal partners, and other industry participants. The initiative was further amplified through coordinated social media efforts that highlighted its importance in reducing barriers to compliant banking. Media outlets, including the *Rochester Business Journal* and *Long Island Business News*, also covered the launch, contributing to strong public visibility and reinforcing the Directory's value to the emerging cannabis industry.

To maintain overall effectiveness of the directory, the SEE team regularly engages with banks, credit unions, and industry associates to address misconceptions, share compliance best practices, and foster partnerships that expand financial access. For example, OCM participated in the *Ponce Bank's "Elevate & Empower: A Cannabis Business Financial Workshop"* where it presented on equity in the cannabis market, highlighting the success of SEE programs. Such interactions provide a platform to address the unique challenges and opportunities in providing financial services to the cannabis industry, emphasizing the importance of aligning banking practices with regulatory requirements. The directory and ongoing coordination of services are a few resources designed to reduce barriers to capital, strengthen industry relationships, and equip SEE licensees with educational access. Looking ahead to 2026, these efforts are

poised to drive greater financial inclusion, and support more equitable participation in the market by ensuring operators can reliably access the banking and financial services necessary for long-term success.



Building on the SEE Team’s suite of programs and tools, the **Social and Economic Equity Programming, Assistance, and Training Hub (SEE PATH)** will serve as a centralized online hub that brings together the resources highlighted in this section in a single, accessible location. SEE PATH is nearing launch and is designed to support SEE applicants and licensees with practical guidance, educational tools, webinar recordings, planning templates, technical assistance programs, and financial resources. By consolidating these materials, SEE PATH makes it easier for licensees to navigate operational challenges, enhance business readiness, and access targeted support to strengthen equity outcomes across the market.

## Community Engagement

OCM’s **Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Business Taskforce** is an interagency consortium of employees and representatives of NYS agencies that regularly interact with veterans. The Taskforce prioritizes: 1) creating an education campaign for consumer awareness and business opportunities in cannabis and 2) expanding

cannabis research to include veterans' health. The Taskforce includes over a dozen OCM employees and partners from several other state and local agencies, including Office of General Services, Department of Labor, Department of Health, and NYC Housing Development Corporation.



During 2025, the Taskforce created educational material about veteran consumption and risks of cannabis and disseminated it at the Veterans for Economic Transition Conference (VETCON). Additionally, OCM tabled at the conference in Albany, NY. The Taskforce continues to conduct outreach, cultivate relationships, and hold discussions with veteran service community-based organizations to help mitigate barriers to entry for interested service-disabled veteran-owned businesses (SDVOBs), promote equity for veterans in cannabis research, and maintain a constant engagement with the veteran community to gain their perspectives as both consumers and business owners in the cannabis industry. Additionally, in partnership with New York City Department of Veterans' Services (NYC-DVS), OCM hosted *Bridging Service to Enterprise: Veteran Pathways in the New York Cannabis Industry*, a webinar focused on connecting veterans to information about workforce pathways within the regulated cannabis industry.

In June 2025, the SEE team launched its **Technical Assistance and Incubator Survey** to collect data about cannabis-related education, training, incubation (both

online and in-person), and shared resources that currently exist across NYS. Over a two-month response window, OCM received 384 responses, of which 56% were licensees. Out of the respondents who currently offer technical assistance, almost 30% assist with regulatory compliance, 26% assist with licensing navigation, and 21% assist with financial literacy. Approximately 33% have shared spaces to host in-person incubation or mentorship programming and another 35% currently offer virtual trainings, courses, or educational modules for licensees or applicants.

When asked what additional support would help strengthen or expand these programs, funding was the top request, at approximately 75%, followed by partnerships at 40%, and access to training materials at 25%. All ten NYS regions were represented among respondents, with the highest participation in New York City, Mid-Hudson, Western New York, and the Capital District. This survey, along with ongoing community outreach, will help inform the creation and goals of future SEE programming, specifically efforts associated with the development of an incubator program.



Beyond the abovementioned efforts, the SEE Team participated in other public speaking and educational engagements including

- Listen & Learn Series, in partnership with Public Health & Education and Public Affairs teams (various dates throughout the year)
- Women & Weed (May)

- NY State Fair (August)
- Cornell University High-Cannabinoid Cannabis Sativa Field Day (September)
- Policy Farm Tour Visits (September)
- Compliance Farm Tour Visits (September)
- Budding Opportunities (October)
- Cannabis Regulator of Color Coalition 2025 Annual Members Symposium (October)
- Parabola Center, *Cannabis Policy Crash Course & Leadership Training* (October)
- CAURD Grant Awardee Tour (October & December)
- *Careers in Cannabis: Building New York's Green Future Panel and Job Fair* hosted by Happy Tree LLC and SUNY Westchester Community College (November)
- 2nd Annual New York State Medical Cannabis Symposium (October)
- Cannabis Regulators Association Conference (December)

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility**

As part of the expanded duties of the CEqO, OCM reinvigorated its Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) efforts to focus on both improving agency culture and integrating equity across its policy- and decision-making practices and programs. Led by OCM's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Belonging (DEIAB) Committee, a five-person cross-agency body, the CEqO and Executive Team revised its mission and vision statements and began efforts to expand its membership to include participation from other staff and teams across the agency. Additionally, the Committee continued its collaboration with the Governor's Office of Diversity and Inclusion by participating in the 2025 New York State Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Workforce Symposium on October 9, 2025. Information and tools shared during the symposium will be used to further develop OCM's DEIA Strategic Plan which will serve as a comprehensive guide for building a more equitable and inclusive culture within the agency that supports diversity and belonging.

To support the integration of equity across the agency's operations, OCM's Executive Leadership, in consultation with the CEqO, engaged the Government Alliance on Racial Equity to provide its *Advancing Racial Equity: The Role of Government* training for staff and coaching support for the Executive Team, with a Q1 2026 start date.

### III: Behind the Numbers: Lessons from the Field



#### Emerging Themes Across Licensee Experiences & Support Networks

The SEE Team analyzed trends in licensee needs and operational challenges by reviewing feedback the team gathered throughout the year, including insights from field visits, direct interactions with licensees, and recurring patterns identified through shared agency mailboxes and community engagement events. These observations were further strengthened by findings from the **Technical Assistance & Incubation Survey**, which the team led to assess the capacity and support needs of organizations positioned to assist SEE businesses statewide. Together, these inputs provide a multifaceted view of the barriers and opportunities shaping equity outcomes across NYS's regulated cannabis market.

Across both the survey results and field-based feedback, a consistent theme emerged: **licensees and supporting organizations continue to face challenges rooted in limited access to clear, timely, and digestible information.** Many survey respondents indicated that regulatory compliance guidance, licensing navigation, and business planning remain areas where additional support is greatly needed. This aligns with issues raised repeatedly by licensees, including uncertainty about application timelines, evolving regulatory requirements, and the need for more transparent communication about enforcement processes and program updates. These shared concerns emphasize the importance of strengthening information delivery systems to reduce confusion, increase predictability, and advance equitable participation.

Feedback also highlighted broader structural gaps affecting market stability and operational readiness. While many organizations offer or are building virtual education and compliance programming, far fewer possess the physical space, equipment, or specialized resources needed to support cultivators, processors, and manufacturers. Survey respondents emphasized the need for stronger partnerships, resource-sharing frameworks, and targeted operational support, noting that these investments would help stabilize supply-chain dynamics and expand opportunities for microbusinesses and other SEE businesses. Altogether, these trends reinforce that advancing equity will require a coordinated approach, pairing clear communication with targeted support development across communities and program partners.

## IV: Reimagining Social & Economic Equity



### Expanding Equity Through the Lens of Business Sustainability

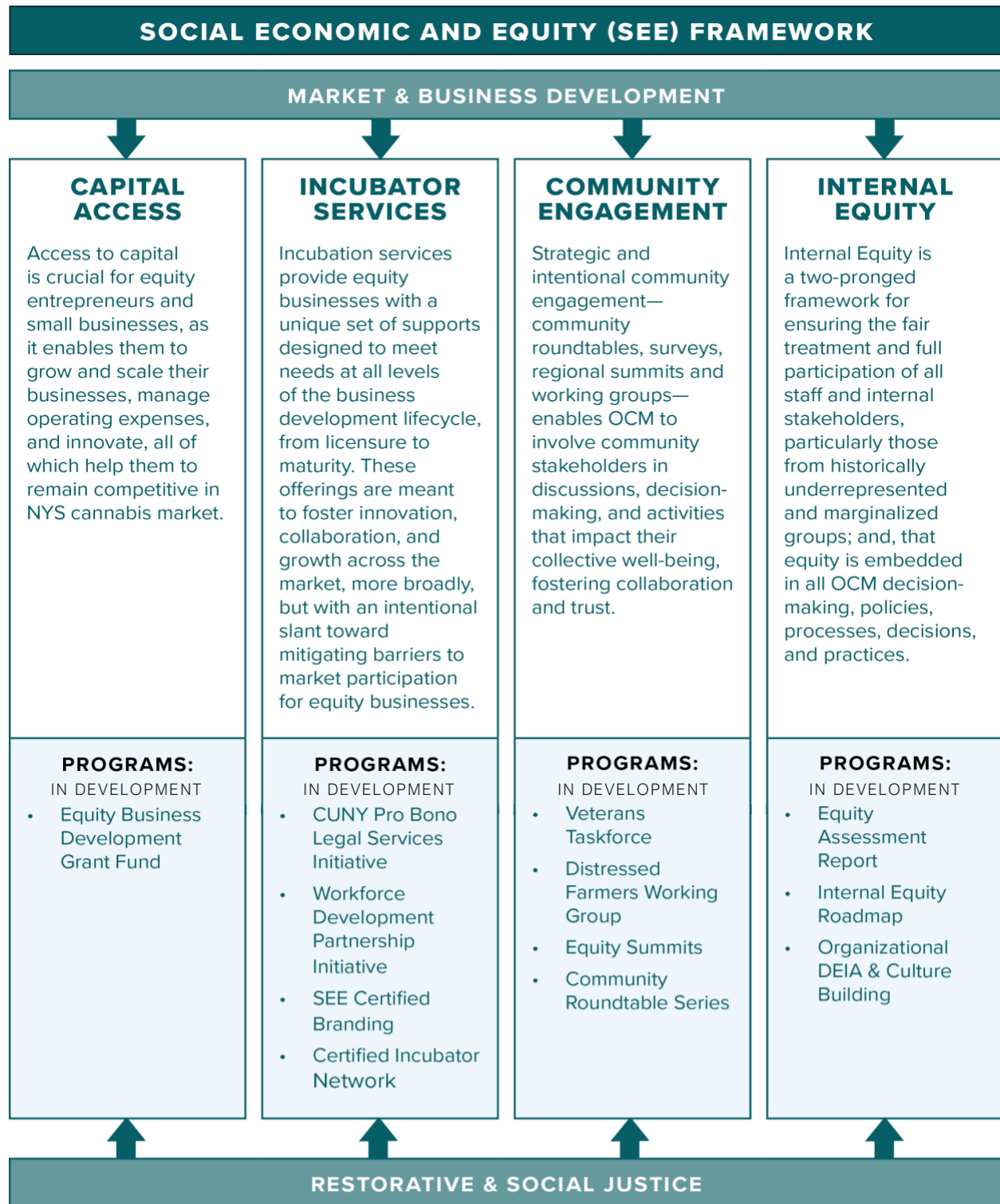
As reported above, the number of equity licensees continues to exceed the statutory goal of 50% or more; however, to create a robust and stable cannabis market, OCM must shift to put equal focus on business development and sustainability. Currently, it takes approximately 214 days from licensure to opening for SEE retail dispensary licensees. This gap between licensure and opening increases the likelihood that SEE businesses will encounter financial challenges and operational setbacks, which ultimately cripple their ability to be competitive and remain functional.

During its four-year existence, OCM has and continues to center equity by offering targeted programs responsive to the needs of an emerging market. However, as the cannabis industry matures, it's evident that interventions that focus solely on building the *supply chain*—seed to sale—offer minimal support to equity applicants and licensees beyond that of moving them into the market.

To ensure that SEE businesses have a fighting chance at sustained success, OCM's approach moving forward will center interventions designed to create a more inclusive and fair *value chain*. OCM will create permanent functions and programs that help SEE licensees differentiate their products and services from that of larger, better resourced businesses and help SEE applicants develop niche culturally- relevant business plans that give them a jump start in the market. This approach means not only looking at the structure of the larger market but also looking at individual business processes and offering tailored solutions that add value to SEE businesses. This will drive fair competition and limit market consolidation, leading to increased customer satisfaction and profitability for the industry overall.

To mark this change in approach, OCM has created a Social and Economic Equity Framework that highlights four core functions designed to support businesses in creating value at all stages of the business development lifecycle: Capital Access, Incubatory Services, Community Engagement, and Operationalizing Equity.

# SEE Framework<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup>

Programs listed are under development, are subject to refinement and may shift depending on resource availability.

## **Capital Access**

Equity applicants and licensees, who often lack generational wealth, access to capital, or traditional business acumen are often at a major disadvantage when opting to pursue entrepreneurship in the cannabis industry. Excess start-up costs, securing viable real estate and equipment, and having operating reserves are serious obstacles to starting a business.

As of the drafting of this report, cannabis remains a Schedule I substance under federal law, which means that many national banks and credit unions are unwilling to provide pertinent banking services such as loans and lines of credit. This forces entrepreneurs to rely on personal savings, 'friends and family' loans, or private investors. A lack of access to capital leaves SEE applicants vulnerable to investors who may charge predatory interest rates or exploit their need for capital to gain priority access to licenses, often pushing the original equity operator out of meaningful ownership or control once the business is operational.

Additionally, access to capital is needed to secure suitable real estate, which is another enormous barrier. Zoning laws often restrict where cannabis businesses can operate, making compliant properties expensive and highly competitive. NYS requires applicants to have a physical location secured before a license is issued, a requirement that is nearly impossible to meet without significant upfront capital.

For SEE licensees, funding would provide working capital, further enable brand development, and cover expenses associated with technological upgrades, all of which help smaller businesses to be competitive with larger business and multistate operators.

In response to this challenge, OCM is working to develop both a grant and other capital programs for eligible CAURD and equity businesses. Grant funding will provide one-time infusions of funding support to cover discrete expenses for operable cannabis businesses, whereas other capital programs could provide low interest financial support to better established businesses for long-term operations and capital expenditures.

## **Incubator Services**

In a constantly evolving regulatory landscape and fast-growth market, incubation services provide SEE businesses with a unique set of supports designed to meet needs at all levels of the business development lifecycle, from licensure to maturity. These offerings are meant to foster innovation, collaboration, and growth across the market, more broadly, but with an intentional slant toward mitigating barriers to market participation for SEE businesses.

Beyond offering technical assistance and training, incubators provide peer networking and mentorship that help smaller upstarts, which may lack prior business experience or industry-specific knowledge, to develop stronger business skills, acumen, and networks. Additionally, incubators can provide tangible resources like shared cultivation, manufacturing, or office space, as well as assistance with securing a compliant physical location, all of which help to reduce operational costs and foster collaboration among SEE businesses.

OCM will work with industry and community partners to develop and deliver a holistic set of coordinated, continuous, and integrated services, ranging from expert technical assistance to workforce development, to ensure business readiness, compliance, and sustainability for equity businesses. This model will help equity businesses seamlessly transition from start-up to scalable models of operation.

In 2026, OCM aims to launch three initiatives focused on providing access to legal services, workforce, and brand development, respectively, and collectively will serve as seed projects for a permanent incubator network. The initiatives are designed to provide access to cost-prohibitive services, coordinate the creation of career pipelines in the cannabis industry, and provide special branding for equity products in the market. While providing real services to market, these projects will allow OCM to ascertain what other services and supports should be included in a comprehensive incubator network.

### **Community Engagement**

Community engagement remains a proven tool for creating an equitable and inclusive cannabis market. Through platforms such as roundtables and webinars, and tools such as surveys, OCM continues to collaborate with stakeholders and communities directly affected by its programs and policies. Intentional touchpoints help to improve OCM's understanding of the pervasive disparate impact caused by cannabis prohibition, identify opportunities to deliver services and craft policies that are responsive to community needs, and facilitate transparent, democratic processes that engender trust and buy-in. Such interactions are not meant to be passive but rather are active attempts to build and sustain true partnership with communities and groups facing systemic marginalization.



Leaning into this strategy, The SEE Team will develop a series of targeted interactions—including community roundtables, regional summits, and newly formed working groups—to inform the structure and implementation of SEE programs, including the 2026-2028 Social and Economic Equity Plan and the development of a permanent incubator network. Additionally, information gleaned from these engagements will help to improve technical assistance on the creation of Community Impact Plans (9 NYCRR § 121.4), and refining all community reinvestment strategies, including the Community Grants Reinvestment Fund.

### **Internal Equity**

The successful integration of equity in the cannabis market is largely influenced by practices and decision-making within OCM. Beyond SEE-specific programs, how the agency develops regulatory policy, recommends legislative changes, and engages with external stakeholders can help to advance equity across the industry. To ensure that all functions of the agency work to achieve this end, OCM has expanded its approach to include a focus on internal equity as a practice. This work has two main thrusts: *Organizational DEIA* and *Operationalizing Equity*.

As a practice, *Organizational DEIA* is a framework that aims to promote the fair treatment and full participation of all staff and internal stakeholders, particularly those from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups. Reflecting the goals of the

[Governor's Office of DEI's statewide mandate](#), OCM will continue to refine and implement its five-Year DEIA Strategic Plan, with a focus on identifying opportunities for awareness, skills building, and enhanced communications to increase participation across the agency's different functions.

To ensure that equity is both an outcome *and* a practice, agency leadership must consistently apply an equity lens to how it makes decisions, specifically decisions that have a direct impact on the cannabis market and stakeholders. This approach to *Operationalizing Equity* means critically interrogating OCM policies, processes, decisions, and practices with the explicit goal of identifying and addressing disparities, barriers, and systemic discrimination that undergird inequities in the market and communities that OCM serves. It encourages OCM leadership to consider how different groups—especially those historically marginalized—are affected differently, and to act accordingly to promote fairness and justice within the cannabis industry.

With guidance from the CEqO, and support from external partners, OCM will develop a slate of processes and tools to enable it to take an equity-first approach to how it addresses challenges, drives change, and engages with the market and affected communities.

## V: Sustaining An Equitable Market: Recommended Actions

Based on the proposed framework and programs for 2026 and beyond, the following actions are recommended to continue advancing equity, both within OCM and across NYS's cannabis market:

### **Strengthening SEE Program Capacity and Deepening Intra-Agency Collaboration**

To ensure that OCM is adequately equipped to deliver quality SEE programs that are aligned with the MRTA, provide support and resources to SEE applicants and licensees, and engage in decision-making practices across the agency that demonstrates its commitment to advancing equity, it is an imperative that the SEE team's operational capacity and functional scope are aligned with these responsibilities. Currently, the team is specifically structured to address industry-specific needs in the areas of economic and business development. However, as OCM aims to integrate equity into its own internal practices, policies, and programs, all of which have a direct effect on equity on the market, this work requires expanded expertise, cross-functional coordination, and sustained implementation capacity. Advancing equity in this manner necessitates dedicated institutional knowledge, and the ability to operationalize equity in ways that mitigate structural, systemic, and institutional barriers.

Additionally, to foster an institutional culture that embodies equity both as a practice *and* set of measurable outcomes, requires cross-function collaboration. To better embed equity across OCM, the SEE Team must be able to collaborate with each of OCM's teams to deliver training and advisory support, develop tools and practices that help to drive equitable outcomes, and inform policy and regulatory changes that affect internal and external stakeholders.

### **Sustaining Core Programming**

Creating positive impact in the market for SEE applicants and licenses and disproportionately affected communities is largely predicated upon OCM's ability to sustain continuing actions that drive systems change. This includes sustainable funding opportunities to support small business development and operations; infrastructure that provides ongoing skills training, resources, and peer support to drive market-wide sustainability and supporting community-based institutions that currently deliver industry resources; and, building a continual communication loop between OCM and the public that helps the agency be more responsive to stakeholders across NYS. To live out the equity mandate in the MRTA, OCM should establish long-term programmatic capacity for the economic development activities including, Equity Business Development Grant

Fund and Certified Incubatory Network, and make mandatory a strict community engagement process for all market-facing programs, including its SEE programs.

### **Ensuring Equity as an Agency Practice**

To demonstrate its commitment to furthering equity as a matter of practice, OCM should adopt agency-wide mandatory use of a Social and Economic Equity Impact Tool (SEEIT). Adapted from practices in other markets, the SEEIT will be designed to analyze the potential effects of policies, programs, or decisions on marginalized communities. The tool will help OCM to identify and address inequities, ensuring that the needs of all populations are considered in decision-making processes and that the agency is consistently promoting equity. Moreover, the tool will provide OCM with a structured approach to assess how different groups—mainly those facing marginalization—may be affected by proposed actions and ensures that decisions are informed by evidence rather than assumptions.

### **Develop 2026-2028 SEE Plan**

Pursuant to the Cannabis Law, the Cannabis Control Board is charged with the creation and implementation of a social and economic equity plan in consultation with the CEqO and Executive Director, and after receiving public input (N.Y. CANBS § 87(1)). The goals of the plan include the promotion of racial, ethnic, and gender diversity when issuing licenses and the promotion of diversity in commerce, ownership and employment, and opportunities for social and economic equity in the regulated cannabis industry. The promotion of social and economic equity in the cannabis industry is a central mission of both the Cannabis Control Board and OCM. The NYSEE Plan presents the strategy for advancing that mission.

To remain compliant with the law, the SEE Team, in partnership with the Cannabis Control Board and Acting Executive Director, should design and implement in a comprehensive process to review and update the NYSEE Plan during the 2026 fiscal year.