

CUNY Cannabis Workforce and Business Development Training
School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Lehman College, CUNY

Annual report 2022-2023



Left to right: Robert Rodriguez, Jr., Donna McLean-Grant, Marcos Lopez, Kimberly Kendall, Tanya Osborne, Gregory J. Pereira, Justin Collins, Henry Brown, Roger Thomas, Council Member Kevin C. Riley, Emmanuela "Venus" Isichei, Jahtah M. Brown, Martha McDermott, Samira Bahrami, Marques Payne

The Cannabis Workforce and Business Development program, funded by NYSDOL, wraps up its first year of efforts having succeeded in our mandate to support the new cannabis workforce and small business entrepreneurs. We have exceeded our goals as outlined in this grant and in some cases have met expectations designed for the entire three years, in year one alone. The unpredictable roll out of the cannabis industry in NYS resulted in the need to deviate somewhat from the original operational plan but as a result what was created this year is even better than what was originally envisaged.

The Cannabis Workforce and Business Development program has emerged as a hub for connection, collaboration, and support in offering no-cost shared workspace, access to conference rooms and HyFlex media instructional systems, enabling hybrid virtual and in person meeting capabilities and exponentially expanding access to vital information. Since government regulators and policy makers were issuing confusing and contradictory guidance, we focused on understanding the changes and communicating the relevant information to our clients and community. Over the course of this first year, we have established a contact list with hundreds of individuals and businesses, have hosted dozens of advising meetings, conducted community outreach ranging from intimate cannabis community gatherings to street fairs and convention center conferences, tabling wherever we were welcomed to spread the word about our program.

When we began to implement the grant in September 2022, our mission seemed simple, that is, to work with Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) implementing one unified mission to expand the cannabis workforce. While BMCC conducted direct workforce training in security, retail and processing, Lehman's mission was to support the development of small businesses in the sector. The vision was for Lehman to support the employers, while BMCC provided the trained workforce. Support in the way of networking groups, educational panel discussions and workshops, and other industry focused activities would emerge in later years and support the mutually sustained ecosystem already in place. Growth in the cannabis industry was all but assured with the passage of the MRTA in April of 2021, a legislative action which took many years and great efforts from the cannabis advocacy community to achieve. The Social Equity mandate gave the mission greater focus and clarity, a mission which BMCC and Lehman College have long embraced, that is, to serve those marginalized by racial discrimination and socioeconomic status.

However, despite the best intentions, the reality did not match the plan. The rollout of the cannabis industry since the passage of the MRTA in April 2021 has been fraught with delay, legal actions, and confusion. Regulators were tasked with creating a program that had not yet existed and where social equity was the focus, not a sidebar. The delay in launching the regulated market has created a quagmire of problems for small businesses waiting for their chance to begin operating. Many voiced frustrations with the process, which continues today.

Without an industry, there is stagnation and trepidation for a burgeoning entrepreneurial business effort. Concerns with launching a business, which involved leveraging capital and risk (in many cases life savings), is only feasible in a stable and favorable economic environment. Many experienced cannabis legacy operators who would be applying to launch legal, regulated businesses, are thinking twice about launching their effort. Faced with this dilemma, Lehman chose to incorporate some of the year two goals (networking, information dissemination and educational workshops) to support the year one initiative of developing a new workforce community while supporting businesses already in planning stages.

When finally on October 8, the application window opened for full Adult Use Licensing (5 categories: Retail Dispensary, Processing, Cultivator, Distribution and Microbusiness), our team was ready to jump in with application technical guidance and assistance. Martha McDermott, Case Manager, participated in the OCM-directed Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) training, as part of the Cannabis Hub and Incubator Program (CHIP). She was able to coach and assist 8 clients, 5 of whom submitted applications on 12/18/23 for various licenses. At that same time, the Bronx Business Tech Incubator welcomed our full-time Business Advisor, Robert Rodriguez, Jr. in October 2023. Robert's expertise in all phases of business development and implementation was immediately used. Able to assess the strengths as well as weaknesses in each client's business plan, Robert succeeded in assisting several of our clients in getting from "idea" to business entity creation, capitalization fundamentals, and goals and operational plan.

Case Study

The best example of where Robert was essential in fulfilling our mandate is seen in his work with Henry Brown, Founder and CEO of World on Juice, LLC. Having no formal training, education or employment experience in the legal cannabis industry, Henry came to the Tech Center in June 2023 as a registered student in the Cannabis Workforce Initiative/Cornell University 10-week course on Cannabis Workforce and Employee Rights certification. Henry did not miss a single class and participated actively. When the class came to an end Henry remained in contact with Martha McDermott, Case Manager, working out the steps of creating a cannabis-infused freshly squeezed all-natural juice beverage. Henry had already begun production, distribution, and sales of his product, and was in the early stage of considering branding, logo, digital and social media marketing. Robert worked immediately with Henry to help him re-prioritize and pivot, focusing exclusively on the completion of Henry's business plan. Henry quickly began to understand that without a comprehensive plan for his business, including short-, medium- and long-term goals, developing marketing and branding was putting the cart before the horse. As Henry honed his plan, it became clear to him that a processing license would make less sense than a microbusiness. With the guidance of Robert, as well as Roger Thomas, from the CAURD coalition, and Tanya Osbourn at CannnaBronx, on 12/16/23 Henry proudly submitted an application for the Microbusiness classification of licensure.

Year 1 Achievements

1. Outreach

Truly a critical component to any community-based service, the goal of our outreach efforts was both to introduce the established legal cannabis industry to our services and offerings, while simultaneously working to reach the social-equity-eligible cannabis entrepreneurs. The space at CUNY on the Concourse Tech Center, is wholly suitable for marginalized members of the Bronx and elsewhere. Some highlights of the year include:

Street Fairs and Community Based Events

From smaller venues of 10-40, to street fairs and conferences in the tens of thousands, Lehman tabled events with flyers, tote bags and pens and established one-to-one connections with individuals, non-profits, and small businesses, to extend the invitation to join the business incubator and avail themselves of our free services. We shared the message of our work and mandate to support cannabis

small business owners at venues ranging from the Javit's Center Cannabis World Congress and Business Expo (25,000 participants) to the briefing of the City Council Black, Latino and AsianCaucus (22). Our efforts resulted in exposure before tens of thousands of participants, with direct contact and communication with at least 250 stakeholders in the cannabis industry.

2. Information Sessions

Panel discussions, small focus groups, and educational seminars

In conjunction with outreach to the community, Lehman College also organized and participated in panel discussions, small focus groups, and educational seminars designed to inform stakeholders and entrepreneurs about current issues facing the cannabis industry, and areas where additional information would prove beneficial. By hosting the Science of Cannabis online course given by McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada), students learned about the science of the plant and its medicinal benefits. Through "lunch and learn" and virtual panel discussions, we were able to offer an overview of the newly emerging cannabis industry to our colleagues through the Continuing Education Association of New York. This proved to be an important resource for our colleagues and stakeholders in a time of transition, confusion and misinformation in the NYS cannabis industry. By staying up-to-date with local and national news (through a daily digest of online news media) we were also able to communicate the most relevant and applicable guidance to those otherwise quite confused about the state of cannabis in NY. We were proud to support and amplify the message of social economic and equity initiatives in NYS (a focus our state is unique in prioritizing) by hosting the Minority Equity Workshop Tour. Lehman College was chosen to represent the whole of NYC by serving as the NYC stop on the Tour.

3. Small Business Explanatory Sessions/Health & Safety Training

Cannabis Workforce Initiative (CWI)/Cornell University 10-week certification and NY CAURD roundtable discussions

Two very early and fundamental efforts we engaged in this year, the CWI 10-week training in Cannabis Workforce and Worker's Rights certification, and a partnership with the NY CAURD Coalition, have led to robust and ongoing impact on our programming plans and efforts around explanatory sessions and safety training. While most people consider the retail or cultivation aspects of the cannabis industry, few are aware that as a highly regulated legal industry; there are vast areas for a business owner to consider, including worker's rights, worker's compensation, labor union peace agreements, and health and safety in the workplace. By aligning early on with the Cannabis Workforce Initiative, a collaboration of the Workforce Development Institute and Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations, our team was able to connect with educators and a curriculum that set a firm foundation and launching pad in the seed-to-sale industry. This curriculum was sufficiently robust to serve as a structure for organizing monthly panel discussions in Year 2.

The NY CAURD coalition, under the leadership of founding members, Jayson Tantalo and Roger Thomas, have brought great expertise to the collaborations we have engaged in thus far in the form of presentations and roundtable discussion. By sharing information and experience as CAURD license applicants, this unique group of entrepreneurs is in the position of being able to speak to the realities of starting a cannabis business in the current environment in NYS. We were lucky to host a representative

of OCM (Jason Salmon, Director of External Affairs) as well, who agreed to conduct a 30-minute virtual Q & A session with all in attendance. This proved especially valuable during the active application for Adult Use licensing, when application guidance changed daily, and causing confusion for aspiring applicants.

4. Small Business and Application Advisory

Application Assistance and Business Advisory services

It is here that we adhered most closely to our operational plan of application assistance and business advising and guidance. Although the application process did not launch until Q3, Lehman was prepared to begin right away. With support from the OCM CHIP program training, and therefore being listed as a resource for application support, we were contacted by 15 applicants, actively offering guidance to 8 individuals with 6 submitting applications. Through the outreach described earlier, our prior connections with the NY CAURD Coalition and CannaBronx led to their using the Bronx Business Tech Incubator at CUNY on the Concourse for application workshops, and best of all, referring Our Academy, a California based consulting firm contracted by OCM to offer support to the CAURD license applicants. The Our Academy presence twice weekly for the 8-week application window brought 10 applicants who eventually submitted applications. Most impressive was Roger Thomas’s personal advising sessions, which attracted over 30 community members, most of whom had never set foot in a higher education institution. The value and impact of Roger’s efforts and outreach and service cannot be overstated. Lehman College provided a foundation and workspace that Roger, a full-fledged client now of the Tech Incubator, uses regularly.

Year 1 outcomes

Lehman College’s Proposed training and completion outcome	Year 1 grant	Year 1 # of people served by Lehman	Minimum (3 Years)	Maximum (3 years)
Outreach	NA	460*	NA	NA
# People served in 3 info sessions -- background to MRTA	300	169	450	750
# People in small business exploratory sessions – Is a business right for me?	160	637	300	500
# People in Health and Safety training			70	70
# Begin application process	15	75	60	60
# Applications completed	5	30	45	45
Total	480	911	1025	1525

*Not counted in the total

Year 1 program breakdown of programs offered.

1- Outreach	Date	Focus	Impact
Pop-up Dispensary sponsored by Bronx Community Foundation at The Bronx Post Office	Dec-22	Virtual Dispensary for general public educational introduction	200
NYC Marijuana Parade	May-23	Annual march to legalize cannabis (50th anniversary)	40
Business of Cannabis, Emmanuel Baptist Church	Jun-23	Educational event focusing on the business of cannabis for member of houses of worship	20
Cannabis World Congress & Business Expo (CWCBE)	Jun-23	Largest East Coast Cannabis Exposition and Conference, encompassing seed to sale supply chain, finance, investing, policy and regulatory issues	60
Revelry	Aug-23	A Grass Roots legacy industry networking event, with vendors, advocates and industry stakeholders, Restoration Plaza, Brooklyn	25
New York City Council - Cannabis Briefing	Sep-23	New York City Employment and Training Coalition (NYC ETC) organized a group of stakeholders in the Cannabis Industry for a briefing on the current state of cannabis in NYC.	15
Fordham Street Fair	Oct-23	Annual street fair for community, 5000 in attendance	55
Continuing Education Association of NY (CEANY) Conference	Nov-23	NYS Continuing Education Professionals Annual conference	45
Total			460*
2- Information Sessions			
Science of Cannabis training	Jan-23	A collaboration with McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, general education and overview	10
Cannabis Workforce Development Panel Discussion	Mar-23	An overview of workforce development initiatives presented by the Cannabis Workforce Initiative (CWI), Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC) & Lehman College staff	70
Continuing Education Association of NY (CEANY) Professional Development meeting	Jul-23	Panel Discussion focusing on current efforts in cannabis workforce development and business advising	44
Lift-Off NYC! NYC Cannabis, Small Business Services (SBS), event in Spanish	Oct-23	Information about the cannabis industry in NYC for Spanish-speaking constituents	12
Minority Cannabis Business Association Equity Workshop Tour	Oct-23	Collaborative brainstorming with social equity stakeholders in NYS	33
Total			169

3- Small business exploratory sessions/ Health and Safety training			
Cannabis Workforce Initiative (CWI)/Cornell University ILR - Cannabis Career Exploration and Worker Rights Certificate Program	Apr-Jun-23	10-week, 15 hour comprehensive education and training program in all aspects of the Cannabis Industry, seed-to-sale, including Worker's Rights and Regulatory compliance.	562
NY CAURD (Conditional Adult Use Retail Dispensary) Coalition Roundtable Discussion	23-Aug	A roundtable discussion focused on starting up a cannabis business in NYS regulated industry, including application process.	20
NY CAURD (Conditional Adult Use Retail Dispensary) Coalition Roundtable Discussion	23-Oct	A roundtable discussion focused on starting up a cannabis business in NYS regulated industry, including application process.	36
NY CAURD (Conditional Adult Use Retail Dispensary) Coalition Roundtable Discussion	23-Nov	A roundtable discussion focused on starting up a cannabis business in NYS regulated industry, including application process.	19
Total			637
4- Small Business and Application Advisory			
Collaboration with Our Academy	Oct-Dec 23	Ashley Pavesio & Cristina Buccola - CAURD focused Adult Use licensing application guidance	10
Collaboration with CAURD Coalition, Roger Thomas	Oct-Dec 23	Application assistance and cannabis start-up business guidance	30
Collaboration with CannaBronx	Nov-23	Grass Roots Cannabis Advocacy Group doing application workshop overview	15
Bronx Business Tech Incubator, Lehman College Business Advisor, Robert Rodriguez, Jr	Oct-Dec 23	Advising and application guidance	12
Martha McDermott, Lehman College, Case Manager	Oct-Dec 23	Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) trained Technical Assistance Provider (TAP) as part of CHIP (Cannabis Hub and Incubator Program) - provided technical assistance in application completion.	8
Total			75
Grand total			911

*Not counted in the total

Year 2 objectives

- Increase Community Outreach – Frequency and original initiatives.
- Build Community Based Organization collaborations and partnerships – Bronx Cannabis Hub
- Monthly Panel Discussion
- Continue Small Business Advisory to Ancillary businesses.
- Continue Collaboration with Cannabis Workforce Initiative (CWI)
- Support start-up/new businesses
- Assist businesses to become licensed

Program staff:

Jane MacKillop, PhD, Dean, School of Continuing and Professional Studies, Lehman College

Samira Bahrami, Director, CUNY on the Concourse, School of Continuing and Professional Studies

Robert Rodriguez, Jr., Business Adviser, Bronx Business Tech Incubator

Martha McDermott, Case Manager, School of Continuing & Professional Studies