

SOCIAL EQUITY

Oakland's Social Equity Programs Continue to Leave Every Other City in the Dust

Most recently, Oakland launched the nation's first government-funded cannabis workforce program

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The City of Oakland, California, continues to pave the way towards social and economic equity in the cannabis business. The city has launched a new million-dollar workforce development grant program. The program is designed to recruit, train, and employ citizens who have disproportionately and unjustly suffered from the War on Drugs. This includes people who have lived in overpoliced neighborhoods in Oakland for at least two years and have endured a cannabis conviction in Oakland.

Oakland continues to smoke every other city in America in terms of social equity programs. Last fall, Oakland launched the [first government-funded shared kitchen production workspace for social equity Cannabis entrepreneurs](#). The new Cannabis Equity Property Purchase Program earmarks \$2 million of funding for cannabis business equity applicants to purchase a property leveraged by multiple equity applicants.

This support is critical, especially in the Bay Area, where real estate prices are notoriously high. Removing this huge financial barrier to entry helps entrepreneurs from disadvantaged backgrounds enter the industry and build community equity and generational wealth.

Related: [A Social Equity Success Story in Oakland](#)

Gregory Minor, Oakland's Assistant to the City Administrator, says the programs "were the products of listening to cannabis operators and equity advocates, and they are based on the 2017 race and equity analysis of the cannabis industry in Oakland that established an equitable approach to regulating cannabis in Oakland."

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Righting the wrongs of history

Funding for these programs comes from a statewide California program that earmarked \$20 million to support cannabis equity programs. Black and Brown people, who were the most targeted by the War on Drugs, made up 64 percent of the 1,000 plus felony-level marijuana arrests in California in 2019. The quest for equitable inclusion in the legal cannabis economy is still very much an uphill battle for most of America's cannabis industry. In New Jersey, lawmakers are currently hitting a familiar stumbling block, figuring out pragmatic ways to include and empower social equity entrepreneurs and employees. Disagreements about how to implement social equity programs are responsible for delaying the opening of what will become one of the nation's largest adult-use cannabis markets.

Related: [Oakland Is Sweet On a Social Equity Incubator for Edibles](#)

The secret to Oakland's success

So what is it that Oakland has figured out that other municipalities are struggling to clone? Minor explains that "Oakland has been fortunate to have elected officials, advocates, Cannabis operators, and staff who have asked how we can ensure that Oakland provides equitable ownership and employment opportunities in the regulated cannabis marketplace."

One such advocate and operator is Amber Senter, co-founder of the nonprofit Supernova Women, an organization formed by women of color for people of color. Oakland has selected Supernova to be one of the first organizations to recruit, train, and facilitate the employment of workers via the Workforce Development Grant Program." Not everyone wants to own a Cannabis business. Our people deserve to benefit from the Cannabis industry, not just through ownership, but also through well-paying jobs and stable careers," Senter says.

The workforce development program provides funding of up to \$50,000 for each social equity cannabis business that recruits, trains, and retains a qualified member of a diverse workforce. This simultaneously helps equity business owners to scale while also creating employment and training opportunities for underserved people, who otherwise would not have a path to high-quality, well-paying jobs within the Cannabis industry.

Candidates selected by Supernova will be trained along two tracks: compliance management and product manufacturing operations. After receiving training and on the job experience, these newly hired professionals will be placed in roles with already operational, licensed equity cannabis businesses. "The goal is not to just provide people with jobs or skills training. We want to develop them to be future leaders in this industry who go on to build long and prosperous careers in Cannabis," said Senter.

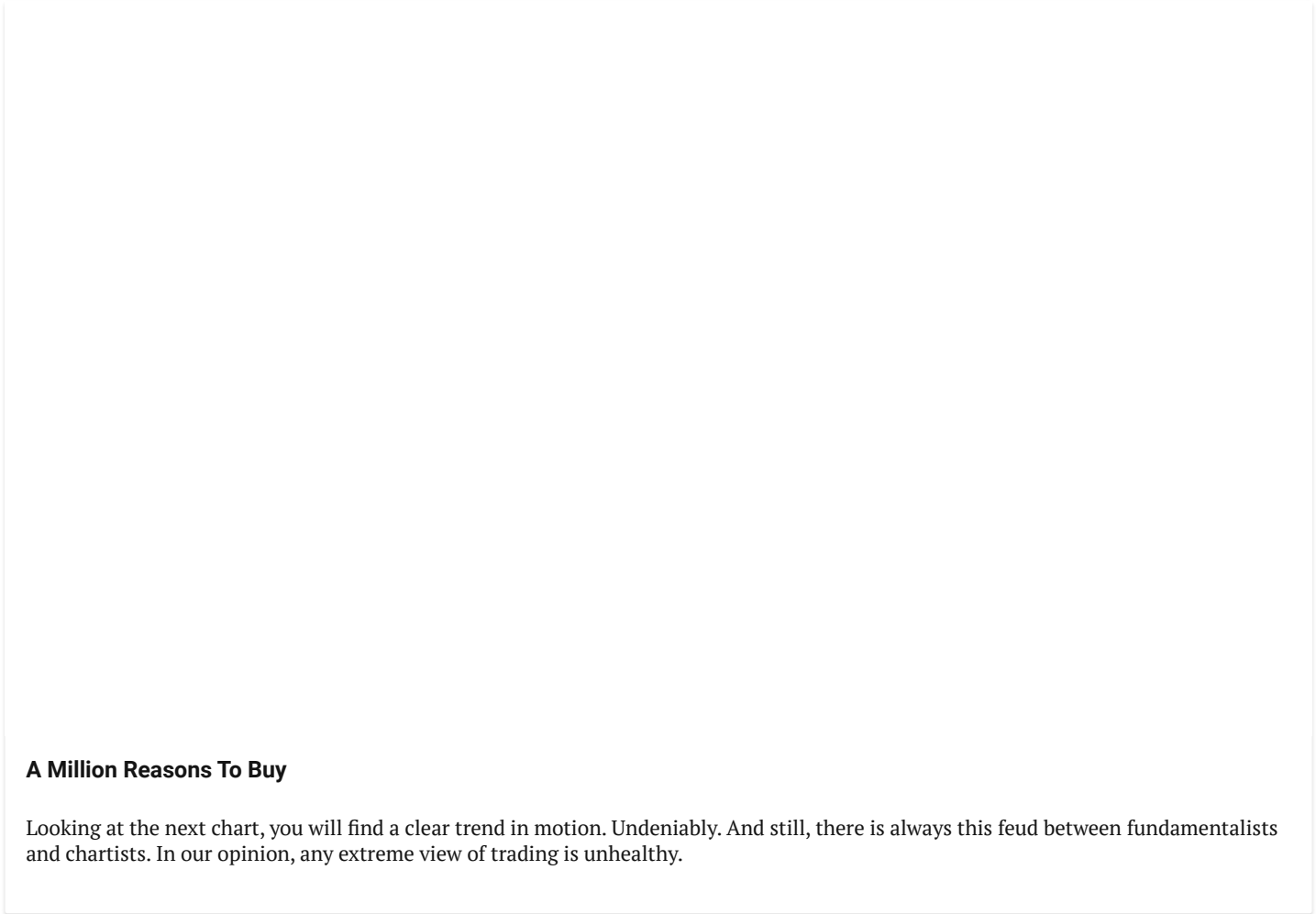
With the cannabis industry projected to create over 1,000,000 new jobs in the next decade, it's critically important that Black and Brown communities –who suffered the most significant collateral consequences of the criminalization of Cannabis commerce– receive appropriate representation in the budding cannabis workforce.

For that to happen, legislators and regulators from all over the country need to learn from Oakland. "Changing the status quo is not easy, but it begins by having a commitment to equity, asking questions, gathering data, and taking action based on the information gathered in that analysis," Minor says.

Last year, the government learned that Cannabis was essential. Perhaps this year, they will learn that a commitment to equity is too.

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