

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Below is a list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) regarding the commercial cannabis program in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. Many of these questions have been collected and consolidated from the virtual information session on March 3, 2022. Additional questions may be submitted to: Cannabis@lacounty.gov. Please put "LA County Cannabis Question" in the subject line.

We will continue to update and add additional inquiries based on questions we receive from applicants and the community.

This FAQ is divided into six question categories: **(I) General, (II) License (III) Application, (IV) Physical Location & Zoning, (V) Social Equity, and (VI) Public Health & Safety.**

I. General Questions

1. How can I contact the LA County Office of Cannabis Management?

You can contact the LA County Office of Cannabis Management via email at cannabis@lacounty.gov.

2. Will you be hosting information sessions?

We will be holding numerous virtual and live information sessions and outreach events throughout the development and implementation phase of the County's cannabis business license program. All upcoming events will be posted on our website, dcba.lacounty.gov/cannabis/ and in our newsletter. You can [sign-up here](#).

3. Does the Board of Supervisors have to review and adopt the proposed cannabis ordinance before it goes into effect?

Yes. OCM will work with County Counsel and other appropriate partners to craft draft amendment language and present it to the Board. The Board of Supervisors must approve this amendment language before it can be incorporated into the ordinance.

4. Will this program also include CBD products and business?

No, the Office of Cannabis Management will not regulate CBD products derived from industrial hemp containing less than 0.3% delta-9 tetrahydrocannabinol.

5. Are you hiring members of the community or only repositioning county employees into the Office of Cannabis Management (OCM)?

As OCM expands its staff capacity we will post job vacancies in accordance with the County of Los Angeles Department of Human Resources employment provisions and guidelines. All qualified interests are encouraged to apply via <http://www.hr.lacounty.gov>.

6. What is the Cannabis Working Group and who will be in it?

The Cannabis Working Group will be an advisory body that track and analyze appropriate data and issue periodic reports evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the County's Cannabis Licensing and Equity Program. The Cannabis Working Group will monitor, advise, and report on the health, economic, social, and environmental equity impacts of the County's programs and policies.

The Cannabis Working Group will consist of appropriate County Departments, subject matter experts, and other relevant stakeholders. County departments may include, but not be limited to, Public Health, Regional Planning, and the Anti-Racism, Diversity and Inclusion Initiative.

External stakeholders may include, but not be limited to, researchers, labor partners, industry representatives, health experts, and other subject matter experts. The membership will be balanced to ensure that a diversity of voices and perspectives are represented.

7. Can undocumented immigrants be considered Equity Applicants?

Despite its legalization in California, cannabis use and activity may be the basis for severe immigration penalties due to its federal prohibition. Please consult with an immigration attorney or appropriate subject matter expert.

II. License Questions

1. How many cannabis business permits will be available when the program launches?

The County will issue up to 25 retail, 25 delivery, 10 distribution, 10 testing laboratory, 10 manufacturing, and 10 cultivation permits when the program launches. Thereafter, the program will be assessed to determine the effect and impact on unincorporated communities and report these findings to the Board of Supervisors. The Board will then decide on any potential expansion.

2. Which L.A. County Department will grant the licenses?

Multiple permits may be required from more than one department for a business to be approved to operate. For example, you may be required to get a health permit from the Department of Public Health, as well as approval from the Office of Cannabis Management (housed in the Department of Consumer and Business Affairs) certifying that you are a social equity applicant.

OCM is working in coordination with other relevant departments involved in the business permit process including Regional Planning, Public Health, Public Works, Fire, Treasurer and Tax Collector, and the Agricultural Commissioner/ Weights and Measures to develop the application process and look for ways to make the process straightforward and easy to navigate for all applicants.

3. What type of mixed-light cultivation will be allowed?

The County will allow cultivation of cannabis in a fully enclosed facility that uses artificial, natural, or mixed light. If a cultivation facility is not fully enclosed, it will not meet the County's requirements. More specific guidelines will be available closer to launch.

4. Will the County issue large cultivation licenses (i.e. greater than 22,000 sq. ft)?

County will not issue large cultivation licenses at this time, in alignment with the State's current policies.

5. Of the 10 manufacturing licenses to be issued, how many will be volatile vs. Nonvolatile?

At this time, there is no allotted amount between volatile and non-volatile manufacturing licenses. Licenses will be issued based on the applications submitted and approved through its forthcoming application process.

6. How is the County considering issuing the select number of licenses i.e. lottery, first come first serve, competitive?

The County is currently exploring best practices and lessons learned to consider both a competitive and a lottery process, or a combination thereof. The approval process will incorporate consideration of the applicant's community impact and equity building practices, while ensuring a fair and unbiased selection. More details will be shared when available.

7. Can the number of permits be reduced in the future?

At any point in time the number of active licenses may be below the maximum allowable for various reasons including license revocation, licensee non-renewal, or other compliance issues. However, at this time, OCM does not anticipate a potential reduction of permit numbers in the future.

8. Can one person hold more than one permit?

Yes, one person or entity can hold more than one permit of different permit types to create a vertically integrated business, or a microbusiness

9. Will the county ensure that the "mom & pop" size business can be established?

OCM is committed to developing a program that will provide training, education, technical assistance, and other resources for small businesses. OCM continues to prioritize an equitable, diverse, and inclusive cannabis marketplace that builds pathways to jobs, entrepreneurship, and wealth.

10. What is a microbusiness and will the County issue microbusiness permits?

County will permit microbusinesses, or vertically integrated businesses that grow, process, and sell onsite. A microbusiness may engage in cultivation on an area less than 10,000 square feet, and hold a distribution, nonvolatile solvent manufacturing, and retail license (storefront or non-storefront).

III. Application Questions

1. When can I apply for a license to operate a cannabis business in unincorporated Los Angeles County?

The County's cannabis licensing program is anticipated to launch sometime in 2023.

2. What is the CLEAR Process?

CLEAR stands for Cannabis Licensing and Equity Approval Review (CLEAR) Process. The CLEAR Process will be the County's license and permit process that minimizes administrative barriers, works in alignment with State and other licensing agencies, and creates a supportive compliance infrastructure to foster a healthy and responsible commercial market in Los Angeles County.

The Office of Cannabis Management (OCM) will be responsible for leading the development and implementation of the CLEAR Process in coordination with other relevant departments, including Regional Planning, Public Health, Public Works, Fire, Treasurer and Tax Collector, and the Agricultural Commissioner/ Weights and Measures.

3. Who will be eligible to receive a cannabis business license from the County?

Initially, Equity and Equity-building applicants (those with robust equity promoting practices) will be prioritized for approval to operate a commercial cannabis business in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.

4. Will individuals found to have participated in an illegal cannabis business be excluded from consideration

No, a prior cannabis arrest or conviction will not disqualify applicants.

5. What is CEQA and how will it impact cannabis businesses when the program launches?

The California Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA, requires public agencies and local governments to measure and limit the environmental impacts of developments and major land-use decisions, including private developments. Under CEQA, local agencies must conduct an “Initial Study,” unless there is a legal exemption codified by law. A more extensive “Environmental Impact Report” may be necessary for those that are determined to pose significant impacts, such as cultivators and manufacturers.

OCM is currently working closely with stakeholders to determine the local CEQA process for applicants and will offer clear and transparent guidelines once it is established.

6. Will the County be requiring full CEQA assessments from the applicants?

OCM will confer with County Counsel, relevant departments, other jurisdictions, and experts to explore options to reduce administrative burdens while balancing the need for a fair and appropriate environmental analysis.

IV. Physical Location and Zoning

1. Where will cannabis businesses be allowed to locate?

Cannabis retail, delivery, and testing laboratories will be allowed to locate in Neighborhood Commercial (C-2), General Commercial (C-3), and Commercial Manufacturing (C-M) Zones, in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County. Additionally, cannabis retailers will be required to locate not less than 600 feet from schools (K-12), day cares, public parks, and public libraries. Manufacturing, cultivation, and distribution will be allowed in C-M, M-1, M-1.5, and M-2 Zones.

2. Does C-1 property qualify if it meets the other sensitive use restrictions?

No, C-1 areas in unincorporated LA County will not be zoned for any type of cannabis business activity.

3. Will you need to have a location to apply for a license?

OCM understands the financial burden of acquiring and securing a property during a long application process. While a physical location will be necessary at some point in the permit approval process, OCM is actively exploring ways to minimize undue burden and delay.

4. Can more than one permitted cannabis business activity occur at the same address and location?

Yes, one location will be allowed to operate multiple cannabis business activities, but a license must be required for each activity.

5. Can I view a zoning map of eligible commercial cannabis locations and addresses?

The County has not published a map with the approved cannabis zoning areas because we are still in the early planning phases and the situation remains dynamic. The County will publish more information on eligible cannabis locations closer to the program launch.

You can learn more about zoning in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County through the Department of Regional Planning website at <https://planning.lacounty.gov/>.

6. Will Lancaster be included in the County's cannabis program?

No, Lancaster, and other incorporated cities, have their own cannabis licensing regulations. For more information, contact your local city representatives for information.

7. What areas are Unincorporated?

You may learn more about Unincorporated Areas of the County of Los Angeles on this [LA County website](#) and view an [Alphabetical Listing of Unincorporated Areas within LA County](#).

V. Social Equity

1. What is an Equity Applicant?

Equity applicants are those who are from communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the overcriminalization and over-commercialization of cannabis.

The County will conduct an appropriate Equity Assessment, per State Guidelines and stakeholder input, in order to develop specific eligibility requirements for an Equity Applicant.

2. Will Equity Program resources come from grants from the County, or will we be able to partner with other businesses?

The County will seek to utilize state grant funds and other sources to build out a robust equity program and resources. OCM will also work with industry stakeholders, philanthropy, institutions of higher education, and other partners to identify resources.

3. Will the County publish specific criteria to evaluate Equity and Equity Building Applicants?

Yes, the CLEAR Process will be guided by predetermined standards and a grading system that rates the applicant's impact on its neighborhood as well as its equity-building impact, such as local or equitable hiring, workforce training, mentoring, equity ownership, community reinvestment plans, and more.

The criteria that will be used to evaluate applicants will be published closer to program launch.

4. Is OCM reviewing recommended equity frameworks models and reports that have been published by groups like the Minorities in Business Cannabis Association?

Yes, OCM has been working closely with industry stakeholders & organizations and other jurisdictions currently regulating cannabis to identify best practices that may be implemented in the County.

5. Was there a previous social equity program for unincorporated area of LA County; and if so, what was the result?

While the County did not previously have a cannabis program, many other programs in County are designed to address inequities in workforce, housing, public safety and health, and more. OCM will leverage these programs and lessons learned to design an equitable program related to commercial cannabis activities.

6. I don't currently live in a disproportionately affected area but lived there for the first 30 years of my life. Will I be disqualified from being an SE applicant?

The eligibility requirements will be designed to be inclusive and supportive of the individuals most harmed by cannabis criminalization and the War on Drugs and follow all legal guidelines. More specific guidelines will be released after an appropriate Equity Assessment.

7. Will a social equity applicant that was approved in the City of Los Angeles be allowed to participate at the County level assuming they meet the county verification requirements?

Currently, there are no restrictions on applicants having multiple business licenses in different cities.

VI. Public Health & Safety

1. How do I report an illegal cannabis business?

You may report an illegal cannabis business in the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County to the Office of Cannabis Management via email at Cannabis@LACounty.gov.

2. How do you know if a cannabis retailer is legal?

Any retailer located in unincorporated LA County is currently unpermitted, because the licensing program has not launched. For other jurisdiction that are already regulating cannabis you can verify the license status of a California state-licensed cannabis businesses, including retail, delivery, distributors, testing laboratories and more by using [this search tool](#).

In addition, the County administers the Emblem Program for Authorized Cannabis Stores in partnership with contracted cities. Cannabis businesses with the LA County Emblem have been inspected by the LA County Department of Public Health, and have all appropriate licenses, permits, or authorizations from the State of California and local governments. Find out more about the Emblem Program [here](#).

3. How will you enforce the illegal operators?

While the County's Cannabis Consumer Health & Safety Taskforce (CCHST) continuously combats the illicit cannabis market, particularly illegal grows and nuisance retailers that create significant safety and quality-of-life harm to communities, we understand that some communities continue to be burdened with "whack-a-mole" situations. OCM will work closely with County Counsel, Public Health, and other appropriate partners to enhance its capacity to promote compliance and reduce unpermitted activity. This includes increasing County's administrative and civil processing authority to address nuisance shops, accessing State funding and better dedicating resources, and expanding outreach and education to shift consumer demand to the licensed market and its safer products.

4. Can there be an integration with the 211 "The Works" app to be able to report illegal dispensaries?

OCM will explore available options to ensure illegal cannabis business can be quickly and easily reported including using existing infrastructure and technology.

5. What can be done to give the sheriff's dept greater authority in closing illegal dispensaries without lengthy proceedings i.e. investigations and obtaining a warrant from a county judge.

Investigations and obtaining warrants are needed to substantiate illegal activity and provide due process. To avoid a lengthy civil court action, the County has adopted an Administrative Nuisance Abatement Ordinance to be enforced administratively. This program is currently being developed and will add another tool to better address businesses causing harm.

6. Will current medical dispensaries be given a period of time to transition to recreational, or will they be expected to close during the licensing period?

We are still developing our guidelines for currently operating businesses. More information will be released soon.

7. How much revenue will be directed to mental health issues for cannabis addictions?

We are currently conducting analysis on taxation rate and structure, including projections on potential revenue. Until such analysis is completed, we are unable to determine allocation of revenue. However, County understands the importance of prevention, treatment, and recovery services for substance use disorders, including cannabis use disorders, and other public health services necessary to mitigate potential harms from commercialization of cannabis activities.

An appropriate stakeholder process and analysis will be undertaken to determine the allocation of revenue.

8. What safeguards will prevent cannabis businesses from overcrowding unincorporated communities?

The County will ensure cannabis business are not over-concentrated in unincorporated communities through zoning restrictions, sensitive use buffering requirements, and limits on the total number of licenses.