

EQUITY IN STATE CANNABIS REGULATIONS

What do New Jersey adults think about equity in the context of cannabis legalization?

This study was created and conducted by Jane Allen, Dr. Youn Ok Lee, Robyn Woodlea, Vincenzo Malo, and Lauren Zitney, with input from Andrew Freeman, Allie Rothschild, Jessica Sobolewski, Burton Levine, Jessica Speer, Anna MacMonegle, Dr. Jim Nonnemaker, Dr. Gary Zarkin, Dr. Matthew Farrelly, and Dr. Jennifer Duke. Thank you to Shaleen Title for reviewing our survey instrument; to Dr. Stephanie Hawkins, Tauhid Chappell, and Reverend Charles Boyer for talking with us about this idea; and to Shellery Ebron and the Innovation Team at RTI International for support of this project.

For questions about this study, please contact Jane Allen at janeallen@rti.org



States that are legalizing cannabis for adult use—like New Jersey—are increasingly focused on equity. This means they are interested in acknowledging and repairing some of the harm done by past enforcement of marijuana laws, commonly known as the “war on drugs.”

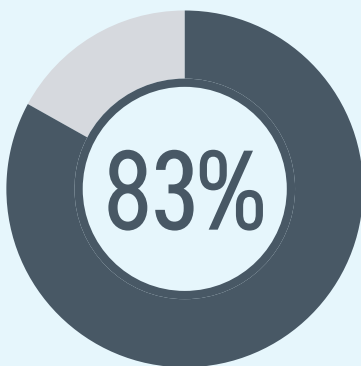
The war on drugs is an example of systemic racism. Black people in the United States have been arrested for marijuana possession at much higher rates than white people, although rates of marijuana use are similar. These arrests have produced negative outcomes for individuals, families, and communities.

To date, states that have sought to prioritize equity in cannabis regulations have not achieved as much as they hoped, in part due to competing interests in this emerging industry. This study documents public support for equity and specific equity-focused policies in New Jersey, and assesses whether an educational message can increase support for equity provisions.

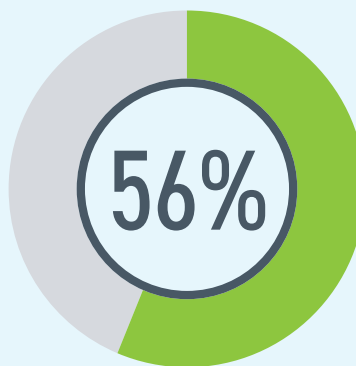
“The New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission has two core values: equity and safety.”

– Summary of the Cannabis Regulatory Commission’s Initial Rules for the Personal-Use of Cannabis, August 19, 2021

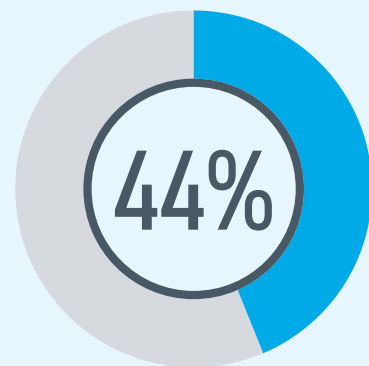
We conducted a survey of New Jersey adults in August and September of 2021. This is what we learned.



Somewhat or very concerned about racism in the United States today



Equity in cannabis policy is important or very important



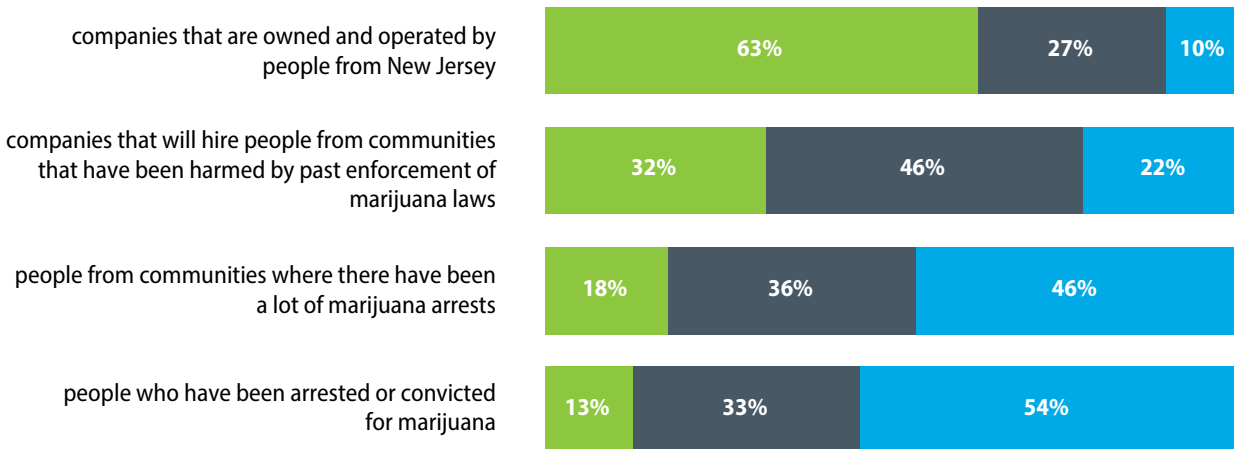
Positive attitude toward reparations

More than half of New Jersey adults support equity in cannabis policy, but there is less support for specific equity-focused policies.

A substantial proportion of New Jersey adults don't have an opinion on specific equity-focused cannabis policies, suggesting an opportunity to increase support through public education.

Who should get a cannabis business license?

Cannabis business licenses should go to...



How should the state treat old marijuana convictions?



Where should taxes from marijuana sales go?



● Agree ● Neutral ● Disagree

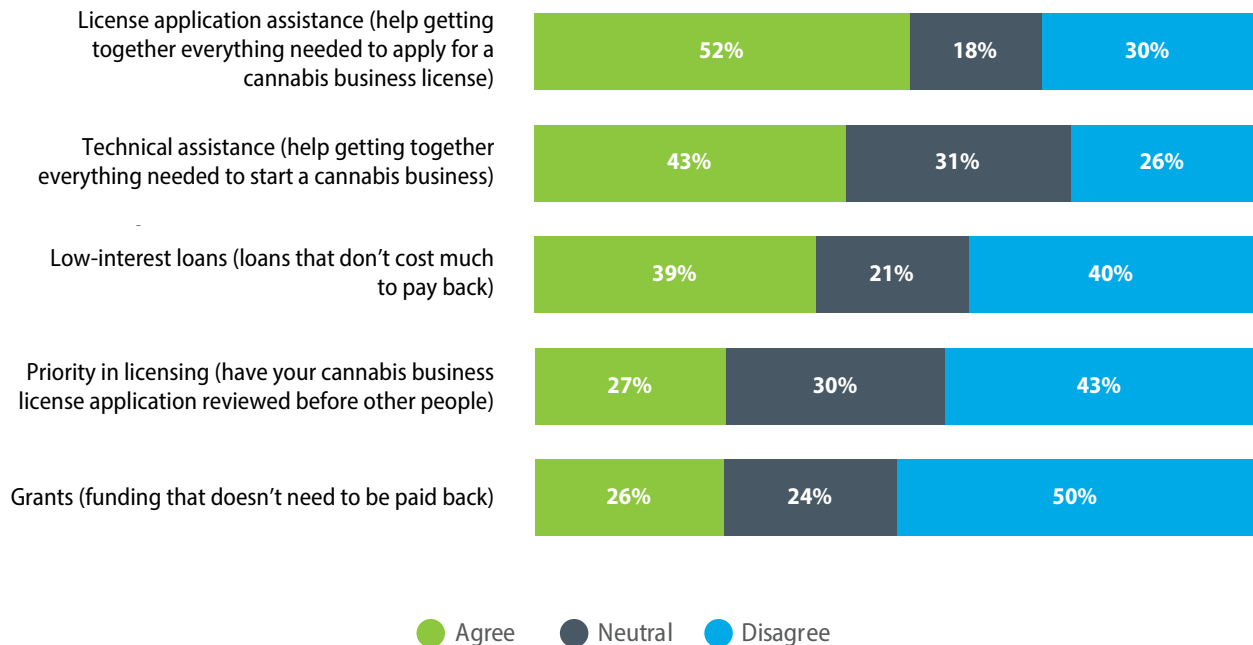
“People who were arrested and charged for marijuana... **committed a crime and did something that was illegal at the time** and providing resources to getting a selling license would almost be like rewarding them and that’s not fair to the rest of the population of New Jersey.”



“I strongly believe that those with marijuana convictions **should have their record expunged** and be allowed to open and operate marijuana dispensaries [in] their communities with technical assistance and support provided by the State of New Jersey.”



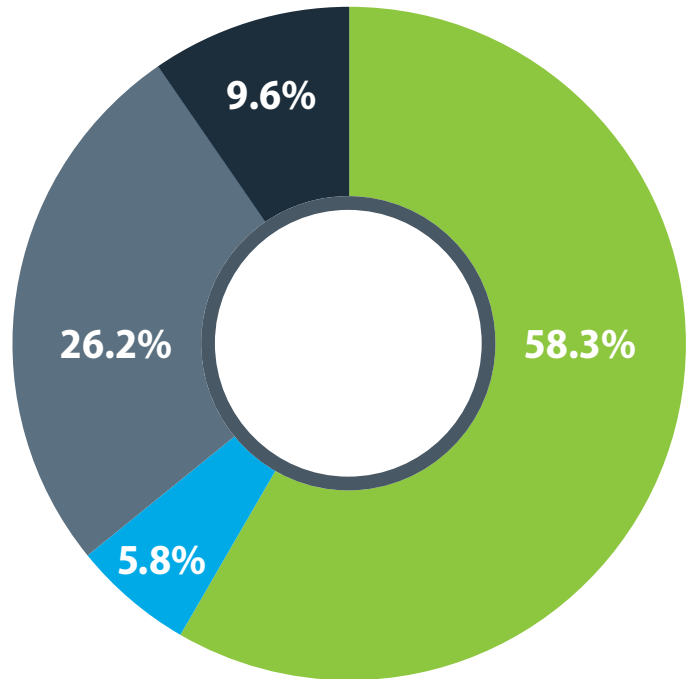
New Jersey should provide the following types of support to people who have been arrested for marijuana, and who now want to participate in the legal cannabis industry...



Among New Jersey adults, an equitable rollout of the new industry is more important than a rapid rollout.

If you had to choose, which is more important to you?

- Equitable rollout of the new industry
- Rapid rollout of the new industry
- Neither is important to me
- I don't know



Experiment

We conducted an experiment to find out if an educational message can increase support for equity provisions in cannabis policy.

People who viewed the infographic—shown on page 6—

- ✓ Placed greater importance on equity in cannabis
- ✓ Had greater agreement that people who have been arrested for marijuana should be prioritized for a cannabis business license
- ✓ Had greater agreement that people who have been arrested for marijuana should receive training and technical assistance to start a cannabis business.

Experiment (continued)

Infographic shown to study participants:

WHAT DOES EQUITY MEAN IN THE CONTEXT OF CANNABIS?



In New Jersey, Black people are **3.5 times** more likely than white people to be arrested for having marijuana.

Even though Black and white adults use marijuana at about the same rate.



Arrest can lead to serious negative outcomes, like...



Loss of housing



Reduced job opportunities

These outcomes hurt people and their families.



Legalizing marijuana will dramatically reduce the number of people who are arrested for marijuana.

It won't put an end to all marijuana arrests, or racial differences in arrest rates.



One way to make up for past unfairness is to make sure people and communities that have been harmed by marijuana laws in the past benefit from marijuana laws in the future.

Here are a few ideas about how **we can create equity** in the new cannabis industry.



People who have been arrested for marijuana, or who are from a community where there were a lot of marijuana arrests can...

- Be prioritized for a business license
- Get help planning and starting up a business



Communities where there were a lot of marijuana arrests can...

- Receive tax revenue from legal marijuana sales.

Key Takeaways From This Study

1

More than half of New Jersey adults...

- think equity in cannabis policy is important
- prefer an equitable rollout of the cannabis industry to a rapid one

2

A substantial proportion of New Jersey adults had no strong opinion about specific equity-focused cannabis policies. This represents an opportunity to use public education to increase support for policies such as prioritizing licenses for people who have been arrested or convicted for marijuana, and allocating cannabis taxes for communities that have been harmed by past enforcement of marijuana laws.

3

Results show that a simple educational message is associated with:

- Placing greater importance on equity in cannabis
- Greater agreement that people who have been arrested for marijuana should be prioritized for a cannabis business license
- Greater agreement that people who have been arrested for marijuana should receive training and technical assistance to start a cannabis business

Public education can be used to increase support for policies such as prioritizing licenses for people who have been arrested or convicted for marijuana.

Who is Responsible for this Study?

RTI International (RTI) funded this study, and the study was developed and conducted by RTI staff. The New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission was not involved in this study.

Why Did We Conduct this Study?

RTI staff conducted this study to document what New Jersey adults think about equity in the context of cannabis policy, the degree to which they support specific equity-focused policies, and to assess whether an educational message can increase support for equity. Equity is a core value of the New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory Commission

How Was this Study Conducted?

We surveyed 863 New Jersey adults, age 21 and older, in August and September of 2021. We recruited survey respondents through social media ads. Half of the respondents in this study were randomly assigned to view an infographic explaining what equity means in the context of cannabis before answering questions about their support for equity provisions. The other respondents did not view the infographic. We gave qualified respondents who completed the 15-minute survey a \$15 digital gift card to thank them for their time. Data were weighted to remove bias using data from the 2018-2019 National Survey on Drug Use and Health. This study was approved by RTI's IRB.

Who Was Included in this Study?

We surveyed people who had used cannabis in the past month (33.3%), people who had used cannabis, but not in the past month (31.8%), and people who had never used cannabis (34.9%). We surveyed people who identify as female (56.1%), male (41.8%), and genderqueer (2.1%); Hispanic (24.9%); white (43.7%), Asian (23.4%), Black (18.3%), American Indian and Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian, or Other Pacific Islander (2.3%), and multiracial or other races (12.3%). The average age of those who completed the survey was 39.

A Note on the Findings Presented Here

Because viewing the infographic influenced study participants' beliefs about equity, findings presented here are based on data from people who did not view the educational infographic (429 people), except for the findings relating to the experiment.

For questions about this study, please contact Jane Allen at janeallen@rti.org

