# Comprehensive Research Plan: Analysis of Major Awards and Honors in the Cannabis Industry

## I. Research Objectives

This research initiative is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the awards and honors landscape within the global cannabis industry. The primary goals are to map the existing awards, analyze their operational frameworks, evaluate their impact, and identify emerging trends. Achieving these objectives will yield critical insights into how recognition mechanisms function within this rapidly evolving sector and their significance for various stakeholders.

* **Objective 1: To comprehensively map and categorize the landscape of major cannabis industry awards globally and regionally.** The initial objective is to identify and document the significant awards recognizing achievement within the cannabis sector worldwide. This involves casting a wide net to capture awards operating at international, national, and regional levels, such as those specific to Europe or North America. A key component is classifying these awards based on their primary focus – whether they emphasize product quality (like traditional cannabis cups ), business performance and strategy (such as The Emjays or Business of Cannabis Awards ), innovation and technology , marketing and branding prowess (like the Clio Cannabis Awards ), advocacy and social impact , or other specialized areas. This foundational mapping is essential for understanding the breadth and depth of recognition systems currently active. The sheer volume and diversity of existing awards, ranging from long-established product competitions like the High Times Cannabis Cup to newer accolades focusing on ancillary services or social equity , suggest an industry that is maturing and diversifying, seeking validation across multiple facets of its operations and impact. Different segments value distinct achievements, reflecting the complex ecosystem that encompasses cultivation, manufacturing, retail, technology, legal services, marketing, and advocacy.
* **Objective 2: To critically analyze the eligibility criteria, judging processes, and selection mechanisms of these awards.** Beyond identification, this research seeks to understand the mechanics behind the awards. This involves a detailed examination of the requirements for entry – who is eligible to be nominated or submit products? What specific criteria must be met? Furthermore, the research will dissect the evaluation processes. How are winners determined? Is it through panels of experts , quantitative lab testing , public voting via mechanisms like judge kits , or a combination thereof? Who constitutes the judging panels , and what are their qualifications? Analyzing these elements is crucial for assessing the rigor, objectivity, transparency, and ultimately, the credibility of each award. The observed variations in judging methodologies – from expert panels at the Business of Cannabis Awards and the creative focus of the Clio Cannabis Awards , to the lab-testing basis of The Emerald Cup's flower awards , and the public-participation model of the High Times Cannabis Cup People's Choice – point towards different underlying philosophies and priorities. Awards relying on objective data may hold more weight in product categories, while those with rigorous expert review may be more prestigious for business or creative achievements. Public voting introduces different dynamics, potentially boosting consumer awareness but raising questions about merit versus popularity among industry insiders. Understanding these differences is key to interpreting the value proposition of each award.
* **Objective 3: To evaluate the significance and impact of receiving cannabis industry awards on businesses and the industry at large.** This objective addresses the practical value and consequences of winning awards. How does recognition influence a company's standing? The research will investigate the effects on brand reputation, market visibility, consumer trust, investor relations, strategic partnerships, and employee morale. Winning awards is often positioned as a powerful public relations and marketing tool, contributing to a brand's perceived expertise, authority, and trust (EAT). These reputational benefits can translate into tangible outcomes, such as increased customer loyalty, easier access to capital, and an advantage in a competitive marketplace. Beyond individual companies, the research will explore how awards collectively influence industry behavior – do they drive adherence to higher standards, foster specific types of innovation, or shape market trends and consumer perceptions? Awards are presented not just as accolades but as assets that validate a brand's impact and leadership. The connection between recognition and business development suggests that awards can be integral components of a company's strategic growth, offering social proof and differentiation.
* **Objective 4: To identify current trends and future directions in cannabis industry awards.** The final objective is to analyze the evolution of the awards landscape itself. This involves identifying shifts in focus, such as the increasing prevalence of categories related to sustainability , social equity , diversity , technological innovation , or specific ancillary services. By examining these trends, the research aims to anticipate how the awards ecosystem might develop as the cannabis industry continues to mature, legalize in new jurisdictions, and strive for mainstream acceptance. The emergence of awards specifically recognizing social responsibility and environmental stewardship suggests a broadening of industry values beyond purely commercial or product-centric metrics. This reflects wider societal expectations and the industry's efforts to build legitimacy. Awards focusing on these areas may become increasingly influential, potentially encouraging companies to adopt more holistic and responsible operating models. The inclusion of cannabis awards within traditional frameworks, like the California State Fair , also signals a significant trend towards normalization and integration.

## II. Methodology

A multi-phase, mixed-methods approach will be employed to ensure the collection of comprehensive, reliable, and nuanced data necessary to achieve the research objectives. This methodology combines extensive desk research with qualitative data gathering and systematic analysis.

* **Phase 1: Comprehensive Desk Research & Source Identification (Weeks 1-4)**
  + **Activity 1.1: Identification and Review of Official Award Websites:** The foundation of the research will involve systematically identifying and reviewing the official online presence of known cannabis industry awards. This includes dedicated websites for major awards such as The Emjays International Cannabis Awards , Business of Cannabis Awards (Europe) , Cannabis Business Awards (CBA Globes) , International Cannabis Awards , Clio Cannabis Awards , High Times Cannabis Cup , The Emerald Cup , Spannabis Champions Cup , Grow Up Awards Canada , and others identified like the Global Health & Pharma Commercial Cannabis Awards , LeafLink List , and CannaPortugal Global Cannabis Awards. Data extracted will cover the award's history, mission statement, specific categories offered, lists of past winners, details on nomination procedures, stated judging criteria, organizing bodies, key sponsors, and contact information. These official sites serve as primary sources for foundational data.
  + **Activity 1.2: Systematic Review of Industry Publications and News Archives:** To supplement official sources and gather contextual information, a systematic review of leading cannabis industry publications and news archives will be conducted. Keyword searches (e.g., "cannabis award winners," "best cannabis cultivator award," specific award names like "Emerald Cup results") will be performed across platforms such as MJBizDaily , Ganjapreneur , Cannabis Industry Journal , Marijuana Moment , StratCann , Business of Cannabis , and Cannabis Cup Winners. This review will capture award announcements, profiles of winning companies and individuals, articles analyzing the significance or impact of specific awards, discussions of trends, and any available expert commentary. These sources provide crucial context, independent reporting, and analysis often missing from official award materials.
  + **Activity 1.3: Academic and Market Research Database Search:** To incorporate rigorous analytical frameworks and potentially validated impact studies, searches will be conducted in academic business databases (e.g., ProQuest One Business, Business Source Complete ) and market research repositories (e.g., MarketResearch.com , resources from ESOMAR or MRII ). The search will target scholarly articles, dissertations, or market reports that discuss cannabis industry awards, methodologies for evaluating industry recognition programs, or analyze their economic or social impact. While specialized reports on this niche topic may be limited, this step ensures relevant academic perspectives and established market research methodologies are considered.
* **Phase 2: Data Extraction and Compilation (Ongoing, Weeks 2-8)**
  + **Activity 2.1: Structured Data Extraction:** A standardized data extraction template (likely a spreadsheet or database schema) will be developed and utilized to ensure consistency when pulling information from diverse sources. Key fields will include Award Name, Organizer, Year Founded, Categories, Judging Process Summary, Eligibility Criteria, Geographic Scope, Website, etc. (as detailed in Section VI).
  + **Activity 2.2: Compilation of Winner Lists and Recent Announcements:** Historical data is vital for trend analysis. Lists of winners for major awards, ideally spanning the last 3-5 years, will be compiled from official sites and news reports. Recent announcements regarding nominations, winners, or changes to award formats will also be systematically collected.
* **Phase 3: Qualitative Data Gathering (Optional but Recommended for Expert Level) (Weeks 9-12)**
  + **Activity 3.1: Expert Interviews:** To gain deeper, nuanced insights beyond publicly available information, semi-structured interviews will be sought with key industry stakeholders. Target interviewees include:
    - Award organizers or representatives (e.g., from High Times, Emerald Cup, MJBizCon/Farechild Events, Business of Cannabis, CBA Globes, ICA ).
    - Executives or representatives from companies that have won prominent awards (e.g., Curaleaf , Royal Queen Seeds ).
    - Industry journalists who regularly cover the awards beat or have won journalism awards themselves.
    - Individuals who have served as judges on different award panels.
    - Interviews will explore perceived award prestige, the intricacies and fairness of judging processes, the tangible and intangible impacts of winning, the evolution of awards over time, and predictions for future trends. This primary research adds significant depth and credibility, capturing perspectives not available through desk research alone.
* **Phase 4: Data Analysis and Synthesis (Weeks 9-16)**
  + **Activity 4.1: Comparative Analysis of Award Criteria and Judging:** The collected data on eligibility rules and judging methodologies will be systematically compared across different awards. This analysis will assess the relative rigor, objectivity, transparency, and focus (e.g., product science vs. business metrics vs. creative merit) of various award programs.
  + **Activity 4.2: Impact Assessment:** This involves triangulating data from multiple sources. Company communications (press releases announcing wins), media coverage discussing the significance of wins , and potentially publicly available financial data (where accessible and relevant) will be analyzed to assess changes in visibility or market perception following an award win. Qualitative analysis will examine how award criteria related to quality, innovation, sustainability, or ethics appear to influence documented industry practices or standards.
  + **Activity 4.3: Trend Identification:** Data on award categories, judging methods, and winner profiles will be analyzed longitudinally (over the past 3-5 years) to identify significant shifts or emerging patterns. This includes tracking the introduction of new award types (e.g., technology , social equity ) and changes in judging approaches (e.g., increased use of lab data or public voting).
  + This multi-faceted analysis approach is necessary because the research aims to move beyond a simple inventory of awards. Understanding *how* they operate (Objective 2), *what effect* they have (Objective 3), and *how they are changing* (Objective 4) requires comparative analysis, impact assessment using diverse evidence, and longitudinal observation. The combination of desk research and potential expert interviews provides both the breadth and depth needed for an expert-level assessment.

## III. Key Awards Identification

A diverse array of awards and honors exists within the cannabis industry, reflecting its multifaceted nature and growing maturity. These range from globally recognized competitions with long histories to newer, regionally focused, or niche accolades. This section identifies and categorizes prominent awards based on the research conducted.

* **A. Global & Internationally Recognized Awards:** These awards generally attract participation and recognition from multiple countries, setting benchmarks on a wider stage.
  + **1. High Times Cannabis Cup:**
    - *Organizing Body:* High Times Magazine.
    - *History:* Established in 1988 in Amsterdam, making it one of the oldest and most iconic cannabis competitions. Has adapted with "People's Choice" editions across legal US states, utilizing consumer judging kits.
    - *Focus Areas:* Primarily product-centric, evaluating cannabis flower (Indica, Sativa, Hybrid, Sungrown), pre-rolls, solvent and non-solvent concentrates, vape pens/cartridges, edibles (gummies and non-gummies), and topicals/tinctures/capsules.
    - *Significance:* Historically pivotal in establishing strain reputations and setting quality benchmarks for cannabis products. Its legacy lends significant weight, even as its judging model evolves.
  + **2. The Emjays International Cannabis Awards:**
    - *Organizing Body:* Farechild Events, in association with MJBizCon.
    - *Focus Areas:* Comprehensive recognition across ~26 categories, spanning business and ancillary services (finance, software, legal, retail services, PR, marketing), technology (cultivation hardware/software, testing labs, packaging), media (journalism, content creation), product brands (flower, infused, concentrate, CBD/hemp, consumer gear, vapes), advocacy, and campaigns.
    - *Significance:* Explicitly designed to honor the supporting ecosystem of the cannabis industry, not just plant-touching businesses. Its close ties to MJBizCon, a premier industry trade show, provide substantial visibility and networking opportunities.
  + **3. International Cannabis Awards (ICA):**
    - *Organizing Body:* Founded by Dani Walton, with European partnerships (Planta Sur, BBG Projects).
    - *History:* Launched in 2024. Held virtually in 2025, associated with Spannabis week, with plans for an in-person European event in 2026.
    - *Focus Areas:* Broad scope covering cultivation, breeding, technology (extraction, lighting, ventilation), hardware (vapes), seed banks, nutrients, social justice, advocacy, media (journalism, podcast, trade publications), and individual recognition (trailblazer, woman of the year) across US and European markets.
    - *Significance:* Positions itself as a prestigious global award ("Oscars" of cannabis), aiming to recognize excellence and innovation across continents and foster international community.
  + **4. Clio Cannabis Awards:**
    - *Organizing Body:* An extension of the established and prestigious Clio Awards program.
    - *History:* Launched in 2019. Currently announced as being on hiatus (as of late 2024) while future program cycles are evaluated.
    - *Focus Areas:* Creative excellence in cannabis marketing, advertising, brand design, communications, advocacy, digital experiences, film/video, public relations, social good initiatives, and product/service innovation.
    - *Significance:* Borrows the high credibility and recognition of the mainstream Clio Awards, offering significant validation for creative and marketing achievements within the cannabis space, helping to bridge the gap with traditional advertising industries.
  + **5. Cannabis Business Awards (CBA Globes):**
    - *Organizing Body:* Chloe Villano and Clover Leaf.
    - *History:* Operating since 2011.
    - *Focus Areas:* Wide-ranging recognition of professionals, companies, and advocates. Includes specific Industry Awards, People's Choice, Top 100 lists (Industry Icons, Global Political Leaders), recognition for prisoners impacted by prohibition, and dedicated Hemp Business Awards. Events held in various US cities and internationally.
    - *Significance:* One of the longer-running award series focused on the business and professional aspects of the industry, aiming to provide historical recognition for contributions to progress and innovation.
* **B. Prominent Regional Awards:**
  + **Europe:**
    - **1. Business of Cannabis Awards (Europe):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Business of Cannabis.
      * *Focus Areas:* Specifically targets the European cannabis industry. Categories include Innovator, International Journalist, Cannabis Clinic, Cannabis Team, Equipment Provider, European Company, Business Leader, Producer, and Industry Rising Star.
      * *Significance:* A key awards event for the European market, attracting senior executives and recognizing contributions shaping the regional landscape.
    - **2. Spannabis Champions Cup (Spain/Europe):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Associated with the Spannabis trade fair in Spain.
      * *History:* Held annually for many years (since at least 2006 ).
      * *Focus Areas:* Primarily focuses on cannabis genetics and product quality, with categories for Indica and Sativa flower, Rosin, Hash, and CBD products. The broader Spannabis event also presents awards for Best Seed Bank, Nutrients, etc..
      * *Significance:* Highly prestigious product competition within the European context, held at the continent's largest cannabis fair, making it a crucial event for breeders, cultivators, and extractors.
    - **3. CannaPortugal Global Cannabis Awards (Portugal/Global):**
      * *Organizing Body:* CannaPortugal.
      * *History:* Established in 2022.
      * *Focus Areas:* Recognizes global contributions to the hemp and medicinal cannabis sectors, including sustainable agriculture, research, education, advocacy, media, and policy impact.
      * *Significance:* Highlights achievements in the medicinal and hemp fields with a global perspective, originating from Portugal.
    - **4. Cannabis Industry Awards (Netherlands):**
      * *Organizing Body:* cannabisindustrie.nl.
      * *Focus Areas:* Celebrates the Dutch cannabis industry, including entrepreneurs, companies, coffeeshops, and products across categories like Innovation, Cultivation Product, Grower, Weed, Hash, etc..
      * *Significance:* Provides national recognition within the unique context of the Dutch cannabis market.
    - **5. Grow Awards (Europe):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Associated with Spannabis.
      * *Focus Areas:* Recognizes excellence in breeding and cultivation supplies, including Best Strain, Breeder, Autoflower Strain/Breeder, Grow Lights, Tents, Nutrients, Filters, Hydro Systems, and Fans.
      * *Significance:* Complements the Spannabis Champions Cup by focusing on the tools and genetics underpinning cultivation.
  + **North America (USA & Canada, excluding primarily global awards):**
    - **1. The Emerald Cup (California, USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Founded by Tim Blake / "Emerald Cup Family".
      * *History:* Began in 2003/2004, originating in the Emerald Triangle.
      * *Focus Areas:* Renowned for its emphasis on organic, sun-grown, and sustainable cultivation methods. Judges flower (sungrown, indoor, mixed light), pre-rolls, concentrates (solventless, solvent), edibles, tinctures, topicals, cartridges, alternative cannabinoids, innovative products, dispensaries, and photography. Pioneered terpene-based classification.
      * *Significance:* Considered the "Organic Oscars of Cannabis," highly respected for its advocacy of regenerative farming and small cultivators. A premier event for California's craft cannabis community.
    - **2. Grow Up Awards (Canada):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Grow Up Conference & Expo.
      * *History:* Active since at least 2019, associated with Canada's leading industry conference.
      * *Focus Areas:* Broad recognition within the Canadian market, including Grower of the Year, Micro/Standard Producer, Processor, News Source, Influencer, Young Professionals (30 and under), Legal Services, Environmental Impact, Cultivation Technology (Lighting, Media), Extraction, Breeding, Publications, Distribution, and Pest Management.
      * *Significance:* Key awards platform reflecting excellence and innovation specifically within the regulated Canadian cannabis industry.
    - **3. LeafLink List (USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* LeafLink.
      * *Focus Areas:* Data-driven awards recognizing top-performing brands, retailers, and products based on sales and growth metrics within the LeafLink wholesale marketplace across multiple US states. Includes an "Innovators" category for social equity and tech adoption.
      * *Significance:* Offers recognition based on quantifiable market performance within a major B2B ecosystem.
    - **4. Green Market Report Women in Cannabis Awards (USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Green Market Report / Crain's.
      * *Focus Areas:* Specifically honors female and female-identifying individuals and women-led/founded brands across various industry roles (Advocacy, Ancillary, Cultivation, Legal, PR, Science, Tech, Executive).
      * *Significance:* Addresses gender representation and celebrates female leadership in the industry.
    - **5. CannaTech Innovation Awards (USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Cannabis & Tech Today magazine.
      * *Focus Areas:* Highlights pioneering companies and technologies addressing industry challenges. Covers hardware (cultivation, processing, testing), software, ancillary services, packaging, POS/ERP systems, and training programs. Also includes Sustainable Leadership Awards.
      * *Significance:* Focuses specifically on the technological advancements driving the industry forward.
    - **6. Cannabis Marketing Association Seven Awards (USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* Cannabis Marketing Association.
      * *History:* Launched in 2023.
      * *Focus Areas:* Recognizes successful and effective marketing campaigns that positively shape the image of cannabis. Includes categories for package design, advertising (print, programmatic, outdoor), events, PR, video, social media, brand identity, retail experience, and product design/innovation.
      * *Significance:* Specifically evaluates the effectiveness and creativity of marketing efforts in a challenging regulatory environment.
    - **7. California Cannabis Awards (California, USA):**
      * *Organizing Body:* California State Fair.
      * *Focus Areas:* Open to licensed California cultivators and brands. Uses lab testing (SC Labs) for flower awards based on chemotypes (THCa, CBDa, CBGa, terpenes) and expert judging (Budist) for product categories (Pre-Rolls, Concentrates, Cartridges, Edibles, Beverages, Wellness).
      * *Significance:* Notable for integrating cannabis into a traditional state agricultural fair framework, promoting normalization and benchmarking against established industries.
    - **8. Various State/Regional Cups (USA):**
      * Numerous localized competitions exist, often focused on product quality within a specific state or region. Examples include the Mid-Mo Canna Cup , Rooster THC Classic (Colorado) , Necann Cup (New England) , New Mexico Growers Cup , Farmers Cup (California) , Errl Cup (Arizona) , and Zalympix (multi-state).
      * *Significance:* Provide platforms for local producers to gain recognition within their specific markets.
* **C. Awards by Specific Focus Areas (Illustrative Examples):**
  + **Cultivation/Production:** High Times Cannabis Cup, Emerald Cup, Spannabis Champions Cup, Business of Cannabis Awards ('Producer of the Year'), ICA ('Best Cultivation'), Cultivation Classic, Cannabis Industry Awards (Netherlands - 'Grower'), The Emjays ('Cultivation Company').
  + **Innovation/Technology:** Business of Cannabis Awards ('Innovator'/'Technology'), ICA ('Excellence in Cultivation & Extraction Tech'), CannaTech Innovation Awards, The Emjays ('Cultivation Tech/Software'), Clio Cannabis ('Product/Service Innovation').
  + **Business Leadership/Company Performance:** Business of Cannabis Awards ('Business Leader'/'European Company'), The Emjays (various business service/company awards), CBA Globes, ICA ('Business Trailblazer'), MJBizCon Women in Cannabis honors.
  + **Advocacy/Social Equity/Community Impact:** The Emjays ('Advocacy Org'), ICA ('Social Justice'/'Advocate'), Clio Cannabis ('Advocacy'/'Social Good'), CA Cannabis Equity Grants , GMR Women in Cannabis Awards, JAINE AID Award.
  + **Marketing/Branding/Design:** Clio Cannabis Awards, The Emjays ('PR/Marketing Agency', 'Packaging Design', 'Marketing Campaign'), CMA Seven Awards.

The diverse landscape indicates a sector valuing recognition across its entire value chain, from cultivation and product excellence to business strategy, technological innovation, marketing creativity, and social responsibility. The association of prominent awards with major industry conferences like MJBizCon and Spannabis likely enhances their visibility and networking value, creating focal points for industry recognition. Furthermore, the clear distinction between product-focused "Cups" and broader business or ancillary service awards underscores the industry's maturation beyond the plant itself to encompass the complex ecosystem supporting it.

**Table 1: Global and Regional Cannabis Industry Awards Overview**

| Award Name | Organizing Body / Key Individuals | Year Founded/Launched | Geographic Scope | Primary Focus Areas | Key Categories (Illustrative) | Official Website (Link if Available) |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Times Cannabis Cup | High Times Magazine | 1988 | Global (Origins), USA (State Competitions) | Product Quality (Flower, Concentrates, Edibles) | Indica/Sativa/Hybrid Flower, Concentrates, Edibles, Vapes, Pre-Rolls | [www.cannabiscup.com](https://www.cannabiscup.com) |
| The Emjays International Cannabis Awards | Farechild Events & MJBizCon | ~2023 (2nd year in 2024) | International | Business, Ancillary Services, Products, Marketing, Advocacy | Business Service, Software, Law Firm, Retail Brand, PR Agency, Cultivation Tech, Product Brands, Advocacy Org | [www.theemjays.com](https://www.theemjays.com) |
| International Cannabis Awards (ICA) | Dani Walton / Planta Sur / BBG Projects | 2024 | USA & Europe | Cultivation, Breeding, Technology, Vapes, Advocacy, Media | Nutrients, Vapes, Lighting, Seed Bank, Cultivation, Social Justice, Advocate, Journalist, Woman of the Year | internationalcannabisawards.com |
| Clio Cannabis Awards | Clio Awards | 2019 | International | Marketing, Advertising, Design, Communication, Advocacy | Brand Design, Digital, Film/Video, PR, Social Good, Innovation, Advocacy | [www.cliocannabisawards.com](https://www.cliocannabisawards.com) (On Hiatus) |
| Cannabis Business Awards (CBA Globes) | Chloe Villano / Clover Leaf | 2011 | International & USA (Regional Events) | Business Professionals, Companies, Advocacy, Hemp | Industry Awards, People's Choice, Top 100 Lists, Hemp MVPs | www.cannabisawards.org |
| Business of Cannabis Awards (Europe) | Business of Cannabis | ~2023 (Winners from 2024) | Europe | European Business Excellence, Innovation, Leadership, Clinical Care, Production | Innovator, Journalist, Clinic, Team, Company, Leader, Producer, Rising Star | [businessofcannabis.com/awards/](https://businessofcannabis.com/awards/) |
| Spannabis Champions Cup | Associated with Spannabis Fair | 2006 | Europe (Spain focus) | Product Quality (Genetics, Flower, Concentrates) | Indica/Sativa Flower, Rosin, Hash, CBD | cannabischampionscup.com (via Spannabis) |
| The Emerald Cup | Tim Blake / Emerald Cup Family | 2003/2004 | USA (California focus) | Organic/Sustainable Cultivation, Product Quality, Innovation | Sungrown/Indoor/Mixed-Light Flower, Concentrates, Edibles, Tinctures, Dispensary, Innovation | theemeraldcup.com |
| Grow Up Awards | Grow Up Conference & Expo | ~2019 | Canada | Canadian Business & Cultivation Excellence | Grower, Producer (Micro/Std), Processor, Lawyer, Environmental Impact, Lighting, Breeding, Publication | [growupconference.com/awards/](https://growupconference.com/awards/) |
| California Cannabis Awards | California State Fair / James Leitz | 2022 | USA (California) | Product Quality (Science & Expert Judged) | Flower (by Chemotype), Pre-Rolls, Concentrates, Carts, Edibles, Beverages, Wellness | [calexpostatefair.com/cannabis-awards/](https://calexpostatefair.com/cannabis-awards/) |

## IV. Criteria and Evaluation

Understanding the specific criteria for eligibility and the methodologies used for evaluation is fundamental to assessing the value, credibility, and focus of different cannabis industry awards. These mechanisms vary significantly, reflecting the diverse aims and audiences of the awards themselves.

* **A. Eligibility Requirements for Nominees and Entries:** Participation in cannabis industry awards is typically governed by specific eligibility rules that define who can enter and what can be submitted.
  + **1. General Business/Individual Eligibility:** A common requirement, particularly in regulated markets, is that participating companies hold valid cannabis licenses and are in good standing with regulatory bodies. For instance, the California Cannabis Awards are explicitly open to all licensed California cultivators and brands , while Colorado's Cannabis Business Pitch Competition targets licensed Social Equity businesses. Some awards may have criteria related to operational history, such as minimum revenue generation periods , or target specific demographics, like the Green Market Report Women in Cannabis Awards or age-based categories like Grow Up's '30 and under' award. Submission guidelines often require formal authorization for nominations.
  + **2. Product Entry Requirements:** Awards focused on cannabis products ("Cups") have detailed submission requirements. Entrants must typically provide specific quantities of their product to facilitate judging and potential lab testing (e.g., 228 units for many High Times categories , 4oz of flower for Emerald Cup ). Packaging often needs to meet state compliance standards and be retail-ready. Mandatory or integrated lab testing is common, especially for flower categories, to analyze cannabinoid and terpene profiles or ensure purity. Entrants must usually categorize their products accurately (e.g., Indica/Sativa/Hybrid, concentrate type), though organizers might reserve the right to reclassify entries.
  + **3. Submission Materials for Non-Product Awards:** Awards recognizing business performance, marketing campaigns, innovation, or advocacy typically require detailed submissions beyond just the product itself. This often includes completed entry forms, narrative descriptions or covering letters outlining achievements , supporting evidence such as case studies, performance data (KPIs, ROI), marketing materials, visuals, videos, testimonials, or project descriptions. Strict formatting guidelines, word limits , and procedures for handling confidential information are often specified. The focus is on providing verifiable evidence of excellence relevant to the specific category.
* **B. Judging Processes and Evaluation Metrics:** The methods used to evaluate entries and select winners are diverse and significantly influence an award's character and credibility.
  + **1. Judging Panel Composition:** Awards rely on different types of judges. Many employ **Expert Panels** composed of industry professionals, veterans, academics, or specialists relevant to the category being judged. The selection often emphasizes expertise and impartiality. Conversely, some awards, particularly product cups, incorporate **Public/Consumer Judging**, often facilitated through "judge kits" purchased by consumers. Some awards use a hybrid model, blending expert panel scores with public votes. **Peer Review** by fellow industry members is another model sometimes used, especially for creative or community-focused awards.
  + **2. Evaluation Metrics for Products:** Product awards typically evaluate entries based on multiple factors. **Sensory Analysis** (appearance, aroma, taste, flavor, texture) is crucial. **Effects** (potency, onset time, quality of experience, efficacy for intended use) are also key considerations. Increasingly, **Lab Testing Results** play a significant role, providing objective data on cannabinoid and terpene profiles, purity, and sometimes burn quality. These quantitative results can directly influence scores or determine winners in specific chemotype categories. For non-inhalable products, **Packaging and Labeling** (accuracy, appeal, compliance) may also be judged.
  + **3. Evaluation Metrics for Business, Marketing, Innovation, Advocacy:** For non-product awards, evaluation focuses on different dimensions. **Achievement and Impact** are central, assessed through demonstrated success, key accomplishments, quantifiable results (KPIs, ROI), market impact, or societal benefit. **Innovation and Creativity** are judged based on originality, boldness, forward-thinking solutions, and uniqueness. **Strategy and Execution** evaluate the clarity of vision, strategic planning, and the quality and effectiveness of implementation. **Compliance and Ethics** are increasingly important, considering adherence to regulations, social responsibility efforts, and sustainability practices. Some awards also include a more subjective assessment of **Overall "WOW" Factor** or the work's potential to propel the industry forward.
  + **4. Judging Process Mechanics:** The process typically involves multiple stages. An initial **Nomination** phase (which can be public or internal) is often followed by **Shortlisting**, where judges narrow down the field. Various **Scoring Systems** are used, ranging from detailed point scales to qualitative assessments against defined criteria. **Blind Judging**, where judges are unaware of the brand or producer, is often employed in product competitions to minimize bias. **Transparency** is a key concern, with reputable awards often publishing criteria, identifying judges (where appropriate), and having clear procedures for **Judge Recusal** in cases of conflict of interest. The emphasis is generally on fairness and credibility.
* **C. Selection Committees:** The composition of judging panels and selection committees is critical. Identifying the individuals involved (e.g., judges listed for Business of Cannabis Awards or Clio Cannabis ) and understanding their backgrounds and affiliations provides insight into the perspectives and expertise guiding the award decisions.

The credibility and perceived value of any cannabis industry award are inextricably linked to the rigor and transparency of its evaluation process. Awards that utilize clearly defined, relevant criteria, employ knowledgeable and unbiased judges (whether experts or systematically guided consumers), and maintain transparent procedures tend to command greater respect. A detailed analysis comparing these elements across awards is essential for discerning which accolades truly signify excellence versus those that might be more influenced by factors other than merit. The trend towards incorporating public judging introduces a fascinating dynamic, potentially increasing consumer engagement and providing valuable market feedback for brands, but also potentially shifting the focus from expert-validated quality to broader consumer appeal, which may alter the award's prestige in the eyes of industry connoisseurs versus the general public.

**Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Judging Methodologies for Key Cannabis Awards**

| Award Name | Primary Focus | Key Eligibility Criteria (Summary) | Judging Panel Composition | Core Evaluation Metrics | Transparency Features |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Times Cannabis Cup | Product Quality | Licensed producers (where applicable), specific product quantities & formats | Expert Panel (Historically) / Public Consumer Judges (People's Choice) | Sensory (Aroma, Taste, Visual), Effects, Burnability, Lab Data (Quantitative Score) | Judging Portal for consumers, published categories |
| The Emjays Int'l Cannabis Awards | Business, Ancillary, Product | Public nomination, finalists selected | Blended: Public Vote + Industry Expert Panel | Consumer sentiment, reputation, online presence, innovation, leadership (varies by category) | Public voting platform with verification, judge panel details sometimes shared |
| International Cannabis Awards (ICA) | Cultivation, Tech, Advocacy, Media | Public nomination & voting phases | Public Voting (determines winners from shortlist) | Based on public perception/votes for shortlisted nominees (criteria for shortlisting not detailed) | Two-phase process described, online voting platform |
| Clio Cannabis Awards (Pre-Hiatus) | Marketing, Design, Communication | Creative work within eligibility period, specific media type requirements | International Panels of Advertising/Marketing Professionals | Creativity, Innovation, Execution, Impact, Propelling Industry Forward | Published Juries, Defined Criteria, Judge Recusal Policy |
| Business of Cannabis Awards (Europe) | European Business & Innovation | Submission form, covering letter, evidence of excellence | Independent Panel of Industry Experts | Achievements, Innovation, Impact, Leadership, Quality (based on submitted evidence) | Published Judges, Defined Categories, Judge Recusal Policy |
| Spannabis Champions Cup | Product Quality (Genetics) | Likely requires association with Spannabis fair, product samples | VIP Judges (Experts) | Primarily Sensory (Presence, Smell, Taste), Genetics/Breeding focus | Emphasis on judge expertise, concerns about transparency sometimes raised |
| The Emerald Cup | Organic Cultivation, Product Qual. | Licensed CA producers, specific product quantities, emphasis on sustainable practices | Expert Judges & Lab Testing (Flower), Budist Panel (Products/Top Flower) | Lab Data (Cannabinoids, Terpenes), Sensory Analysis, Sustainability factors | Partnership with SC Labs, Budist evaluation method published |
| California Cannabis Awards | Product Quality (CA Market) | Licensed CA cultivators/brands, specific product quantities | Lab Testing (SC Labs) & Expert Human Judging (Budist) | Lab Data (Chemotypes for Flower), 100-point Budist Scale (Products & Top Flower) | Published testing partner, evaluation methods detailed in guide |

## V. Trends and Impact Analysis

Cannabis industry awards serve as more than mere acknowledgments; they function as influential mechanisms that shape industry standards, bolster company reputations, and reflect or even drive market trends. Analyzing this impact provides crucial context for understanding their strategic importance.

* **A. Influence on Industry Standards and Best Practices:** Awards play a significant role in defining and promoting excellence within the cannabis sector. By recognizing superior performance in areas like cultivation, product development, and technology, they implicitly set benchmarks that others may strive to meet. Awards focused on specific cultivation techniques or product quality standards, such as The Emerald Cup's emphasis on organic and sustainable methods or the Cultivation Classic's Regenerative Cannabis Farm Award , directly encourage the adoption of these practices. Similarly, accolades for innovation in areas like extraction technology or cultivation software incentivize technological advancement across the industry. The increasing presence of awards dedicated to sustainability , social equity , and ethical conduct signals a broadening definition of "best practices" beyond product efficacy or profitability, potentially pushing companies towards more responsible operations to gain recognition and legitimacy. The International Cannabis Awards explicitly aim to honor "trailblazers who are setting new standards" , highlighting the proactive role awards can play in elevating industry norms.
* **B. Impact on Company Reputation and Market Position:** For individual companies, winning a cannabis industry award can yield substantial benefits, acting as a potent tool for brand building and market positioning. Recognition serves as third-party validation, significantly enhancing **brand awareness and reputation** among consumers, peers, investors, and potential partners. This validation cultivates **Expertise, Authority, and Trust (EAT)**, making stakeholders more confident in the company's offerings and operations. Award wins provide powerful **marketing and public relations leverage**; companies frequently showcase award logos on packaging and websites, issue press releases, and highlight wins in social media campaigns to reinforce credibility and attract attention. This increased visibility and trust can lead to **market differentiation** in a crowded field , potentially driving sales and customer loyalty. Prestigious awards, like the High Times Cannabis Cup, have historically been credited with transforming unknown strains into widely recognized names. Furthermore, external recognition can boost **internal employee morale** and aid in **talent acquisition**, signaling a successful and valued organization. Mainstream awards, like the Stevie Awards won by Village Farms , offer broader legitimacy beyond the cannabis niche.
* **C. Influence on Broader Market Trends:** Collectively, the awards landscape can reflect and influence wider market dynamics. The categories that gain prominence and the types of products or companies that consistently win can indicate **evolving consumer preferences** – for instance, a rise in awards for infused beverages might mirror growing consumer interest in that category. The very existence and increasing professionalism of cannabis awards contribute to the **legitimization and normalization** of the industry, particularly when established mainstream award bodies like Clio participate or when cannabis is judged alongside traditional products like wine or cheese at state fairs. Awards focused on ancillary sectors – technology, software, legal, marketing – stimulate innovation and excellence in the crucial support systems that enable the industry's growth and sophistication. Finally, awards recognizing advocacy, social equity, and policy reform efforts highlight the industry's ongoing engagement with its complex legal and social context, potentially influencing public perception and policy discourse.

Awards function proactively, not just reactively. By highlighting and rewarding certain attributes – whether it's organic cultivation , technological breakthroughs , or social impact – they signal to the rest of the industry what constitutes valued achievement. This incentivizes emulation and can steer industry development in specific directions. The growing specialization observed in award categories (e.g., specific software types , women leaders , targeted marketing campaigns ) further suggests an industry that is maturing, developing distinct areas of expertise, and seeking nuanced recognition for contributions across its diverse segments. However, it is crucial to recognize that the impact and prestige of awards are not uniform. Factors such as the awarding body's reputation, the transparency and rigor of the judging process, and the award's visibility heavily influence its perceived value and actual impact.

**Table 3: Matrix of Award Impact Areas (Illustrative Examples)**

| Award Name | Primary Impact on Company Reputation | Observed Influence on Industry Standards | Leverage for Marketing/PR | Contribution to Market Trends |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| High Times Cannabis Cup | High (especially historically) | Setting benchmarks for strain quality & potency | High (Winners heavily promote Cup wins, strain branding) | Historically drove strain popularity; reflects product category trends (flower, vapes, etc.) |
| The Emjays Int'l Cannabis Awards | High (due to MJBizCon association) | Recognizes excellence in ancillary services, promoting standards there | High (Leveraged via MJBizCon platform & event prestige) | Highlights importance of ancillary sectors; reflects tech & business service trends |
| International Cannabis Awards (ICA) | Medium-High (Growing) | Aims to set global standards & promote innovation | Medium-High (Leverages Spannabis association, global scope) | Fosters international collaboration; reflects tech & cultivation trends across US/EU |
| Clio Cannabis Awards | High (Leverages Clio prestige) | Elevates creative & marketing standards towards mainstream levels | High (Significant validation for marketing/creative teams) | Promotes sophisticated branding & marketing; legitimizes industry creatively |
| Business of Cannabis Awards (Europe) | High (within European market) | Sets benchmarks for European business leadership & innovation | High (Networking value, targets senior executives) | Reflects key business & innovation trends specific to the European market |
| The Emerald Cup | High (especially in CA craft market) | Strongly promotes organic/sustainable cultivation standards | High (Prestigious among conscious consumers & craft brands) | Drives focus on sustainable farming & terpene profiles; reflects craft market values |
| California Cannabis Awards | Medium-High (within CA) | Benchmarks cannabis alongside traditional agriculture; uses science testing | Medium-High (State Fair platform offers mainstream exposure) | Promotes normalization; highlights chemotype importance based on testing |

## VI. Data Organization

A systematic and robust approach to data organization is essential for managing the large volume of information collected during this research and facilitating effective analysis and reporting. The following structure and tools are proposed:

* **A. Centralized Database Development:**
  + A relational database (e.g., using Microsoft Access, PostgreSQL) or a well-structured set of linked spreadsheets (e.g., Google Sheets, Excel, Airtable) will serve as the central repository for structured data on each identified award. This follows best practices for organizing diverse data points for easy querying and comparison.
  + Key data fields will include, but are not limited to: Award ID, Award Name, Organizing Body, Year Founded, Geographic Scope, Official Website, Contact Info, Award Frequency, Ceremony Timing, Categories List (potentially linked), Detailed Eligibility Criteria, Judging Process Description, Judge Composition/Known Judges, Evaluation Metrics, Entry Fees, Historical Winner Data (linked), Qualitative Assessment of Prestige, Notes on Impact/Influence (with source links). Examples of award databases include FINRA's arbitration awards database and the IFRS Integrated Reporting database , demonstrating the utility of such structures.
* **B. Document Management System:**
  + A dedicated cloud storage solution (e.g., Google Drive, SharePoint) will be used to house all unstructured and semi-structured documents collected. This includes archived web pages, downloaded PDFs of rules and guidelines , press releases, news articles, interview transcripts/notes, and related images or marketing collateral.
  + A strict, logical folder structure and consistent file naming conventions will be implemented to ensure efficient retrieval. For example: /[Award Name]/[Year]/SourceType\_FileName.ext (e.g., /EmeraldCup/2024/Rules\_EC24\_Competition\_Guide.pdf). This systematic approach prevents information silos and facilitates quick access during analysis and writing.
  + Version control will be maintained for the central database and key analytical documents to track revisions and prevent accidental data loss.
* **C. Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) Software:**
  + If expert interviews are conducted, specialized QDA software such as NVivo, ATLAS.ti, or MAXQDA will be utilized. These tools are designed for systematically coding, analyzing, and identifying themes, patterns, and sentiments within large volumes of textual data (interview transcripts, extensive articles). This is crucial for extracting nuanced insights about perceived award prestige, judging fairness, impact narratives, and emerging trends that may not be apparent from structured data alone.
* **D. Presentation of Findings:**
  + The primary output will be a **Comprehensive Research Report**, structured according to this plan, synthesizing all findings.
  + **Summary Reports/Fact Sheets** will be created for key awards or award types, providing easily digestible overviews.
  + **Data Visualizations** will be employed where appropriate using charting tools. Potential visualizations include timelines mapping the establishment of different awards, geographic maps showing award density, bar charts comparing the focus areas of awards (e.g., % product vs. % business), and comparative tables summarizing judging methodologies (as included in this plan). An **Interactive Dashboard** (using tools like Tableau or Power BI) could be developed as a premium deliverable, allowing users to filter and explore the award data dynamically.
  + **Presentation Decks** will be prepared to communicate key findings effectively to stakeholders, using clear visuals and concise language, drawing on best practices for research presentations.

This multi-tool approach ensures that both quantitative and qualitative data are managed appropriately. The structured database facilitates comparative analysis, while the document management system preserves source materials, and QDA software enables deep analysis of textual data. This organized system not only supports the current research project but also establishes a valuable, potentially updatable resource for ongoing monitoring of the dynamic cannabis awards landscape.

## VII. Timeline and Resources

A structured timeline and clear identification of required resources are necessary for the successful execution of this comprehensive research plan. The following outlines a projected schedule and resource requirements.

* **A. Proposed Timeline (Estimated 16-20 Weeks):** This timeline accommodates the depth required for an expert-level analysis, including potential expert interviews. Adjustments may be needed based on resource availability and the final scope of qualitative data gathering. The phased approach mirrors standard research project management practices.
  + **Phase 1: Project Initiation & Foundational Research (Weeks 1-4)**
    - *Week 1:* Finalize research protocol, data templates, initial award list. *Deliverable:* Finalized Research Protocol.
    - *Weeks 2-4:* Conduct broad desk research (official websites, key publications ), populate database with initial findings, identify potential interviewees. *Deliverable:* Partially populated database, interviewee list.
  + **Phase 2: In-Depth Data Collection & Analysis (Weeks 5-12)**
    - *Weeks 5-8:* Extract detailed data for key awards (eligibility, judging ), categorize all awards, conduct academic/market research searches , initiate interview scheduling. *Deliverable:* Detailed award profiles, categorized award list.
    - *Weeks 9-12:* Conduct expert interviews (if pursued), transcribe and begin QDA analysis , analyze historical trends, begin impact assessment. *Deliverable:* Interview findings (initial), draft trend analysis, preliminary impact notes.
  + **Phase 3: Synthesis, Report Writing & Review (Weeks 13-18)**
    - *Weeks 13-16:* Synthesize all findings, draft the full research report integrating analysis and insights, develop tables and charts. *Deliverable:* First full draft report.
    - *Weeks 17-18:* Internal review, incorporate revisions, final proofreading and formatting. *Deliverable:* Final Research Report.
  + **Phase 4: Dissemination (Optional) (Weeks 19-20)**
    - Prepare presentation deck and executive summary. *Deliverable:* Presentation materials.
* **B. Required Resources:**
  + **1. Personnel:**
    - *Lead Industry Analyst (1 FTE):* Oversees project, conducts high-level analysis and interviews, writes final report.
    - *Research Assistant(s) (1-2 Part-Time or 1 FTE):* Executes data collection, database management, transcription, initial data organization.
  + **2. Tools & Software:**
    - *Standard Office Suite* (Word processing, Spreadsheets).
    - *Reliable Internet Access*.
    - *Potential Subscriptions:* Access to premium content on industry news sites or academic/market research databases may be required for comprehensive coverage.
    - *QDA Software:* License for NVivo, ATLAS.ti, or similar if interviews are conducted (Estimated cost: $500-$1500).
    - *Data Visualization Software (Optional):* Tools like Tableau or Power BI for advanced visualizations/dashboards.
  + **3. Access & Information:**
    - Publicly available information on award websites and publications.
    - Cooperation from award organizers and industry experts for interviews (if pursued).
  + **4. Budgetary Considerations:**
    - Personnel costs (primary driver).
    - Software license fees.
    - Potential costs for acquiring specific paywalled reports or data.
    - Transcription service costs (if outsourced).

This timeline provides a structured framework, acknowledging the significant effort required for thorough data collection from diverse sources and in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis. The allocation of resources, particularly personnel time, is critical. While basic office tools are sufficient for initial data gathering, investing in specialized tools like QDA software is recommended to achieve the depth of analysis expected in an expert-level report, particularly for interpreting qualitative data from interviews or extensive textual analysis.

## VIII. Conclusion

This research plan outlines a systematic and comprehensive approach to identifying and analyzing the major awards and honors within the cannabis industry. By defining clear objectives focused on mapping the landscape, dissecting evaluation mechanisms, assessing impact, and identifying trends, the plan provides a roadmap for generating valuable strategic insights. The proposed mixed-methodology, combining extensive desk research across official sources, industry publications, and academic databases with potential expert interviews, ensures both breadth and depth of data collection.

The identification and categorization of key awards—globally, regionally, and by focus area—will create a clear picture of the current recognition ecosystem. Critically analyzing eligibility criteria and judging processes is essential for evaluating the credibility and significance of each award. Furthermore, the analysis of trends and impact will illuminate how these awards influence company reputations, industry standards, and market dynamics, moving beyond simple acknowledgment to understand their strategic role.

Effective data organization through a centralized database, document management system, and appropriate analytical tools will be crucial for managing the complexity of the information gathered and enabling robust analysis. The proposed timeline and resource allocation provide a realistic framework for executing this expert-level research project.

Upon completion, this research will yield a detailed understanding of the cannabis awards landscape, providing stakeholders—including businesses, investors, marketers, and industry observers—with the knowledge needed to navigate and leverage these recognition systems effectively. The findings will shed light on the perceived value of different awards, the practices they incentivize, and their overall contribution to the maturation and legitimization of the global cannabis industry.

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