

December 19, 2024

MEMO TO: David Raatz, Director  
Office of Council Services

F R O M: Ellen McKinley, Legislative Analyst *EBM*

SUBJECT: **CONFERENCE: “A CATALYST FOR CHANGE: INDIGENOUS INNOVATION AT UH”** (PAF 23-021(45))

On November 8, 2024, I attended a conference titled “A Catalyst for Change: Indigenous Innovation at UH” at the Hawai‘i Convention Center. The conference was intended to showcase the functions of the Office of Indigenous Knowledge and Innovation at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, the only school of indigenous knowledge in the United States.

Indigenous knowledge offers helpful solutions, seen through a cultural lens, valuing an ‘āina-centric focus, operating transparently, and recognizing the community as experts.

This report summarizes conference sessions.

### **“Restoring Regional Health Through Indigenous Practices”**

Panel members discussed indigenous innovations in health care, policy solutions, and connecting people to services. Panelists asserted that many health disparities for Kānaka Ma’oli are because of cultural loss. Pilina (connection) and ancestral practices such as hula, oli, ho‘oponopono, lomilomi, and ‘ōlelo Hawai‘i can restore health and reduce the incidence of suicides and post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms.

Intergenerational trauma from historical and modern injustices, lack of infrastructure for traditional and cultural practices, limited access to land, and inadequate compensation for practitioners create barriers.

Suggestions for responding to the next disaster include:

- allowing the community to lead recovery efforts,
- deploying cultural practitioners side-by-side with the federal agencies,

- understanding it is culturally insensitive to ban music in the hotels where survivors must be housed, and
- providing traditional cultural practitioners with other counselors to aid survivors. It is important to ensure stable State funding, insurance reimbursement, and job training.

### **“Pewa: Weaving Ancestral and Contemporary Technologies: Indigenous Data Hubs”**

Panel members shared how they used technology to harness data, created a framework for tech design, and used it in models to allow viewers to visualize climate change impacts. The technology can be influential for policy decisions.

### **“Keynote: Trajectory of Indigenous Innovation”**

Nikora Ngaporo is the CEO and founder of Nikora Ngaporo Motion Design and Young Animators in Aotearoa (New Zealand). He started the Young Animators’ 16-week program to teach middle- and high-school students to preserve their cultural history through storytelling, creating their own content. Using artificial intelligence and their own phones, they build animation skills and create job opportunities for themselves in the film industry.

### **“Integrating Indigenous Knowledge and Social Innovation for an Abundant Future, a Showcase”**

This panel consisted of representatives of:

- Purple Mai‘a Foundation, teaching digital technology skills;
- Ulu A‘e Learning Center, offering culture and place-based education for keiki and families;
- MA‘O Organic Farms, helping youth experience regenerative connection with ‘āina; and

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- Edith Kanaka‘ole Foundation/Sig Zane Designs, providing cultural and ancestral knowledge education and Hawaiian clothing.

Some of the ideas expressed include establishing kānaka housing as a fundamental right, choosing the right kumu to gain knowledge, seeking the opinions from kūpuna in the community first, and using Hawaiian knowledge respectfully, allowing non-native allies to serve as support. “If you have two feet on this ‘āina, you have kuleana to mālama it.”

### **“Growing Indigenous Innovation Partnerships and Initiatives”**

Suzanne Case is the Director of the University of Hawai‘i’s new Office of Land and Ocean Conservation Futures. The office integrates Hawaiian culture into conservation and ‘āina-based learning, creating a holistic view.

Thank you for the opportunity to attend this conference. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me at ext. 7661.

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cc: Deputy Director of Council Services