

NATIONAL CAPACD

Weaving Thriving Communities: Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations and the power of arts, identity, and relationships

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Summary

Arts and culture are vital in building community capacity among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations. Recognizing that Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander groups possess unique histories, languages, and traditions that are often obscured by aggregation with the larger Asian American community, this report focuses on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations. This report includes survey data from 16 organizations and five talanoa/talkstory sessions with organizations to gather distinct perspectives about how arts and culture organizations build thriving communities.

Arts and culture are fundamentally interwoven with the identity and operations of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations—they are not separate programs but central to these organization's mission, identity, and daily work. From this foundation, organizations described the importance of arts and cultural practice for: Cultivating community and individual identity; Tauhi vā: nurturing the space between; and Mana to advocate for Pasefika people. These interdependent and self-reinforcing aspects of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations create thriving communities and perpetuate culture.

Despite their strengths, these organizations face significant challenges: a pervasive lack of funding and a reluctance from external systems to recognize the essential, transformative value of their work. This is compounded by Western systems incapable of understanding the value and complexity of arts and culture in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, which hinders access to necessary resources.

Across these findings, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations use arts and culture to address root causes of disconnection and inequity, including colonization, displacement, cultural and linguistic disruption, chronic underfunding, lack of physical space, data invisibility, and Western systems that fail to recognize Indigenous and Pacific ways of knowing. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations are rooted in their kuleana or responsibility and privilege to do the work to care for the community today and into the future. Understanding these organizations, therefore, requires attention to the values that guide them, which recognize forms of impact beyond conventional Western metrics of organizational success. Supporting and learning from this work calls for approaches that can reflect its holistic nature—where arts, culture, and community well-being are inseparable.



Photo credit: Pu'uhonua Society - Hō'eu Mana

Overview

This report is the culmination of a research project led by the National Coalition of Asian Pacific Community Development (National CAPACD). National CAPACD is a coalition, intermediary, and the country's leading organization in advancing community development and advocating against gentrification and displacement of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. The research examines how community arts initiatives expand the community's capacity to address socioeconomic and cultural well-being and historical and structural disparities facing the Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities. The team of dedicated community-engaged researchers included Dr. Jeffrey Hou (National University of Singapore, formerly of University of Washington), Dr. Diane Wong (Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey), and Dr. Jonathan Jae-an Crisman (University of Arizona), along with Dr. Lexie Jackson and Kanoe Enos of 'A'ali'i Alliance.

This report highlights the role of arts and cultural practices in building organizational capacity among Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations in the United States. This report focuses specifically on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities because they represent distinct populations with unique histories of colonization, migration, displacement, and relationships with the United States government. Centering these stories underscores the importance of disaggregating racial and ethnic data, narratives, and lived experiences from the broader Asian American and Pacific Islander category. Without disaggregation, the unique histories, perspectives, needs, and strengths of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities are often obscured.

This focus is especially important because histories of migration and colonization—including the disruption, loss, and ongoing revitalization of cultural practices and ancestral languages—shape the work, priorities, and capacity-building needs of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations. While this report is grounded in partnership with organizations that also support broader Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander communities, it is important to recognize that there are distinct histories and experiences within the broader Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander community that require nuanced and culturally responsive approaches. At the same time, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities are not monolithic. Their stories reveal shared experiences of displacement and resilience, while also reflecting distinct cultural contexts, ancestral relationships, and community priorities.

Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community-based organizations play a vital role in preserving culture and building community resilience. As Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are composed of smaller communities that have been deeply impacted by colonization, as well as loss of cultural practices and language, perpetuating culture is particularly important to ensure cultural practices, language, and values live into future generations. Data from a survey and talanoa/talkstory sessions with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations help to explain how Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander arts and cultural organizations build thriving communities.

The design of this report is meant to represent the idea of weaving together the shared values, impact, and challenges of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations. The weaving pattern along the border recognizes weaving as a traditional practice across Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. The triangles alongside the woven pattern symbolize movement, progress, and the idea of forward momentum. Images included are from organizations that have contributed to this report.



Photo credit: Hawaiian Community Assets

Methods Used

An online survey assessing the perceived impacts of arts-based initiatives on community capacity was developed as part of a larger research project that included perspectives of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander organizations. The survey was distributed to the National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development's (National CAPACD) Creative Placemaking Program participants, all National CAPACD member organizations, and a national list of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander-serving organizations. Survey data were collected from May 1, 2024 through August 14, 2024. Of the 157 responses, researchers identified and included 21 responses from 16 organizations that primarily serve the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community. Survey data from organizations that do not primarily serve the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community are not included in these analyses.

Alongside the survey data, researchers held five talanoa/talkstory sessions with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations to learn more about their organizations, programs, and how arts and culture build capacity within their communities. Transcripts of each session were reviewed by the authors and coded using reflexive thematic analysis. Codes were synthesized into themes explaining how Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander arts and culture organizations build thriving communities. Survey and talanoa/talkstory data are merged together in this report to describe how arts and culture build capacity within Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations in the United States.

Because this work includes communities with many distinct languages, researchers did not include Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander terms in the themes or findings unless those terms were used by participants themselves. When cultural practices or non-English language were described by participants, researchers verified their use with participants to ensure they were represented appropriately. This approach reflects the researchers awareness of our positionality as a research team, including the limits of language knowledge, and recognizes that some Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander languages have been more widely documented, maintained, or revitalized than others as a result of different histories of colonization, migration, and cultural disruption.

Findings

Arts, culture, and family at the core of the organizational identity

For Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities, arts and culture are inseparable from everyday life. They are not distinct practices, but part of how people live, form the foundation for relating to others, and help to transmit knowledge and values across generations. For organizations serving these communities, arts and culture are woven throughout all programming, rather than treated as distinct categories or standalone programs. As a result, arts and culture are difficult to define in isolation. Instead, participants understand arts and culture as embedded in how Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander communities live, relate, teach, and express identity.



Photo credit: SoCal Pacific Islander Community Response Team (SoCal PICRT)

“don't have, like, is the word Art a word in our culture? Or is it just all culture? They don't have a word for nature because nature is the world, you know?” - JP / Jason Pereira, Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum (PIEAM)

“Culture and arts are woven into everything we do as Pasefika peoples.” - Leila Tamale, Pacific Islander Community Partnership (PICP)

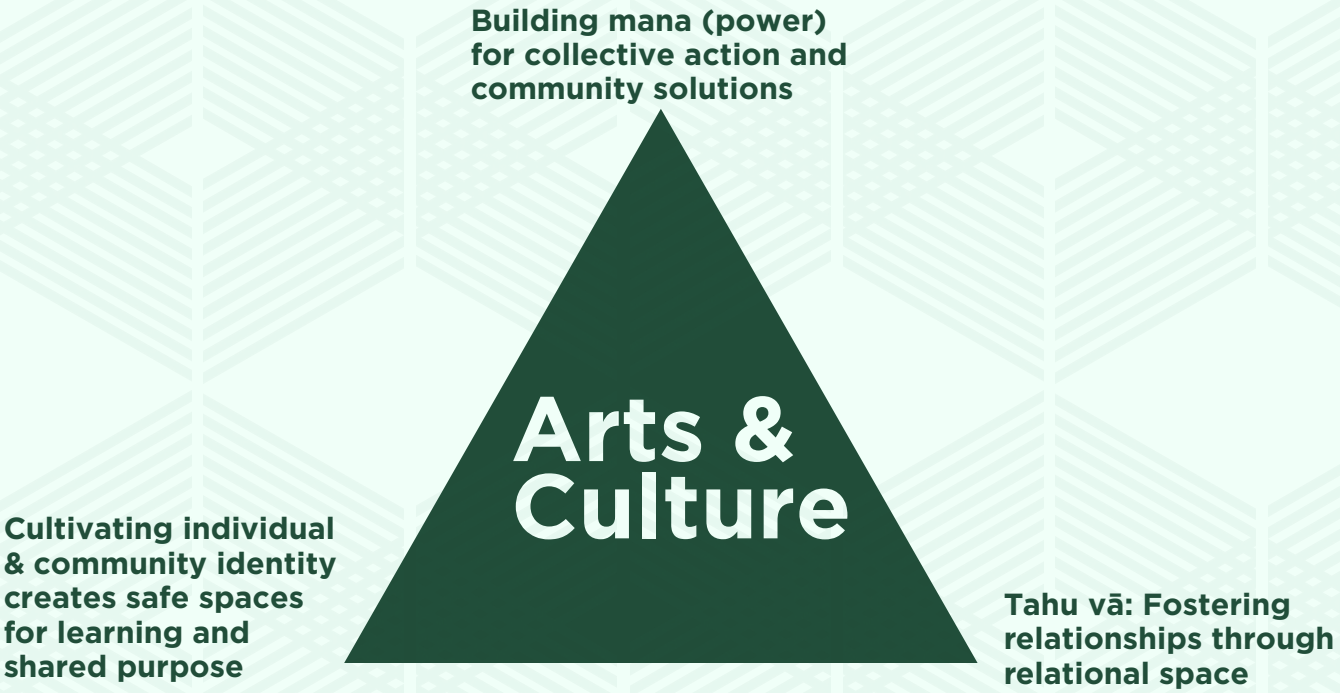
It’s not just arts and culture. It’s simply us being who we are.” - Reno Anoa’i, PICP

This understanding extended beyond programming to identity itself. Participants described culture not as something people practice at specific moments, but as inseparable from who they are. Culture is lived and embodied. It shapes how people see themselves, how they relate to others, and how they move through the world, whether or not it is explicitly named as "cultural." In this way, identity is not formed apart from culture, but through it. For example:

> **"My dad is who he is, and has never been able to take the islander out of himself, but he wouldn't have - it was never articulated for us that it was cultural." - Melodie Turori, PIEAM**

Similarly, a participant noted that the term "artist" was often used out of necessity as there was no equivalent for what artists do in Pacific Islander languages. However, the term "artist" did not fully capture the nature of the role in Pacific Islander society. Rather than describing a distinct profession or individual identity, their work was understood as part of a broader cultural and relational responsibility. To explain their identity, one "artist" described themselves as **"a storyteller and culture bearer in the shape of an artist." - JP / Jason Pereira, PIEAM**

At the organizational level, perpetuation of arts and culture are central to the mission and the goals of the organization. For example, mission statements for each organization included in this report center the perpetuation of art and/or culture. This is also reflected in the survey data, with **79% of respondents indicating that arts and culture initiatives have a significant impact on the opportunity to collect, share, and/or preserve local history.** While each organization is unique in how they serve or work with the community, arts and cultural practices are fundamentally integrated within each organization and the individuals involved; they are not distinct concepts, but rather a "fine tapestry" woven into all aspects of life.



Across conversations, a framework emerged describing how Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations use arts and culture at the core of programming to build thriving communities. At the center of this framework sits arts and culture, which as shown above, serves as a programmatic core. From this center, organizations described three interconnected and reinforcing dimensions of their work that stem from arts and culture at the core: 1) Cultivating individual and community identity; 2) Tauhi vā (nurturing the space between): Fostering relationships through relational space; and 3) Building mana (power) for collective action and community solutions. Across organizations, these three interdependent dimensions create conditions for communities to build capacity to thrive and for culture to be sustained and transmitted into the future. For Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations, thriving communities are those in which arts and culture are embedded in everyday life, sustained within families and across generations. In this vision, organizations act as catalysts and stewards until communities are resourced and capable to carry these practices into the future.

Findings

Cultivating individual and community identity creates safe spaces for learning and shared purpose

According to interview participants, organizations cultivate identity by creating spaces for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander individuals and families to come together around arts and cultural practices. These programs respond to root causes created by colonization, migration, and assimilation, including disrupted access to language, cultural practice, genealogy, and community spaces. Rather than treating identity as an individual issue, organizations create collective spaces where community members can reconnect to histories, relationships, and cultural responsibilities that have been interrupted. These spaces begin to look and feel like villages: small groups where individuals can learn and share to build connections and a sense of belonging. For many Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander people living in the diaspora, these spaces are especially significant given how small of a minority they are compared to other ethnic groups. These spaces offer opportunities to reconnect with culture, build relationships, and affirm identity in environments where it may otherwise feel fragmented or isolated. In doing so, these spaces become not only sites of cultural learning, but also spaces for healing and shared purpose. As one participant shared:

> **"I was really struck by how many people said the most important thing for them was simply gathering together and how healing it was for them. So many people were going through pretty difficult transitions in their life when they found our lauhala weaving program, and just to be able to gather with the same people, to talk story, and to heal through weaving was significant."**
>
> **– Lehuanani DeFranco, Pu'uhonua Society**

Organizations create spaces where Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander individuals and families can develop a sense of belonging and reconnect to cultural practices, particularly for those living far from their ancestral homelands. These spaces do more than preserve culture; these spaces help individuals navigate what it means to live in both worlds. By being in community, program participants are able to name shared experiences, reconnect with their genealogy, and find pathways to stay involved while living in a larger social context that does not reflect or affirm who they are. As one participant shared:

“Once we created safe spaces for Pasefika-Pacific Islander families, we were able to truly understand the needs of our community. One of the biggest needs we heard from youth and parents was cultural loss — how to exist in the diaspora, remain connected to their roots, and still find their identity.” - Reno Anoa’i, PICP

Cultural practices also serve as a means of connecting individuals to their histories, their ancestors, and their responsibilities to learn how to move forward. Through culture and arts, participants engage with knowledge that has been carried across generations, allowing them to understand where they come from and how their histories continue to shape their lives. In this way, culture functions not only as preservation, but as an active guide offering wisdom, values, innovation, and protocols that inform how to move through the world. These practices reconnect people not only to their stories, but to lineage, land, and ways of being that extend beyond the present moment. As one participant shared:

“Our arts and culture serve as an archive of our history, stories, and ancestral knowledge. Every movement carries meaning, connection, and purpose beyond performance.”
- Reno Anoa’i, PICP

The impact of arts and culture initiatives on belonging was evident in the survey data, with 93% of survey respondents identifying arts and culture initiatives as significant in generating a sense of belonging in their community. This sense of belonging is not created through programming alone, but is often rooted in families and intergenerational leadership. Many organizations that participated in the talanoa/talkstory sessions are led by multiple family members or inherited from prior generations of family members, reflecting a model of community-building that is deeply relational and grounded in responsibility to both family and community. In this way, arts and culture work is not separate from everyday life, but grows out of family systems that sustain identity and connection over time.



Photo credit: Mariquita "Micki" Davis

Photo credit: Melodie Turori



The importance of family lineage and community leadership is evident in the origin story of one organization in which the impact of intergenerational leadership was felt after the passing of a beloved elder:

“They (Mama Dee and Papa Senita) were like, okay, we have to preserve our own culture. Like the black community leading in the forefront; the Latino community, they're just slowly migrating there. There was a huge Asian community for farming and things of that sort in the town. So that's where all of this was - this movement was happening between the 70s and the 90s where the city was developing. Leaders were emerging. And so my mom was running with the pioneers of the town. She was neck and neck, learning how to community organize, how to mobilize the movement...Everything started in my home. It started off as a reading program to help young Pacific Islander students, migrating families for who English was a second language. And she would bring in tutors from Stanford, volunteers from the local community. And then that just grew into cleaning the streets from drug dealers and just all of the other multi-layers of priorities just started...when my mom passed away, her funeral was over 2,000 people. Those are the people that she has impacted, and it was a one week-long life celebration.”

-Tiffany Hautau, ‘Anamatangi

As family-based organizations, the work of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations interviewed for this project extends beyond programming. The work is deeply personal and reflects who the people are and their responsibilities to current and future generations. Rather than being separate from their lives, the work of these organizations is an extension of self carried forward through generations of families and with culture at the core. As one participant shared:

"We hope this work continues across generations because it is an extension of who we are — not just a program."

- Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP

In addition to being led by families, it is important to emphasize that Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander programs serve the entire family, regardless of who the programs are specifically designed to impact. This whole family approach makes intergenerational transmission of culture and knowledge possible, but also ensures support is scaffolded across generations. As several participants shared:

"While many of our programs are youth-focused, the entire family becomes involved. That intergenerational engagement has remained the spirit of every project we've built."

- Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP

"Our moms, grandmothers, pastors, and families all showed up for our youth — cooking meals, driving vans, and supporting every part of the journey."

- Reno Anoa'i, PICP

Photo credit: Pu'uhonua Society - Aupuni



In Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations, arts and culture serve as a foundation for cultivating connections and strengthening relationships. By engaging entire families and creating spaces for connection, these organizations support the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, values, and cultural practice. Individuals and families in these communities find places to grow a sense of who they are and support to navigate the world around them. In the context of cultural loss and marginalization, this work is especially critical. These organizations not only reconnect individuals to culture, but also restore connections to sources of healing and a collective sense of purpose. In doing so, they help ensure that culture is not only preserved, but lived, used to ground people in purpose, and carried forward to sustain future communities.

Findings

Tauhi vā: fostering relationships through relational space

Participants described tauhi vā as a guiding principle that emphasizes the importance of relationships and the intentional care of the space between relationships. As one participant explained:

> **"Tauhi vā in our culture is the relationships, the space that you keep and move about, and how you foster those relationships. And it starts with yourself." -Tiffany Hautau, 'Anamatangi**

More than connections between people, tauhi vā acknowledges the relational space between people and the ongoing practice of nurturing that space. Arts and cultural practices support the work of nurturing the space between by creating opportunities for connection and shared experience. This is especially significant for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities navigating diaspora or marginalization where maintaining connection to culture requires intentional effort. By cultivating these relational spaces, organizations create conditions for people to reconnect, not only with each other, but with their histories, identities, and purpose. In this way, tauhi vā is not only about maintaining relationships, but also about restoring and strengthening the connections that sustain community.

“And I think there's something really important about the work of art and artists in helping our people make the transition to being here and for this to become home because like the academic word that everyone likes to use is liminality, this idea of like, in between spaces. And I think that artists have a greater capacity to hold that unknownness of doing that kind of work and the arts is a way to make that more tangible and real.” - Melodie Turori, PIEAM

Of the organizations we spoke with, four of the five organizations serve the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community living in the diaspora. All of the organizations in diaspora recognize the importance of connecting to their home islands while living in their current land. While separation from their homelands presents challenges, participants describe the diaspora as an opportunity. As voyagers, movement and adaptation are not new, but part of a rich and long history. In this context, diaspora becomes an opportunity to honor the space between, where relationships to both homeland and current residence are bridged through art and culture.

“We are so embedded in this land now and migrating and still moving as Pasifika folks. And time is still moving, and new things are happening, new people are being born. And so, what does Pacific Island art look like for people that are growing up here and only have here as a physical reference? You know what I'm saying? We don't have access to laufala, lauhala. We don't have access to some of these other traditional materials. No one's making the dye from the charcoal and the plant to make tattoo ink. You know, things like that. No one has the bones to carve tattoo. But we're still practicing our culture, we can still do things that mimic what was done. And we can also make new things.”

- JP / Jason Pereira, PIEAM

“In my mind, a culture bearer was somebody who does art and cultural practice in our islands. But I'm out here... and I've lived in Samoa, so I understand what these two worlds look like. And so my calling is weaving through and bridging these things together so that our artists that are growing up here in diaspora have a new reference point. Where they can weave their work into mine to continue that lineage. That's something that I always think about, with the work that I'm doing today. Because a lot of our community do not get to visit their home islands. I think about that a lot too. What does that like, what does that mean in their minds, for the way they move and exist in this world? I can be a connection for them, like a bridge or a pathway for them to find their way back.” - JP / Jason Pereira, PIEAM

For the organizations in the diaspora, learning how to perpetuate culture away from home is deeply important. This is especially important for the younger generations who may have limited direct connection to their ancestral homes, but are seeking ways to perpetuate practices, evolve, and come together.

“There is a fierceness in a lot of diaspora communities to stay together. And it's a really beautiful thing to see those communities form around that.” - Lehuanani DeFranco, Pu‘uhonua Society

Tauhi vā, nurturing the space between, allows for cultural practices to be preserved and evolved, serving as a critical bridge that connects younger generations to their ancestral islands and sustains resilient communities away from home or with limited access to their own land.

For the Native Hawaiian community in Hawai'i, this understanding of relational space extends further to include the relationship between self, 'āina (land), and kuleana. Space between one's identity and responsibilities to sustain culture and sovereignty are nurtured by arts and culture. Colonization has disrupted relationships by limiting access to culture and 'āina, often resulting in feelings of shame and guilt from not knowing cultural practices, values, or language. In this way, organizations address more than cultural disconnection; they respond to structural barriers created by colonization, development, displacement, and the rising cost of living. By expanding access to cultural practice, they create pathways for reconnection, sovereignty, and self-determination. Additionally, the rising cost of living has pushed out the Native Hawaiian community, with the majority of Native Hawaiian people living away from their ancestral lands. Organizations work to expand access to art and cultural practice for all people with all levels of experience, creating pathways for reconnection and restoring a sense of sovereignty and self-determination.

> **"Our programs allow people to have access to cultural practices that have been theirs all along. But because of colonization, historical trauma, and racist policies and systems, basic knowing that would have been taught through family systems is now being taught in community spaces and workshops. We allow folks to step into a space of learning without feeling bad about not knowing." -Emma Manu-Broderick, Pu'uhonua Society**

Beyond strengthening individual and organizational capacity in the present, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations also nurture the space between as a site of imagination, innovation, and future-building. In this sense, tauhi vā is not only about sustaining relationships, but also about creating the conditions for new ideas, practices, and possibilities to emerge. Arts and culture play a critical role in this work by offering communities ways to experiment, reimagine, and express collective aspirations for sovereignty, justice, healing, and self-determination. Through creative practice, artists and cultural practitioners help communities move beyond responding to current conditions and toward envisioning the futures they want to build.

“Artists and cultural practitioners are some of our dreamers, our visionaries, and our change makers. They create spaces where individuals in Hawai‘i can come to understand histories and present realities of colonization, militarism, tourism, and other currently extractive industries and move to what just futures could look like. It’s through what we can create with our hands that our consciousness too can change.” -Emma Manu-Broderick, Pu‘uhonua Society

Through arts and culture, organizations nurture the space between, creating opportunities for connection and shared understanding across individuals, generations, and many other concepts. These practices ground identity in the present while also opening pathways for innovation, allowing communities to imagine new futures and build the cultural, relational, and organizational capacity needed to move toward them.



Photo credit: Pacific Islander Health Partnership

Findings

Building mana (power) for collective action and community solutions

Participants described mana, or power, as something that is cultivated through arts and cultural practice. Mana is not only individual, but collective: it emerges through relationships, shared identity, and connection to culture. By engaging in art and cultural practices, communities build identity, confidence, and collective efficacy to advocate for themselves and one another.

Relationships cultivated through art and culture create opportunities for communities to build collective efficacy. As individuals engage in cultural practices, their sense of identity deepens and their connection to others strengthens, creating a foundation of acting together. Participants described mana as something that grows from within rather than coming from an external source. Cultural practices are not only expressions of identity, but sources of strength and knowledge. When individuals experience this collective strength and successfully implement programming, their collective confidence grows, along with the belief that together they can act with success. Arts and culture builds relationships, identity, connection, and power within communities to come together and find solutions needed to create stronger communities.

“Often, in arts and culture communities we’re told we don’t have enough of what we need to actualize an idea, a.k.a. money. Money is for strangers. In community, the resources that are needed, manifest through sharing and creating space for people to respond in unanticipated ways. Don’t get me wrong, money is one way, but it’s just A way, and certainly not the only way. Community effort and participation is the real engine that fuels getting stuff done in Hawai’i nei.” -Maile Meyer, Pu‘uhonua Society

“I’ve seen our students begin to recognize our traditions and arts as power — and understand that greatness already exists within them.”

- Leila Tamale, PICP

“Our traditions and art forms carry deep meaning, strength, and history. Watching youth truly feel the weight and beauty of that connection is incredibly powerful.”

- Leila Tamale, PICP

This power also translates change into action within existing systems as individuals gain the confidence and voice to advocate for their communities. By building mana, organizations help communities move from surviving the impacts of colonization, displacement, environmental exploitation, and political invisibility toward collective action. Arts and culture become tools for analyzing root causes, communicating community priorities, and advocating for systemic change. As participants deepen their connection to culture, they begin to see themselves not only as participants, but as leaders capable of speaking, organizing, and influencing change.

Arts and cultural practice create pathways for transformation. What begins as engagement in cultural programming can evolve into a stronger sense of self and responsibility to community. Individuals come to understand who they are, learn cultural practices, and meanwhile also assert their voices in civic and community matters. As one participant shared, their organization emphasizes the importance of voting: **“When you're a US citizen, go vote. You've got to vote. You've got to show your voice.” -Faaluaina (Lua) Pritchard, APCC**

Participants described how this shift unfolds over time. Arts and cultural programs become a foundation for advocacy – not as something separate, but as a natural extension of identity. Cultural practice builds the knowledge, connection, and grounding needed to speak out, organize, or lead. In this way, advocacy is not an added outcome, but an expression of fully stepping into identity and all of the potential to be a catalyst for stronger communities.

Photo credit: Melodie Turori



“Many of our Pasefika youth now use arts and culture as a form of advocacy because it’s natural to us. We’ve watched young people reconnect with their language, identity, and history, then step into leadership and advocacy fully grounded in who they are.” - Reno Anoa’i, PICP

“One powerful example was when our fellowship youth combined climate research with cultural expression. After researching deep sea mining and ocean stewardship, one of our youth choreographed a Siva Samoa inspired by the collective work and responsibility to protect our oceans.” - Leila Tamale, PICP

Through arts and cultural practice, the youth, described above, was able to interpret complex issues and communicate them in ways that are culturally grounded and accessible to their community. In this example, the performance was not simply artistic expression, but a translation of information into a format that could reflect the negative impacts of deep sea mining on their community and the need for better ocean stewardship practices.

While participants in the interview process talked at length of the importance of art and culture as central to advocacy and community organizing, only 36% of respondents in the survey portion of this project indicated arts and culture initiatives significantly increase the community's ability to influence local issues and politics. Survey participants may have focused only on politics and not the informal conditions for organizing and advocacy. Arts and cultural practices may not always translate directly into measurable political participation, but arts and culture play a critical role in seeding opportunities for collective action.

Arts and cultural practices create spaces and relationships to build community advocacy and create a powerful, organic mechanism for change. While survey data indicated organizations see arts and culture having small direct political impact, interviews strongly suggest that arts and culture are essential for building the internal power, historical understanding, and collective identity necessary for effective, long-term advocacy and community self-determination.

Findings

Making waves to perpetuate culture beyond the organization

The work of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations does not end within the organization itself. Rather, it is designed to move outward into families, communities, and future generations as a catalyst for innovation and collective transformation. By cultivating individual and community identity, nurturing the space between, and building power, or mana, organizations create the conditions for successive waves of impact. Individuals do not simply receive cultural knowledge; they adapt, apply, and extend it in ways that respond to contemporary needs and future possibilities. Participants described this as a dynamic cycle of learning, application, sharing, and expansion. In this way, cultural knowledge is not held in place or confined to a single program or organization. It moves into everyday life, where it can generate new practices, strengthen relationships, and shape how communities imagine and build what comes next. This ripple effect matters because the root causes facing Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities cannot be addressed by one-time programs alone. Sustained cultural transmission builds the long-term community capacity needed to interrupt cycles of cultural loss, isolation, underrepresentation, and disconnection from land, language, and ancestral knowledge.

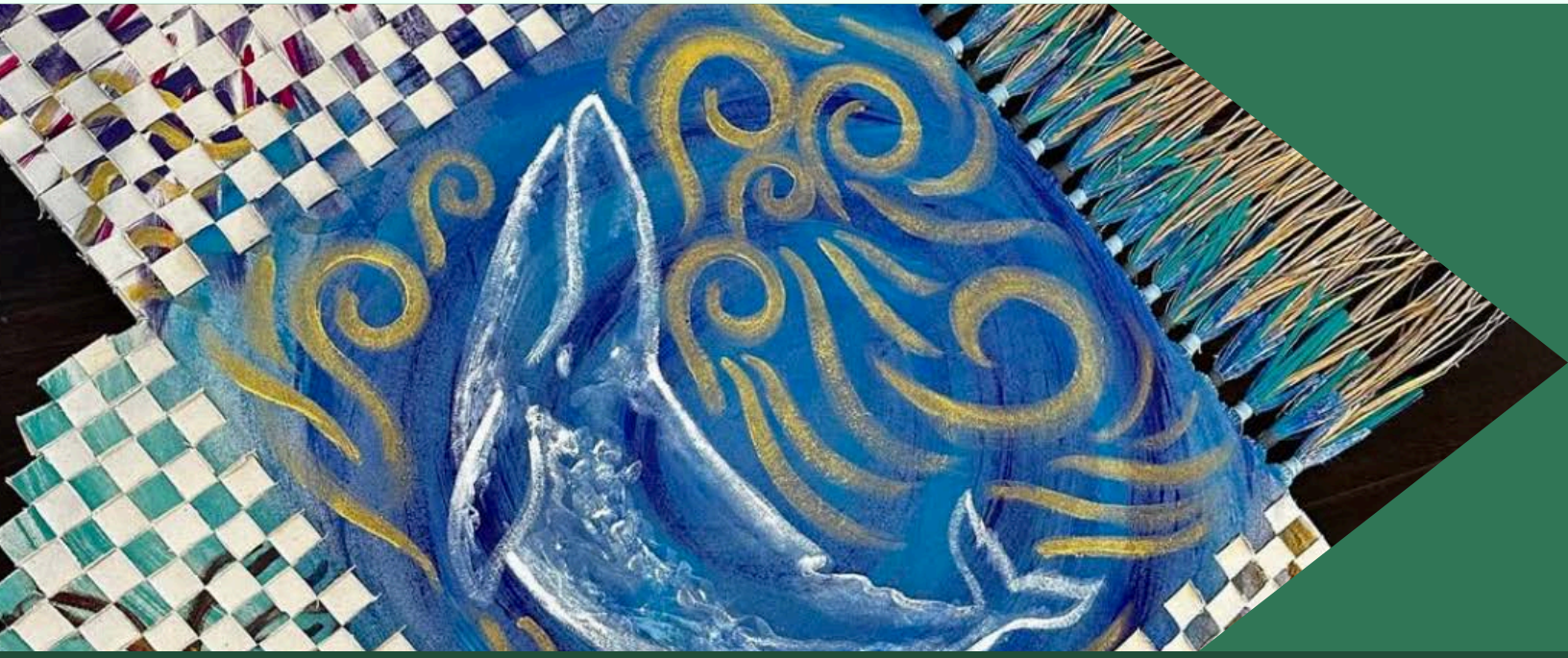


Photo credit: JP / Jason Pereira

“Full cycle learning. With any of our workshops, it’s not just about teaching somebody once. It’s about giving them the knowledge and skills to teach and perpetuate that practice in their own communities.” - Lehuanani DeFranco, Pu‘uhonua Society

In this way, success is not defined solely by participation in programs, but by what happens after programs. Organizations described outcomes such as reduced involvement with the criminal justice system, perpetuating culture and knowledge, building relationships, and applying what they’ve learned in their own lives and communities.

“Since launching this flagship program in 2011, we’ve witnessed transformational outcomes for system-involved youth, and that is something we take immense pride in.”
- Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa’i, PICP

Participants also emphasized the importance of sharing knowledge as a reflection of belonging. When individuals feel grounded in culture and community, they are more likely to pass on what they have learned and support others in their journey.

> **“For me, teaching is tied to how the "teacher" feels about "sharing." The ability to share is tied to a generosity that's the amplification of a community value system. A sharing community creates a sense of safety and pilina, a connection to one's beliefs, spiritual practices, and faith in humanity. The ability to manifest this orientation starts with a willingness to share.” - Maile Meyer, Pu‘uhonua Society**

These shifts are often visible in small but meaningful ways. One participant described how community gatherings evolved over time from bringing store-bought food to preparing and sharing family recipes. What begins as convenience and “safe bets” transform into care, vulnerability, and a deeper investment in community.

> **“You can tell when people are really participating in meaningful ways...one indicator that always makes me laugh, when potluck dishes change from mostly chips and dip, to homemade stew and baked desserts." -Maile Meyer, Pu‘uhonua Society**

Cultural perpetuation is ultimately realized through transmission of practice. Knowledge is carried forward not only through instruction, but through lived experience and participation in the process. As one participant shared, **“You know, that's in our Samoan culture, it's like we tell our kids, it's not taught. It's caught.” -Tiffany Hautau, ‘Anamatangi**

This process requires sustained access to arts and cultural practices over time. Participants emphasized that this work cannot be treated as supplemental, but must be consistently supported to be effective and transformative.

> **“Arts and cultural programming is essential, like breathing. You don't necessarily see breathing as much as you recognize that without it, there is no life. I think the presence of creative energy is really, really powerful and takes time to develop and that commitment creates generational results.”**
>
> **-Maile Meyer, Pu‘uhonua Society**

Organizations also described a long-term goal that, **“Realistically, the goal is for organizations like PICP to no longer be needed because our communities are fully resourced, empowered, and thriving on their own.” — Reno Anoa’i, PICP** These organizations recognized that participants needed to build and create their own spaces, rather than hold the knowledge and practices within one place or one organization. As communities build their capacity, they are ready to lead in their own ways.

> **“Our goal is not simply to inspire, but to build lasting ownership within our community by ensuring families have sustainable tools to continue this work beyond our organization.”**
>
> **- Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa’i, PICP**

Capacity-building within Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander arts and culture organizations is therefore not a one-time passive transfer of knowledge, but an active, continuous cycle of learning, application, and perpetuation. As individuals carry this work into their families and communities, the impact expands. Relationships grow. The work finds new footholds, and the cycle continues. These organizations and the arts and culture work they do has implications far beyond the present. They are making waves for generations to come.

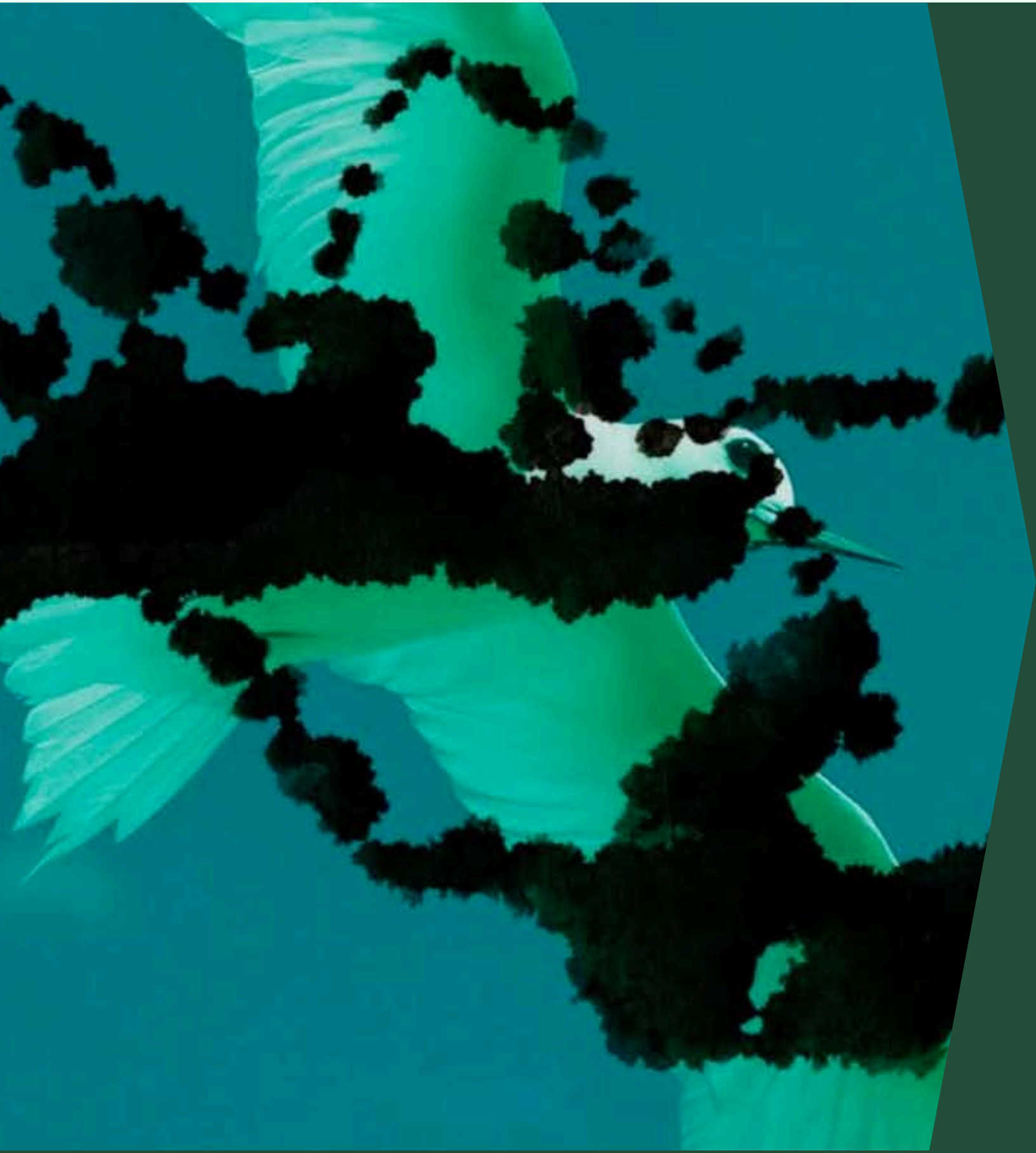


Photo credit: Isa Gagarin and Sid M. Dueñas

Organizational Challenges

Organizations described significant challenges they faced to build capacity and serve their communities.

- ***Physical Space***
- ***Funding***
- ***Cultural appropriation and creating allies***
- ***Aggregated data***

Physical Space

While organizations brought the community together, most did not have a place of their own. Of the 5 organizations, 2 had physical locations they had control of. The 3 other organizations partnered with churches, businesses, and schools to host events and activities and had no secured physical space for their organization. One of the organizations that did have a space, nurtured artists, building capacity for artists to develop their own spaces to practice.

> **"We don't really have art spaces where we can just practice our art, gather, and commune and make art, except now. Now we're starting to nurture our artist family... Now I've opened up my studio around the corner from PIEAM."**
>
> **- JP / Jason Pereira, PIEAM**

While these organizations were able to build their own communities or villages, not having their own space was a significant challenge. The lack of physical space is not simply an operational challenge; it reflects broader patterns of displacement, land dispossession, rising costs, and underinvestment in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities. Without stable places to gather, organizations must continually rebuild the infrastructure needed to practice culture, care for community, and sustain relationships. The following quotes describe the challenges organizations face without their own physical space.

> **"In collaboration with some of our partners, we've been able to help host a lot of these workshops, listening sessions, wellness retreats, cultural adaptation trainings. So that's been the key in all of the work that we've done because we don't have much, but what we have is dedication and commitment to our families. The city sold the lot that we all lived in or worked at or had a building in. And the city had promised all of us that were housed at "Whiskey Gulch" to be relocated. Still to this day we do not have a home in East Palo Alto, that was like over 30 years ago. And what stands there is the Four Seasons Hotel."**
>
> **-Tiffany Hautau, ʻAnamatangi**

"Space in general is a challenge and a need. When we're in gatherings with other arts and culture organizations, everybody needs space for their programs. It's not that space doesn't exist, it's that it's not always accessible to us." -Lehuanani DeFranco, Pu'uhonua Society

"t's frustrating that we still have to fight to create spaces centered on our ancestry, leadership, and brilliance — but our youth recognize the importance of those spaces deeply." - Leila Tamale, PICP

Funding

Unsurprisingly, a lack of funding and recognition of the impact of arts and cultural practice was a significant challenge for most organizations. This lack of funding was also highlighted in a report indicating that Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations receive only 2 cents for every $100 of funding[1].

Specifically, the limited amount of funding and restrictive funding practices of government programs and private philanthropy hindered organizations from meeting their potential. Organizations described how they can have to fight against one another with the limited funding available:

"Limited funding and resources too often create unnecessary division within our own communities." - Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP

Additionally, the restrictions or expectations from both public and private funders can hinder how organizations are able to do their work. This is evident in the following description from a participant:

“And I've had to tell funders that, you know, that this is not cookie cutter type stuff. This is what we're dealing with - real people. And if we want them to thrive and persevere, we have to be able to meet them where they're at.” -Tiffany Hautau, ‘Anamatangi

Other organizations described that to be able to obtain funding, they needed to show the value of arts and culture as an entry point to serve the community.

“I struggled at the beginning, I said, how am I supposed to get money to run this organization? I had to be creative. And so then I realized, how can I relate arts and culture to the well-being and safety of human beings so that I can turn this organization into something that is far more and much more critical.” -Faaluaina (Lua) Pritchard, Asia Pacific Cultural Center

Organizations recognized that they need to show the value of the work that they do on their own terms. This is particularly relevant as most organizations found it difficult to differentiate practices that were not arts and culture; or to conform to Western expectations to justify their organizations or arts and cultural practices. The importance of recognizing these differing value systems is highlighted in the following example of a community member who was told that they were poor based on the values held by someone outside of their community.

“And I'll never forget him saying, ‘I didn't know I was poor until you told me. I feed my family, I hunt, I fish, I make everything I need. Get off my land.’ I remember thinking that was very Hawaiian. How dare people tell others what their capacity is or isn’t through a framework that isn't theirs.” -Maile Meyer, Pu‘uhonua Society

[1] https://aapip.org/resources/2025-native-hawaiian-funding-snapshot/

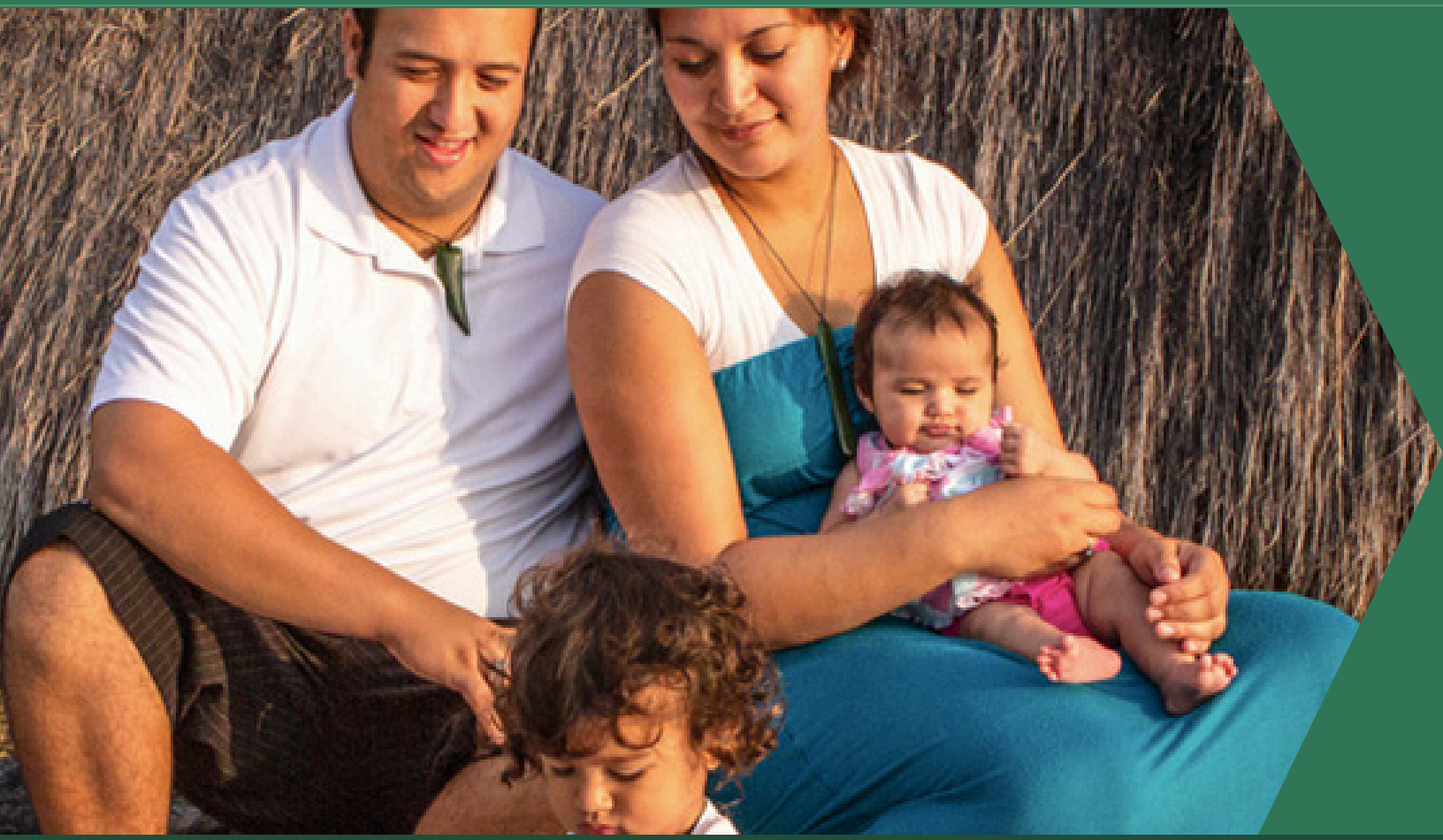


Photo credit: Hawaii Community Assets

As work is often funded based on external valuation systems, it is important to include Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander values when determining organizational or community impact and capacity.

In the survey data, only half of the respondents indicated that arts and culture initiatives significantly expand economic well-being of the community. Similarly, hosting arts and culture initiatives was not an indicator of funding growth as 57% of respondents indicated that arts and culture initiatives significantly expand access to resources. Rather, as described above, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander focus on building relationships, rather than developing economic wealth.

Cultural appropriation and creating allies

Organizations also described challenges with cultural appropriation and the importance of shifting from appropriation to appreciation. Organizations suggested this shift can happen as funders and community members recognize the importance of funding Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-led organizations and recognize that non-Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander-led organizations can often take Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander space and funding. Cultural appropriation is not only interpersonal harm; it also affects organizational capacity when resources, visibility, and authority are redirected away from Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-led organizations. Funding Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-led work is therefore a strategy for correcting extractive patterns and supporting cultural accountability. For example, one participant described:

> **"We are also working to address cultural appropriation and protect the integrity, responsibility, and accountability that come with being true cultural practitioners."**
> **- Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP**

While cultural appropriation is a substantial challenge for most Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations, many organizations described the importance of building allyship and creating accountability partners with the inclusion of people who don't identify as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander in their programs. Rather, by being inclusive of the broader community, organizations develop allies who appreciate and can also work with the community to perpetuate culture.

> **"People outside of our communities are coming to learn with genuine appreciation rather than appropriation, and through that we're building deeper accountability and shared community."**
> **- Reno Anoa'i, PICP**



Photo credit: Pu’uhonua Society - Keanahala harvest

Aggregated Data

Lastly, recognition of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders as an incredibly diverse, yet specific community and separate from Asian Americans was important to ensure community organizations received necessary resources and were able to tell their stories. Organizations described that when data are aggregated with the broader Asian American category, disparate impacts experienced by the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community can be masked. When Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders are included in the much larger Asian American population, their data becomes invisible and they lose the ability to advocate and gain access to resources. Data aggregation functions as a structural barrier because it makes Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander needs, strengths, and organizational impacts harder to see, fund, and support. The following participant described how they were advocating for legislation to change ethnicity reporting and accountability of government agencies to implement these standards.

"The limited resources available to Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities continue to create barriers, especially when others define our culture and experiences instead of allowing us to define them ourselves." - Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP

Not only can the needs of the community be masked when data are aggregated, aggregated data can also mask the impacts of community organizations. One participant highlighted how important it is to capture accurate data with the following, **"If disaggregated data truly reflected our impact and the realities of our communities, our work would consistently receive the investment it deserves." - Manūfou Liaiga-Anoa'i, PICP**

Limitations

There are significant limitations of this report and findings presented. First of all, we describe the experiences of survey responses from 16 organizations and interviews with five Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations, all located on the West Coast and Hawai'i. **With this small sample, it is important to recognize that there are likely nuances that are not reflected in this report**. Additionally, while Micronesian voices were included in the survey data, the talanoa/talk story sessions with community-based organizations primarily reflected organizations serving Polynesian communities. Although we sought to include a broader range of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander perspectives, we were not able to meaningfully highlight organizations that primarily serve Micronesian or Melanesian communities in the qualitative findings. This was likely due, in part, to the limited time available to build the trust and relationships necessary for participation. Future research would be strengthened by deeper engagement with Micronesian and Melanesian-serving organizations and by more fully centering the voices and experiences of these communities.

In this report, we aimed to weave similarities across organizations together to describe how arts and culture initiatives build community capacity. With this approach, **we did not describe the uniqueness of each organization.** Each organization held their own stories of development, their unique approaches to working with their communities, and how they perpetuated arts and culture within their organizations. These organizations had varying aims, from supporting artists and creating spaces to showcase art to recognizing that by offering cultural practices, they can reach and serve their communities as social service organizations.

Kuleana

Rooted in Purpose

As Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander organizations, each organization is rooted in culture and their kuleana or responsibility and privilege to do the work they do. Arts and culture are at the heart of these organizations that build identity, nurture the space between, and build power to perpetuate culture and thriving communities. The capacity and value of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander arts and culture organizations must be understood through the lens of their own values, many of which are goals beyond conventional Western metrics of organizational success. Therefore, efforts to assess and support these organizations must move beyond applying external, restrictive frameworks that often misunderstand the holistic nature of their work—where arts, culture, and community well-being are inseparable.

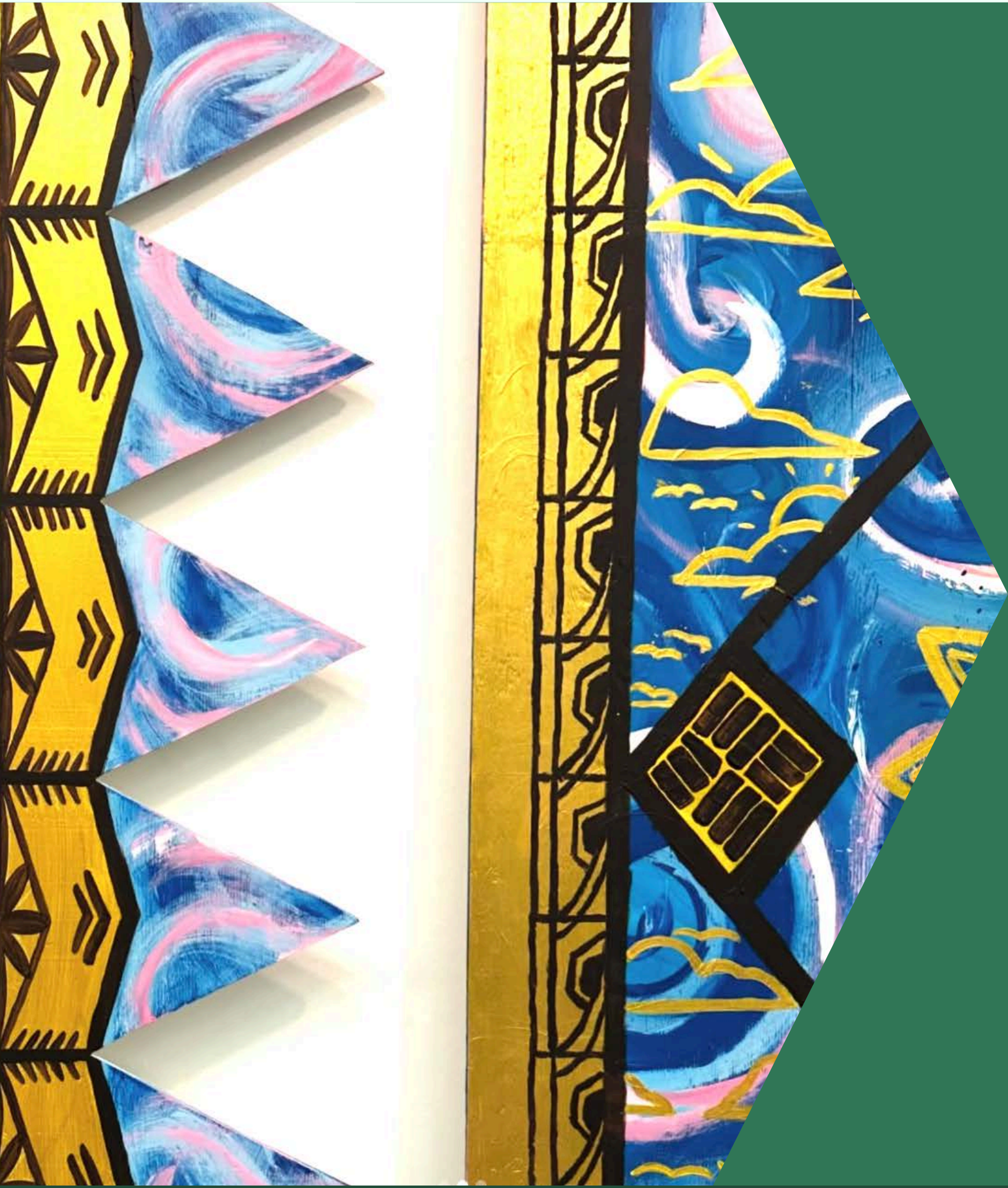


Photo credit: JP / Jason Pereira

Recommendations for Funders

Recognize and acknowledge chronic underfunding and limited access to physical space.
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations carry expansive cultural, educational, health, advocacy, and community-building work with limited infrastructure. Fund dedicated physical spaces where communities can gather, practice culture, host programs, store cultural materials, prepare food, and build relationships across generations.

Provide long-term, unrestricted funding.
Multi-year general operating support demonstrates trust and sustained commitment. Flexible funding allows organizations to respond to community priorities, strengthen internal capacity, and sustain work beyond short-term grant cycles.

Build partnerships grounded in trust, humility, and accountability.
Approach Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations as knowledge holders, not only as service providers. Invest time in relationship-building, compensate organizations for planning and advisory time, attend community events when invited, and ask what support is most useful.

Fund work without requiring cultural compromise.
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations do not need to dilute cultural language, protocols, values, or practices to fit Western nonprofit or philanthropic frameworks. These practices are central to how organizations build trust, belonging, identity, health, and community power.

Respect unfamiliar practices as valid and impactful.
Just because a funder does not understand a cultural practice, language, protocol, or community-defined outcome does not mean it lacks value. Create space for organizations to define their work, methods, and impact on their own terms.

Resource Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-led work.
Invest in organizations rooted in culture, language, ancestral knowledge, sovereignty, self-determination, land access, cultural revitalization, and healing from colonization and displacement.

- **Support cultural connection across geography.**
For organizations on the continent, local service also requires maintaining relationships with ancestral homelands, cultural practitioners, language speakers, artists, farmers, and knowledge holders in Hawai'i and across the Pacific. Allow budgets to include travel, cultural exchange, traditional food access, shipping of cultural materials, and relationship-building with communities in the Islands.

- **Advance data disaggregation and visibility.**
Fund community-led research and advocate for public agencies to collect and report Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander data separately from Asian American data. Disaggregation honors distinct histories, needs, strengths, and governance.

- **Allow communities to define success using their own values.**
Western evaluation frameworks alone may not capture the benefits of Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander arts and culture organizations. Support outcomes that reflect pilina/relationships, cultural identity, language use, intergenerational learning, connection to ʻāina, belonging, healing, leadership, and collective responsibility.

- **Reduce administrative burden.**
Simplify applications, accept oral or visual reporting formats, provide technical assistance, compensate applicants for extensive proposal development, and right-size documentation requirements for smaller, community-rooted organizations.

- **Move from transactional funding to reciprocal partnership.**
Stay in relationship beyond the grant award, use institutional power to open doors, advocate alongside organizations, and remain accountable to the communities whose work funders benefit from.

Recommendations for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations and their partners

- **Build relationships before projects.**
  Make time to understand each organization's history, community, priorities, and capacity before asking for collaboration. Attend events when invited, meet outside of grant deadlines, and compensate people for their time.

- **Recognize the strengths of small organizations.**
  Small, community-rooted organizations often hold deep trust, cultural knowledge, relationships, and accountability, even with limited funding or staff. Name these strengths in proposals, reports, and partnership conversations.

- **Clarify kuleana (responsibility).**
  Identify each organization's role, responsibility, and limits. Ask: What is our kuleana in this relationship? What can we offer? What is outside our capacity or responsibility?

- **Identify real needs and material asks.**
  Do not assume what partners need. Ask what support would be most useful, whether that includes space, funding, staff time, childcare, transportation, food, grant writing, data support, supplies, land access, or cultural practitioner honoraria.

- **Share and exchange resources.**
  Build systems for mutual support, such as shared resource lists, partner directories, referral pathways, joint calendars, equipment-sharing, co-hosted trainings, and peer learning circles.

- **Honor arts and culture as strategies for change.**
  Recognize arts and cultural practices as pathways for sovereignty, healing, identity, leadership, advocacy, and community power. Support artists, cultural practitioners, protocols, creative outputs, and community-defined ways of knowing.

- **Choose partners who understand culture and well-being as connected.**
  Seek partners who recognize that arts, culture, health, education, land, language, food, and belonging are inseparable in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander communities.

- **Develop shared language for impact.**
  Work together to describe how arts and culture build capacity, strengthen identity, deepen relationships, support healing, and create community power, especially when existing systems do not fully recognize this value.

- **Practice accountability.**
  Set regular check-ins, revisit roles and expectations, welcome feedback, address harm directly, and adjust partnerships when capacity or alignment changes.

- **Share credit and visibility.**
  Credit Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander-serving organizations, artists, cultural practitioners, and community members appropriately. Share platforms, funding opportunities, authorship, media requests, and public recognition.

NATIONAL CAPACD

Acknowledgements

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Organizations that participated in the conversations:

Pacific Island Ethnic Art Museum (PIEAM; pieam.org): Our mission is to offer a place of collective knowledge-making that reflects the multiplicity of Pacific Islanders experiences, histories, and visions for the future, through Pacific Islander artists story works. We recognize the unique kinship that exist between ancestor pieces, people and their histories and the obligation that comes with this recognition. We envision and work towards a world where Pasifika ways of being are thriving and accessible to all of our people beyond the physical space of the museum. PIEAM is fundamentally led by Indigenous principles, particularly the CHamoru principle of inafa'maolek (making good, restoring harmony) which entails a reciprocal culture of respect, collaboration, and solidarity.

‘Anamatangi (anamatangi.org): ‘Anamatangi Polynesian Voices (‘APV) is a California grassroots organization advancing systems-impacted communities through heritage preservation and civic engagement. Formerly known as Pacific Islander Outreach, ‘APV was founded by Appollonia ‘MamaDee’ Grey Uhilamoelangi and Senita Uhilamoelangi in July 1997. Since then, ‘APV primarily serves families in East Palo Alto, the Peninsula Valley, and the wider San Mateo County.

Pacific Islander Community Partnership (PICP; picp.org): Pacific Islander Community Partnership (PICP) is a community-rooted nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging, educating, and empowering Pacific Islander communities through culturally grounded programming, leadership development, civic engagement, environmental justice, and cultural preservation.

Through intergenerational programs centered on youth and families, PICP creates spaces where Pacific Islander communities can strengthen identity, deepen cultural connection, build leadership, and advocate for community wellbeing. Signature initiatives include youth leadership fellowships, cultural arts education, climate justice programming, civic engagement, and family-centered community initiatives that uplift Pacific Islander voices and strengthen long-term community resilience.

Pu‘uhonua Society (puuhonua-society.org): is a community arts and culture organization committed to Hawai‘i and its abundant futures. Founded in 1972, as the Young of Heart Workshop and Gallery, and renamed the Pu'uhonua Society, the work of this creative community organization has been passed down through three generations of Native Hawaiian women. Active at the intersections of contemporary art, cultural practice, environmental stewardship, transformational education and community archiving; Pu‘uhonua Society cultivates space(s) where Native Hawaiian and Hawai‘i-based artists, cultural practitioners, and those rooted in the archipelago can continue creative practices for the collective transformation of Hawai‘i.

We do this for artists, cultural practitioners, and the Hawai'i community by:

- Supporting basic-needs through direct-to-artist grants, commissions, project funding, studio space and professional development
- Creating accessible platforms through exhibitions, archives, libraries, film screenings, and publications
- Nurturing health and healing through workshops, gatherings, mentorships, fiscal sponsorships, fellowships and collaborations
- Affirming expansive, responsive and inclusive definitions of art

Asia Pacific Cultural Center (APCC; asiapacificculturalcenter.org/):
Asia Pacific Cultural Center will transform our community to become a dynamic, inclusive hub for diverse communities, cultures, and generations. Our mission is to bridge communities and generations through art, culture, education, and business. Asia Pacific Cultural Center (APCC) is a center for cultural exchange providing programs and services that promote the greater awareness, understanding, equity, and inclusion of the Asian and Pacific Islander people. This community includes immigrants, refugees, children and youth, seniors and elders, low-income, and all groups who are a part of the Asia Pacific community. Our founders recognized the need for cross-cultural understanding in their community, and in 1996 they founded APCC to address this need.

The National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD) is a coalition, intermediary, and the country's leading organization in advancing community development and advocating against gentrification and displacement of Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AA and NHPI) communities. The organization represents and supports more than 150 community-based organizations in driving their local strategies, and backs their efforts by advancing progressive national policies.

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Photo credit: Pu'uhonua Society - Keanahala

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