

Bridging the Distance: \$17.4 Million to Expand Opportunities for Hawai'i Youth

Ensuring Equitable Access for Neighbor Island Students

HONOLULU, HI, UNITED STATES, March 17, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Stupski Foundation is providing \$17.4 million in support of organizations working to ensure that students across



This work is about making sure that students, no matter what island they live on, have access to the same enriching opportunities as their peers."

*Cheri Souza, Hawai'i
Postsecondary Success
Program Officer*

Hawai'i, particularly those on neighbor islands, have access to the same educational, leadership, and career-building experiences as their peers on O'ahu, reinforcing the belief that geographic isolation should not determine a young person's access to opportunity.

This funding strengthens statewide initiatives that provide mentorship, career pathways, and hands-on learning as well as support for travel to key events and programs. By returning dollars and decision-making to local organizations that understand neighbor island communities' unique challenges, these grants help bridge

systemic and geographic gaps to build lasting connections among Hawai'i's youth.

Investing in Statewide Access for All Students

The following organizations are receiving support to expand access, enhance mentorship, and connect students across islands:

- Center for Tomorrow's Leaders
- ClimbHI
- Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education
- Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance (Community Schools)
- HawaiiKidsCAN
- Purple Mai'a (Hiapo Workforce Development Program)
- EPIC 'Ohana
- KUPU
- Nalukai Foundation
- Maui Economic Development Board (STEMworks)
- Mental Health America of Hawai'i
- University of Hawai'i Community Colleges (Financial Aid Reform)

- University of Hawai'i System (Virtual Basic Needs Cafe)

Expanding Pathways, Strengthening Connections

For many students growing up on neighbor islands, access to advanced coursework, mentorship, and extracurricular programs can be limited. Fewer resources; smaller student populations; and constrained funding for specialized opportunities in the arts, leadership development, and mental health support often create disparities. Strengthening statewide programs helps bridge these gaps, ensuring that young people—no matter where they live—can participate in transformative experiences that foster leadership, career readiness, and community connection.

Beyond structured educational programs, grantee partners also enable students to travel to O'ahu and beyond to participate in key events. These experiences allow students from diverse backgrounds to form lasting connections; learn from one another; and gain exposure to different cultures, communities, and career pathways. Building relationships with peers across islands cultivates a sense of kuleana (responsibility) to Hawai'i as a whole, strengthening collaboration and leadership.

"Thanks to this funding, we have been empowered to open doors to leadership development for students across all islands, fostering meaningful connections among young leaders statewide. This initiative not only strengthens the fabric of our communities but also brings invaluable opportunities to our neighbor islands, ensuring a more robust and dynamic workforce for Hawai'i's future," shared April Nakamura, interim Executive Director from the Center for Tomorrow's Leaders.

Shifting Power to Support Maximum Flexibility

The Stupski Foundation believes that the communities closest to the work are best positioned to determine how to use resources. Supporting organizations that are already leading the way without burdensome funding restrictions sustains critical programs and provides the flexibility needed to respond to evolving needs.

"Being a statewide organization located outside of O'ahu allows us to remain deeply connected to the unique challenges and opportunities across the islands," noted Leslie Wilkins, CEO of Maui Economic Development Board. "The general operations support we received gave us a lot of flexibility to adapt our programming, which allowed us to bring young people together for our STEMworks conference, where innovation and collaboration spark new ideas and lasting change."

"This work is about making sure that students, no matter what island they live on, have access to the same enriching opportunities as their peers," said Cheri Souza, Hawai'i Postsecondary Success Program Officer at Stupski Foundation. "We are honored to partner with these organizations as they support Hawai'i youth and strengthen the connections that have the potential to make our communities thrive."

Matthew Nagato
Stupski Foundation
+1 415-655-4434

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