



RESTORING BALANCE
COLLABORATIVE

INDIGENOUS STEWARDSHIP SUCCESS STORY

Kūlana Kahu'āina

A Living Ethical Code of Conduct
for Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship



HULIAUAPA'A





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About

The Kali'uokapa'akai Collective is an interdisciplinary community of practice for advocates in Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship (WKS), created in 2017 to organize our shared ideas, resources, and strategies to build capacity and take collective action to safeguard Hawai'i's wahi kūpuna (ancestral places). Our mission is to collectively activate and fulfill our kuleana (responsibility) to protect Hawai'i's wahi kūpuna and 'ike kūpuna (ancestral knowledge).

We are advocates from across Hawai'i, committed to the care and protection of wahi kūpuna. We come from many sectors: cultural resource management, education, planning, historic preservation, community-based nonprofits, government agencies, land trusts, and more. Our purpose is to strengthen wahi kūpuna stewardship through collaboration and collective action, driving positive change and increasing resiliency in our communities.

Huliauapa'a, an Indigenous-led nonprofit whose mission is to grow Hawai'i's communities through culturally-based innovative learning, leadership development, and collaborative networking in wahi kūpuna stewardship, serves as our administrative backbone and active convener. Together, we cultivate meaningful pilina (relationships) among Collective members through our shared kuleana.



KALI'UOKAPA'AKAI
COLLECTIVE

Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship is the protection and care of Hawaiian ancestral places, resources, and knowledge systems. It is grounded in 'Ōiwi (native) values and centers Hawaiian relationships to land, genealogy, and community.





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The Current Situation

For decades, Kānaka 'Ōiwi (Native Hawaiian) have endeavored to maintain the ea (sovereignty) of our mo'olelo (stories), wahi kūpuna, and koehana (material culture) against threats of colonization, over-tourism, military expansion, land development, and mismanagement on our islands. Part of our ea involves decolonizing these processes and asserting ourselves as Kānaka 'Ōiwi in spaces originally meant to exclude us. While we celebrate our resistance to these pressures, we also recognize that it was time to develop our own frameworks in a manner that is undeniably and unconditionally Kānaka 'Ōiwi.



For the Kali'uokapa'akai Collective, that framework is the Kūlana Kahu'āina, a living ethical code that guides how we care for Hawai'i's wahi kūpuna and uplifts our ea. Rooted in the formation of the Collective, it carries forward our eight Collective living values as standards of practice: Aloha 'Āina, Lōkahi, Mo'okū'auhau, Pono, 'Auamo Kuleana, 'Ike Pāpālua, Kūkulu Pilina, and Mauiola. This living document reflects community values and outlines the ethics, standards, and foundational principles that guide Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship. It serves as a guide for members of our community of practice and others engaging in Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship. It conveys these responsibilities through kūlana (principles) of our living values: each kūlana outlines ethical responsibilities and best practices for engaging with 'Ōiwi communities, 'āina (land), and wahi kūpuna. Together, they establish shared expectations and standards that foster trust, accountability, and integrity in this interdisciplinary field.

In February 2026, we released the Kūlana Kahu'āina report and accompanying film at Kamakakūokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. The Kūlana Kahu'āina is a physical expression of our Collective aspirations, visions, and commitments to uphold our living values and advocate for the proper stewardship of 'āina and wahi kūpuna. This gathering was a time to celebrate with our community of practice on what we can accomplish through collaborative efforts.

Additionally, with support from the Restoring Balance Collaborative, we held a facilitated roundtable discussion with Collective attendees representing community-based non-profits, cultural resource management organizations, the private sector, historic preservation, government agencies, and Native Hawaiian serving organizations. Together, we strategized ways to promote and uphold the standards and best practices outlined in the Kūlana Kahu'āina within our respective communities, fields, and organizations. Because our kuleana is deeply rooted in both community and 'āina, we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards, and the Kūlana Kahu'āina is the embodiment of that commitment.



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Implementation Highlight

Our roundtable provided dedicated space for critical dialogue around shared ideas, resources, and strategies to mobilize the Kūlana Kahu'āina. And ultimately, how we can grow and empower wahi kūpuna stewards to normalize the standards and best practices with the Kūlana Kahu'āina in our respective fields.

Participants organized themselves into five topic areas: community consultation and engagement; mālama iwi kūpuna (caring for ancestral remains); education and building community capacity; advocacy, law, and policy; and 'āina ho'i (land back) and stewardship. Huliauapa'a staff facilitated the group of 40 attendees through three guiding questions:

- What are the best management practices that need to be mobilized in this area?
- What strategies already exist, and how do we make them better?
- What is preventing us from being able to do this?

Huliauapa'a gathered the discussions into a summary, available at kaliuokapaakai.org/kulana, holding the key questions raised, the best practices and solutions named, the challenges, and the short-and long-term priorities across all five areas. The conversations emphasized the importance of creating a safe environment for meaningful discussions, knowledge exchange, and accountability.



"Native experts set the standards based on traditional knowledge."

- Malia Akutagawa, ESQ
(Kali'uokapa'akai Collective
'Aha Kuapapa)



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Successes



The roundtable provided an intentional space to name and better understand the barriers we face when we uphold and integrate our values, best practices, and 'Ōiwi solutions into state and federal government systems. Additionally, the conversations allowed us to identify key priorities and strategies that carry Kūlana Kahu'āina into practice:

The first is advancing a broader shift: valuing, prioritizing, and normalizing stewardship grounded in Indigenous ethics, and issuing specific calls to action that support deeper understanding and more meaningful engagement with our practice.

"The principles in the Kūlana Kahu'āina are applicable everywhere."

- Māhealani Matsuzaki (Kamehameha Schools 'Āina Ulu)

The second is normalizing our best practices: to set them as enforceable standards in our respective fields, so they shape how professional training, research requests, and contracts are built and honored.

"By having that exposure, it gets to the point of normalization."

- Hannah Kihalani Springer (Ka'ūpūlehu)

The third is to build capacity: to provide training and workshops for community members, archaeologists, planners, law firms, government agencies, and more. This includes developing resources and toolkits that support our community partners in wahi kūpuna advocacy, such as writing and delivering testimonies, engaging with the legislature, and monitoring bills.

"Research is ceremony. Advocacy is ceremony. Part of our kūpuna legacy is that advocacy."

- Dr. Kano'e'ulalani Morishige (Hawai'i'Inuiākea School of Hawaiian Knowledge, UH Mānoa)

These key takeaways acknowledge that we must identify barriers to working within non-Indigenous systems while reinforcing what we believe are professional standards and best practices when engaging with wahi kūpuna. Within this, we must also prioritize developing tangible resources for our communities to utilize.



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Lessons Learned

The Kūlana Kahu'āina introduces the foundational principles that guide our approach to Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship and how these principles inform best management practices. A few lessons we carry forward:

The Kūlana Kahu'āina is a foundational step in systems transformation

Considerable efforts are still required to fully reform Hawai'i's historic preservation and resource management systems. The Kūlana Kahu'āina embodies the shared responsibility we hold to heal our systems within our communities, sectors, and practices.

Building capacity in Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship at all levels

Continued efforts are needed to build community capacity, specifically through education and resource creation. We also have a kuleana within our own organizations to enforce and normalize our best practices and ethical standards.

Huliauapa'a Backbone Support

With Huliauapa'a as the administrative backbone and active convenor for the Kali'uokapa'akai Collective, our ongoing work is to support members in putting these strategies into practice and reinforcing the best practices embedded within the Kūlana Kahu'āina.





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Next Steps

The Kūlana Kahu'āina is in its initial phase since publication. Our solutions evolved from within the Kali'uokapa'akai Collective and based on insights from our roundtable discussions, we plan to implement these solutions in the near future. Achieving systems change requires gaining support from stakeholders across various sectors, which is why our endorsement form remains open for pledges of support.. These pledges will carry the document through our network and build the trust and credibility we need as we apply its principles.

We depend on our Kali'uokapa'akai Collective to integrate the Kūlana Kahu'āina into their organizations and practices. Whether in government, education, or the private sector, our members are actively advocating and driving change. While we rely on the collective efforts of our community of practice, we are also promoting the Kūlana Kahu'āina more publicly. This includes presenting it at conferences attended by professionals and communities involved in wahi kūpuna stewardship, such as planning, archaeology, and law. Additionally, we are preparing a legal article that points out systemic malfeasance and suggests the Kūlana Kahu'āina as a remedy.

The Kūlana Kahu'āina serves anyone engaged in, or seeking to engage in Wahi Kūpuna Stewardship. It offers clarity about our shared values and how we enact them in practice, advancing a broader shift toward valuing stewardship grounded in 'Ōiwi ethics. This practice calls us to honor the continuity and complexity of living culture, and thus, requires us to strive for Indigenous-led systems transformation informing our work at every level.





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Key Resources Used

- [Kūlana Kahu'āina Report](#)
- [Kūlana Kahu'āina Executive Summary](#)
- [Kūlana Kahu'āina Regional Roundtable Summary](#)
- [Kūlana Kahu'āina Film](#)

Contributors

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*Advancing Indigenous-led Systems Transformation
for the Wellbeing of Humanity and the Environment*

About the RBC's Sacred Waters Regional Roundtable Grants:

Regional Roundtable grants support our Core Stewards who are leading land and water stewardship solutions and initiatives in their homelands. They explore what we have in common in terms of the systems change we are leading, the sectors they are engaging, the barriers and resiliency factors, and recommendations for reinforcing Indigenous-led solutions going forward. In 2025-26, four RBC Core Stewards received the Regional Roundtable Grants.

Funding for Sacred Waters Regional Roundtables was made possible by a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation