climbHI

2025 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT LEADER AWARDS

In 2025, businesses and organizations engaged 141,975 students and 5,975 teachers in 677 events statewide.

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ClimbHI has raised more than $500,000 to provide five more years of workforce development programs to the state Department of Education, with a goal to reach $1 million. The commitment builds on ClimbHI's success in helping more than 400,000 students in the past five years. Pictured at the recent celebration are (from left) Julie Morikawa, president of ClimbHI and Keith Hayashi, DOE superintendent.

PHOTO COURTESY CLIMBHI

... Workforce development nonprofit ClimbHI recently gifted more than $500,000 to the state Department of Education during a breakfast ceremony at Wai'alae Country Club. The money, donated by local leaders, businesses and organizations, will help the DOE provide five more years of workforce development programs. ...

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Star Advertiser

Nonprofit receives $500,000 infusion for career exploration in public schools

By Victoria Budiono
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A Hawaii workforce development nonprofit announced Tuesday that it has secured more than $500,000 from local leaders, businesses and organizations to extend career exploration and workforce programs in public schools for another five years, with a broader goal of raising $1 million through a statewide community campaign.

ClimbHI made the announcement at an event at Waialae Country Club, where education and business leaders gathered to celebrate the milestone and recognize companies, educators and state Department of Education employees for their participation in workforce development efforts during the 2024-2025 academic year.

The funding commitment will support continued programming within the DOE, building on ClimbHI's reach to more than 400,000 students through nearly 2,600 events over the past five years. During the most recent academic year alone, participating businesses and organizations engaged nearly 142,000 students and about 6,000 teachers across 677 events statewide.

ClimbHI officials said the campaign, dubbed "$1 Million to Reach 1 Million Students," is aimed at ensuring long-term sustainability for career exploration, work-based learning and industry partnerships in public schools.

"This five-year gift reflects a shared commitment to our students and to Hawaii's future workforce," DOE Superintendent Keith Hayashi said on Tuesday.

Hayashi emphasized the importance of partnerships between schools and industry in helping students see tangible pathways from education to careers, particularly through hands-on learning experiences with local employers.

"As a result, hundreds of thousands of DOE students from nearly every school have benefited from opportunities that build skills, confidence and a sense of purpose," Hayashi said. "These experiences help students envision futures where they can succeed professionally while contributing to their communities."

He added that the department is revisiting its vision for a Hawaii public school graduate — one who is "globally competitive" but "locally committed."

Hayashi said that in his conversations with students across the state, many express a strong desire to return to Hawaii, remain in their communities and contribute locally, a sense of purpose he said is shaped not only in classrooms but also through partnerships and mentoring opportunities.

Special guests at the event included Duane Kurisu, chairman of the Hawaii Executive Collaborative, and James Tokioka, director of the state Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism, underscoring the role of workforce development in the state's broader economic strategy.

Corporate support has played a major role in the campaign. Kevin Sahara of Expedia Group said the company awarded ClimbHI a first-time $100,000 grant to support the initiative, citing the value of early exposure to career pathways for local students.

In addition to funding announcements, ClimbHI recognized its 2025 Community Engagement Leaders — businesses, organizations and DOE employees noted for their excellence and sustained involvement in workforce development programs.

Among those speaking was Kristen Giang, a 2021 Roosevelt High School graduate, who shared how ClimbHI-supported hospitality and tourism programs helped shape her career path.

Giang said she first discovered her interest in hospitality while taking pathway courses in high school, which included industry visits and leadership-focused programming. Although she initially pursued a different academic route after graduating during the COVID-19 pandemic, she later returned to hospitality, enrolling at Kapiolani Community College's tourism management program.

"If it wasn't for programs such as ClimbHI to show me the numerous opportunities in many different pathways, I wouldn't have been able to be where I am today," Giang said, crediting the organization for helping her reconnect with her passion and plan her next steps in higher education and the workforce.

ClimbHI leaders said stories like Giang's illustrate the long-term impact of sustained partnerships between schools and employers — and why community investment is critical to reaching more students statewide.

The nonprofit said it will continue fundraising efforts toward its $1 million goal, with the aim of expanding access to career exploration opportunities and strengthening Hawaii's local talent pipeline for years to come.

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Roosevelt High School 2021 graduate Kristen Giang said her interest in the hospitality field grew after exploring hospitality and tourism career pathways through ClimbHI programs.

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December 17, 2025

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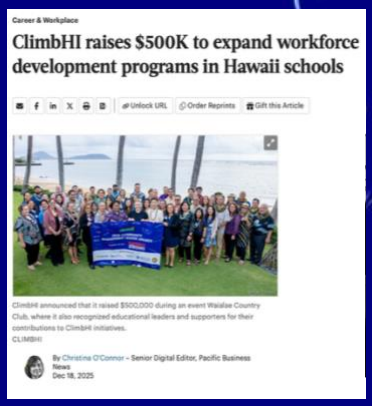

Career & Workplace

ClimbHI raises $500K to expand workforce development programs in Hawaii schools

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ClimbHI announced that it raised $500,000 during an event Waialae Country Club, where it also recognized educational leaders and supporters for their contributions to ClimbHI initiatives.

CLIMBHI

By Christina O'Connor – Senior Digital Editor, Pacific Business News
Dec 18, 2025

Kokua Kahiau

CLIMBHI

ClimbHI raised $500,000 to provide five more years of workforce development programming to the Hawaii state Department of Education. The organization said the funding came from local leaders, businesses and organizations and is part of ClimbHI's larger goal to reach $1 million in funding. ClimbHI's programs with the DOE include career fairs, job shadowing and site visits and guest speakers, with the goal of exposing students to different businesses and career options.

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