TRUE
TECHNOLOGY READINESS USER EVALUATION

4th Annual Hawaiʻi AI & Cloud Innovation Summit: Impact Report

September 10, 2025

Executive Summary

The 4th Annual Hawaiʻi AI & Cloud Innovation Summit convened 443 leaders, practitioners, and innovators from across the Islands to chart a distinctly Hawaiian path through digital transformation. This wasn't a summit about racing to adopt the newest technology—it was about choosing to navigate this moment with intention, guided by three enduring principles: **Service, Resilience, and Skills**.

What emerged was clear: Hawaiʻi is ready to move from exploration to execution, and the community is doing so in a way that centers people, place, and purpose.

The State of Readiness: What the Data Revealed

A Community in the "Messy Middle"

Pre-summit survey data from 443 registrants painted a revealing picture of where Hawaiʻi organizations stand:

Journey Stage

- 68% are mid-journey (33% exploring options + 34.8% actively implementing)
- 18.5% have fully integrated AI/cloud solutions
- 13.5% are just getting started

Current Technology Adoption

- 62.5% are using AI tools
- 52.4% have adopted cloud infrastructure
- 47.9% leverage analytics and business intelligence
- 30.5% use automation/RPA

Confidence vs. Execution Gap

- Nearly 70% report being at least "somewhat confident" in AI and cloud technologies
- Yet only 18.5% have achieved full integration
- This confidence-execution gap reveals a critical insight: optimism exists, but practical roadmaps are needed

What's Holding Us Back—and What We Need Most

Top Barriers

1. Lack of technical expertise (29.3%)
2. Budget constraints (24.2%)
3. Unclear ROI (7.7%)
4. Leadership buy-in (6.1%)

Top Desires (What Attendees Want Most)

1. Upskill myself and my team (65.5%)
2. Real-world use cases (61.9%)
3. Implementation guidance (54.2%)
4. Networking opportunities (40.6%)
5. Partnership/vendor options (33.2%)

The Pattern: What people want most directly addresses what's holding them back. The demand for upskilling, use cases, and implementation playbooks mirrors the barriers of expertise gaps and unclear ROI. Hawaiʻi doesn't need more vision decks—we need actionable, tested, repeatable frameworks.

A Unique Strength: Cross-Sector Collaboration

The summit brought together a powerful mix of decision-makers and practitioners from both public and private sectors. This cross-pollination created a rare environment where:

Government agencies could learn agility from private sector innovators

Small and medium businesses gained insights into security and scale

Educational institutions connected workforce development to real market needs

Both decision-makers and doers were in the same room, ready to act

Summit Highlights

Opening Remarks

James Tokioka, Director, State of Hawaiʻi Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT)

Director Tokioka welcomed attendees and set the tone for the day, emphasizing the importance of technology adoption for Hawaiʻi's economic future and the state's commitment to building digital infrastructure that serves all residents.

Keynote: "Hawai'i's Roadmap to a Technology-Enabled Government"

Christine Maii Sakuda, Chief Information Officer, State of Hawai'i Office of Enterprise Technology Services
Chris Hein, Field CTO, Google Public Sector

CIO Sakuda opened the summit by drawing a powerful parallel between Hawai'i's voyaging tradition and digital transformation. Just as Hōkūle'a and Hikianalia navigate by stars, currents, and ancestral wisdom, organizations today must navigate the digital ocean guided by data, purpose, and cultural values.

Key Themes: Voyaging and Digital Innovation

Voyaging Principle	Digital Innovation Parallel
Navigation & Wayfinding	Guided by stars and currents → Guided by data and algorithms
Collaboration	Requires tight crew coordination → Enables global teamwork through shared platforms
Resilience & Adaptability	Navigating unpredictable seas → Adapting to dynamic markets and user needs
Cultural Stewardship	Preserves Indigenous knowledge → Can amplify diverse voices and ethical frameworks
Sustainability	Powered by wind, sun, and human effort → Enables smarter resource use and environmental monitoring

ALOHA Intelligence: Reframing AI

Sakuda introduced the concept of **"ALOHA Intelligence"**—reframing "AI" to represent the values embedded in the Hawaiian concept of Aloha:

Akahai
tenderness

Lōkahi
unity/harmony

ʻOluʻolu
agreeable/pleasant

Haʻahaʻa
humility/modesty

Ahonui
patience/perseverance

She also invoked "Ancestral Intelligence" with the ʻōlelo noʻeau (Hawaiian proverb): *I Ka Wā Ma Mua, Ka Wā Ma Hope* (The Future Is in the Past). This reminded attendees that innovation doesn't mean abandoning what has worked for generations—it means bringing forward-thinking technology into alignment with timeless values.

> Her closing message resonated throughout the summit: ʻA ʻohe hana nui ke alu ʻia — No task is too big when done together.

"Hawai'i Cyber Readiness 2025: Threat Landscape, Response, and Recovery Playbook"

Kathy Cruz, Regional Leader – SLED West, Google Public Sector

Cruz provided a sobering yet actionable overview of the cybersecurity challenges facing Hawai'i in 2025. She outlined the current threat landscape—from ransomware targeting critical infrastructure to phishing attacks on government employees—and presented a clear recovery playbook for organizations at any stage of cyber maturity.

Key Takeaways:

- Zero-trust architecture isn't just for large enterprises—it can be implemented incrementally
- Multi-factor authentication and least-privilege access are foundational quick wins
- Incident response plans must be tested regularly, not filed away
- Recovery isn't just technical—it requires clear communication with stakeholders and the public

Panel: "Democratizing Data & AI Resources for Hawai'i's Communities"

Moderated by Daniel Liu, Head of Customer Engineering, Google Public Sector

Panelists:

- Rebecca Cai, Chief Data Officer, State of Hawai'i Office of Enterprise Technology Services

- Ed Sniffen, Director, Hawai'i Department of Transportation

- Representative Sean Quinlan, State of Hawai'i Legislature

- Michael Heath, Senior Solutions Architect – Data & AI Services, SHI

This dynamic panel explored how open data, AI tools, and cross-sector partnerships can democratize access to resources that traditionally required significant capital or technical expertise.

Panel Highlights: Democratizing Data & AI

Rebecca Cai discussed the state's data strategy and how making datasets publicly available enables transparency and innovation

Ed Sniffen shared DOT's use of predictive analytics for traffic management and infrastructure maintenance

Rep. Sean Quinlan emphasized the legislative perspective on data privacy and ensuring technology serves all communities

Michael Heath provided vendor insights on how cloud-based AI tools lower barriers to entry for smaller organizations

The conversation reinforced that democratization is about building capacity so people can use tools effectively.

Afternoon Track Sessions: Deep Dives into Action

Public-Private Partnerships for Growth Track

"How Public-Private Partnerships Unlock Opportunity for Small Businesses in Hawai'i"

Wayne Wong, Maui Center Director, Hawai'i Small Business Development Center (SBDC)
Binil Chacko, Senior Business Advisor, Hawai'i SBDC
Haley Hendricks, Public Sector and Education, Google Public Sector

This session demonstrated how strategic partnerships between government, educational institutions, and private sector can create pathways for small businesses to access contracts, funding, and technical assistance. The SBDC team shared success stories of local businesses scaling through government contracts and leveraging cloud tools for growth.

"Winning Government Contracts with AI"

Daniel Liu, Head of Customer Engineering, Google Public Sector

Liu provided a masterclass in practical AI application—demonstrating how vendors in Hawaiʻi can leverage AI tools to navigate the complex process of winning government contracts.

The Challenge: Vendors face:

- Complex regulations (Hawaiʻi Revised Statutes Chapter 103D)
- Labor-intensive bidding processes
- Documentation and compliance hurdles
- Competition from larger, mainland firms with more resources

The AI Solution: Liu walked through real-world workflows using:

1. Google Search with AI Overview – Quickly surfacing key procurement resources (HANDS, HIePRO, Hawaiʻi Compliance Express)
2. NotebookLM – Digesting complex RFP documents, extracting key requirements, deadlines, and evaluation criteria
3. Gemini Deep Research – Creating comprehensive research plans that analyze solicitations, identify competitors, and recommend best practices

Impact: By using AI to automate research, analysis, and initial drafting, small businesses can level the playing field—spending less time on administrative burden and more time on strategy and quality proposals.

Liu's presentation embodied the summit's ethos: AI as an equalizer, not just an accelerator.

"Lōkahi: Unifying for an Empowered Government"

Michael Heath, Senior Solutions Architect – Data & AI Services, SHI

Heath explored how unified data architectures and integrated AI services can break down silos within government agencies, enabling better collaboration and more cohesive service delivery to residents. He emphasized that technology alone doesn't create unity—it requires intentional governance, shared standards, and a commitment to interoperability.

Workforce Development Track

"Vibe Coding: AI-Powered Service Delivery – Automating Board Meeting Transcription and Summarization"

James Hogarty, Information Technology Specialist, State of Hawaiʻi Department of Commerce and Consumer Affairs (DCCA)
Dean Hazama, Deputy Director, State of Hawaiʻi DCCA

Hogarty and Hazama showcased a real-world AI implementation that saves staff hundreds of hours: using AI to automatically transcribe and summarize board meeting recordings. This "vibe coding" approach—building practical solutions quickly with AI assistance—demonstrated how even non-technical staff can leverage AI to solve workflow problems.

> 🗒 **Key Lesson:** You don't need to be a coder to use AI effectively. The best solutions often come from people who deeply understand the problem, paired with AI tools that accelerate development.

"Creating a Future-Ready Workforce: AI in Hawaiʻi's Creative Industries"

Thomas Chock, Program Specialist, State of Hawaiʻi DBEDT
Kevin Lim, CEO, Technology Outreach Hawaii

Chock and Lim explored how AI is transforming creative industries—from film and animation to graphic design and content creation—and what this means for Hawaiʻi's workforce. They discussed both the opportunities (new tools that amplify creativity, lower production costs) and challenges (displacement concerns, need for upskilling) facing creative professionals.

Outcome: Hawaiʻi's creative economy can thrive in an AI-augmented world, but only if we invest in training that helps artists and creators become skilled AI collaborators, not competitors.

"Career Pathways in an AI Economy – Mapping Roles & Competencies"

Garret T. Yoshimi, VP for Information Technology & CIO, University of Hawai'i System
Charles Elliott, Head of Industry Architects, Google

Yoshimi addressed a critical question: How do we prepare Hawai'i's workforce for an economy where AI is reshaping every industry?

He contrasted the "Legacy Pathway"—a linear K–12 → Postsecondary → Workforce model built for the Industrial Age—with emerging, flexible pathways that recognize:

- Multiple entry points (early college, training programs, certifications)
- Stackable credentials that lead to family-sustaining careers
- The need for continuous upskilling and adaptability

Career Pathways: Key Highlights

Showcased Hawaiʻi's Program of Study pathways in Computer Programming, Cybersecurity, and Artificial Intelligence

Each pathway maps connections between K–12, community colleges, university degrees, and career outcomes

Introduced a new career mapping tool that visualizes how education, skills, interests, and work experience connect to career opportunities

Next phase: Integration of micro-credentials, certificates, and non-credit pathways to provide more flexible on-ramps to careers

The University of Hawaiʻi's vision is clear: be "Hawaiʻi's University for Today and Tomorrow"—a forward-looking institution that creates not just graduates, but adaptable, skilled professionals rooted in place and grounded in values.

Secure Government and Cyber Resilience Track

"Pacific Command Threat Landscape + Google Security Portfolio: Securing Mission-Critical Infrastructure"

Kathy Cruz, Regional Leader – SLED West, Google Public Sector / Mandiant
Jodi Ito, Chief Information Security Officer, University of Hawaiʻi System

In this technical deep dive, Cruz and Ito expanded on the morning session by focusing specifically on the unique threat landscape facing Hawaiʻi and the Pacific region. Cruz outlined Google's security portfolio and how government agencies can leverage enterprise-grade security tools to protect critical infrastructure, while Ito shared the University of Hawaiʻi System's approach to securing a complex, multi-campus educational environment with thousands of users and diverse mission-critical systems.

Key Insights:

- Educational institutions face unique security challenges—balancing openness and collaboration with the need to protect research data, student information, and administrative systems

- Multi-layered defense strategies are essential: no single tool or approach provides complete protection

- Security is not just a technology problem—it requires ongoing training, policy enforcement, and cultural commitment across the organization

Additional Cyber Resilience Sessions
"Survivor Journey: Improving The Road to Recovery"

Craig Clouet, Data Scientist, Office of the Governor, State of Hawai'i
Divya Soni, Customer Engineer – SLED West, Google

Clouet and Soni presented work on using data analytics and AI to improve disaster recovery processes—particularly for survivors navigating complex applications for assistance. By mapping the "survivor journey" and identifying pain points, they demonstrated how technology can make recovery faster, more transparent, and more equitable.

Impact: When the next hurricane or wildfire strikes, survivors won't face a maze of disconnected forms and unknown wait times. They'll have visibility into where their applications stand and what steps come next.

"Tech Talk: Google Security Operations SIEM/SOAR"

Zach Coker, Customer Engineer – SLED Security, Google / Mandiant

Coker provided a hands-on technical overview of Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) and Security Orchestration, Automation, and Response (SOAR) platforms. This session equipped IT security teams with practical knowledge of how to detect, respond to, and automate responses to security threats.

Key Insights: What We Learned Together

1 The Messy Middle Is Where Hawai'i Lives—and Where Opportunity Lies

68% of organizations are in the exploration or active implementation phase. This is the hardest stage—past the excitement of pilots, but before the stability of full integration. It's where expertise gaps, budget constraints, and unclear ROI create the most friction.

What This Means: The greatest impact will come from deployment playbooks, 30/60/90-day checklists, and Hawai'i-tested case studies with ROI data—not more conceptual frameworks.

2 AI Has Leapfrogged Cloud Infrastructure—But That Creates Risk

62.5% of organizations report using AI, compared to 52.4% using cloud infrastructure. Normally, cloud is seen as the foundation upon which AI is built.

What This Means: Hawai'i organizations are experimenting with AI tools (like ChatGPT, Gemini, Copilot) before laying stable infrastructure foundations. This creates fragile wins—impressive pilots that can't scale or secure sensitive data.

3 Confidence ≠ Completion

Nearly 70% of respondents are "somewhat confident" or better in AI/cloud technologies, yet only 18.5% have fully integrated solutions.

What This Means: Confidence is high, but execution lags. People believe in the potential but need structured guidance to turn belief into practice.

The Path Forward: Pair AI's momentum with cloud readiness. Build resilience into the foundation, not as an afterthought.

More Key Insights

1 What People Want = What's Holding Them Back

Top desires (upskilling, use cases, implementation guidance) align almost perfectly with top barriers (lack of expertise, unclear ROI).

What This Means: The summit wasn't just a learning event—it was a needs assessment. Attendees came ready to move from ideas to action, and they told us exactly what would help: hands-on learning, real examples, and step-by-step playbooks.

2 Cross-Sector Collaboration = Hawaiʻi's Competitive Advantage

The summit brought together government agencies, small businesses, educational institutions, and large enterprises. This isn't common—most tech events skew heavily toward one sector.

What This Means: Hawaiʻi's strength is lōkahi (unity, harmony). The most durable wins will be the ones we co-design across sectors:

- Government provides scale, security standards, and public trust
- SMBs bring agility, creativity, and customer focus
- Education connects skills to market needs
- Large enterprises share best practices and infrastructure

Public-Private Partnership (PPP) pilots are the natural next step.

Impact Beyond the Summit

Service: Making Government Faster and Easier

Attendees left with practical examples of how AI can transform public services:

- Permit processing: Using AI to pre-check applications for completeness, routing them to the right reviewer automatically
- Benefits eligibility: Chatbots that help residents understand what they qualify for and guide them through applications
- Disaster response: Predictive analytics that help agencies pre-position resources before storms hit

Outcome: Residents experience government as helpful, responsive, and human—even when technology does the heavy lifting behind the scenes.

Resilience: Systems and Communities That Bounce Back

The summit emphasized that resilience isn't a product you buy—it's a practice you build.

Key Themes:

- Zero-trust security quick wins: Multi-factor authentication, least-privilege access, regular backups
- Data-sharing frameworks: Open where possible (public datasets), protected where necessary (PII, health records)
- Redundancy and failover: Cloud infrastructure that doesn't rely on a single point of failure

Outcome: When the next crisis hits—hurricane, cyberattack, or supply chain disruption—Hawai'i's systems absorb the shock and recover faster.

Skills: Keeping Opportunity Rooted in the Islands

One of the summit's most urgent messages: If we don't upskill local talent, opportunity will leave.

Yoshimi's presentation made this tangible:

- Pathways exist from high school to high-wage careers in AI, cybersecurity, and cloud engineering
- But they require intentional bridges: early college credits, industry certifications, apprenticeships, and micro-credentials
- Employers must participate —not just by hiring, but by co-designing curricula and offering work-based learning

Outcome: More Hawai'i residents—especially Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and underserved communities— have clear, achievable paths to family-sustaining careers in tech.

The Charge: What Happens Next

The summit's closing message was simple and actionable:

> **Pick one service to simplify, one security habit to institutionalize, and one skill to practice for 90 days. Share what works so others don't have to start from zero.**

Commitments We're Making:

1

Playbooks

One-page deployment guides for high-priority use cases (permits, benefits, disaster response) with clear ROI math, security baselines, and procurement paths.

2

Training

Cohort-based AI literacy and hands-on labs through partnerships with SBDC and UH, mapped to specific roles (analyst, manager, technologist).

3

PPP Pilots

An intake process and selection rubric to launch 3–5 public-private partnership pilots with agencies and SMBs, proving that Hawaiʻi-tested solutions work.

4

Community Updates

Ongoing newsletters with speaker highlights, use case spotlights, and Q&A from the summit, keeping momentum alive year-round.

Mahalo to Our Speakers: The Navigators Who Guided Our Journey

This summit succeeded because of the generous expertise, lived experience, and commitment to Hawaiʻi shared by our remarkable speakers. Each brought a unique perspective—and together, they created a comprehensive roadmap for our digital future.

Summit Leadership & Opening

James Tokioka, Director, State of Hawaiʻi Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT) – Opening Remarks

Nicole Cacal, Executive Director, TRUE Initiative – Master of Ceremonies (Morning Session)

Amanda Stange, Field Sales Manager, Google Public Sector – Master of Ceremonies (Morning Session)

Morning Sessions

Christine Maii Sakuda, Chief Information Officer, State of Hawaiʻi Office of Enterprise Technology Services – Keynote: "Hawaiʻi's Roadmap to a Technology-Enabled Government"

Chris Hein, Field CTO, Google Public Sector – Keynote: "Hawaiʻi's Roadmap to a Technology-Enabled Government"

Kathy Cruz, Regional Leader – SLED West, Google Public Sector – "Hawaiʻi Cyber Readiness 2025: Threat Landscape, Response, and Recovery Playbook"

Panel Discussion: "Democratizing Data & AI Resources for Hawaiʻi's Communities"

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Public-Private Partnerships for Growth Track

Wayne Wong, Maui Center Director, Hawaiʻi Small Business Development Center – "How Public-Private Partnerships Unlock Opportunity for Small Businesses in Hawaiʻi"

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Zach Coker, Customer Engineer – SLED Security, Google / Mandiant – "Tech Talk: Google Security Operations SIEM/SOAR"

Special Acknowledgment: Afternoon Track Masters of Ceremonies

A special mahalo to our afternoon track MCs, who kept the energy high, transitions smooth, and ensured every attendee felt welcomed and engaged throughout the breakout sessions:

Nicole Lim, Executive Director, Movers & Shakas

Ee Soo Paik, Executive Director, Kaimukī-Waiʻalae YMCA

Your warmth, professionalism, and deep commitment to community made each track feel like an intimate conversation among friends, even as we tackled complex technical topics. Thank you for being the connective tissue that held our afternoon sessions together.

To every speaker: Your willingness to share not just what you know, but how you learned it—the mistakes, the breakthroughs, the moments of doubt and determination—gave this summit its depth and authenticity. You showed up not to sell, but to serve. Not to impress, but to equip.

Mahalo nui loa.

Looking Ahead: Join Us for the 5th Annual Summit

If you felt the energy in the room, with the mix of urgency and optimism, and the sense that something is shifting, mark your calendars for next year!

Next year's summit will build on this strong foundation. We'll proudly showcase:

→ Live pilots and tangible results stemming from the partnerships seeded this year.

→ Hawaiʻi-grown case studies featuring real ROI data and invaluable lessons learned from local implementations.

→ Hands-on labs where attendees will leave with a working prototype, moving beyond theoretical discussions to practical application.

→ Deeper dives into critical areas of resilience—including cybersecurity best practices, disaster technology advancements, and innovations in supply chain management.

Bring your questions and your solutions. Because the best way to predict the future is to navigate it—together.

Closing Reflection

> This summit was about us: choosing to build systems that reflect our values, serve our people, and honor this place.

Contact:

For questions, partnership inquiries, or to stay connected:

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4th Annual Hawaii AI and Cloud Innovation Summit

Recap of TRUE Initiative's 4th Annual Hawaii AI and Cloud Innovation Summit on September 10, 2025. In partnership with Google, DBEDT, and...

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