



**BRANDING STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING  
HAWAII TOURISM AUTHORITY  
Thursday, June 20, 2024, at 10:00 a.m.**

**Virtual Meeting**

**MINUTES OF THE BRANDING STANDING COMMITTEE MEETING**

<b>MEMBERS PRESENT:</b>	Blaine Miyasato (Chair), Sig Zane (Vice-Chair), David Arakawa, Mufi Hannemann
<b>MEMBERS NOT PRESENT:</b>	Dylan Ching, Sherry Menor-McNamara
<b>HTA STAFF PRESENT:</b>	Daniel Nāho'opi'i, Kalani Ka'anā'anā, Maka Casson-Fisher, Iwalani Kūali'i Kaho'ohanohano
<b>GUESTS:</b>	Jeffrey Eslinger, Lynn Whitehead, Jay Talwar, Tom Mullen, Lei-Ann Field, Tyler Gomes
<b>LEGAL COUNSEL:</b>	John Cole

**1. Call to Order**

Chair Miyasato called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

**2. Roll Call to Announce Name of Participating Board Members and to Identify Who Else is Present with Board Member if Location is Nonpublic**

Ms. Kaho'ohanohano did the roll call, and members were confirmed in attendance by themselves. Mr. Ching and Ms. Menor-McNamara were excused.

**3. Opening Protocol**

Mr. Casson-Fisher did the opening cultural protocol.

#### **4. Approval of Minutes of the May 16, 2024 Branding Standing Committee Meeting**

Mr. Arakawa made a motion to approve the minutes, and Mr. Hannemann seconded. Ms. Kaho'ohanohano did the roll call, and the motion passed unanimously.

#### **5. Presentation and/or Discussion on HTUSA's Recent Advertising and Messaging Campaigns and Marketing Maui Recovery Plan**

Mr. Talwar introduced the latest campaign and informed the Committee that messages evolved from collaboration with the HTA staff, Kilohana, island chapter staff, industry and agency partners, and the Chair of the Branding Committee.

Mr. Talwar explained that the development of the campaign had started with identification of target travelers. They were the right audience because they spent more time and money on travel. Their behavior in daily life and their travels made them mindful visitors. Campaign developers continued to consider residents of Hawai'i and how they wanted to host visitors in their communities, homes, parks, and beaches. The HVCB took a broad look at communication management using the results of their research and those of the HTA and the Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT).

Mr. Talwar reminded the Committee that they had previously seen a draft version of this campaign, whose inviting appearance was based on market dynamics, including the fact that U.S. visitors were beginning to participate in more international travel. When the pandemic first ended, U.S. visitors had not been so excited about international travel but were now beginning to take more interest, especially as the value of the U.S. dollar impacted international travel.

The HVCB examined factors motivating travel to other destinations to market the Hawai'i product competitively. The agency also hoped to reinforce the benefits of tourism and the HTA's plan for regenerative tourism so that tourism would assist a broader part of the community, along with artisans, musicians, chefs, and agricultural producers. It was important to ensure that everyone had a stage to share their Aloha in a way that would invite visitors.

Mr. Talwar introduced video material which had been produced in a three-minute format. This could then be cut into other formats depending on the destination. The Committee was to be shown two 30-second segments and one 3-minute segment.

This campaign was based on each of the four islands and had already been rolled out across the U.S. The HVCB had taken advantage of the opportunity to update its knowledge bank and had obtained about 300 photos. These were being tagged and stored in the knowledge bank to be shared with industry partners. Mr. Talwar noted that a campaign that everyone supported would be amplified from the perspectives of public and private partnerships. Social media posts

were also in play, and Mr. Talwar noted that the Hawai'i destination was being shared by amazing ambassadors with a passion for portraying Hawai'i as their home to potential visitors. When visiting someone's home, one's behavior must be fitting.

Mr. Talwar referred to Chef Kyle Kawakami and pointed out that everyone loved the cuisine and wanted to get local insights. Mr. Talwar was aware that not every action would lead to an immediate sale, but the aim was to start visitors down the path toward selecting Hawai'i as their next destination.

Content for training and educational programs for travel trade teams had been amended and was already in the marketplace. Educational events and multi-island FAM tours were organized to accompany the campaign theme. Wholesaler consortia industry events multiplied the number of contacts and created additional salespeople for the HVCB team. Broad-reaching media, trade marketing, and the travel trade website were being updated.

Mr. Talwar explained that a cooperative marketing program engaging with wholesalers had been put in place from the additional budget and would run up to the end of June with sophisticated targeting based on past visitation and modeling. Results showed twice the number of "click-throughs" compared with previous results, and this was about three times the industry standard. The team looked forward to seeing further improvement in results.

The team examined the proposed messaging to ensure that the target audience understood and consumed the intended message. This study was in the early phases, and the intention was to return to the marketplace to determine whether edits were necessary. The study would also provide insights for the next phase of campaign development.

The public relations team stretched the available dollars by obtaining unpaid exposure, sometimes with a contribution to travel costs, which resulted in a good return on investment. A state-wide media blitz was scheduled for September, coordinating media visits to bring media to the destination and include maximum coverage for Maui.

Mr. Talwar introduced Ms. Lei Ann Field, the Senior Director of Visitor Public Relations and Communications at HVCB, who would provide information about Maui coverage over the past five months. Ms. Field explained that the total number of impressions was estimated at over 100 million. She thanked the team at Anthology for their excellent work in educating and inspiring the media to write stories about Maui.

Ms. Field mentioned several high-impact outlets that accessed the target audience, including Virtuoso magazine, Travel & Leisure, AFAR, Forbes, Points Guide, Sunset Magazine, Travel, the New York Times and the Matador network. The message had been:

"Now, more than ever, Maui needs visitors who tread lightly and compassionately and support local businesses."

These high-level publications reinforced the message to uplift Maui's people, community

leaders, and business owners. Good Morning America featured two small business owners from Maui whose travel to New York had been supported by the HTA to participate in the Mana Up pop-up market.

Good broadcast coverage from Minneapolis, and Ms. Field noted that Minnesota had been a key market for Maui. CBS had run a Maui story 630 times over their linked regional T.V. stations as a result of a meeting held in New York. The fact that this story had taken some time to develop illustrated Ms. Field's point that there was often a delay before stories were published.

Last month, team members traveled to California to meet with representatives of travel outlets such as Travel & Leisure, AFAR, Conde Nast Traveler, and the Wall Street Journal, sharing updates about Maui and Lahaina. Conde Nast Traveler was planning a major feature focusing on Maui in print and online.

While the team was in California, Maui businesses participated in a wine and food experience at Sonoma to promote responsible travel to Maui, utilizing Tourism Emergency Special Fund 1(b), focusing on small businesses. Maui businesses participated in three different events, of which the marquee was a tasting that attracted over 2,000 participants, many of whom fit the profile of the mindful traveler and many media representatives. Several stories about Maui had already appeared, and the team had discussions with media representatives to suggest they travel to Maui to experience the destination. The previous day, Ms. Field met with a writer from Forbes who expressed interest in attending the Hawai'i Food and Wine Festival. A total of 28 Maui brands and small businesses had been featured at the event, and products were displayed from vendors, including Paradise Now, a small boutique, and the Portney Farm project.

The "Maui at the Matheson Dinner" was a fundraising event, and it was a collaboration between Chef Lee Anne Wong and Healdsburg chefs, using live music. A portion of the proceeds went to Maui Strong. The Magnum Party was headlined by Guy Fieri and raised over \$75,000 for Maui Strong. Ms. Field thanked Alaskan Airlines, Fairmount Four Seasons, and other partners who donated items for the auction.

The Committee viewed a short video showing the Grand Tasting, which featured 15 ambassadors from Maui who expressed their gratitude to the HTA.

Television expert Emily Kaufman had partnered with the HVCB to create a segment that had already run in Phoenix, Sacramento, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, and other cities. Ms. Kaufman spoke about her love for Maui and gave a call to action, directing visitors to the GoHawaii website. The website had created a new landing page featuring around a dozen value-added offers from Maui hotels. This was just part of the campaign driving awareness that Maui was open.

Mr. Talwar thanked Ms. Field for her presentation and invited questions from Committee members.

Chair Miyasato asked how this report related to the incremental budget that had been approved in response to the Maui wildfires. Mr. Talwar replied that there had been incremental funding for Maui recovery from January to June 2024. The PR aspects of the campaign, in particular, had been funded by incremental funding, but Ms. Field and Ms. Kaho'ohanohano had worked closely with Ms. Anderson and other staff to find additional incremental funds to take Maui people to the marketplace.

Chair Miyasato reminded Mr. Talwar that the Maui recovery campaign was intended to be covered by approved funding and that compliance was important.

The Chair asked whether cooperative ventures had been reviewed and noted that partnerships with airlines, hotels, and other agencies were assessed for the return on investment (ROI) as a basis for future cooperation. He inquired whether there was a rating system to determine which partner gave the best return.

Mr. Talwar responded that tracking visitors was simple because wholesalers worked with airlines, lodging partners, on-island attractions and activities, and car rentals. The return on investment could be assessed. When a business did not appear to be returning an investment, the team held private conversations to obtain a sense of the most effective strategy. This formal process involved regular calls and examination of data such as click-through rates.

Chair Miyasato praised the positioning of various partners within the industry and community and asked whether there was a coterie of artisans, musicians, food suppliers, and others that was used as an informal advisory board to ensure that messaging was on point and authentic, as well as leveraging resources in a specifically targeted fashion.

Mr. Talwar explained that the HVCB had a relatively formalized evaluation process, including the HTA staff, island chapters, and Kilohana. They had put together spreadsheets of people whose values were aligned with those of the HTA and often worked with this group. So far, they had not yet provided a "seal of approval" as the Chair had suggested. This type of process would be more product-based than marketing-based.

Chair Miyasato replied that he was not recommending a permanent association but an aspirational measure so that partners would understand the benefits of their association with the HVCB and the HTA.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i pointed out that this corresponded to the quality assurance program scheduled to launch on June 25 under a Kilohana contract. Incentives regarding weighting, communication, and vetting were still to be developed. It was intended that only partners who had been vetted would be part of the HTA process of participating in travel trade or FAM events, but this had not yet been formalized.

Chair Miyasato explained that a more formal process would imply *kakou*, contributions, and results. In this way, everyone became a marketer. The Chair appreciated the videos but felt that

the final message, “the people, the place, the Hawaiian Islands,” needed to be emphasized and repeated by the voice-over.

Mr. Hannemann thanked Mr. Talwar for his informative presentation. He wondered how the public and stakeholders, such as elected officials, could be made aware of the magnitude of the active initiatives being undertaken by the HTA to mitigate the effects of the “soft summer” that was predicted. He suggested that different aspects of the work of the HTA could be emphasized depending on the audience. There had been frequent complaints that insufficient action was taking place. It was understood that the message had pivoted away from “Mālama,” but the follow-up appeared not to be known. A collective strategy should be developed to work with P.R. staff to ensure that Board members and staff of the HTA and HVCB can communicate the new message.

Mr. Hannemann noted that the image of the HTA at the legislature had been rebuilt, which had been a major accomplishment during the past session. Legislators had been assured that the HTA would be proactive. Mr. Hannemann had taken part in a meeting the previous day to discuss an excellent idea that would be great for Maui. This was still being worked out, but would be good for the HTA when it was eventually made public.

Mr. Hannemann asked Mr. Nāho’opi’i to work with Mr. Talwar and Mr. Gionson to communicate the work being done by the HTA. It was good that this should pass through the Branding Standing Committee since this Committee approved the funding. The public needed to be aware of the actions the HTA took to demonstrate their proactive attitude.

Mr. Nāho’opi’i thanked Mr. Hannemann for this suggestion. He pointed out that there was a process for industry partners, global marketing teams (GMTs), and stakeholders to receive information, but he would investigate the possibility of expanding this process to include other stakeholders in related areas. He promised to work with internal groups and staff on branding and communications to develop a strategy. He would keep Mr. Hannemann informed and would submit initial suggestions to the Board meeting.

Mr. Zane thanked Mr. Talwar for the presentation and noted that the message was less commercial than before the pandemic. He appreciated the subtle, almost subliminal message and noted that although the number of visitors might not be as high at the moment as had been hoped, the quality of visitors was more important than their numbers. Mālama had meant trying to change the demographics of visitors, with the hope that they would show respect for the community. It was important to express a message that local people would appreciate. He thanked the campaign team for involving people with a good local reach, even if they were not necessarily commercially well-known. At first, he considered the video segments slow-moving, but he then realized that they were aimed at the thoughtful visitor Hawai’i hoped to attract.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Mr. Talwar for his presentation and agreed with Mr. Hannemann on the importance of community. Mr. Talwar mentioned that he had already checked with all major

industry partners so he could go back to those people and confirm that their input had been incorporated, explaining how this had been done. Partners needed to know that they were part of the process, and this would cause them to adopt a more positive attitude. He suggested requesting all the industry partners to inform their contacts that the HTA was using their collective ideas, which would build on the strong base built up over the past three years.

Mr. Arakawa stated that he looked forward to witnessing the exciting new program announced by Mr. Hannemann but warned that it was important for the budget to provide for this program. As Chair Miyasato had said on several occasions, it was a *kakou* thing. Mr. Arakawa appreciated the HVCB reaching out to industry partners for input.

Mr. Hannemann thanked Mr. Arakawa for his points and stated that he had already spoken with Chair Miyasato about regular sessions with industry stakeholders. He had convened a group on a few occasions even before the new message had evolved. He wanted the community to understand what the HTA was doing, although stakeholders had their own ideas.

Mr. Hannemann referred to Mr. Talwar's mention of more cooperative plans coming out and pointed out that it was necessary to target the base market in California while not giving up on Japan, though the market was still slow. Eventually the Japan market would start to improve.

Mr. Hannemann noted that the Food and Wine Festival in Healdsburg, California, had not been widely publicized. The community had been brought together, money had been raised, and businesses had been exposed. This event needed to be reported in a comprehensive press release:

“HTA and HVCB were in Northern California.”

He agreed with Mr. Zane that ambassadors and others had been involved. The event should be publicized for people to understand. Every family in Hawai'i had someone either employed in tourism or impacted directly or indirectly by the economy fueled by the visitor industry. Mr. Hanneman gave kudos to everyone but emphasized that the efforts should be made public.

Mr. Arakawa agreed with Mr. Hannemann that focusing on Hawai'i and the West Coast markets, was important. The local community should be informed, and he noted that the local destination management teams and neighbor island bureaux could be used to inform local people.

Mr. Talwar promised that he would offer support in any way for local message-sharing, and the benefits of this had been seen in the past.

Chair Miyasato expressed his opinion that in terms of a “seal of approval,” there was no better champion than Mr. Zane to be a barometer for success. He agreed with the Vice Chair that the campaign was evocative and subtle, creating a relationship even before visitors arrived. A relationship made a person respectful, and Mālama would follow. It was important to get the message out, and there was a branding challenge. Many people did not understand the

symbiotic relationship between the HVCB and the HTA. Before he joined the Board, he had the impression that the HTA, HVCB, and Kilohana were three separate entities. It was important to reinforce the concept of the HTA as a brand.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

## **6. Presentation and/or Discussion Regarding an Update on the Meetings, Conventions and Incentives Market Activity and Pace Report, and Hawai'i Convention Center Activity and Local Sales**

Before introducing the HVCB Vice President of Global MCI Sales and Marketing, Ms. Lynn Whitehead, Ms. Kaho'ohanohano mentioned that minor adjustments had been made to the presentation that had previously been given to Committee members. The updated version will be available on the HTA website.

Ms. Whitehead stated that this was her first Branding Committee meeting, and she looked forward to sharing information about the business her team brought to the destination.

The aim of the collaboration between the Hawai'i Convention Center (HCC) and the HVCB was to reinforce the brand of the Hawaiian Islands as a location for Meetings, Conventions, and Incentives (MCI) business. Statistics from DBEDT for 2022 showed that convention delegates had spent a total of \$808 million. This resulted from many factors, such as total length and purpose of stay, average daily rate (ADR), and ancillary spending.

During 2022, the Meet Hawai'i team contracted rooms from city-wide and single-property events, amounting to \$452 million. DBEDT was to release 2023 figures later this summer. Currently, the Meet Hawai'i team has 2024 figures of \$558 million for business contracted by the State of Hawai'i. The City-wide team did not expect further bookings in 2024, but the single-property team expected the number of bookings to increase over the next six months.

Ms. Whitehead explained that MCI business was important to the Hawai'i economy because MCI delegates were business travelers on expense accounts, entertaining customers and participating in higher-end activities. Their spending permeated the economy, not just hotels or the HCC. MCI delegates also spent money on restaurants, off-site events, and transportation, contributing to many areas of the economy.

All the islands benefited from MCI business because delegates typically spent an additional three or four more nights in Hawai'i when attending a convention. They would attend the convention and then stay for a vacation in which they might visit another island. Typically, MCI delegates visited at least two islands.

When a significant event was booked at a destination, it helped to create limited availability, which drove up ADR in the community, thus directing more money towards transient



accommodation tax (TAT) to impact the state economy.

Ms. Whitehead explained that MCI had a unique sales and marketing process in which the target audience was corporate incentive association clients. These clients had a long sales cycle. When the Meet Hawai'i team received a request for proposal (RFP) either for the HCC or single-property, it came with detailed requirements, such as the number of rooms required, specifications for the meeting space, whether the convention center was required or whether the event could be fitted into a hotel, and whether the location should be a resort or urban setting. All these possibilities were on offer in Hawai'i. The Meet Hawai'i team would present a detailed proposal to the client, usually narrowed to two or three destinations. This would be followed by a site inspection. Single-property event planners often considered several islands. City-wide events were usually focused on the HCC, a hotel package, and venues around the area that could be used to conduct receptions and other events. A site selection committee usually makes the final decision, and it was important for the seller to know the various decision-makers and influencers involved in the process. Sometimes, a housing company might travel with the client to provide insights to help close the business.

The marketing strategy for MCI's business was mainly about rationality instead of emotional appeal. The client needed to know that the product would be able to manage all their meeting objectives. Targeting digital campaigns was very important, and LinkedIn had been a reliable source for Meet Hawai'i. It would be represented in the 2025 brand marketing plan. Industry relationships were long-term, and many sellers had collaborated with the same clients for years, building their trust and always trying to bring new business to the destination. Maintaining relationships was vital to provide great experiences and create continual repeat rotations for the groups brought to Hawai'i.

The main way that the team connected with clients was through trade shows and events. IMEX was a key trade show where the team had appointments representing their global client base and conducting direct sales and partner calls with hotels in the MCI market. This emphasized the need for strong industry relationships.

Sustainability, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have always been key components for MCI customers and have been considered by every RFP. Every destination was expected to address these issues, and Hawai'i had always represented a strong DEI and sustainability message.

Ms. Whitehead reviewed industry market trends. Lead volume and room night attendance were up, and overall bookings were near 2019 levels. Short-term bookings continued to be a trend, allowing venues to increase post-pandemic revenue. Planner optimism continued to grow. Japanese clients always included a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)/Community give-back component in the RFP process, and this trend was becoming common among all groups. 60% of planners expected more meetings in 2024 than in 2023, although rising costs were a concern.

The Meet Hawai'i team was fully staffed and had recently welcomed Marykay Lui to the single-property team. She was based in the Bay area and was very experienced and energetic, with established clients in the corporate market in the West.

First-quarter production had been strong, but there had been a slowdown during the second quarter. Two city-wide staff joined the team in April and May, enabling production to increase later in the year. The short-term booking cycle continued, but incentive travel was expected to hold steady and grow moderately in 2025. Competitors were putting incentive dollars into their proposals for groups being booked later in the future, concerning groups for 2026 and beyond, as well as City-wide groups for 2029 and beyond. Group business helped establish a base, and because of the short-term booking cycle since the pandemic, destinations have been doing everything necessary to build business for future years. The HTA and HVCB have been very helpful in creating conversations to compete with this new trend.

The team concentrated on managing 2024 and 2025 city-wide groups to ensure their continued future rotation. The calendar years 2024 and 2025 were very busy, with 2024 being the most productive year since the opening of the HCC. The fact that there were leaks in the building meant that teams were taken away from servicing booked customers. It was important for the Board to be aware that the Client Services and Event Management teams had been stretched, and they looked forward to repairing the roof during 2026.

The strategic focus was to redefine incentive programs for single-property and City-wide events, and rather than incentivizing at the end of the year as usual, the intention was to spread it throughout the year. The plan was to ensure a sales strategy with key incentive houses and third parties to keep Hawai'i at the forefront of the mind. Meet Hawai'i was to partner with stakeholders while focusing on putting partnerships into Maui.

The team recently partnered with Marriott to bring key incentive planners to Maui. IAAA will take place in August and focus on a key market segment, bringing in representatives and meeting planners from over 20 countries. Destination Hawai'i was to be hosted in December in O'ahu, and the team was developing a program with a third party to bring in key CEO decision-makers from larger programs to be hosted at the end of the year in Maui.

Ms. Whitehead explained that it was important for the Client Services team to have good processes to ensure success in bringing back groups that have been booked. They always tried to reinforce Meet Hawai'i groups' benefits to the community. Bringing an industry to HCC, a hotel, or an island allowed schools, their students, and the Hawai'i community to gain access to programs offered by the client. Through Debbie Zimmermann, the community was involved in processes such as medical expertise. The team looked forward to collaborating with the meeting of the American Farm Bureau in 2030.

Ms. Whitehead explained that once a group had been booked, it committed to give back to the destination, whether an initiative with the Hawai'i Food Bank – as took place recently when a

corporation donated \$20,000 to benefit communities in Maui and the Island of Hawai'i – or the Ala Wai Genki Balls project, or support for the HCC reforestation project.

The Meet Hawai'i City-wide sales team contracted groups 13 months outside arrival. The local sales teams contracted bookings within 13 months. The single-property sales team booked any event requiring ten or more rooms. The Event Management team dealt with center business and the Client Services team dealt with anything outside the building that would connect the client to the destination. The Client Services team also worked with single-property businesses.

Ms. Whitehead explained that the Meet Hawai'i sales team had 13.5 full-time employees, selling in the domestic, Canada, Europe, Asia, and Oceania markets.

City-wide sales production for May had been good, with some key bookings and tentative room nights at an average level.

Ms. Whitehead outlined Hawai'i's Future Pace for City-Wide for the next eight years and stated that the number of room nights was a KPI for Meet Hawai'i because it brought in TAT. She presented data for 2024–2031, showing contracted room nights and tentative room nights, which were proposals that had gone out to the customer. Taking a three-year average, the present total was 103,000. This meant that 2024, 2025, and 2030 were close to the pre-pandemic benchmark.

Ms. Whitehead presented a detailed graph showing target Pace as of June 1. It was important to focus on 2028, 2029 and 2031. Bookings would be lower during 2026 because of the planned roof repairs, implying that more work would be needed to keep up with the pace required.

The intention was to divert business to hotels in 2026 since construction would be underway in the HCC. She recently met with the HVCB CEO, Mr. Tom Mullen, and his team to discuss this. It would be necessary to allocate money towards incentives to drive money into the State.

Ms. Whitehead presented a detailed list of events hosted in 2024. The economic impact amounted to \$335 million. For 2025, \$453 million was on the books, and an additional three or four meetings were likely.

Single-property production was slightly reduced, but tentative room nights were steady. Now that there was a full-time seller, Ms. Whitehead expected single-property production to return to the expected levels.

Ms. Whitehead presented details of single-property production by island, along with tentative room nights representing leads. She reminded the Committee that clients often examined several islands, so the total number of tentative room nights by island was likely higher than the total presented by the sales team. From the perspective of definite room nights, the island of Hawai'i had received some larger groups, which put them ahead of O'ahu. There was still more work to do on Maui. The team ensured that Maui was highlighted in every conversation.

Future Pace for single property had been shortened to three years because the booking cycle was usually shorter, about 18 months. The team was working to increase numbers and had held a strategy meeting in April. The new seller in a vital market area was expected to impact production figures positively.

Ms. Whitehead presented a detailed list of recent events targeting incentive business, including the TOBUTOP Hawai'i Workshop in Tokyo and Osaka, the IRF Invitational, and the Marriott Momentum Convention Resort Network, which was attended by the Asia/Oceania team. Mr. Nāho'opi'i had recently attended ITB Asia in Shanghai. The team was revising the MOU of HIS in collaboration with JTB.

The economic impact was close to \$200 million for the Fiscal Year to Date (YTD) up to May 2024, and numbers were expected to increase now that the team was fully staffed.

Chair Miyasato thanked Ms. Whitehead and invited questions.

Mr. Hanneman thanked Ms. Whitehead for the presentation. He noted that the General Manager of the HCC had been encouraged to accelerate more youth sports events, as was the case in many other American cities such as Roseville, California. He asked whether there was a strategy for involving more youth sporting events.

Ms. Whitehead replied that Trevor Newman, based in the Bay area, managed the sports market and knew local sports groups well. A software platform has just been introduced that tracks room nights and should make bringing sports events to the HCC easier. During construction in 2026, the halls would be available for hire, so this was a way to create revenue and attract room nights to earn TAT.

Mr. Hannemann's second question concerned the recently concluded Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (FestPAC). This was a meaningful experience from which the people of Hawai'i benefited. He asked whether there was a strategy for more initiative about encouraging Oceania countries, including Japan, to plan meetings and conventions in Hawai'i to take advantage of the impact of FestPAC.

Ms. Whitehead replied that FestPAC had been amazing and exciting, and the local team had done an excellent job. There was a great benefit for the Asia/Oceania team, and the head of the Australia team was working on increasing impact. The Asia-Pacific group was preparing to sign up for 2027, and the team was focused on this with strategies in place to take advantage of the impact of FestPAC.

Mr. Hannemann noted that Governor and First Lady Green had led the initiative for FestPAC, but Mr. Ka'anā'anā and Mr. Casson-Fisher had worked on the event 24/7.

Ms. Whitehead promised that her team would discuss how best to take advantage of the impact of FestPAC.

Chair Miyasato confirmed that Mr. Hannemann was right to suggest the importance of leveraging the impact of FestPAC for future events.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Ms. Whitehead for her presentation and stated that the Budget, Finance, and Convention Center (BFCC) Committee hoped to do as much as possible to support MCI because of the large return on investment. He asked Ms. Whitehead to keep the BFCC Committee informed about what could be done. He believed that 2018–2019 had been the best year for MCI, with 27 City-wide events. The budget was now \$2 million less, and fewer employees were funded. He planned to discuss with Mr. Mullen what further support the HTA could offer next year. Mr. Arakawa requested Ms. Whitehead to present to the Board regarding the incentives offered by other destinations so that the Board could consider what more was needed for success.

Mr. Arakawa continued by asking how neighbor islands were being supported and whether, when professional convention groups conducted public service activities on O‘ahu, a group could also conduct public service on neighbor islands. This would help destination management teams propagate the idea that tourism was good because it also helped neighbor islands.

Thirdly, Mr. Arakawa agreed that the success of FestPAC had to be leveraged. He noted that Chair Hanneman had attended the Okinawan festival, which took place every five years, during which Okinawans returned to Okinawa. Mr. Arakawa wondered whether the Hawaiian community could consider this. Every governor who had attended the Okinawan festival had suggested that every five years, every Hawaiian should be invited to return to Hawai‘i. Ms. Whitehead and the HVCB team could consider this.

Ms. Whitehead thanked Committee members for their comments and feedback. She and Mr. Mullen had discussed what additional funds were needed. Business on other islands was a regular occurrence, but tracking it was not always possible. It was difficult to report the economic impact of single-property events.

Chair Miyasato congratulated Ms. Whitehead on her fascinating presentation and noted that all four components were present at this Committee meeting to maximize synergy.

## **7. Presentation and/or Discussion on Kilohana’s Visitor Education & Post Arrival Marketing Program**

Mr. Ka‘anā‘anā pointed out that Kilohana aimed to ensure visitors had a seamless transition from pre- to post-arrival.

Mr. Gomes presented a flow chart beginning with topic assignment and research, noting the value of access to resources and ensuring a balance between “Hawaiian-ness” and what would be appropriate to represent the Hawaiian Islands. The design team drafted ideas that were returned to the HTA, HVCB, and other stakeholders to ensure alignment in various campaigns.

In partnership with Nexstar, Kilohana had created a campaign thermometer for KPI. This schematic tracked KPI in terms of user clicks each month. To date, they were ahead of the goal of achieving deliverables by the end of the contract.

Travel808 was a newly created program in which Ms. Kaho'ohanohano was one of the cohosts. This was a collaboration between KHON2 and Nexstar. Five episodes were pending approval by the HTA, including a licensed instrumental from a local artist. This ensured that local artists and local businesses were integrated. The video to be shown was about Diamond Head.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā informed the Committee that Nextar and KHON had agreed that the HTA had the full license to use the program as they saw fit.

Mr. Gomes thanked Ms. Kaho'ohanohano for participating in this program. Similar segments could be made for other islands specific to O'ahu.

The Committee was also shown a campaign on social media about natural resource management, showing monk seals on Kaimana Beach. Kilohana had worked with the HTA and DLNR to ensure the messaging was attractive and highly visible. Visitors were informed about activities that were or were not permitted.

Mr. Gomes gave details of the Maui recovery campaign separate from the destination stewardship contract; although it shared the same acronym, VEPAM, the budget of \$300,000 from the Tourism Emergency Special Fund was explicitly limited to recovery on Maui.

The Committee viewed a video being shown at the Maui airport baggage claim with messaging highlighting areas that were closed to the public and open areas. This became the theme for the Maui Visitor Education and Post-Arrival Marketing (VEPAM) campaign to combat misinformation and highlight areas and activities still open for visits.

Mr. Gomes explained that this was the first video to be made. The Board had previously seen clips. This video could be cut in several ways to highlight the people who took part. It was not funded by Maui VEPAM, but was created in partnership with Maui County and CNHA. Kilohana worked closely with the HVCB and other work of the same kind.

Digital media content had also been specifically created to feature each open area on Maui. These media were then integrated into native advertisement campaigns on other websites and made to look like news stories or "naturally occurring material." This was based on a comment from Member Hannemann, who urged that material created by the HVCB should be cost-effectively repurposed in native advertisement spaces to present the material to new eyes.

The Maui Destination Management Action Plan (DMAP) developed four airport advertisements showing itineraries created by local Maui people to give visitors an idea of activities and destinations. These segments were in the final editing phase, ensuring that the tone was appropriate and brand outlines were matched. They would go out shortly once editing was complete. Some VEPAM digital advertisements had been repurposed from the existing

knowledge bank since resources to capture new material were unavailable.

The budget for advertisements at the airport baggage claim was significantly lower than eight years ago. The Committee viewed a sample of the advertisements developed from repurposed material for cost-effectiveness. These advertisements contained Q.R. codes to direct visitors to the relevant web pages. YouTube videos had been repurposed from the pre-existing HTA campaign about Mālama.

Mr. Gomes informed the Committee that the expenditure for VEPAM was \$1.3 million to date. Up to the end of December 2024, the budget was \$1.7 million, so about \$400,000 remained. Most of the expenditure had been on social, digital, out-of-home, and native media, with search expenditure the lowest. The original intention had been to develop advertisements that were no longer permitted, so the budget was repurposed to other categories.

Chair Miyasato invited questions.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Mr. Gomes for the presentation and commented that he had not seen material showing Ka'anapali apart from a slide that showed work was taking place. Mr. Gomes replied that later research showed insufficient awareness of the distinction between Ka'anapali and closed areas in the northern part of Lahaina. The team had since pivoted to ensure enough itineraries were being created for that area. It was impossible to prevent visitors from going there, so the team felt positive redirection was better than negative reinforcement.

Mr. Hannemann thanked Mr. Gomes for the presentation. He recalled that the Committee chaired by Ms. Paishon to develop additional finances for Maui provided by the governor, had called for Kilohana to organize a Farmers' Market, but there seemed to have been issues about a venue. Mr. Nāho'opi'i replied that money had been allocated to work with the County and the CNHA to develop a venue for Maui businesses since the Lahaina fire had destroyed a large part of their market area. The CNHA had been working hard to secure a location and leases but could not do so before the June 30 deadline for spending the money.

Mr. Gomes explained that, based on the minimum space requirements from vendors, it had been challenging to find an appropriate area in a desirable location. A space had been identified at Maui Mall, but eventually, it proved impossible to ensure that all arrangements could be made and that the money was spent before the deadline. Mr. Nāho'opi'i stated that they had been working with the County, but finally, the Farmers' Market became a lower priority than when they started to distribute emergency funds.

Chair Miyasato asked how the money allocated to the Farmers' Market would be used, and Mr. Gomes stated that it would be redistributed. Mr. Ka'anā'anā had been working with the special projects manager for Maui in the Governor's Office, and it appeared that something temporary rather than long-term might be the solution. Local vendors could be given vouchers for survivors, and this would be a way of supporting local survivors.

Mr. Hannemann expressed a concern that everything should be accounted for.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i explained that a presentation of the status of the fund to date would be made at the Board meeting. Another area had money allocated, but the contract could not be completed, and the Board could decide whether the money could be reallocated. The deadline for expenditure was June 30, but since the emergency declaration would still be in force after that date, the Board could agree to extend the deadline or apply the money to other projects.

Chair Miyasato asked whether Mr. Nāho'opi'i would prepare a presentation with recommendations. The funds should not be allowed to lapse, but they must also be used as originally intended. He asked about the timeframe and the intended use of the funds.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i replied that the Board's original recommendation was to complete all projects by June 3<sup>h</sup>. By that date, either contract would be in place, or the money would have been encumbered. The HTA staff had been looking for alternative proposals.

Mr. Arakawa pointed out that the Budget, Finance, and Convention Center Committee (BFCCC) had not been informed and asked whether Mr. Nāho'opi'i had consulted with the HTA Vice President of Finance, Mr. Isaac Choy. Mr. Nāho'opi'i responded that a report would be presented at the meeting of the BFCCC the following week.

Mr. Arakawa agreed that it was important for the money not to lapse but must also be spent in the intended manner. He was concerned that he had only now become aware of this issue. It was particularly concerning that there seemed to be an intention to give the HTA money to individual people. Mr. Arakawa intended to contact Mr. Choy and advised Mr. Nāho'opi'i to collaborate with the appropriate committees, reminding him that the HTA was under audit and the legislature had been examining the budget. Next year, Program I.D.s will be in use, so this year, the HTA must build trust with the legislature.

Mr. Ka'anā'anā apologized and explained that this was merely an idea that had been floated. It had not been requested or enacted.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Mr. Ka'anā'anā for his response and asked him whether, at the time that he was acting CEO, he had informed Mr. Choy about this. Mr. Ka'anā'anā stated that he had discussed the matter with Ms. Anderson because she was the Maui project's brand manager.

Mr. Arakawa commented that all this could have been done by email, but it appeared to have been kept a secret. However, he would discuss the matter further offline. He explained again that his concern related to HTA being under audit.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i stated that the disbursement of emergency money would be reported to the BFCCC, and then to Board. He was aware that new projects could not be created and executed before June 30.

Mr. Arakawa pointed out that if the HTA were to be run like any American corporation or



government agency, the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) ought to be made aware of budget issues occurring less than one month before the end of the fiscal year and as Chair of the BFCCC Mr. Arakawa should also have been made informed.

Chair Miyasato appreciated Mr. Arakawa's points and stated that it was clear that the CFO should have been informed. This was an opportunity to improve the management process. Chair Miyasato thanked Mr. Gomes and Mr. Ka'anā'anā for the presentation. The Board needed to know about the work being done by Kilohana, which was very impressive on a small budget. Returning to the idea of Okinawans going home every five years, Chair Miyasato suggested that Kilohana would be the agency to plan such an event. The HTA had resources and should use them to build the brand.

Mr. Hannemann agreed that the CNHA and Kilohana were the perfect organizations to replicate the Okinawan reunion. They had already done something similar in Las Vegas with all the Hawaiians on the U.S. mainland. To do something on O'ahu would be a pivot.

Secondly, Mr. Hannemann loved the videos and congratulated Ms. Kaho'ohanohano on her talent. He appreciated the synergy across the HTA brand and found the video very authentic. The HTA had many resources which had to be utilized. He thanked Mr. Gomes and Mr. Ka'anā'anā.

Mr. Arakawa agreed that an event bringing all Hawaiians back home would be an excellent opportunity for the two HTA contractors, Kilohana and the HVCB, to work together on something huge. He hoped that this idea would continue to be considered.

Chair Miyasato stated that this was the right Committee for this conversation because there could not be a boundary between marketing to visitors and marketing to Kama'āina. For this type of major project, there had to be a driver; in his mind, it should be Kilohana. Sometimes it seemed that if everyone was in charge, no one was in charge.

Mr. Hannemann pointed out that the CNHA had probably already discussed this idea. It would require the collaboration of Kilohana, the HVCB, and the HCC.

Chair Miyasato stated that there were two audiences: the external audience trying to get visitors here via MCI and the internal audience, residents, helping them feel more positive about tourism. There were many ambassadors for Hawai'i. He had moved away from Hawai'i when he was 15. That was when he realized how proud he was to be from Hawai'i since his friends all wanted to visit Hawai'i because of their relationship with him. It was poetic and stimulating for everyone to come home, but it was important for one group to be responsible.

## **8. Presentation and/or Discussion of the 2025 MMA Brand Marketing Plan Outline**

This agenda item was postponed. Mr. Nāho'opi'i promised to send out the information in writing.

## 9. Presentation, Discussion, and Action on Fiscal Year 2025 Hawai'i Tourism Authority Operating Budget for Branding and Marketing (BED114)

Mr. Nāho'opi'i presented part of the process for budgeting for FY25. This would ensure that Board is approved, starting with BFCCC and then the full Board next week. Each Committee was supposed to examine items relating to it before passing them to BFCCC. The beginning of the process was approving items relating to branding and marketing under Program ID BED114.

A general presentation was made to the BFCCC last month since most budget line items were detailed in the budget worksheets. The amounts would not be changed since staff would not manipulate existing line items.

At present, only the general category for the branding and marketing budget for FY25 is to be considered. This was the marketing opportunity fund, which included incremental changes to be used for MCI and other opportunities. This had been discussed in testimony to the legislature and was concerned with the adjustment to current market conditions.

The total budget line item was \$2.7 million, and the legislature had instructed that a 10% restriction should be deducted at the beginning. If it were made available later, contracts could be returned, or the funds could be utilized for any additional programs at the end of the fiscal year. This meant that an amount of \$2.47 million was available.

The branding team has made the following recommendations:

1. Market support for travel missions \$75,000  
This was to include cultural, talent, or musicians not covered in the base contracts
2. Korea RFP Transition (Travel cost to HTA Fall Conference Week) \$5,000  
The new contract would only start next calendar year and would not cover this travel
3. Japan incremental budget \$535,000  
Last year, \$2.5 million was approved over the calendar year. This was the second half of the calendar year 2024 and would be \$1.15 million. After 10% reduction, it would be \$1,035,000, but it was recommended that only \$535,000 be used for Japan incremental. It was felt that the U.S. market was a more critical need.
4. USA Incremental Fall Activation \$1,500,00  
It was important to make up for the losses seen since the beginning of the year. An additional fall activation not part of the base contract would be important. It was most likely in Los Angeles, Hawai'i's largest market, probably in September. The campaign would be full saturation and integrate large-scale consumer and travel trade events to draw awareness into target marketing on the West Coast.

That would leave about \$300,000, which potentially could be used for a new airline, Korea Air Premia, which was moving to a regular scheduled service, and a cooperative of \$100,000 could be considered with them.

There was also a possibility of supporting China market cooperatives with \$200,000 if a new non-stop or one-stop flight was developed.

Mr. Arakawa thanked Mr. Nāho'opi'i for the presentation and recognized that the HTA staff knew the challenge of adjusting to the slower summer season. He reminded Mr. Nāho'opi'i that there would be Program I.D.s that VP Choy would ensure were complied with next year, even though the Governor had not yet signed the budget. Mr. Nāho'opi'i replied that they had been working closely with Mr. Kishi to comply with Program I.D.s.

Mr. Hannemann stated that he had encouraged staff to look into the marketing opportunities fund and thanked Mr. Nāho'opi'i for putting together a good plan. The plan had not been compiled in a vacuum but through collaboration with the U.S. and Japan marketing teams. The plan would address the U.S. market while not neglecting Japan since the need was now greater for the U.S. Some funds for the Japan market were to go ahead. Mr. Hannemann appreciated the two potential opportunities for Korea and China. Out of all the Asia markets, Korea was doing best. It was also necessary to take advantage of the China market. During their visit to China, Mr. Nāho'opi'i and the House Tourism Chairs had heard about the strong interest in visiting Hawai'i. The U.S. Embassy in China should understand the advantages of the China market for Hawai'i.

Chair Miyasato asked how much would be left in the Marketing Opportunities Discretionary Fund. Mr. Nāho'opi'i replied that the remaining funds would be \$312,133.50.

Chair Miyasato pointed out that it would be unfortunate to have nothing in the discretionary fund if an opportunity arose for which there was no financial provision. Mr. Nāho'opi'i replied that it was not certain whether the two potential opportunities for Korea and China would need to be funded.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i stated that he was always in contact with the global marketing teams (GMTs), and they had not mentioned any needs. The GMTs had base funding, and more would be requested in FY26. However, for FY26, the beginning of a biennial budget, the intention was to build the budget on a strategic plan.

Mr. Hannemann proposed a motion to approve the Fiscal Year 2025 Hawai'i Tourism Authority Operating Budget for Branding and Marketing (BED114). Vice Chair Zane seconded the motion.

Ms. Kaho'ohanohano conducted the roll-call vote, and the motion was carried unanimously with the proviso from Mr. Arakawa that this was to be approved by the Finance Department.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i agreed to make this presentation during the BFCCC meeting.

Mr. Nāho'opi'i stated that Agenda Item #8 would be sent out in written form for information purposes only.

**10. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sheillane Reyes".

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Sheillane Reyes  
Recorder