

From statutory concept to launch-ready institution

A decision brief on the Aloha Intelligence Institute and the minimum work required to make a successor proposal coherent, nonduplicative, governable, and implementable.

Core proposition. Hawai'i has already articulated an ambitious place-based AI institute. The next challenge is not inventing another vision. It is resolving the authority, governance, operating, fiscal, and public-legitimacy questions that determine whether the Institute can actually launch and endure.

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THE IMMEDIATE OPPORTUNITY**Strengthen the Institute before asking government to build it.**

SB 1622 and its House companion established a serious public-policy proposition: a University of Hawai‘i-based institute that would connect AI research, workforce development, public-private partnership, ethical implementation, and Hawai‘i-specific priorities. The measures also left the hardest implementation questions unresolved.

Recommended next action: commission or invite a bounded legislative and institutional design brief that converts the existing statutory concept into three viable operating options, identifies the minimum viable launch, and specifies the decisions a successor measure must resolve.

01**CLARIFY PURPOSE**

Define the single public problem the Institute uniquely solves and the outcomes by which it should be judged.

02**ALLOCATE AUTHORITY**

Separate Institute functions from responsibilities already held by UH, ETS, the Chief Data Officer, agencies, regulators, counties, and other institutions.

03**DESIGN FOR LAUNCH**

Translate broad statutory duties into governance, staffing, budget, implementation phases, safeguards, and stop-or-expand criteria.

WHY THIS IS TIMELY

Hawai‘i’s AI policy is now developing along several tracks. The 2025 Institute bills focused on research, workforce, statewide initiatives, partnerships, ethics, and reporting. In 2026, HB 2597 assigned the Chief Data Officer proposed responsibilities for an open-data AI assistant, governance-tool evaluation, and reporting of state AI uses and vendors. SB 3001 addressed consumer and minor safety in AI companions. These initiatives are not inherently duplicative, but they make institutional boundaries more important. [1-6]

The policy question is no longer whether Hawai‘i should prepare for AI. It is how the State assigns responsibility without creating gaps, overlap, or unfunded expectations.

THE SPECIFIC REQUEST

After review of this brief, a short conversation with Senator Chang to identify whether an Institute-design memorandum would be useful, what decision it should support, and whether the appropriate pathway is legislative research, UH collaboration, external sponsorship, or no further work.

THE VISION IS SUBSTANTIAL

SB 1622 already contains the foundation of a place-based institution.

The introduced measure placed the Aloha Intelligence Institute within the UH Office of the Vice President for Research and Innovation. It proposed interdisciplinary AI research tied to climate resilience, disaster management, food security, marine resources, healthcare, renewable energy, creative industries, advanced manufacturing, and cultural and linguistic preservation. It also contemplated training, statewide initiatives, public-private partnerships, community participation, external funding, and biannual reporting. [1]

Established direction	What the bills say	Implementation question left open
Institutional home	Located under UH's research and innovation leadership.	What authority would the Institute have across UH campuses and outside UH, and how would it interact with existing centers and administrative offices?
Mission breadth	Research, education, workforce, partnerships, ethics, and statewide AI advancement across many sectors.	What is the minimum core mission, and which activities are first-year priorities rather than eventual ambitions?
Staffing	The introduced bill proposed ten permanent and seven nonrecurring positions; SD1 retained the counts but blanked appropriation amounts.	Which functions justify each position, and can a smaller launch produce evidence before permanent expansion?
Governance	Community leaders, including Native Hawaiian cultural experts, were contemplated among participants.	Who holds decision authority, how are members selected and compensated, and what rights do communities have over priorities, data, and outputs?
Funding	Legislative appropriations plus federal, private-sector, and philanthropic funding.	How are conflicts, donor influence, IP, procurement, public benefit, and long-term operating sustainability governed?
Accountability	Biannual reports to the Legislature and Governor.	Which measurable outcomes, independent reviews, public disclosures, and reauthorization gates should accompany reporting?

Legislative signal, not a failure finding. The Senate advanced SB 1622 SD1 and the Ways and Means Committee reported supportive testimony from UH, UHPA, the Chamber of Commerce Hawai'i, and an individual. The House received the measure and referred it to Higher Education, Economic Development, and Finance. The public record reviewed for this brief does not establish one definitive reason the measure did not become law. [2-4]

WHAT CHANGED DURING THE PROCESS

The introduced bill specified \$2 million in the second fiscal year and set concrete allocations for permanent positions and start-up expenses. SD1 left appropriation amounts blank and inserted a distant effective date. The companion HB 546 later reached the Senate in a form that established the Institute but omitted the appropriation section. These changes indicate that the concept advanced further than its launch mechanics. [1,2,5]

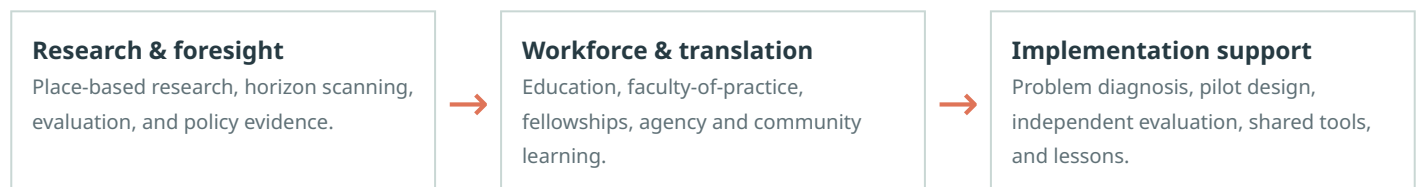
THE UNRESOLVED BOUNDARY QUESTION

What should the Institute own - and what should remain elsewhere?

The Institute should not become a second enterprise technology office, a regulator, a procurement authority, or a catch-all home for every AI-related function. Its durable value is more likely to lie in research, workforce, translation, evaluation, and shared implementation support that existing institutions do not provide alone.

Actor	Likely core authority or role	Potential Institute relationship
University of Hawai'i	Research, teaching, workforce development, administration, faculty and student participation.	Host, research engine, talent pipeline, and statewide academic network.
ETS / CIO	Enterprise technology, cybersecurity, architecture, shared systems, and operational standards.	Implementation and technical-governance partner; not displaced by the Institute.
Chief Data Officer	State data policy, data sharing, open-data infrastructure, and proposed AI-use/ vendor reporting and governance-tool work.	Source of state-use intelligence and data-governance requirements; Institute can research, evaluate, and translate findings.
Departments and counties	Program ownership, statutory duties, frontline workflows, data stewardship, and service delivery.	Problem owners and implementation partners; retain authority over programs and decisions.
DCCA / Attorney General / OIP	Consumer protection, enforcement, legal review, privacy, and public-information functions.	Safeguard and legal-authority partners; Institute does not certify compliance or enforce law.
Native Hawaiian institutions and communities	Community authority, cultural knowledge, collective and place-based interests, and data-governance expectations.	Foundational governance participation, research-priority authority, review rights, benefit-sharing, and accountability - not ceremonial consultation.

A DEFENSIBLE CORE MISSION



Regulation, enterprise operations, procurement authority, enforcement, and agency program ownership remain with the entities legally responsible for them.

NONNEGOTIABLE DESIGN PRINCIPLE

Native Hawaiian governance cannot be a late-stage advisory box. The design process should determine how Native Hawaiian participants shape the Institute's mandate, research priorities, data practices, partnership terms, publication choices, and measures of benefit from the beginning.

THREE CREDIBLE PATHS

The successor proposal should choose an operating model, not merely repeat the mission.

RECOMMENDED STARTING POINT Option A: Planning and Design Office Purpose: validate need, map existing capacity, establish governance, build the first research agenda, and prepare a launch decision. Scale: small time-limited team, independent advisors, compensated community participation. Decision gate: expand, reconfigure, place functions in existing entities, or stop.	Option B: Networked Institute Purpose: coordinate existing UH, government, community, and industry capacity through funded nodes and shared standards. Strength: lower duplication and statewide reach. Risk: diffuse accountability and coordination burden.	Option C: Full Institute Purpose: permanent research, workforce, partnership, and implementation center with its own staff and operating programs. Strength: durable capability. Risk: premature staffing, scope expansion, and fiscal exposure without validated demand.
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WHAT A PLANNING PHASE SHOULD PRODUCE

Product	Decision enabled
Legislative history and unresolved-questions memorandum	Which provisions should be retained, narrowed, clarified, or deferred in successor legislation.
Authority and nonduplication map	Which functions belong to UH, ETS/CDO, agencies, regulators, counties, communities, and the Institute.
Three operating models with fiscal scenarios	Whether to launch a planning office, networked model, full institute, or no new entity.
Governance and public-legitimacy framework	How appointments, community authority, conflicts, data, partnerships, IP, publication, and review should work.
First three-year agenda and evidence gates	What the Institute should do first, what it should not do, and what evidence would justify expansion.
Successor-legislation design recommendations	How statute, appropriation, reporting, sunset, and reauthorization language can support implementation rather than aspiration alone.

Housing as a later application, not the first commission. Senator Chang’s Housing chairmanship and Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs vice chairmanship make implementation questions especially relevant, but no housing AI pilot should be presumed before an agency owner, lawful authority, actual workflow problem, data conditions, and non-AI alternatives are established. [7,8]

A BOUNDED FIRST ENGAGEMENT

Aloha Intelligence Institute Legislative & Institutional Design Memorandum

A six-week, primary-source-led engagement focused on one question: what must a successor proposal resolve for the Institute to be credible, implementable, and worth public investment?

WORK PACKAGE 1

Legislative and institutional audit

- Compare SB 1622, SD1, HB 546, and the relevant committee record.
- Map current 2026 state AI responsibilities and institutional overlap.
- Identify unresolved fiscal, governance, staffing, authority, and sequencing questions.

WORK PACKAGE 2

Operating-model analysis

- Develop planning-office, networked, full-institute, and no-new-entity options.
- Test each against authority, cost, duplication, statewide reach, legitimacy, and implementation capacity.
- Specify minimum viable launch and evidence gates.

WORK PACKAGE 3

Governance and legitimacy design

- Define public, academic, executive, community, and Native Hawaiian roles.
- Address data governance, conflicts, external funding, IP, publication, benefit, transparency, and accountability.
- Identify required specialist review.

WORK PACKAGE 4

Successor-legislation roadmap

- Translate findings into statutory design choices.
- Develop phased staffing and appropriation scenarios.
- Recommend reporting, sunset, reauthorization, and implementation milestones.

RESEARCH DISCIPLINE

The work would begin with bill text, amendments, committee reports, testimony, appropriations, agency authorities, UH materials, and current Hawai'i AI measures. Limited interviews would test implementation reality and validate role descriptions, not replace documentary evidence. No interviews or nonpublic review would begin without an authorized sponsor, agreed scope, and permissions.

WHAT THIS FIRST ENGAGEMENT WOULD NOT DO

- Build or procure software.
- Draft a complete statewide AI code.
- Commit UH or any agency to an operating model.
- Conduct a legal compliance or cybersecurity audit.
- Characterize public employees or institutions without validation.
- Treat community participation as unpaid decoration.
- Publish nonpublic findings without written approval.
- Assume a new Institute is preferable to strengthening existing capacity.

WHY RN

RN Collins combines legal and regulatory research, qualitative research, regulated research, neuroscience and psychology, technology transfer, curriculum design, and hands-on AI workflow building. She would conduct the cross-institutional inquiry, synthesize primary evidence, clarify tradeoffs, and coordinate specialist review - not substitute for UH leadership, legislative counsel, fiscal analysts, Native Hawaiian governance expertise, cybersecurity, procurement, or domain owners.

Requested next step

Provide this brief to Senator Chang. If the institutional-design question is relevant, reschedule a 30-minute conversation with him to identify the single decision that would be most useful and the lawful, practical pathway for developing the memorandum.

Official sources. [1] SB 1622 (2025), introduced version. [2] SB 1622 SD1 (2025). [3] Senate Standing Committee Report 867 (2025). [4] House referral of SB 1622 SD1 to HED/ECD/FIN (2025). [5] HB 546 SD1 (2025). [6] HB 2597 and 2026 committee reports; SB 3001 CD1 (2026). [7] Hawai'i Senate 2026 hearing notices identifying Senator Chang as Housing Chair. [8] Hawai'i Senate 2026 hearing notices identifying Senator Chang as Energy and Intergovernmental Affairs Vice Chair.

All legislative-status statements are limited to the official records reviewed. The public record cited here does not establish a single definitive reason the 2025 Institute measures were not enacted.