



DEPT. COMM. NO. 207

IOLANI PALACE

December 29, 2025

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura
Speaker and Members of the
House of Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

For your information and consideration, I am transmitting a copy of the State of Hawai'i Museum of Monarchy History 2025 Annual Report as required by Hawai'i Revised Statutes §6E-35.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me at (808) 522-0822 ext. 125 or email at paula@iolanipalace.org

Sincerely,

Paula Akana
President and CEO
The Friends of 'Iolani Palace



IOLANI PALACE

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

STATE OF HAWAII MUSEUM OF MONARCHY HISTORY



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July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025

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MISSION STATEMENT

E mālama, ho'ihō'i hou, wehewehe, ka'ana a ho'ohiwahiwa i ke 'ano laha ole o ka mo'omeheu, ka mō'aukala a me ka mana o ka Hale Ali'i o 'Iolani a me kona pa no ka pono o ke kānaka 'ōiwi a me ka po'e o Hawai'i nei a me ko ke ao nei.

To preserve, restore, interpret, share, and celebrate the unique cultural, historical, and spiritual qualities of 'Iolani Palace and its grounds for the benefit of native Hawaiians, the people of Hawai'i, and the world.



MESSAGE FROM THE FRIENDS OF 'IOLANI PALACE PRESIDENT AND CEO PAULA AKANA

Aloha kākou,

The Friends of 'Iolani Palace presents its annual operational report for FY25. As we near the 60th anniversary of our organization, we are honored to share an account of our stewardship of 'Iolani Palace and the ways its story continues to resonate with kama'āina and visitors.

Throughout the year, we remained committed to caring for this wahi pana, a sacred place. Time and weather take their toll on a 143-year-old building. Our kuleana is to protect the Palace, steward its collections, and share the history of Hawai'i's ali'i with integrity and care.

This work depends on partnership. We are grateful for the Hawai'i State Legislature's \$1.8 million in operational support for the State of Hawaii Museum of Monarchy History, which helps fund wages, IT and security systems, and utilities. We also mahalo the State Foundation on Culture and the Arts for administrative support, and the Department of Land and Natural Resources for funding critical CIP projects. State support provides the foundation that allows the Palace to remain open, safe, and well cared for.

You may hear the phrase, "it's a kākou thing." The meaning is clear in the way our partners, supporters, volunteers, and staff show up for this place. Stewardship is shared. Together, we ensure 'Iolani Palace stands strong for generations to come.

Mahalo for your continued trust and support. We invite you to read this report and see what we accomplished together.

Me ke aloha,

Paula Akana, President and CEO
State of Hawai'i Museum of Monarchy History





OPERATIONS

Operations at 'Iolani Palace focus on care, protection, and continuity. State support provides the backbone for this work, allowing the Palace to function as both a historic site and a working museum. In FY25, **\$1.8 million in state funding** supported daily operations, essential systems, staffing, and long-term maintenance for a building that requires constant attention.

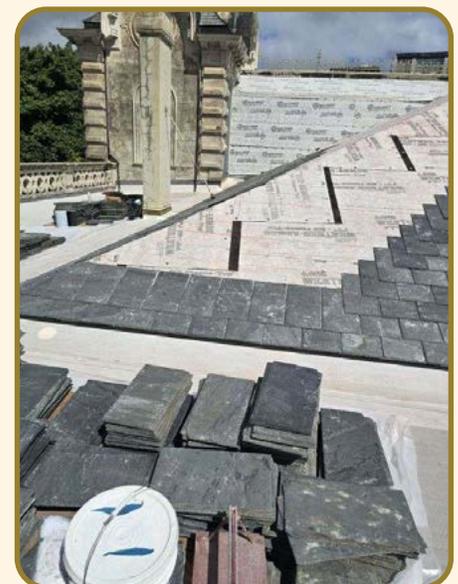
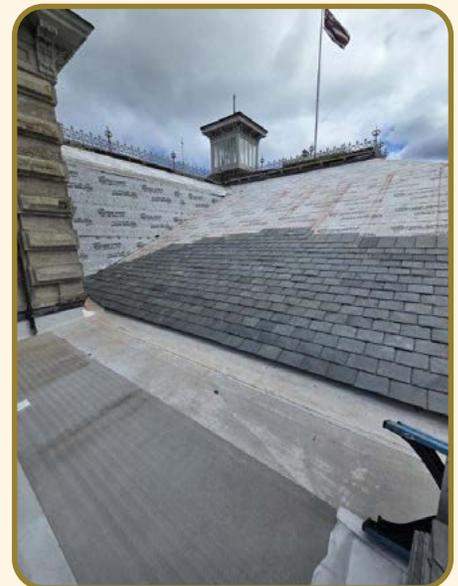
A significant portion of this funding supported the systems that protect the Palace and its collections. **\$92,000 supported maintenance** for the elevator, wheelchair lift, and HVAC systems. Climate control is essential to the **care of nearly 6,000 cultural objects** housed within the Palace. Temperature and humidity must remain stable to protect historic materials. The HVAC system operates 24 hours a day, making electricity a major operational need. **\$210,000 supported electricity** to keep these systems running year-round.

Security remained a core operational priority. **\$31,000 supported maintenance for a modern security system** that complements a highly experienced security team. These measures protect the Palace, its collections, and all who enter the site.

State funding also strengthened the Palace team. **\$1.3 million supported staffing** as the organization continued rebuilding following the pandemic. This investment supported recruitment and retention for employees with the skills, knowledge, and dedication needed to move the organization forward. Staff members are essential to the daily care of the building, the protection of collections, and the work of empowering volunteers to help share the story of the Palace and Hawai'i's ali'i.

Repair and maintenance work continued throughout FY25, supported by state operational assistance and capital support. A major milestone was the **completion of the 'Iolani Palace roof repair in 2025**. Supported by a \$500,000 Save America's Treasures grant and close to **\$1 million in matching funds from the Hawai'i Department of Land and Natural Resources**, the project addressed one of the most critical elements of the building's structure. More than 9,000 square feet of hand-cut slate were shipped from Vermont. Crews removed the aging slate, installed the new material, and repaired the decorative medallions at each roof corner. Completing the roof before the rainy season brought welcome reassurance, as the roof is the first line of defense for the building and everything inside it.

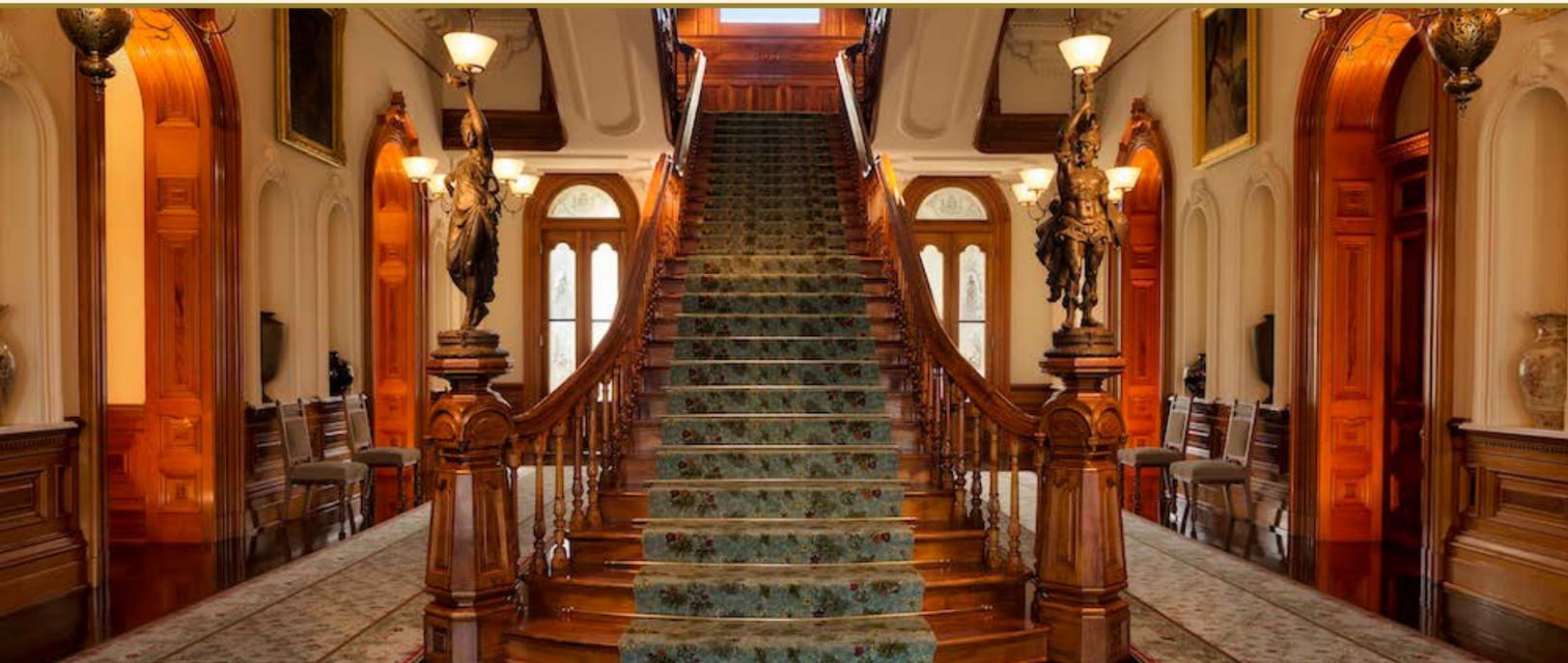
Additional protective measures were also completed. Bird netting was installed along the lānai to prevent nesting. Bird droppings can cause long-term damage to historic surfaces, and the netting offers a cost-effective way to protect the structure.





Work also began on a basement rehabilitation project that will allow the space to house a new permanent exhibit. S. M. Sakamoto was selected through a competitive RFP process to lead the work. Using State Grant-in-Aid funding and private donations, crews addressed rising damp, rusting beams, and deteriorated plaster. In preparation for a future fire suppression system, The Friends of 'Iolani Palace funded the installation of necessary piping throughout the basement. These improvements lay the groundwork for expanded interpretation and public access while addressing long-standing structural challenges.

These operational investments demonstrate ongoing stewardship of a complex historic site and help ensure 'Iolani Palace remains protected, accessible, and well cared for.





CURATORIAL AND COLLECTIONS

Curatorial and collections work focused on two priorities. Preparing new interpretive content for the Palace, and advancing the care of objects held and displayed within 'Iolani Palace.

Staff continued developing the new basement exhibit, contributing thousands of hours to research, writing, and the creation of interpretive panels and educational content. This work is ongoing as the project moves toward fabrication and installation.

Collections care also advanced through a focused conservation effort for silver objects on display, including silver on loan from the Hawaii State Archives. Silver conservator Kent Severson was engaged to assess and treat these pieces. Severson is known for his work with silver collections, including previous work with the Shangri La Museum. The project cost exceeded \$80,000 and was supported by a committed partnership, including Prince Waikīkī, which helped make Severson's work in Honolulu possible.



Another major milestone was the restoration of the portrait of Princess Po'omaikelani, sister of Queen Kapi'olani. The portrait is one of three painted by Serbian artist Petrovits and was in need of significant conservation. With support from multiple donors, The Friends of 'Iolani Palace funded restoration of both the painting and its frame. Paint conservator Larry Pace completed work on the painting, and wood conservator Thor Minnick restored the frame. The portrait now hangs in the King's Bedroom, returning it to public view in a prominent space within the Palace.

With this restoration complete, staff are assessing next steps for additional portraits in the collection, including portraits of King Kalākaua and Queen Kapi'olani.





COMMUNICATIONS

Communications work advanced the mission of Iolani Palace by strengthening public understanding of its history, its continued care, and its role as a place of learning. Throughout the year, earned media, social media, and monthly newsletters worked in concert to keep the Palace visible, relevant, and accessible to residents and visitors. Content and outreach emphasized accuracy, respect, and context, while elevating the stories, people, and preservation work that sustain the site.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Public relations efforts focused on earned visibility through proactive pitching, consistent media service, and long-standing relationships with reporters, editors, producers, and partner organizations. Outreach supported the Palace's year-round programs and milestones, helping ensure media coverage reflected both the depth of the Palace's history and the ongoing work required to preserve it for future generations. Coordination with partners, including the Hawaii Tourism Authority public relations team, expanded opportunities to reach travel and culture media while keeping messaging aligned and timely.



These efforts resulted in **more than 1,500 earned stories** across television, radio, print, and online outlets at local, national, and international levels. Broadcast **coverage reached more than 9.7 million viewers and listeners**, generating **33.7 million impressions**. Print and online coverage extended the Palace's global reach, delivering billions of impressions and reinforcing it as a trusted source for Hawaiian history and cultural education.

Media interest remained strong around signature programs and meaningful moments. Stories frequently highlighted monthly Kama'āina Sundays, Queen Kapi'olani Evening Tours, and birthday commemorations for past ali'i. Coverage also spotlighted preservation work, including the restoration of Queen Lili'uokalani's portrait, helping audiences connect present-day stewardship with the Palace's enduring legacy. Travel and visitor-focused stories positioned the Palace as an essential stop for those seeking a deeper understanding of Hawai'i, while local reporting strengthened community connection and participation.

These public relations efforts increased awareness, strengthened credibility, and sustained interest in the Palace throughout the year. Earned media reinforced the value of preservation and public access, and helped extend 'Iolani Palace stories to audiences in Hawai'i and far beyond.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media served as a daily storytelling channel for 'Iolani Palace, sharing timely, informative content rooted in history, preservation, and public education. The approach emphasized context and care, pairing archival material, photography, and video with clear interpretation. Posts reflected the Palace's role as a



place of learning and remembrance, while inviting audiences to engage with programs, milestones, and moments of significance.

Content focused on both enduring history and present-day stewardship. High-performing posts highlighted monthly Kama'āina Sundays, Queen Kapi'olani Evening Tours, Poi Supper, ali'i birthday commemorations, and the annual Palace Ornament. These stories reinforced the Palace as an active historic site with ongoing public programs and cultural responsibility.

Across Facebook and Instagram, social media reached wide audiences and generated strong engagement. **Combined impressions exceeded 5 million, with more than 366,000 engagements** and a **7.3 percent engagement rate** per impression. Total audience reached more than 74,000, with net audience growth of 6,317 over the year.

Facebook delivered the largest volume of views, with **nearly 4 million views** and more than **216,000 engagements**. Followers increased to nearly 39,000, reflecting steady interest in Palace programs, history, and preservation updates. Instagram generated the strongest engagement, with a **14.5 percent engagement rate** per view and follower growth exceeding 3,500. Visual storytelling and short-form video drove meaningful interaction and expanded reach.

Social media extended the Palace's presence beyond the grounds and into daily conversations. These platforms supported awareness, participation, and understanding by connecting audiences to the Palace's stories with consistency, care, and measurable impact.

EMAIL MARKETING

Email marketing served as a reliable and trusted channel for direct communication with supporters, members, and the broader public. Monthly newsletters provided timely, well-paced updates on 'Iolani Palace programs, events, preservation work, and opportunities for engagement. Content emphasized clarity and relevance, offering readers meaningful ways to stay connected to the Palace and its work.

Twelve monthly issues were distributed, creating a consistent rhythm of communication. Newsletters highlighted upcoming programs, signature events, historical features, restoration updates, and member-related news. This approach balanced storytelling with practical information, reinforcing the Palace as both a historic site and an active public institution.

Performance remained strong throughout the year. **Open rates ranged from 46 percent to 57 percent, averaging 53 percent, well above typical benchmarks for nonprofit and cultural organizations. Click rates**





reflected active reader interest, **ranging from 3.6 percent to 7.9 percent**, with an average of 5.5 percent. Higher engagement aligned with major announcements, seasonal programming, and membership-focused content.

Distribution scaled strategically during peak periods. Monthly sends ranged from approximately 9,300 to more than 27,000 emails, supporting broader awareness while maintaining strong engagement. Results show readers consistently sought out and interacted with Palace communications.

Overall, email marketing strengthened ongoing relationships with audiences. Strong performance across open and click rates underscores the value of the newsletter as a dependable tool for sharing Palace stories, promoting participation, and supporting awareness of preservation, education, and access efforts.

WEBSITE

The 'Iolani Palace website served as a primary gateway for planning visits, learning Palace history, and engaging with programs and tours. Content and structure prioritized clarity, accessibility, and accuracy, supporting both local and global audiences seeking trusted information about the Palace.

During the year, the website recorded strong and sustained use, with **more than 288,000 active users and 291,000 new users**. Visitors **spent an average of 1 minute and 14 seconds per session**, reflecting purposeful engagement with Palace content. Organic search remained the leading driver of traffic, accounting for more than 283,000 sessions, followed by direct traffic and referrals. This pattern shows visitors actively sought out the Palace by name or through related historical and travel searches.

Audiences accessed the site from around the world. Most users were based in the United States, with additional traffic from Japan, Canada, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, and South Korea. This global reach mirrors the Palace's role as both a place of local significance and an international destination for learning about Hawaiian history.



Visitor behavior highlighted a strong interest in planning and educational content. The most visited pages included Tours and Admission, Visit, Self-led Audio Tours, Hours, Docent-led Tours, and Kama'āina Sundays. These patterns show the website's central role in guiding visitation, supporting ticket purchases, and providing essential context before guests arrive.

The website served as a reliable communications platform that connected audiences with the Palace's programs, tours, and history. Substantial traffic, search-driven discovery, and sustained engagement underscore the site's importance in supporting access, education, and public understanding.



MEMBERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT

Membership and development efforts supported the long-term care of ‘Iolani Palace while strengthening relationships with the community, partners, and supporters who sustain its work. Giving and engagement focused on preservation, education, and access, with opportunities designed to deepen connection to the Palace and its collections.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership continued to show steady growth. **Total membership increased to 1,248**, up 78 members from the previous year, representing a **6.7 percent increase**. **Membership revenue rose to \$115,474, an increase of \$8,554 or 8.0 percent**. Members supported the Palace through annual dues and participated in programs, tours, and behind-the-scenes opportunities that connect them more closely to the Palace’s history and ongoing stewardship.

FOUNDATIONS & GRANTS

Grant funding remained a cornerstone of development efforts. **Government grants totaled \$2,163,052, with an additional \$534,137 released from donor restrictions**. Support came from a mix of public and private funders, including the City and County of Honolulu, Hawai‘i Tourism Authority, Hawaiian Native Corporation, Ifuku Family Foundation Fund, John R. Halligan Charitable Fund, Kawānanakoa Foundation, Nakupuna Foundation, and the National Park Service Save America’s Treasures program. These resources supported preservation projects, public programs, and core operations.

CORPORATE DONORS

Corporate partnerships continued to grow through both cash and in-kind support. Partners included Aloha de Mele, Hana Koa Brewing Company, Kōloa Rum, Kuana Torres Kahele, Mahina Made, Mālie, and the Waikīkī Prince. Several partnerships included product collaborations, with a portion of sales benefiting The Friends of ‘Iolani Palace. Recognition across newsletters, the website, and media outreach reflected the level of combined financial and in-kind support.

INDIVIDUAL GIVING

Individual donors remained a vital source of support. **A total of 821 individuals contributed \$803,921.95**. While overall totals declined from the previous year due to the absence of a significant estate gift, individual giving continued to support daily operations, preservation work, and public programming.





GUEST EXPERIENCES

Guest experiences connected residents, students, and visitors to ‘Iolani Palace through access, learning, and cultural engagement. Programs welcomed diverse audiences while maintaining the dignity and historical integrity of this wahi pana. During the year, ‘Iolani Palace welcomed 113,069 guests.

KAMA’ĀINA SUNDAY

Held on the second Sunday of each month, Kama’āina Sunday offers complimentary Palace admission for Hawai’i residents, along with Hawaiian music, hula hālau, and cultural workshops. Support from the Hawai’i Tourism Authority through the Kūkulu Ola Program and Hawaiian Native Corporation helped sustain this community-focused program. Kama’āina participation across the year totaled 14,034.



QUEEN KAPI’OLANI EVENING TOURS

Queen Kapi’olani Evening Tours provide rare nighttime access to the Palace and highlight the personal history and legacy of Queen Kapi’olani. The program is sponsored by the Office of Hawaiian Affairs and the Kawānanakoa Foundation.



SCHOOL VISITS

School visits offered students place-based learning rooted in Hawaiian history and civic understanding. **School groups brought 6,772 students and chaperones** to ‘Iolani Palace during the year. In addition, **3,503 Hawai’i K-12 students from 78 schools participated in organized school visits**. Free admission was supported in part by a City and County of Honolulu grant. Beginning in November 2025, an anonymous donor expanded access further, making admission free for all K-12 students statewide, including public, charter, private, and homeschool students. **Visits included 1,496 students from Title I schools.**

