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Dear Foundation for the Advancement of Health Education:

It is my pleasure to nominate Tina L. Tamai for the Dr. Robert Blackburn Advocacy for Advancing Health Education and Promotion Award. As a former founder and COO/CEO of The Kohala Center, a community-based NGO focused on research, education, and 'āina stewardship for healthier ecosystems, and as initial a member of the taskforce group which established the Hawai'i Good Food Alliance (HGFA), I have been working with Tina for the past ten years.

Tina Tamai is the networker and founder of the Hawai'i Good Food Alliance (HGFA), a statewide group of community-based food system leaders dedicated to increasing equitable healthy food access by supporting local production and promoting healthy eating among low income populations in Hawai'i. (<https://hawaiigoodfoodalliance.org>) Starting in 2010 Tina organized selected community leaders using health education theories to develop a "network of networks" model that recognizes the complexities of food systems in order to advance food justice and health equity.

Developing this collaboration involved bringing together organizations that had similar values and goals but were competing for limited resources to maintain their localized activities. Tina painstakingly facilitated a series of meetings over several years to create the atmosphere of trust that allowed organizational leaders to commit to shared decision-making and distributed resources. This process involved thoughtful attention to interpersonal dynamics as well as the logistical skill to facilitate gatherings of people from five different islands, all of whom were donating precious time to participate in this trust- and collaboration-building process. As a result of Tina's efforts, the HGFA currently includes not-for-profit food producers, distributors and educators, as well as community health centers with strong programs for culturally appropriate food access.

Starting from her position with the Hawai'i State Department of Health Tina set out to intentionally build a platform to lift the voice of community and the people who work on food and health from an authentic community base. Her purpose was to support each and every member of the developing coalition to express their hopes and concerns, then coach and weave them into a collaborative effort for greater impact at both the local and state level. Honoring each members' expertise and experience, she created a safe and inclusive space for them to share opinions, thoughts and disagreements. Simultaneously, she spent hours of thought to develop a framework and model ("network of networks") which would support individual communities while addressing the more expansive and complex issues that impact food systems and health equity.

As a result of Tina's commitment and skill, leaders from ten key community development organizations voluntarily dedicated hundreds of hours of work over the past eight years to create and now operate HGFA. Over time the group members developed a shared purpose and vision that includes these statements: *The Hawai'i Good Food Alliance is a diverse hui of community leaders who share in the production, aggregation and distribution of food to re-build thriving community food systems. We join together—with a sense of urgency—to raise community voice and support one another in the belief that each and*

every person in Hawai'i can share in healthy, locally produced food. “Good food” is defined with just, fair, and equitable access; contributing to community economic and social development; culturally grounded; and recognized as a foundation for health and well-being.

With the experience of collaboration and solidification of shared purpose, the group incorporated as a 501c3 organization in 2020 and, because of the quality of its participating organizations and Tina's leadership, HGFA was immediately awarded a \$750,000 grant to build capacity by hiring staff and implementing strategic projects to fulfill its mission. Currently these projects include a \$5 million USDA GUSNIP “Double Bucks” fresh food incentive program statewide, a \$829,000 USDA Regional Food Hub development project, a statewide Farmers Markets association with a USDA WIC promotion program, and an initiative to create a Hawai'i Good Food Fund to increase access to capital for community-based, equity-oriented food system enterprises. At the same time policy efforts are focused on developing stronger relationships with traditional medical care and health insurance entities to connect their staff and resources to tangible support for good nutrition as a foundational healthcare strategy, ie. “food as medicine.”

A key reason HGFA is successful and is gaining influence and traction in the state can be attributed to the work and dedication of its founder, Tina Tamai, who created the culture and theory of change by which HGFA operates. She insured that our HGFA model is structured to address food and food systems as a complex dynamic intersection of multiple sectors and issues, developing a structure in which members coordinate and organize food systems within their communities while simultaneously working as a collective to address issues on a societal level. Currently those issues include building and linking distribution hubs so that smaller farmers can increase their reach and incomes, ensuring that emergency feeding programs and larger institutions can purchase fresh locally produced food, initiating change in community and institutional healthcare and insurance systems to integrate food as medicine, developing an innovative evaluation framework which reflects the impact of food in a multisector ecosystem that includes agriculture, culture, health systems, and economic development.

Because of that initial model development Tina was accepted as a Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Leader Fellow. This award helped HGFA and its members gain the necessary confidence to acquire 501c3 status and achieve recognition with a significant capacity-building grant from the Weinberg Foundation in its first year of operation. Having established HGFA as a high functioning organization, she is working to transfer authority and leadership to younger members of the collaboration to ensure that HGFA is no longer dependent on the vision and energy of one person but is sustainable as an effective and well-respected organization going forward.

With this testimony, I heartily encourage your recognition of Tina Tamai's work.

Sincerely,



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