Kākoʻo Connections directly supports Hawaiʻi high school students in making connections that can help them realize their college and career goals in the natural resources field. Participants visit Hawaiʻi post-secondary institutions and environmental organizations, engage in related mālama ʻĀina, and learn and practice job readiness skills. Upon successful completion of the program, participants receive a $350 stipend.

The program is intended for 11th and 12th grade students or recent graduates who hold a strong interest in the natural resources field. While the program is free of cost, interested students complete a rigorous application process, including educator recommendations and an interview. Sessions are held in the summer and fall, with cohorts ranging from 12-18 participants.
This first session of Kāko’o Connections was piloted for one (1) week during Summer 2022 with six (6) participants from five (5) O'ahu schools: James Campbell, Kapolei, and Waipahu High Schools; Nānākuli High and Intermediate School, and Hawai‘i Technology Academy. Five (5) of the participants were entering 12th grade and one (1) recently graduated; 50% had Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Ancestry; and 67% were a part of their school's Natural Resources Career and Technical Education Pathway.

**College and Career Readiness:**

- **Connecting with the Natural Resources Sector in Hawai‘i:** Participants received an overview of Hawai‘i’s unique natural resources field and the numerous career opportunities it offers. Through their mālama ʻāina experiences they saw these careers firsthand.

- **Social Capital Building:** Participants learn about recognizing, cultivating, and mobilizing diverse relationships to support success. Participants scheduled and conducted an informational interview with a professional sharing their career interests.

- **Applying to College:**
  - Participants learn about FAFSA and other diverse ways to fund college with a University of Hawai‘i admissions officer
  - Participants completed and submitted an application to a post-secondary institution in the University at Hawai‘i system with the guidance of a college admissions officer.

"Before this, I didn't have any idea what colleges were like and which colleges to go to. Now that I did this program, I have a better understanding of my future. I also realized how different fields... can be connected with the environment.”

- Skye, Hawai‘i Technology Academy
Looking Ahead

Based on feedback and evaluation of the pilot, Kupu is excited to institute the following additions and changes in future Kāko‘o Connections sessions:

- Create structure and support for long-term learning and community by offering pre and post program sessions and maintaining connection through online workspaces and virtual events
- Provide opportunities for participants to build near-peer connections that can be used to better illustrate the college to career path
- Adding a participant learning outcome of increased digital literacy such as developing skills in Slack, a tool common in professional settings

School, Organization, and Site Connections

Each day of the program included a combination of University of Hawai‘i (UH) System tours and overviews, connections with partner sites and mālama ʻāina opportunities, and career and college readiness training. After the program all participants connected with a natural resource professional who aligned with their interests.

- **UH System**
  - University of Hawai‘i at Hilo
  - University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa
  - University of Hawai‘i at West O‘ahu
  - Windward Community College

- **Natural Resources Professional Match Organizations**
  - Conservation International Hawai‘i
  - Hawai‘i Conservation Alliance
  - The Indigenous Soap Company
  - Kua‘āina Ulu ‘Auamo (KUA)
  - Paepae o He‘eia

- **Mālama ʻĀina Sites and Partner Organizations**
  - Elemental Exelerator
  - Hawai‘i Conservation Alliance
  - Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies Ka Papa Lo‘i o Kānewai
  - Mālama Pūpūkea Waimea
  - Paepae o He‘eia
  - The Uluniu Project
  - Waimea Valley

"I would definitely participate in Kāko‘o Connections again because it was a really fun experience [and]... opportunity for me to meet actual people in their everyday lives and see if I could see myself doing the same or similar [career]."

- Kasi, Nānākuli High and Intermediate School