

ISLAND SECURITY POLICY INSTITUTE

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COMMENTARY

Beyond Land Acknowledgment

What Genuine ESG Accountability Looks Like for Corporations Operating on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island Lands

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The land acknowledgment has become a standard feature of corporate ESG communication in Hawaii: a brief statement recognizing that the company operates on the traditional lands of the Native Hawaiian people, often delivered at the opening of annual reports. Native Hawaiian community leaders and scholars have been increasingly direct about what they think of this practice. In the words of one kupuna who spoke at a 2023 community forum: "The minimum we do so we don't have to do the maximum."¹

ESG frameworks developed for continental corporate operating environments include community relations metrics that are meaningful but insufficiently specific for corporations operating in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island community contexts. The specific accountability dimensions that matter most — land and resource relationship transparency, cultural impact assessment, indigenous community governance engagement, and revenue sharing from resources on indigenous lands — are not adequately captured by standard ESG community relations metrics.

The Security Dimension

Corporate security operations on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island lands carry specific accountability dimensions that standard corporate security frameworks do not address: the relationship between corporate security personnel and Native Hawaiian community members exercising traditional rights, the use of security infrastructure on or adjacent to culturally significant sites, and the community trust implications of security practices that community members experience as surveillance or exclusion from lands with cultural significance.²

What Substantive ESG Accountability Requires

ISPI's analysis identifies five practices that distinguish substantive corporate ESG accountability from performative land acknowledgment: meaningful indigenous community governance engagement in corporate decision-making that affects community lands and resources; transparent accounting of cultural and environmental impacts; local and indigenous hiring practices creating genuine economic participation; community benefit agreements providing direct community value; and security practices reflecting cultural competency and community relationship rather than exclusion and surveillance.

ISPI Recommendations

1. Develop Hawaii-specific ESG accountability standards for corporations operating on or adjacent to Native Hawaiian cultural lands — developed in

partnership with Native Hawaiian community organizations rather than adapted from mainland corporate ESG frameworks.

2. Commission ISPI to develop a corporate security accountability framework for operations in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island cultural contexts — a practitioner guide for corporate security directors.
3. Advocate for indigenous community relations accountability metrics in federal ESG disclosure requirements that reflect the specific accountability dimensions most relevant to corporations operating in Native Hawaiian and Pacific Island community contexts.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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The Island Security Policy Institute (ISPI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization based in Honolulu, Hawaii. ISPI produces practitioner-led research, policy analysis, training programs, and commissioned research on public safety, emergency preparedness, insider threat, and security policy for island and coastal communities worldwide. ISPI is registered as a federal contractor on SAM.gov under NAICS 541720. Warren Pulley, Founder & Executive Director.

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