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Commercial Real Estate • **Executive Insight**

Kealohi Sandefur assumes ACEC Hawaii presidency as infrastructure workload intensifies



Kealohi Sandefur is the current president of ACECH and a principal at Yogi Kwong Engineers.
ACECH



By Alexander Lugo – Commercial Real Estate Reporter, Pacific Business News
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Story Highlights

- Kealohi Sandefur became president of the ACEC Hawaii chapter.
- The organization develops a pipeline of employees for infrastructure projects.
- Oahu agencies manage critical harbor, airport, and rail infrastructure work.

Kealohi Sandefur, a principal at Yogi Kwong Engineers, was recently named president of the American Council of Engineering Companies' Hawaii chapter.

In his new role, Sandefur wants to help the local sector build up its workforce and forge tighter relationships with governments as infrastructure work remains strong. Oahu alone has several major projects in the works, like the Skyline rail and the Aloha Stadium redevelopment, both demanding huge infrastructure tweaks.

However, the number of individual projects spread throughout Oahu and the Neighbor Islands continues piling up, oftentimes requiring a robust roster of engineers to help build up infrastructure capacity.

Sandefur sees the need to continue upgrading Hawaii's infrastructure as an opportunity. But he also sees a need to make sure the industry is prepared to handle all that work.

He sat down with Pacific Business News to discuss how Hawaii's engineering workforce is adapting to make sure it remains healthy enough to feed workers into projects the state will tackle in the coming years.

What specific challenges is Oahu facing in regard to infrastructure?

[The Hawaii Department of Transportation] has a lot of infrastructure work that they're constantly programming. They've got harbor work going on. They've got airport work. But many of the city and county agencies have critical infrastructure projects that they're working on, too.

As an organization, we're working to make sure that the pipeline for this is extending as far as we can tell into the future … That way, our member firms have a pipeline of employees they can hire, and we can train our future staff to continue to service the future needs, which we don't see as necessarily slowing down.

We've collaborated with the Hawaii Chamber of Commerce … They're actively engaged with various STEM industries and trying to make sure that there is a connection for kids who go to the Mainland for school to come back here and have access to local industries and employers who are looking to hire.

UH does a great job of educating our future workforce, and also, it's good to have diversity. The students who go away, they want to come back. They can bring a different type of education and bring that cross-sharing back to our industry.

Is technology having an effect on the kind of skills you look for in engineers?

I don't think that it has quite impacted us yet. I have a sense that our industry is trying to figure out how it's going to impact us.

There's an ethical obligation within our work. There's a standard of care to make sure that we're upholding ethical practices to try and make sure that whatever we're doing is safe and compliant with code.

Some industries are creating specialists, even C-suite roles, based on innovating tech or AI.

Have you seen that at all?

I think there may be some pilot studies within certain member firms. I don't know that it's gotten widespread yet.

About Kealohi Sandefur

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