

DRAFT VALDEZ TOURISM TASK FORCE REPORT

BACKGROUND

The Valdez Tourism Task Force, a seven-member advisory group established by Resolution 26-10 of the Valdez City Council, was created to help navigate change, provide industry feedback and maintain tourism and destination marketing support structures amid the organizational challenges currently faced by the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau (VCVB).

This group aims to support tourism, strengthen local businesses and foster collaboration among stakeholders, subject matter experts, and community members to identify opportunities and practical solutions.

The scope of the Valdez Tourism Task Force's work was to provide the following recommendations to City Council:

- A summary of short-term actions required to avoid major disruption of tourism information services and destination marketing activities in 2026.
- A summary of long-term needs and desired community support mechanisms for tourism sector businesses.
- Analysis of existing models for visitor, tourism and destination marketing organizations including examples of how tourism organizations are sustainably funded or supported in other communities, and a recommendation on the best option for Valdez.

The task force met every other week and held a total of four meetings. Additionally, the group conducted one internal survey on organizational questions and an external survey to gather feedback from the broader business community.

Meeting topics included:

- February 18, 2026: Overview of Valdez Task Force responsibilities; Status of city funding for the VCVB; Introduction to common management models; Discussion of next steps including plan for an internal survey on organizational models and goal of identifying critical outstanding expenses.
- March 4, 2026: Review of organizational model internal survey; Review of identified urgent expenses and approval of recommendation to City Council for funding; Recommendation on management structure; Discussion of next steps including a need for broader community outreach and additional coordination with the VCVB.
- March 18, 2026: Continuation of recommendation on management structure; Review and approval of feedback survey to local businesses; Next steps discussion including physical site conversation and timeline for finalizing task force work and potential for task force to assist with creation of a new organization.
- April 1, 2026: Review of broader business survey input; Discussion and approval of recommendations to City Council to be presented April 7, 2026.



RECOMMENDATIONS ON ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The Valdez Tourism Task Force recommends that a future destination marketing organization in Valdez be structured as a quasi-public non-profit corporation that balances member driven leadership with municipal financial oversight.

Narrative on Discussion of Organizational Structure:

Overall, the group expressed strong alignment in favor of enhanced oversight, additional accountability, and improved financial transparency. Concerns were voiced about the potential of the city being too involved in day-to-day decision making of a destination marketing organization and the desire for the organization to still be member-directed.

Considerable attention was given to how future bylaws might outline the city council's role in a future organization and create additional structured safeguards. The group discussed several options for city oversight that would satisfy the requirements of government accounting standards for the organization to be considered a "component unit" in the City of Valdez budget. Members also discussed outstanding VCVB liabilities and the potential drawbacks of continuing the current structure.

The group discussed the overall pros and cons of a membership model and emphasized the need for a clearer definition of membership. They expressed an overall desire for fairness among members. Participants expressed interest in a simple, standardized structure, with optional advertising opportunities and streamlined communication. The discussion also highlighted the value of a strong membership organization and the importance of ensuring that participation provides meaningful benefits for members' time and involvement.

Key Recommendations for City Oversight:

- Extend the sunset date and purview of the task force to assist with drafting initial bylaws and policies of the future organization.
- Require City Council approval of the organization's annual budget and regular financial updates.
- Clearly define the role City Council will play in appointment of a governing board or employment actions related to an executive director in future bylaws.
- Include a non-voting ex-officio member on the governing board to represent the City Council.
- In addition to bylaws, establish a memorandum of agreement between the city and the future organization to clearly outline expectations for services provided.
- Ensure that Public Accommodation Tax revenues continue to be allocated to tourism marketing and visitors' services facilitated by the future organization.



Key Recommendations for Membership:

- Ensure that vision for and priorities of the organization are set by membership.
- Create a single standardized membership level to provide clarity for businesses.
- Ensure fairness for all members and equal access to base level benefits.
- Establish membership as a pre-requisite to serve on the governing board in the organization's bylaws.
- Create a governance structure and clear channels of communication that help guarantee positive outcomes for members' commitment of time.

SUMMARY OF SHORT-TERM ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

The Valdez Tourism Task Force recommends that the City Council allocate specific funding to maintain baseline visitor services in 2026 and provide financial and administrative assistance with the transition between the dissolution of the VCVB and formation of a new entity.

The task force discussed several operational and logistical considerations, including identifying a possible site or physical location and a review of preliminary outstanding financial obligations. How to allocate resources toward both past VCVB expenses and emerging operational requirements was identified as a key challenge. There is a need to allocate funding quickly in order to maintain key relationships, resources and services including the "Discover Valdez" website and the 2026 Visitors Guide.

Members noted the potential benefits of continuing to use the current building through 2026, depending on the owner's willingness, and suggested seasonal use of the Kelsey Dock kiosk to augment visitor contact. Additional priorities included outlining a short-term budget and evaluating options for hiring seasonal employees. The task force voted on March 4, 2026, to recommend that city council appropriate \$100,000 in initial funding for specific urgent expenses, subsequent conversations of the group brought other possible costs into focus. A summary of identified initial expense is provided in Appendix A.

Key Recommendations for 2026 Funding Needs and Visitors' Services:

- Appropriate adequate funding to pay for time sensitive items needed to maintain stable tourism services in 2026, including printing and distribution of the 2026 Visitors' Guide, hosting and upkeep of the "Discover Valdez" website and already scheduled in-state print advertising.
- Enter an agreement with the VCVB to take ownership of certain intellectual or physical property in exchange for helping the VCVB board of directors with the dissolution process and settling of additional outstanding debts.
- Hire two or three part-time seasonal staff through a city department to provide visitor information services for the 2026 summer season.



- Negotiate a lease to maintain the current Visitors' Information Center at least through the end of the 2026 summer season.

SUMMARY OF LONG-TERM ACTIONS RECOMMENDED

The Valdez Tourism Task Force envisions a future tourism marketing organization for our community that is sustainably funded by the City of Valdez, responsive to the needs of its members and focused on making visitors' experiences in Valdez unforgettable.

What a future organization could look like and how an organization would be successful were discussed by the task force. Task force members broadly agreed on the need for a clear mission, narrowly defined scope of responsibility, strong leadership and member engagement. Destination marketing organizations face similar challenges to other non-profit organizations in recruiting and retaining executive level staff and maintaining engaged board members. Governing documents can provide a strong foundation for an organization, but knowledgeable and dedicated people are the key to an organization's success. Regular board training was also suggested.

Task force discussion also touched on the benefits of using digital media and maintaining a robust web presence with improved search engine optimization. Effective communications was a general theme in conversations with task force members expressing a strong desire to ensure that information provided by a future organization be clear, accurate and consistent and that feedback from businesses be sought out actively and used in decision making.

Of 103 businesses who were emailed the survey only 14 responses were received. This survey's sample size cannot be indicative of the views of the full Valdez business community and more robust outreach is needed.

Despite limitations of this feedback, the respondents who participated were from a broad array of sectors and presented some strong opinions that the task force reviewed and considered. Responses expressed an overall desire for a transparent, community-connected, locally representative, and efficiently run tourism organization.

Key Recommendations for a Sustainable Organization:

- Prioritize clarity in communications, both external and internal.
- Maintain and improve the existing "Discover Valdez" website.
- Look carefully at ongoing costs, including costs for maintaining a physical visitors' center.
- Design and maintain governing documents and policies that:
 - Are clear and easy to understand.
 - Have built-in organizational and financial safeguards.
 - Are reviewed regularly.
- Develop and maintain a strong leadership team to include:
 - A membership who is engaged, informed and active.



- An executive director who has Alaska specific experience to guide the organization.
- A governing board who can assume some managerial responsibilities in the absence of an executive director.
- A City Council with a concrete understanding of the organization's operations and financial position.

Key Feedback from Business Survey:

- Build a simple, effective organizational structure with a small skilled team.
- Keep decisions grounded in real business needs and increase transparency and clear communication with the community.
- Prioritize local representation and fairness to ensure small and year-round Valdez businesses have equal visibility and access.
- Maintain a physical visitors' center that provide year-round promotion space for local businesses but consider a smaller footprint.
- Ensure that public money goes toward the public good.
- Offer affordable participation options.
- Consider policies ensuring out-of-town operators contribute fairly.
- Emphasize sustainable, low-impact tourism.
- Use data to guide strategy by track basic visitor trends and sharing insights with businesses.
- Invest in strong digital marketing, an improved website, and clear trip-planning tools.
- Highlight all Valdez experiences, not just a few.
- Focus on out-of-state, international, and in-state audiences.
- Improve signage, maps, and communication of cruise schedules and events.
- Encourage tourism that supports local spending and reduces strain on resources.
- Evaluate cruise ship impacts and improve ways to connect visitors to local businesses.
- Work closely with cruise lines, RV companies, and tour operators to increase consistent, high-quality visitation.
- Coordinate business partnerships to unify messaging and create stronger visitor experiences.