



# City of Valdez

212 Chenega Ave.  
Valdez, AK 99686

## Meeting Agenda

### Valdez Tourism Task Force

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Wednesday, April 1, 2026

5:00 PM

City Council Chambers

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#### Regular Meeting

#### I. CALL TO ORDER

#### II. ROLL CALL

#### III. DISCUSSION ITEMS

1. [Discussion Item: Review of Business Survey Results](#)

#### IV. ACTION ITEMS

1. [Action Item: Approval of Valdez Tourism Task Force Recommendations to City Council](#)

#### V. TASK FORCE MEMBER COMMENTS/ NEXT STEPS

#### VI. ADJOURNMENT



Legislation Text

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**File #:** 26-0129, **Version:** 1

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**ITEM TITLE:**

Discussion Item: Review of Business Survey Results

**SUBMITTED BY:** Elise Sorum-Birk, Deputy City Clerk

**FISCAL NOTES:**

Expenditure Required: n/a

Unencumbered Balance: n/a

Funding Source: n/a

**RECOMMENDATION:**

n/a

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:**

A survey was sent to 103 registered businesses in Valdez and 14 responses were received. For the first 9 respondents an error in the survey caused the initial section of questions related specifically to VCVB membership to be skipped - there are only 5 responses on these questions.

Despite survey issue and low response rate the 14 respondents represented a wide variety of economic sectors and those who responded provided robust feedback.

Results are attached here for task force review and discussion.

# Tourism Task Force Business Survey Results

# Notes on survey:

- Survey was sent to 103 businesses via email
- Only 14 responses were received
- For the first 9 responses there was an issue that did not show the first sections of questions related to VCVB membership – only 5 responses received on these after setting were fixed.
- Despite survey functionality problem and low participation, the respondents were from various sectors of the business community and feedback was varied.

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## Businesses responding:

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Prince William Sound Subway

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Alaska Guide

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Saltwater and Snowflakes

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Radio Shack

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Chugach Mountain Institute and Foundation

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A Place On Coho BnB

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South Central Hardware

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End Of The Road Ren Fair

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Pangaea Adventures

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Capt'n Joe's Gas

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Valdez Museum

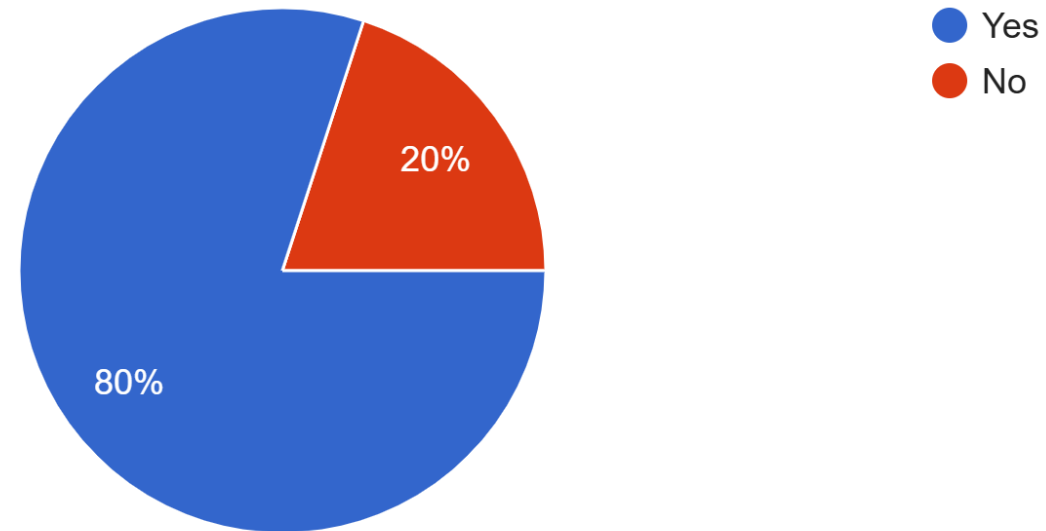
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Sound Crafts Alaska

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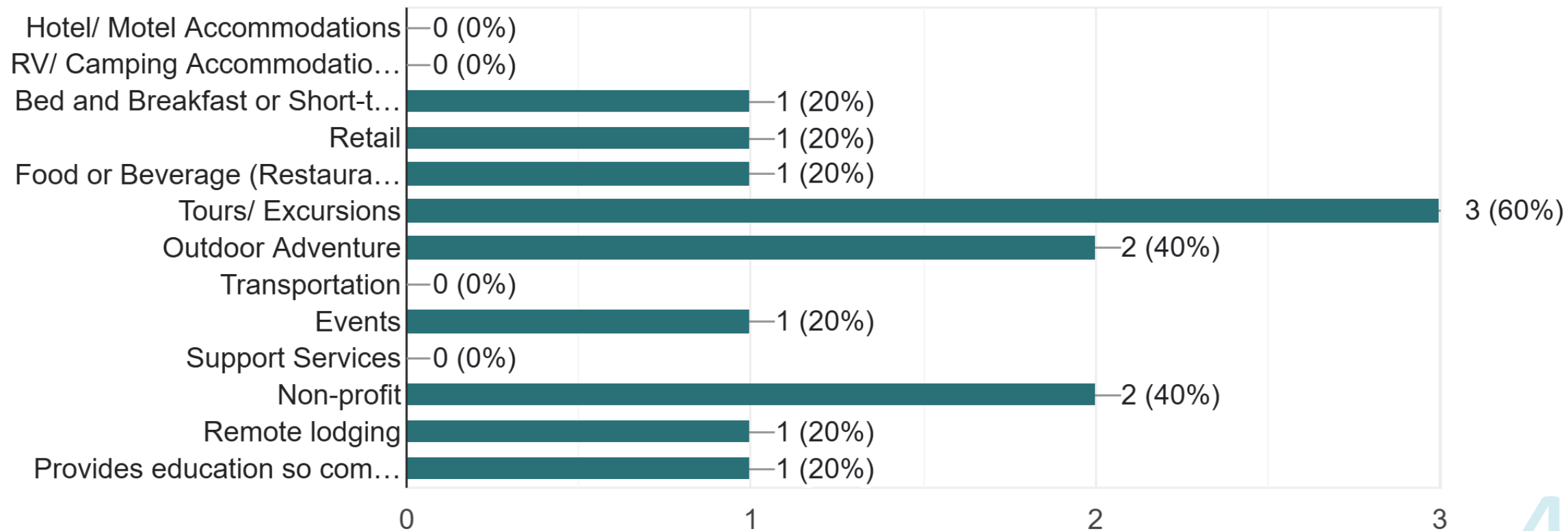
Are you a business that directly provides a service to business and leisure travelers to Valdez?

5 responses



## How would you categorize your business? (check all that apply)

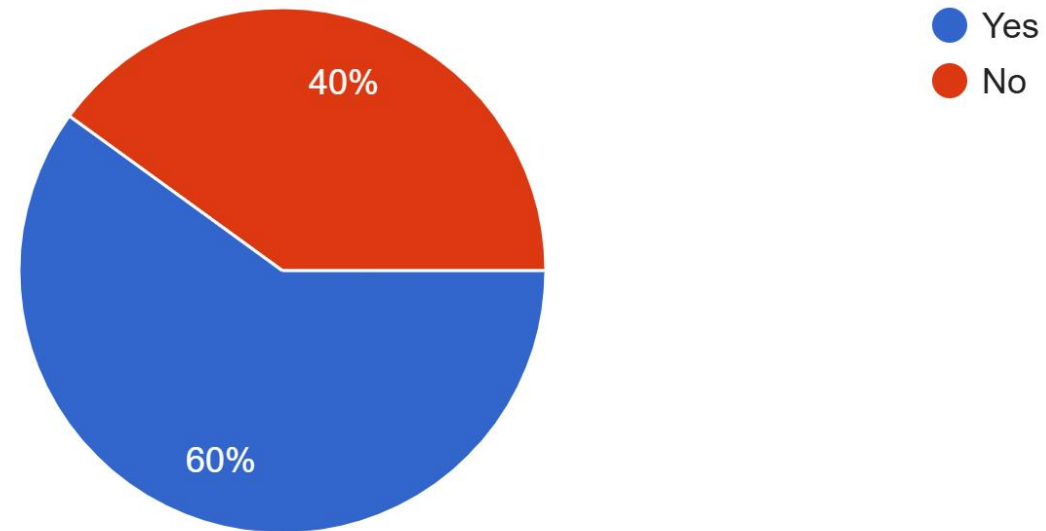
5 responses



4

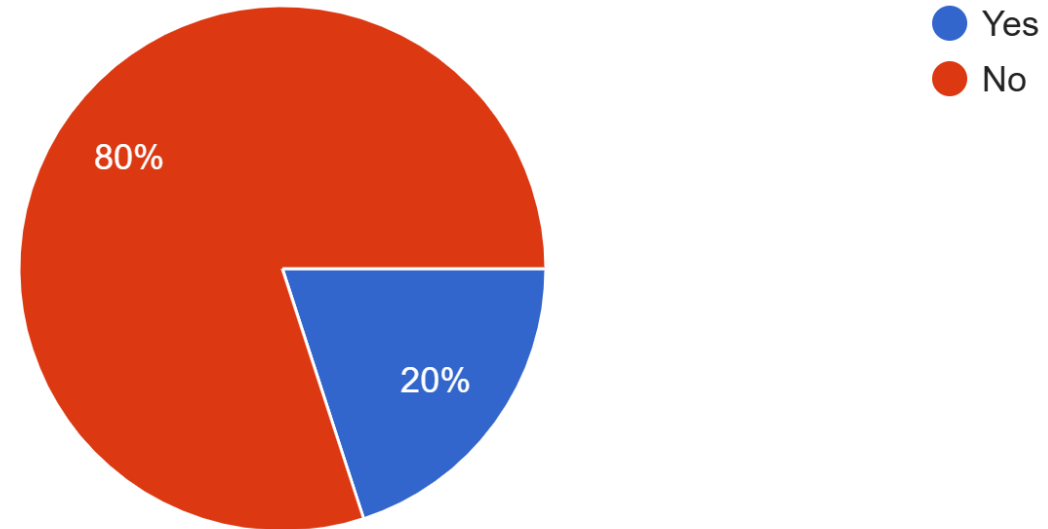
Are you currently a member of the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau?

5 responses



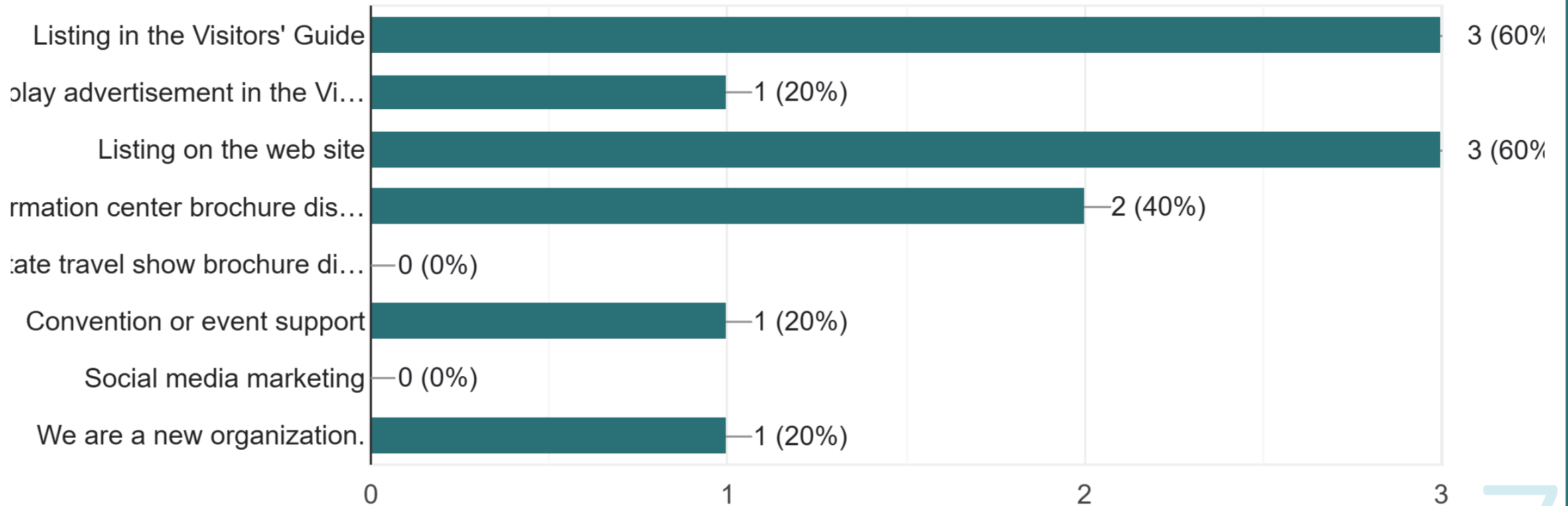
Do you purchase an ad in the Valdez guidebook?

5 responses



# What VCVB benefits or services did you take advantage of in the past? (check all that apply)

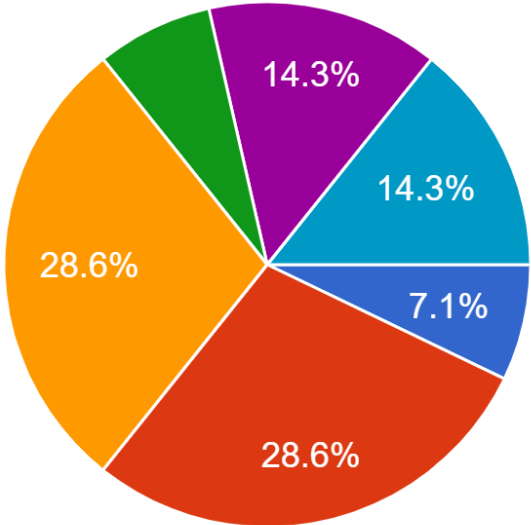
5 responses



7

# What do you feel is the primary role of an organization like the VCVB should be?

14 responses



- Marketing to in state visitors
- Marketing to out of state visitors
- Providing a visitor's center
- Advertising for local businesses
- Maintaining a website highlighting Valdez
- Maintaining a website highlighting Valdez

# How can a future tourism marketing organization best support you as a local business?

“A tourism marketing organization can best support my business by driving consistent visitor traffic to Valdez and making sure small, everyday businesses like mine are included in promotions—not just major attractions. Providing updated visitor information, highlighting quick and convenient dining options, and helping direct foot traffic through signage, maps, and online visibility would make a big difference. Clear communication about cruise ship schedules and major events would also help us staff appropriately and better serve visitors.”

“So many different ways...”

“Attract visitors from beyond Alaska and internationally.”

“I have brochures at the Visitor Center”

“Equitable marketing and advertising. Being more inclusive and not letting community insiders run the show. Highlighting SUSTAINABLE, LOW-IMPACT tourism that preserves the natural wonders of Valdez for future generations (not kowtowing to snowmachine club bullies and the big capital of the heli ski industry that serves the Epstein class).”

“Advertisement” “Be available to visitors to direct them to local attractions.”

“By having a section in the visitors center for us to advertise year round.”

# How can a future tourism marketing organization best support you as a local business? (continued)

“I think the biggest way a future tourism organization can support us is by helping bring the right people to Valdez and making it easy for them to say yes once they find us. For a place like Valdez, awareness is everything. If someone doesn’t decide to include us early in their Alaska trip planning, we usually don’t even get a shot. So strong, targeted out-of-state marketing is huge, especially if it helps drive more demand into May and September. Even a small lift in those shoulder months makes a real difference on our end. Valdez really shines as a multi-day destination, but that story isn’t always obvious to visitors. Anything the DMO can do to help build simple itineraries, connect experiences, and guide people toward spending more time here is incredibly valuable. Access to good data would also go a long way. Even basic insights on where visitors are coming from, how they’re booking, and how demand is shifting helps us make better decisions as operators. Helping align businesses, share opportunities, and build partnerships with groups like cruise lines, RV companies, and international operators. That kind of coordination is hard for any one business to do alone, but it benefits everyone when it’s done well. At the end of the day, it’s not just about more visitors, it’s about the right visitors. People who are excited to be here, who stay a little longer, and who really engage with what makes Valdez special. If a future DMO can help with that, it would be a big win for all of us.”

“Providing info to consumers about what we offer”

“Continue letting visitors know about the FREE self-guided walkway tour at the hatchery to learn about its fish culture operations, Alaska's salmon enhancement programs and their economic benefits.”

“By providing a single location for potential and current visitors to obtain accurate information on Valdez businesses and events.”

“Increase awareness of our organization among Alaska residents—particularly those facing financial, geographic, or social barriers, including youth from low-income, rural, urban, and Indigenous communities—so they can access high-quality outdoor education, safety training, and wilderness experiences.”

“Not only bringing visitors to Valdez, but also CONNECTING visitors to the local businesses. Having people show up, camp on the side of the road or in the Glacier Stream riverbed, hike on trails, bring their own food, and enjoy everything they can for free is more of a drain on local resources than an economic opportunity. I've talked with several store owners who do not see a significant uptick in sales on cruise ship days.”



# If budget allowed, what marketing do you think the next destination marketing organization for Valdez should focus on?

“If budget allowed, marketing should focus heavily on digital and social media campaigns that highlight Valdez as an easy, must-visit destination. This could include promoting road trips, cruise stopovers, and outdoor experiences, while also showcasing local businesses and food options. Short-form videos, influencer partnerships, and targeted ads during peak travel planning seasons would be especially effective. It would also be helpful to market shoulder seasons to help extend tourism beyond just the busiest months.”

“Market EVERYTHING Valdez offers. Faith just started doing that. But only listing half of what we have makes Valdez half as appealing. When funding comes from the city it should do it's best to draw people to it. That means show the whole menu of Valdez has to offer.”

“Drawing in more international travelers”

“The cruise ships are great”

“Some of this is probably repeating earlier comments. Apologies ahead of time. At the top of the list would be targeted digital marketing to out-of-state travelers who are already in the consideration phase for Alaska. That means search, high-intent social, and content that’s built around real trip planning, not just inspiration. We want to show people exactly how Valdez fits into their itinerary and why it’s worth the time. I’d also invest in content that tells a clear, usable story of Valdez. Not just beautiful imagery, but practical storytelling, things like “3-day” or “5-day” itineraries, route-based planning (Anchorage to Valdez), and combinations of experiences. The easier we make it for someone to picture their trip, the more likely they are to commit. Another big opportunity is partnership marketing. Working closely with cruise lines, RV rental companies, and international tour operators to get Valdez built into their recommended routes and packages. Those channels can drive consistent, high-quality demand at a scale individual businesses can’t reach on their own. I’d also put meaningful budget toward shoulder season campaigns. Specifically, May and September. That could be targeted offers, itinerary-focused campaigns, or partnerships that encourage travelers to shift slightly earlier or later. Even modest success there has a big impact locally for us, and I would guess for other operators, too. Finally, I think there’s real value in high-quality media and PR, but it needs to be intentional. Bringing in the right writers, creators, and storytellers who align with the kind of visitor we want, not just volume for the sake of exposure.”

If budget allowed, what marketing do you think the next destination marketing organization for Valdez should focus on?  
(continued)

“Small Businesses”

“Social media campaign”

“A dynamic web presence”

“Emphasis should be placed on highlighting the wilderness and outdoor opportunities in Valdez and the surrounding region, while reinforcing our community’s commitment to environmental stewardship and responsible recreation.”

“I have not seen your marketing metrics or analysis of current efforts, but I strongly suspect that a coordinated online marketing presence with an improved website experience would be beneficial.”

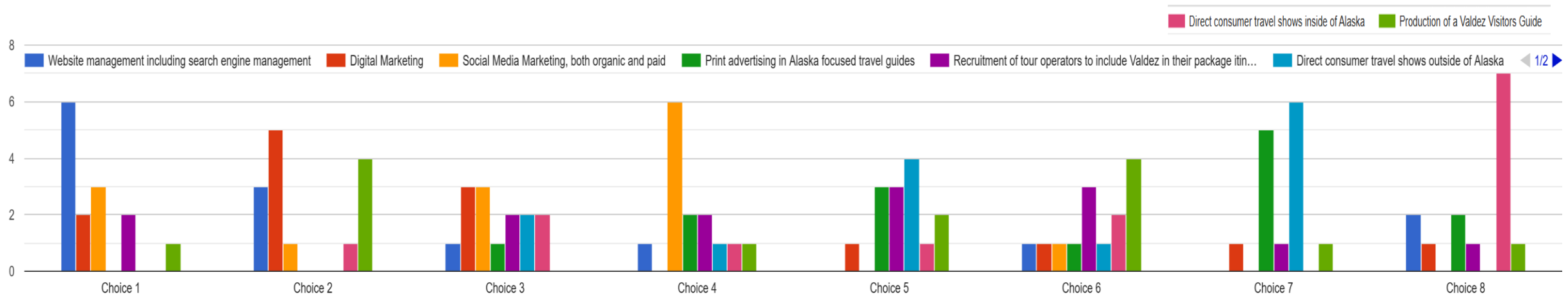
“As with most public spending in Valdez (as with the USA at large), it's likely public spending will continue to serve those who need it least while the needs of the working class and poor are ignored. I don't need public spending to serve my business. PUBLIC SPENDING SHOULD SERVE THE GENERAL PUBLIC.”

“In state and out of state information”

“Try to work with marketing agencies besides Seed Media.”



Please rank the following marketing activities in order of importance. (Select 1 choice for each row- 1 is highest and 8 is lowest)



Do you have comments or thoughts on organizational structure and membership? (preferred organization type, oversight, membership requirements, etc.)

“I think the organization should be simple, transparent, and easy for small businesses to be part of. It’s important that all types of businesses in Valdez feel represented—not just larger tourism operators. Clear communication, regular updates, and some level of local business input or advisory group would go a long way. Membership requirements should be affordable and not overly complicated, especially for small, year-round businesses. The focus should be on collaboration and making sure everyone benefits from increased tourism, not just a few.”

“Valdez based companies. Preferred rates for business owners who actually live year-round in Valdez and not just have a house in Valdez that they stay in while they run their seasonal business. Ideally have a minimum average customer rating. If you're sending people away from Valdez who aren't pleased, you're hurting the towns reputation. They should also lead up things with City Council like pushing for a head tax on out-of-town tour operators like Premier Alaska Tours who swoop in to make bank off the cruise ships and leave with all the money at the end of the day. If you're going to bank in on what we are you should help support it.”

“I think it should be managed through the city. BNBs already pay for the tax to support this endeavor, let the city manage that money to draw in more commerce and visitors. As for the following question I am only answering it to complete the survey.”

“As a nonprofit organization I wish the organization would do more for locals that do not have a large marketing budget.”

“I think there’s a real opportunity to build something here that works well for everyone, and I’d approach the structure with that in mind. I really appreciate the opportunity to share thoughts.”

Do you have comments or thoughts on organizational structure and membership? (preferred organization type, oversight, membership requirements, etc.) (continued)

“I believe it starts with having a small, capable team that’s empowered to execute. The organization doesn’t need to be big, but what it’s trying to achieve should be clear and it should have people who are accountable for moving those priorities forward. When that’s in place, confidence is quickly built across the community.”

“I also think it’s really important to have strong input from local operators. The businesses here are in it every day, so having that perspective represented (whether through a board or advisory group) helps keep things grounded and practical. At the same time, the structure should stay simple enough that decisions can be made efficiently and protect momentum. What this looks like might be a nice balance between shared direction and clear roles. The broader group helps shape priorities, and the team is trusted to carry those forward.”

“I also think there’s value in using data to guide decisions, even at a basic level. Understanding what’s working and where there’s opportunity helps all of us make better choices. And then zooming out a bit, it would be great to have an organization that can think long-term while still supporting what’s happening right now. Tourism here has a lot of potential, and having a group that can help guide that in a thoughtful way would benefit everyone.”

“Overall, I see the DMO as a partner to the business community; something that helps connect the dots, keeps things moving forward, and supports all of us in building something strong together.”

“No.”

“Unsure, but suggest stronger community connections and transparency. I've been here since 2008, my husband was previously on the board of VCVB, and I can't really tell you what they do.”

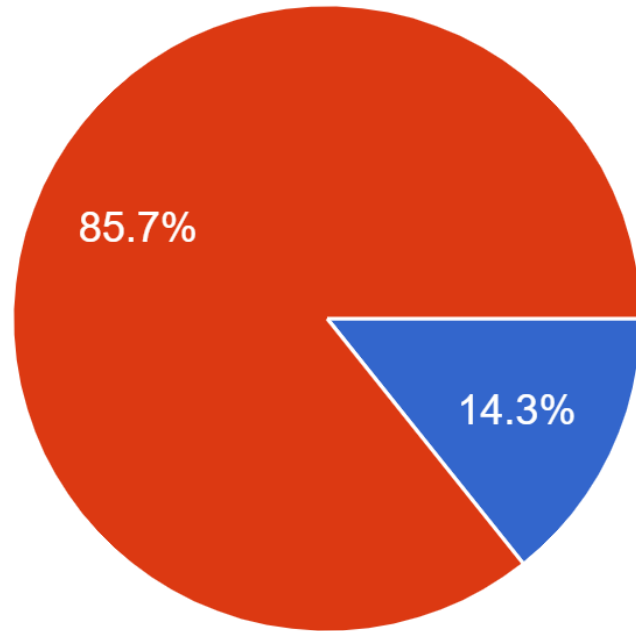


\*Word Cloud generated using Microsoft Co-Pilot AI

## Key Words From Answers

Related to membership, would you prefer opting into the services of a future organization through membership levels or a single membership level with...nu (such as social media, wall advertising, etc.)?

14 responses



- Prefer tiered membership levels with variable benefits
- Prefer single membership type with "a la carte" benefits paid for separately

Please identify any other topics that you think need to be addressed immediately or support needs you have for the coming season.

“Trade shows are old fashioned. Can you justify a ROI? There's also the VisitValdez website if starting fresh why not consider it, I could run it for less.”

“The current focuses are not worth the money for me to join this organization and I do not see how they will help my business.”

“As someone with a graduate level education in the social sciences, this is a poorly designed survey (with a lot of typos, spelling, and grammatical errors).”

“Thank you for all that you do for the community.”

“If you are going to have a building, consider downsizing to something smaller.”



## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 26-0130, **Version:** 1

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**ITEM TITLE:**

Action Item: Approval of Valdez Tourism Task Force Recommendations to City Council

**SUBMITTED BY:** Elise Sorum-Birk, Deputy City Clerk

**FISCAL NOTES:**

Expenditure Required: n/a

Unencumbered Balance: n/a

Funding Source: n/a

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Review and approve Valdez Tourism Task Force Recommendations to City Council.

**SUMMARY STATEMENT:**

The task force purview was outlined in Resolution 26-10 as making recommendations on the following:

1. A summary of short-term actions required to avoid major disruption of tourism information services and destination marketing activities in 2026.
2. A summary of long-term needs and desired community support mechanisms for tourism sector businesses.
3. 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 has completed research and deliberation on these topics and draft report detailing recommendations to city council and the work of the task force is attached for member review.

*Note on process: Amendments and edits to the report may be adopted by consent of the group if there is no objection. If there is an objection to a specific suggested change, it should be offered by formal amendment and voted on by the members.*

# 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.

**Appendix A:**

**Valdez Tourism Task Force Recommendations for Short Term Expenses\***

Category	Cost Estimate
<b>2025 MARKETING EXPENSES</b>	
2025 External Advertising**	\$ 15,000.00
2026 Visitor Guide Printing**	\$ 40,000.00
2025 and 2026 Brochure Storage/ Distribution**	\$ 7,500.00
2025 Outstanding Website Monthly Fees**	\$ 9,000.00
<b>2026 MARKETING EXPENSES</b>	
2026 External Advertising**	\$ 30,000.00
2026 Website Monthly Fees	\$ 33,000.00
Website Overhaul and Search Engine Optimization Project (estimate)**	\$ 12,000.00
<b>MONTHLY RENT FOR VISITORS CENTER (1 -YEAR)</b>	
Monthly Rent (\$3000) for 2026 (does not include heat or utilities)	\$ 36,000.00
<b>2026 SUMMER TEMPORARY STAFF</b>	
Estimate for 2 seasonal city employees	\$ 43,000.00
<b>TOTAL ESTIMATE ON SHORT TERM COSTS</b>	<b>\$ 225,500.00</b>
<p>*Expenses are specific to categories identified by the task force as key components of avoiding a major disruption to tourism services in 2026 and not inclusive of all outstanding liabilities of the Valdez Convention and Visitor’s Bureau or all possible future expenses.</p>	
<p>** Portions of these categories were included in the initial recommendation for an initial appropriation of \$100,000 made by the task force on March 4, 2026.</p>	