

# WILD REVIEW

A VISITOR INDUSTRY UPDATE PUBLISHED BY  
VISIT ANCHORAGE



October 2021



## MAKING THE MOST OF ARPA FUNDING FROM THE MUNICIPALITY OF ANCHORAGE

Visit Anchorage's summer grant funding included \$1 million in American Rescue Plan Act support via the Municipality of Anchorage. This grant funding helped acquire up-to-date photography resources, support invaluable marketing efforts, produce an updated Visitor Guide, and develop a new Neighborhood Guide to further showcase and support Anchorage's distinct neighborhoods and local businesses.

Marketing supported via municipal ARPA funds included a range of sponsored content, dedicated emails, video advertising, and more, produced in partnership with publications like Sunset, AAA, and Outside. These marketing materials target independent travelers, reinforcing important safety messaging by spotlighting Anchorage's wide open spaces and outdoor opportunities.

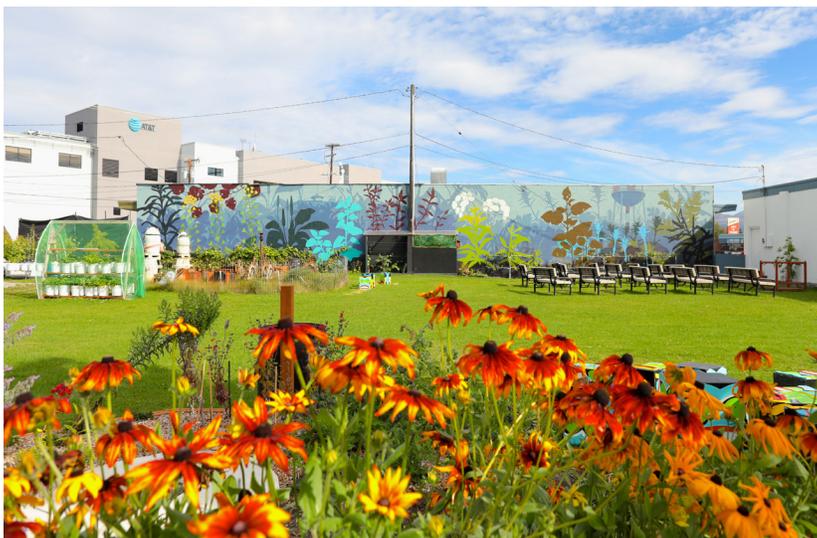
New imagery from local photographers gives prospective visitors a fresh view of Anchorage, highlighting the city's unique blend of urban amenities and wild Alaska beauty. Photos depict current business safety measures, neighborhood gems, cultural treasures, and outdoor activities around the community.

Municipal grant support covered half the cost of printing a refreshed Visitor Guide, passing significant savings on to tourism businesses. The guide will be distributed to 350,000 potential travelers around the country and in Anchorage, providing trustworthy trip planning tools and itinerary inspiration.

While the refreshed Visitor Guide engages Outside visitors, a new Neighborhood Guide encourages Alaskans to spend more time exploring the city. This new publication highlights neighborhood history, local parks and trails, public art, and other unique area attractions, drawing residents to different parts of the community, spreading the love for local businesses and landmarks.

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## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



### After Summer: Where We Are Now, Where We Go Next

Summer 2021 exceeded our initial hopes, with some sectors approaching – but not quite reaching – performance records set in 2019. If you remember the level of uncertainty we faced in the spring, that's a remarkable achievement. We made the right moves to capitalize on enthusiasm to travel this past spring, and get to the market at the right time to capture attention and channel it to summer visitation. In the end, we saw overnight visitation this summer increase significantly compared to 2020, but not quite return to levels set in 2019.

Of course, hotel performance is just one indicator among many to take stock of where we are. We know that recovery this summer was uneven. For businesses geared to groups or reliant on international visitation, 2021's results may have diverged from the broader community. And there's ongoing uncertainty to the return of meetings. Many groups set to convene in Anchorage this fall have pushed meetings to late 2021 or early 2022, or rebooked for future years. Retaining the business is important, but leaves us with less on the books than we had hoped for in the final quarter of 2021. COVID continues to be the single biggest stumbling block along the path. Much as with each of the last 20 months, tourism's prospects are still tied to successfully addressing COVID.

Our 2022 budget was approved by the board in September, and transmitted to the Municipality of Anchorage in early October. Visit Anchorage's revenue assumptions (mainly based on what bed taxes we expect to come in) remain lower than 2019 but slightly better than 2021. Assuming public health conditions don't significantly alter travel expectations again, we'll have a robust marketing and promotions program for our community next year. Our total budget is just above \$10 million, and by maintaining slightly reduced staffing levels, a greater proportion of the overall budget will be spent directly in promotions. We'll apply lessons learned while testing the waters with new ad creative and new programs in 2021 to further refine and improve results in 2022.

In addition to sales and marketing, there are some new initiatives included in next year's plan. While these items are small sums relative to marketing and promotions, they have the potential to further develop the destination, improve visitor experience in Anchorage, and – I hope – make running your business easier in the long term. Just a handful of examples: We'll zero in on better developing and drawing a talented workforce ready for jobs in Alaska tourism. We'll work to ensure that Anchorage is a welcoming place for our guests from the visitor centers to your front desk and the wider community beyond. We'll take stock of what the community needs to improve the travel experience (and life for residents at the same time) and work with partners locally to get it off the ground. We will share more details on these and other plans in future months.

With summer in the books, I hope that there's a moment to take a breath, to take stock, and to size up what needs attention next. Pause for a moment and reflect on the gains made, the steps forward, and the milestones to celebrate, even in times unlike any other.

Thank you,

Julie Saupe  
President & CEO



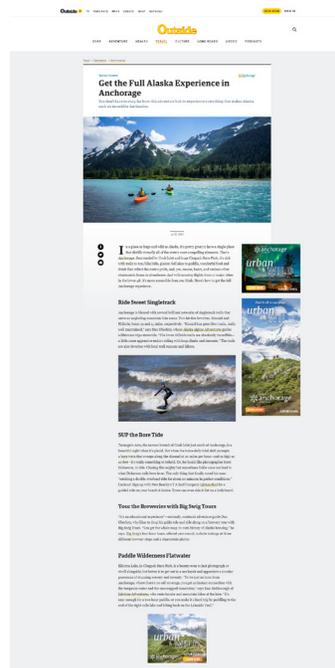
## GRANT SUPPORT FROM THE STATE

Leveraging \$1.63 million from the State of Alaska’s COVID-Safe Travel Promotion and Marketing Grant Program, Visit Anchorage successfully launched a comprehensive destination marketing program inspiring travelers to safely experience Anchorage in summer 2021 and beyond. This marketing program included a series of sponsored articles published in partnership with some of the most recognizable names in travel: outlets like Outside, Conde Nast Travel, and Travel + Leisure.

These stories showcased Anchorage’s wide-open spaces, outdoor attractions, rich Alaska culture, and visitor opportunities, and travelers flocked to read about it. By September, these articles — and the surrounding social media, email, banner ads, and related promotion — generated 28.5 million impressions for Anchorage. With the help of other marketing tactics ranging from streaming TV to audio, email, pay-per-click, in-state TV, Facebook, and other digital ads, the impressions grew even larger. In the three-month span from June-August, Visit Anchorage saw nearly 100 million digital ad impressions — twice as many as received over the full course of 2019.

For a complete list of Visit Anchorage sponsored content, visit: <https://www.anchorage.net/articles/post/how-summer-grant-funding-promotes-future-travel-to-anchorage/>.

This campaign helped produce immediate results for Anchorage operators. Some businesses reported record-breaking seasons. At the same time, the broad and safety-focused marketing message helped spread the word about Anchorage as a future travel destination, planting seeds for guests planning trips in 2022 and beyond.



Sponsored content from Conde Nast and Outside Magazine.

## ANCHORAGE’S TOURISM GRANT PROGRAM

Visit Anchorage is working with the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) to help support disbursement of another \$2.85 million in tourism business grants, funded through the municipality’s share of federal ARPA funds approved earlier this summer.



Round 3 of the municipality’s Tourism Grant Program accepted applications Sept. 23 - Oct. 6, 2021. The program will provide four tiers of grants – \$5,000, \$10,000, \$25,000, or \$50,000 – to businesses and organizations that rely primarily on outside visitation to the community for revenue. Economic recovery in tourism has been uneven, with some businesses rebounding, while other segments lag. To qualify, businesses must have demonstrated a continued loss of revenue in 2021. Grants are awarded to businesses yet to fully recover and that have experienced economic hardship and income loss from the pandemic’s effects on outside visitation. Grant eligibility was based upon a comparison of 2019 revenue from January through August (business prior to the pandemic) to 2021 revenue from January through August to determine ongoing need.

Applications are reviewed and managed by a panel comprised of community and philanthropy advisors. Visit Anchorage oversees disbursement and accounting.

Additional information about the MOA’s other grant programs may be found on the [COVID-19 response website](#).

## FALL STAY & PLAY GIVEAWAY

In-state tourism promotion efforts continued this season with a fall Stay & Play campaign, which included a giveaway featuring thousands of dollars in prizes from local businesses. Hundreds of Alaskans threw their names in the hat, and Seward resident Ronda L. won the grand prize: a Grand Knik Tour from Alaska Helicopter Tours, two nights at an Anchorage hotel, and \$200 in gift cards to Anchorage restaurants.





## COMING SOON: BOARD ELECTIONS

It's almost time for Visit Anchorage's annual elections. In early November, each official designated voter of the Visit Anchorage membership in good standing will receive a ballot along with a pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope for convenient return. Working from home? Ballots are mailed to your primary address, so make plans to check your office mailbox.

This is your chance to vote for the Visit Anchorage Board of Directors. There are 12 candidates for seven seats, each a three-year term beginning in January 2022. View the full slate of candidates at: <https://www.anchorage.net/articles/post/board-approves-candidates-for-2021-elections/>.

Decisions made by our board of directors affect how Visit Anchorage represents your interest in the local, state, and national visitor and convention markets, so make plans to participate: Please vote and return your ballot to Visit Anchorage, ensuring it is received on or before Friday, Dec. 3, 2021, by 4:30 p.m.



## TRIBUTE TO JACKIE OWEN

Join us honoring the memory of Jackie Owen, a former volunteer and staff member who was with Visit Anchorage for 6.5 years before passing away earlier this year. Jackie started volunteering the summer of 2014. She did such a wonderful job assisting our visitors, always going above and beyond, and she was offered a paid staff position in 2015. Her knowledge of Alaska made her a huge asset. Jackie always made sure she was giving out accurate information, making her a wealth of knowledge for both visitors and the entire Visit Anchorage team.



## THE LATEST FROM SALES



Visit Anchorage meeting sales staff attended Meeting Planners International World Education Conference (MPI WEC) in June. This conference included 20 one-on-one appointments with qualified meeting planners, and interactions with over 1,200 attendees.

MPI is the world's largest association for meeting and event professionals, and an influential educator and advocate for the industry. The MPI WEC event is a terrific opportunity to build relationships and plan for future business. With nearly 70 chapters, clubs, and members in more than 75 countries worldwide, MPI has a global community of 60,000 meeting and event professionals including nearly 14,000 engaged members.

Meanwhile, state meetings are slowly returning. The Alaska Native Village Corporation Association Annual meeting took place at the Hilton August 26-27. Attendance numbered approximately 125 statewide attendees and 15 exhibitors, with 28 attendees and 2 exhibitors attending virtually.

Visit Anchorage hosted the Fall Meeting Planner FAM with 20 qualified meeting planners from across the country from Sept. 14-18. Meeting planners were introduced to members across Southcentral and the FAM resulted in more than 20 RFPs.



*Convention Sales Manager Cherise Arola, keynote speaker Johnny C. Taylor, and attendance promotion winner Christina Gilbert at the Alaska Society for Human Resource Management Conference at the Hilton Anchorage, September 22-23.*



FAM participants Sally Pavao, Elaine Girardi, Judith Zavala, Lindsey Holmes, Andrea Williams, Jennifer LeBrun, Angela Carris, and Cathy Dunagan, accompanied by Visit Anchorage Tourism Sales Manager Tia Froehle.

- The sales staff attended Travel Agent Forum with 900 delegates, completing a full-capacity training of 300 advisors, and 125 meetings.
- Visit Anchorage hosted the Fall Anchorage Wild Expert (AWE) FAM with eight qualified travel advisors on a four-day program featuring 38 Visit Anchorage members across Southcentral Alaska. This is the third fully executed Travel Trade AWE FAM in 2021. The tourism sales team has also assisted several independent advisors and tour operators pursuing product development programs in Anchorage over the summer.
- The sales department attended IPW in Las Vegas after its 18 month hiatus due to the global pandemic, which shut down almost all international travel to the USA. A total of 74 international travel trade appointments were held on the show floor and four virtual appointments prior. News of Australia and Europe opening their borders to vaccinated travelers certainly elevated the discussions.
- Tourism sales held 13 virtual and live travel trade training programs in September. Visit Anchorage staff met with over 228 travel trade contacts, and trained 1,635 travel professionals.
- More than 1,500 pieces of sales collateral were distributed, including Visitor Guides and Travel Trade Planners. Nearly 1,100 accounts were added in September and 4,087 member referrals have been made year-to-date.
- Visit Anchorage co-hosted a lunch with the Alaska Railroad at GTM West in Tucson, Arizona, including one-on-one meetings with 43 travel advisors and a presentation to 250 travel trade contacts.

## FROM MEMBERSHIP

Following CDC-recommended safety guidelines, Visit Anchorage transitioned back to in-person Monthly Membership Luncheons over the summer, bringing groups of socially distanced guests back to the Dena’ina and William A. Egan Civic and Convention Centers. In September, Visit Anchorage staff and members offered an in-depth recap of the summer season. In October, Anchorage Mayor Dave Bronson spoke alongside Mike Robbins, executive director of the Anchorage Community Development Authority. To view video recordings of past luncheons and webinars, visit: <https://www.anchorage.net/for-businesses/member-events/member-webinars/>.

### Membership Survey

Thanks to all who shared feedback and insight as part of our recent annual membership survey. Your responses help shape Visit Anchorage programs going forward, showing us how we can better serve our entire community. Survey questions asked about member satisfaction with Visit Anchorage services, business expectations for the year ahead, and observations from the summer season. Survey respondents reported seeing:

- An increase in independent visitors
- Extended booking windows
- Difficulty meeting workforce needs

Stay tuned for additional survey insights, and subsequent future additions to Visit Anchorage member programs and services.

## Staffing Challenges

A new question in 2021 asked members how challenging staff recruitment/hiring was in summer 2021. Three-quarters of members (75%) said it was either somewhat or very challenging; only 5% said it was either somewhat or very easy.

Table 8. How challenging was it to recruit/hire staff this summer (2021)?

n=182	% of Total
Very challenging	51
Somewhat challenging	24
Somewhat easy	3
Very easy	2
Not applicable	16
Don't know	4

Just over half of members (53%) were supportive of Visit Anchorage assisting members with staff recruitment, while 8% were opposed, and 38% didn't know.

Table 9. How supportive are you of Visit Anchorage offering members assistance with staff recruitment? Note that it would divert some staff resources from other programs.

n=182	% of Total
Very supportive	27
Supportive	26
Opposed	8
Very opposed	-
Don't know	38



## LATEST FROM THE VIC

The Visitor Information Center served tens of thousands of travelers this summer, averaging around 700 visitors a day during the peak of the season.

Volunteers and staff also answered calls from visitors curious about COVID travel requirements and car rentals; they shared transportation options, and convinced numerous visitors not to cancel their Alaska vacation because they couldn't find a car rental.

They spent time connecting with member activities and restaurants, ensuring correct open hours and days in order to provide accurate information to visitors.

Airfare deals led many visitors to book last-minute trips with nothing planned and no research done ahead of time. This marked a milestone for the VIC, with volunteers and staff assisting a record number of visitors planning their entire stay in Alaska.



### Volunteer In-Services go Virtual

To maintain volunteer training opportunities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the VIC transitioned to virtual in-service training sessions. These events feature presentations from up to six member businesses, with members sharing their products with VIC staff and volunteers. It's an invaluable way to help inform future visitors about all the fun, unique activities and attractions available in Anchorage and beyond.

The November virtual volunteer in-service event is scheduled to take place Tuesday, Nov. 9, from 4-5 p.m. Contact Visitor Services Director Linda Brandon at [lbrandon@anchorage.net](mailto:lbrandon@anchorage.net) to RSVP.

## SHARE THE LOVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Help us highlight your business on social media: When you post great photos of your products, activities, and attractions, make sure to tag Visit Anchorage (@VisitAnchorage on Instagram or @VisitAnchorageAK on Facebook). We might share your images on our social channels, or ask permission to include them in an online gallery or print brochure. It's a quick, easy way to get the word out about our wonderful local restaurants, hotels, tour operators, and other businesses.

### Fall Hot Spots for Photographers

By Visit Anchorage  
Anchorage has no shortage of beautiful sights, from the colorful murals painted by local artists, decorating neighborhood walls to the fields of fireweed waving in the wind, marking the end of summer. As the seasons change and autumn is upon us, the birch and cottonwood trees turn from hues of bright green to rich reds, oranges, and yellows, colors with which only a midnight sunset could compete.

Looking for a fun daytime activity or weekend road trip this fall? Grab your camera and a hot cocoa from a local coffee hut and hit the road to capture some amazing colors.



More shared photos: [Fall Colors in Anchorage](#)  
[Click here to share a photo of your own.](#)

## WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

Get to know these new members; they could be your next business partners!

- [Alaska Bus Company](#)
- [Alaska Pablo's Bicycle Rentals and Tours](#)
- [Alpine Urgent Care & Sports Medicine](#)
- [Avalanche Escape Rooms, LLC](#)
- [Bombay Deluxe Indian Restaurant](#)
- [Brilliant Connection Consulting](#)
- [Flattop Mountain Shuttle](#)
- [Float49](#)
- [Gateway Hotel](#)
- [Greatland Adventures](#)
- [Indian Arts and Crafts Board](#)
- [Outbound Heli Adventures](#)
- [Peroni Hospitality Consulting](#)
- [Ravn Alaska](#)
- [Snug Harbor Outpost](#)
- [The Wagon Wheel Marketplace](#)
- [Wild Journeys LLC](#)

