Valdez Museum & Historical Archive



2026 Annual Report

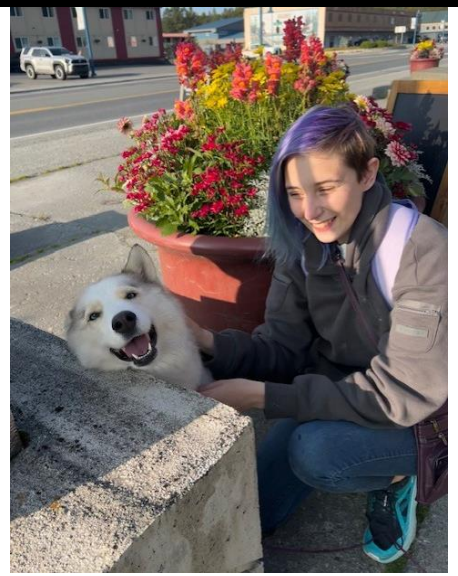
The Valdez Museum & Historical Archive preserves, presents, and interprets the heritage and culture of Valdez, Copper River Basin, and Prince William Sound, Alaska

2026 Museum Staff

- April Vasher-Dean, Executive Director
- Dr. Caren Oberg, Curator of Collections & Interpretation
- Amber Lee Dennis, Marketing & Communications Manager
- Emma Haase, Associate Curator of Education & Installation
- Andrea Searles, Museum Services Manager
- **Seasonal Ambassadors:** Madison Arreola, Max Brainerd, Jesse Chapin, Jaisyn Hoehn, Charlie Mehlberg, Caleb Rusk, Aysiri Shiujones, Jackson Vincent, & Brook the Husky
- **Tour Guides:** Celeste Addison, Elijah Haase, Cammie Hsu, Dale Jones, Gianna McCune, Tommy Sheridan, Shelby Shumate, Jessica Vincent, & Molly Walker

Staff at Work















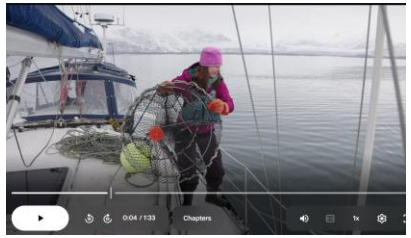
2026 Board of Directors



- Martha Barberio, President
- Gary Minish, Vice President
- Jim Shirrell, Treasurer
- Margaret Nordstrom, Secretary
- Dan Gilson
- Linda Guthrie
- Karen Mitchell
- Pat Olson

Collections











- **In 2026, the Museum prioritized** building the collection to include 21st-century Valdezan experiences. Because our mission is not time-bound, we want to ensure the collection represents 21st-century Valdezans' lives as fully as those of the 20th century.

  A major focus was **Maritime Valdez: Collecting Our Stories Today to Educate Tomorrow**. The Museum collected sixteen 90-minute oral histories and 4 videos capturing the social and historical aspects of living and working in a unique maritime environment over the past 25 years. These oral histories are now stored in the Archives and available to the public. As the Museum contacted more people, word spread about this project. Local Valdezans who have not typically engaged with the Museum because they believe it is only about the 1964 Earthquake or other historical moments are excited to participate in interviews when the project restarts in Fall 2026.

- **We won a Museums Alaska Collections Management Fund Grant** of $13,800 to develop our Digital Archive. This project will begin at the end of 2026. A digital archive is not the digitization, or copying, of physical photographs and documents. That type of work will continue, and you can find these digital copies of physical photographs and documents in our current database, PastPerfect. A Digital Archive is cloud-based storage for born-digital photographs and documents. Our test case will be collecting born-digital pictures of the Damalanche. To follow best preservation and accessibility practices, born-digital objects like these require a different storage area than storage area than just keeping them on a flash drive in the Archives.

Acquisition Highlights



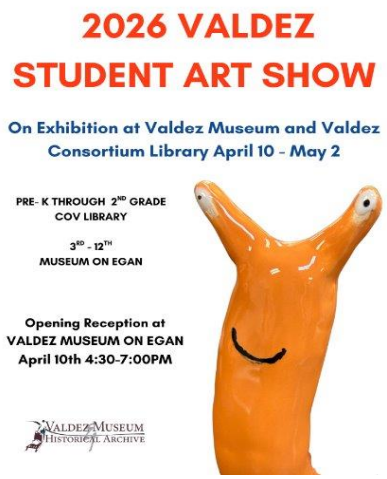


- **New acquisitions** were considered in terms of how they would tell the stories of Valdez, Copper River Basin, and Prince William Sound in new ways, as well as how they could actively engage with the public
- In 2025, Peter Benoit donated two lapel pins from Ft. Liscum. **In 2026**, he donated his **entire collection of Ft. Liscum lapel pins**, and the Museum now has a set encompassing every company at Ft. Liscum from its start to decommissioning in 1922. These are now on display in the refreshed Ft. Liscum exhibit in the Main Building and help represent the thousands of soldiers who played a role in Valdez's life from 1900 to 1922.
- **The Museum purchased** local artist Sharry Miller's artwork "Valdez Temperature Trends." Panels of fused glass stringers show a visual record of daily high temperatures for each decade beginning with1918 (the earliest usable National Weather Service information).The Museum considers this an important piece that can continue to educate our public on climate change while also preserving examples of local artistic talent.
- **By the numbers:**
  - Research Requests: 21 (as of October 1)
  - New Acquisitions: 28 objects (representing 7 donors, 1 purchase,& Maritime Valdez Project)

Exhibitions









- **During the winter season,** the Museum refreshed its exhibitions on the 1898 Gold Rush and Ft. Liscum. These refreshed exhibitions include songs written by 1898 prospectors, newly donated Ft. Liscum uniform lapel pins, and new descriptive labels to better explain Valdez's role in the important and dangerous work of bringing the telegraph to Alaska.

- **2026 saw the return of the Student Art Show**. Valdez students, pre-K thru high school, submitted over 300 pieces of visual and ceramic artworks. Children brought their parents to see their work, and teachers developed additional field trips for their students. It was a wonderful re-established collaboration between the Museum, the Valdez City Schools, and Valdez Library Consortium. 2027 is already on the calendar!

- **During the summer,** Rarefied Light returned to Valdez. As Alaska's premier annual juried photography exhibition, Rarefied Light celebrates the work of Alaskan photographers while also providing visitors with a broad view of the state's contemporary photography.

- **The final exhibition of the year, *Sled*,** will open November 14. *Sled* looks at the importance of sled dogs and snowmachines in connecting Valdez to communities throughout Alaska. The Mayor's Cup, vintage snowmachines, helmets, and clothing will be on display. The Museum appreciates the Valdez Snowmachining Club for their assistance with this exhibition.

Education









- **School Trips**

This year's school field trips were a success; we held 12 field trips between spring and fall. Kindergartners, 2nd graders, 3rd graders, and middle schoolers visited in the spring to learn, ask questions, check out the Student Art Show, and enjoy Museum scavenger hunts. 2nd graders visited again this fall for more scavenger hunt fun and learning. Additionally, this year's annual fall 7th grade kayak trip, led by teacher Tracy Gilson, was a huge success! For the first time, 7th graders visited the Old Town Valdez Museum a week before the trip to see the model and visualize how Old Town looked before the earthquake. They learned about the earthquake and partook in a new scavenger hunt based on the model. The following week, Museum staff met the kayakers at Old Town with cocoa and a fire. We told stories about the prospectors who settled the town while showing photos and then the students panned for “gold.” The students and teachers loved it, and we are excited for next year!

- **Educational Programming**

This year, we hosted 10 history-based arts labs that highlight and teach history from the Museum archives and the Valdez area using art-based media. We hosted 6 in the spring and 4 in the fall. This fall, we also started the Valdez Museum History Club: a space for history lovers to meet, learn, research, and discuss Valdez's history. This club meets 3 times a month, with 6 meetings planned for the fall season.

Education

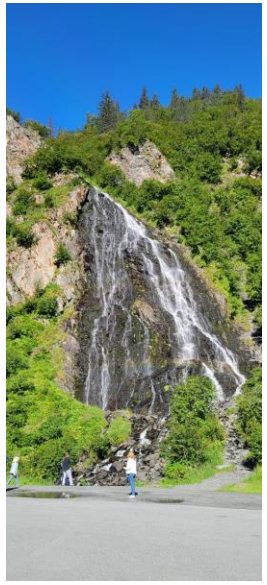


- **Valdez Museum Botanical Garden**

In 2025, the museum submitted a grant application requesting $3,000 from the Copper Valley Electric Association Community Foundation to establish a Botanical Garden at the Museum on Egan in 2026. They awarded us $3500, $500 more than we asked for! Over the course of winter and spring, we planned the garden; purchased materials and plants; and began planting. The Museum Botanical Garden was established to show Valdez's gardening history and showcase native plants to the community and tourists alike. In essence, an outdoor living exhibit space. The garden was very successful; the library used it for nature journaling with a class group, and we won the Karen Stewart Golden Rock Award during Gold Rush Days! We have folks excited to volunteer for the garden in 2027. We look forward to growing and continuing the Botanical Garden for years to come with continued learning and enjoyment!

Guided Tours & Special Programming







- **The Museum provides** 2 and 3-hour guided tours for overland tour companies and cruise ship shore excursions. This year we added special costumed-interpreter guided tours of the Main Building and Old Town. We also rewrote the *Old Town Buildings in New Town* Tour for GoldRush Days to provide a more extensive history of 10 of the Old Town buildings.

By The Numbers:

- # of cruise ship shore excursions (3-hour tours): 114 tours representing 3,804 guests
- # of overland tour company excursions (2-hour tours): 23 tours representing 575 guests
- # of costumed-interpreter-guided tours (1-2-hour tours): 13 tours representing 130 guests
- Total # of guided tours provided between May 9 and Sept. 29: 150 tours (increase of 21% over 2025)

Retail Development and Visitor Services





- On-boarding, training, & management of 10 seasonal Museum Ambassadors & 9 Tour Guides
- Procured new books and maintained our long-standing inventory
- Added 4 new consignment artists and sourced dozens of new products
- Held programs in retail space to introduce consignment artists and vendors to the public

Marketing & Communications

Brand Management/Community Relations

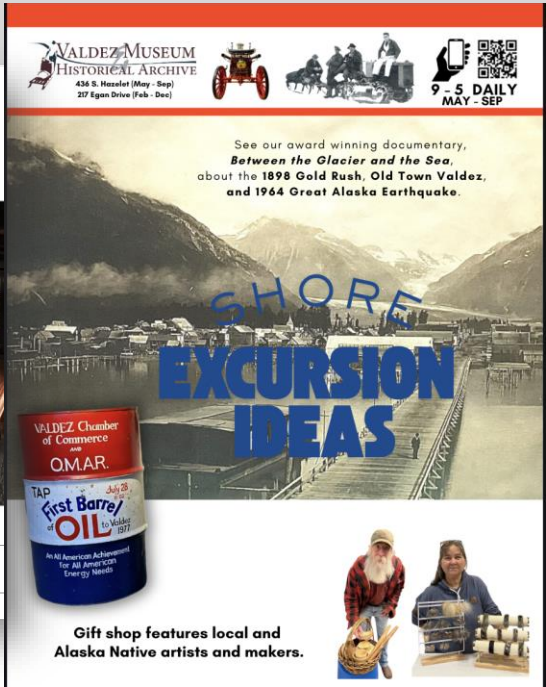
- Valdez Museum presence at:
  - Recreational Tourism for Rural Economies Community Workshop in Whittier Sept '26
  - The 11th Annual Confluence AK Summit in Cordova Sept '26
  - Museums Alaska conference in Juneau Oct '26
  - Alaska Travel Industry Association Annual Conference in Fairbanks Oct '26
- Museum product donations to Alyeska, United Way, and Advocates for Victims of Violence fundraisers
- Community partnerships with Valdez Adventure Alliance, Valdez Trolley Tours, Sound Wellness Alliance Network, and Senior Center
- Introduced new use of member benefits including van service and museum event rentals
- Promotion of Programs and Events statewide
- Produced quarterly Valdez Museum Magazine
- Hosted Monthly Member Sips

ShoreEx Product Development

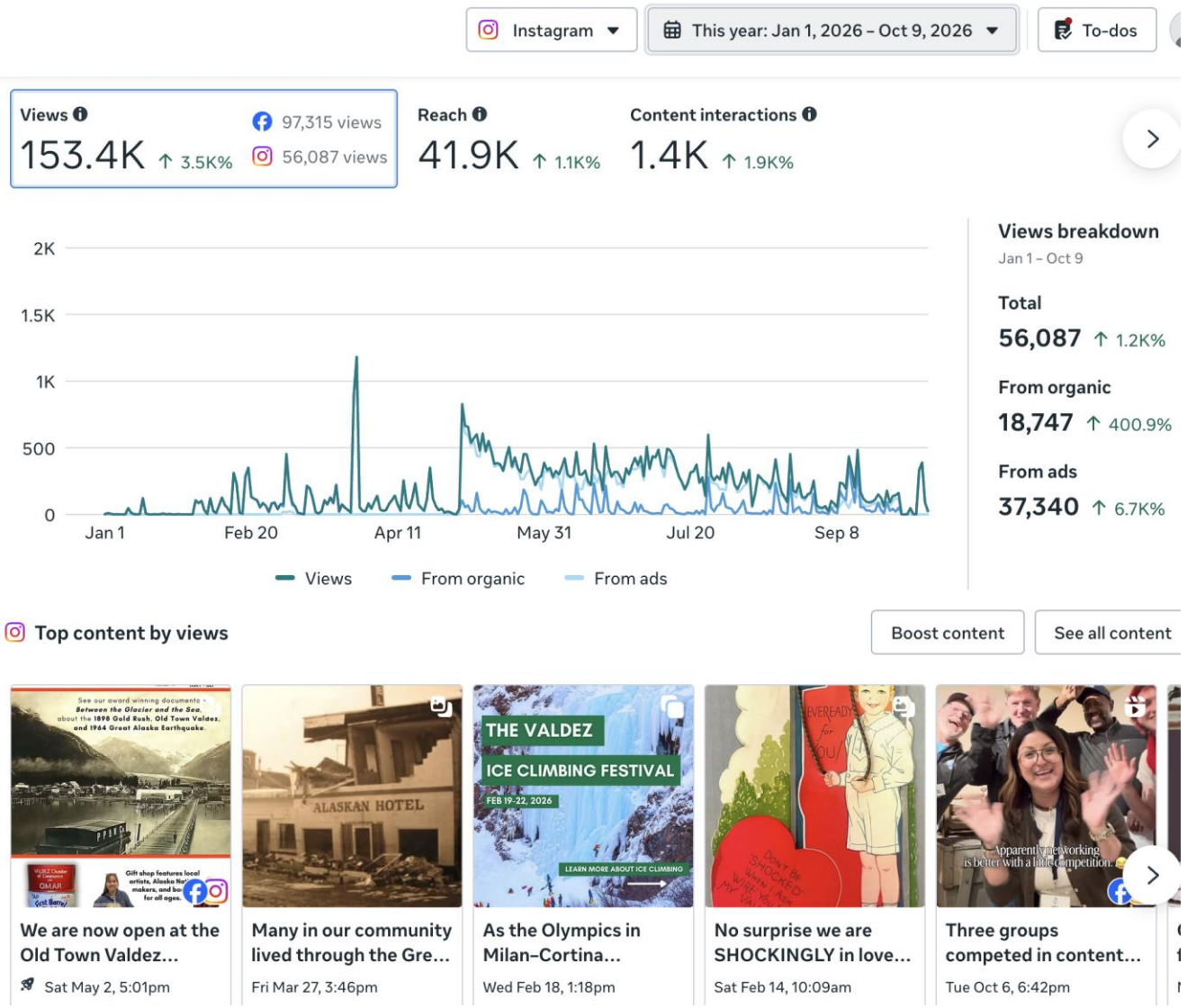
- Museum staff worked to repackage, diversify, and develop new offerings; created a menu for receptive tour operators
- Outreach and coordination with local makers/outfitters to offer programs



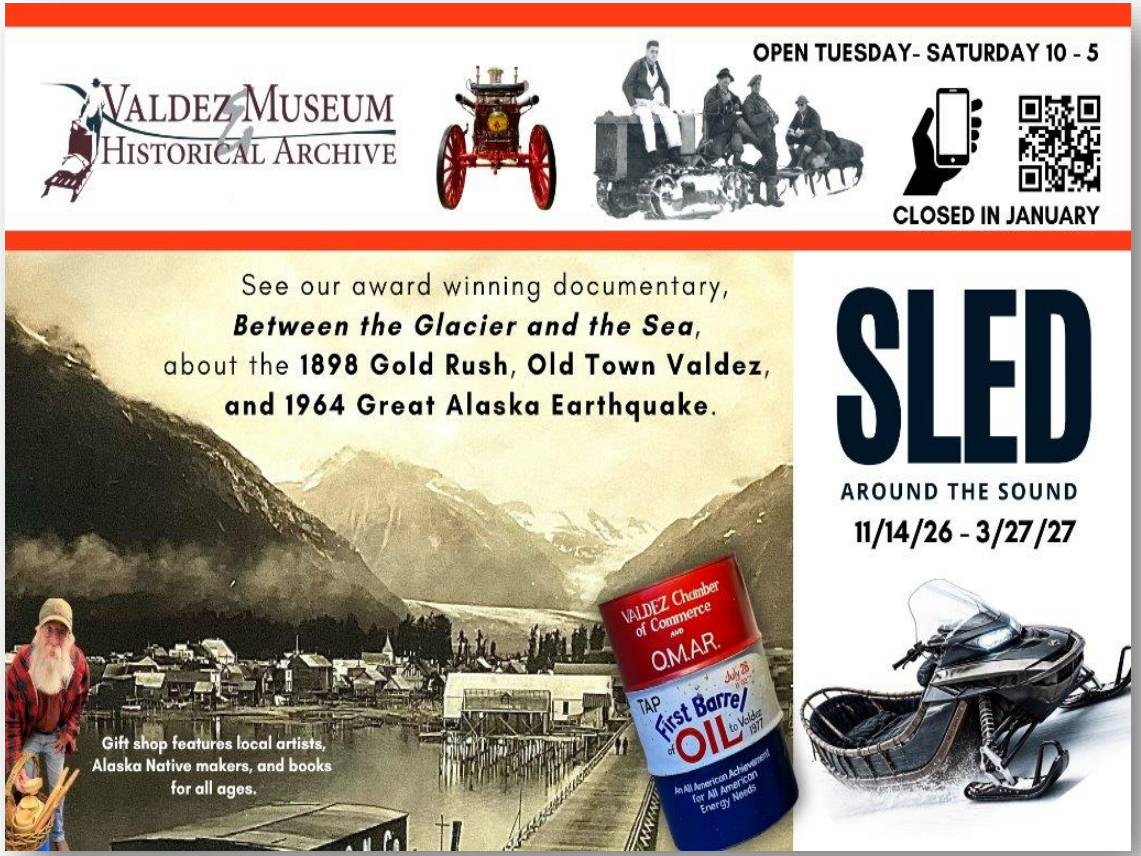




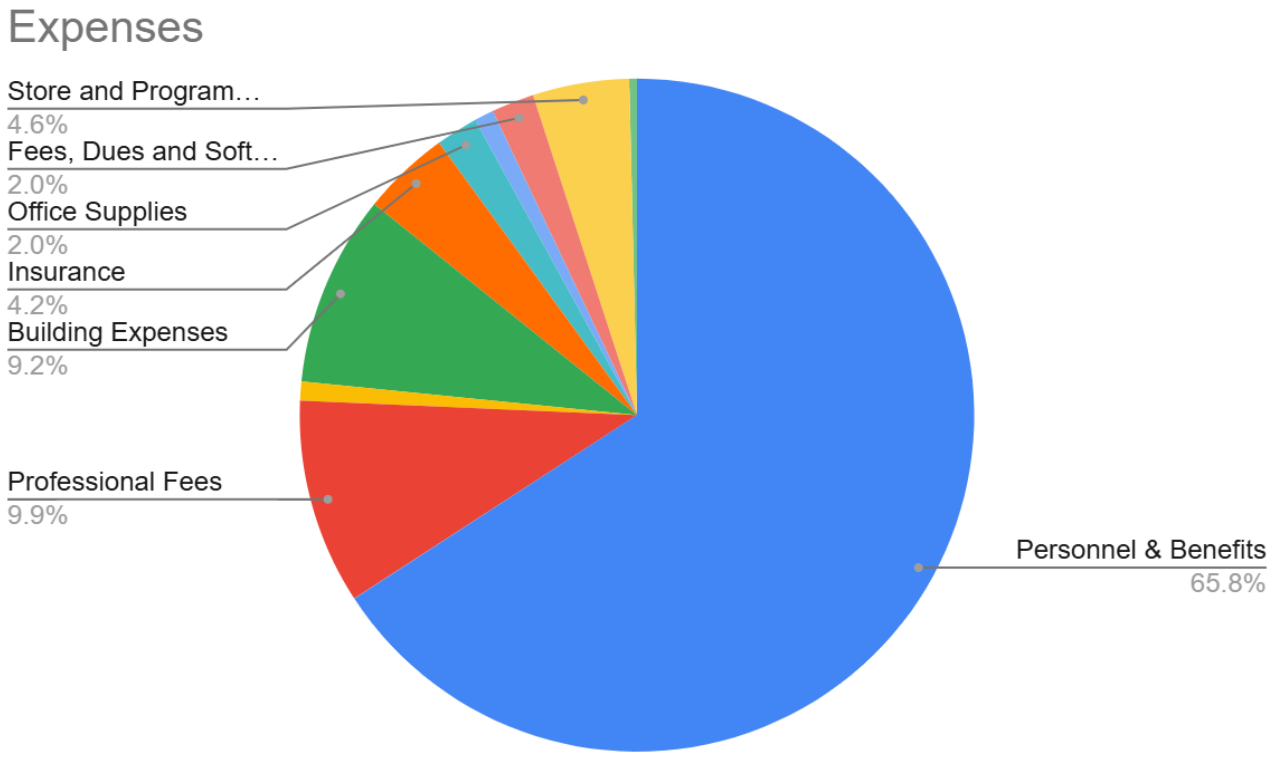
2026 Advertising

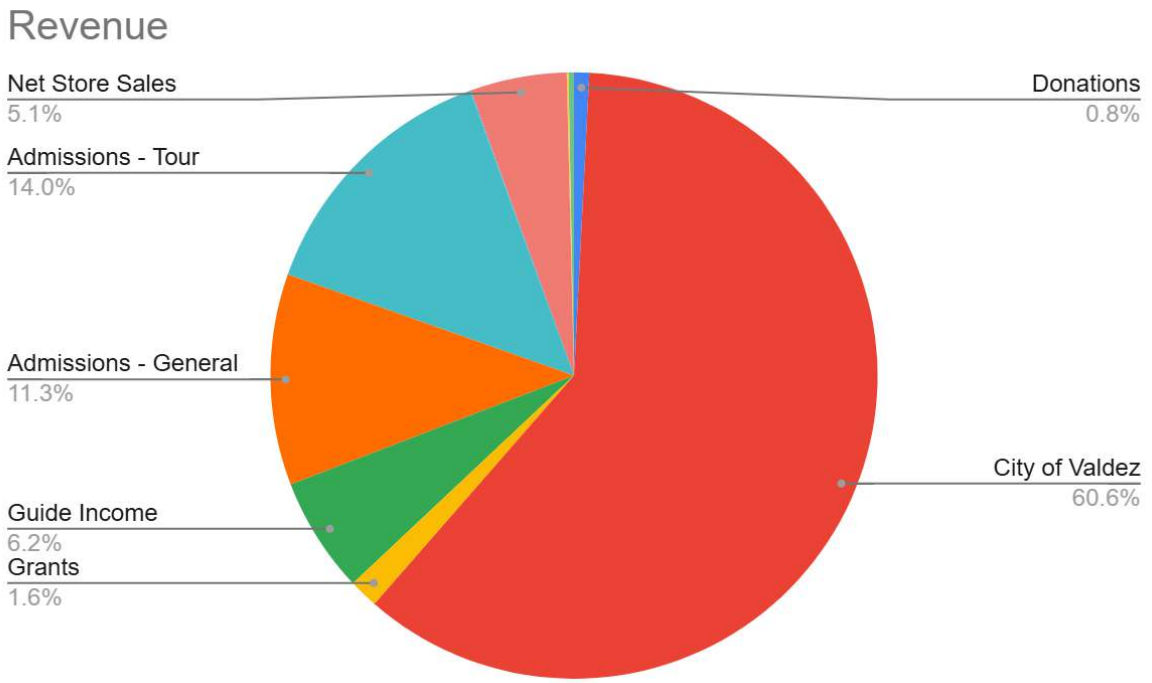


- Meta Ad Performance: 60,407 Views | 35,929 Viewers | 1,744 Instagram profile visits
- Designed and disseminated new rack cards
- Print Ads placed in Alaska Highways, Bearfoot, and McCarthy Visitor Guides as well as Copper River Record
- Reciprocal announcements on KCHU

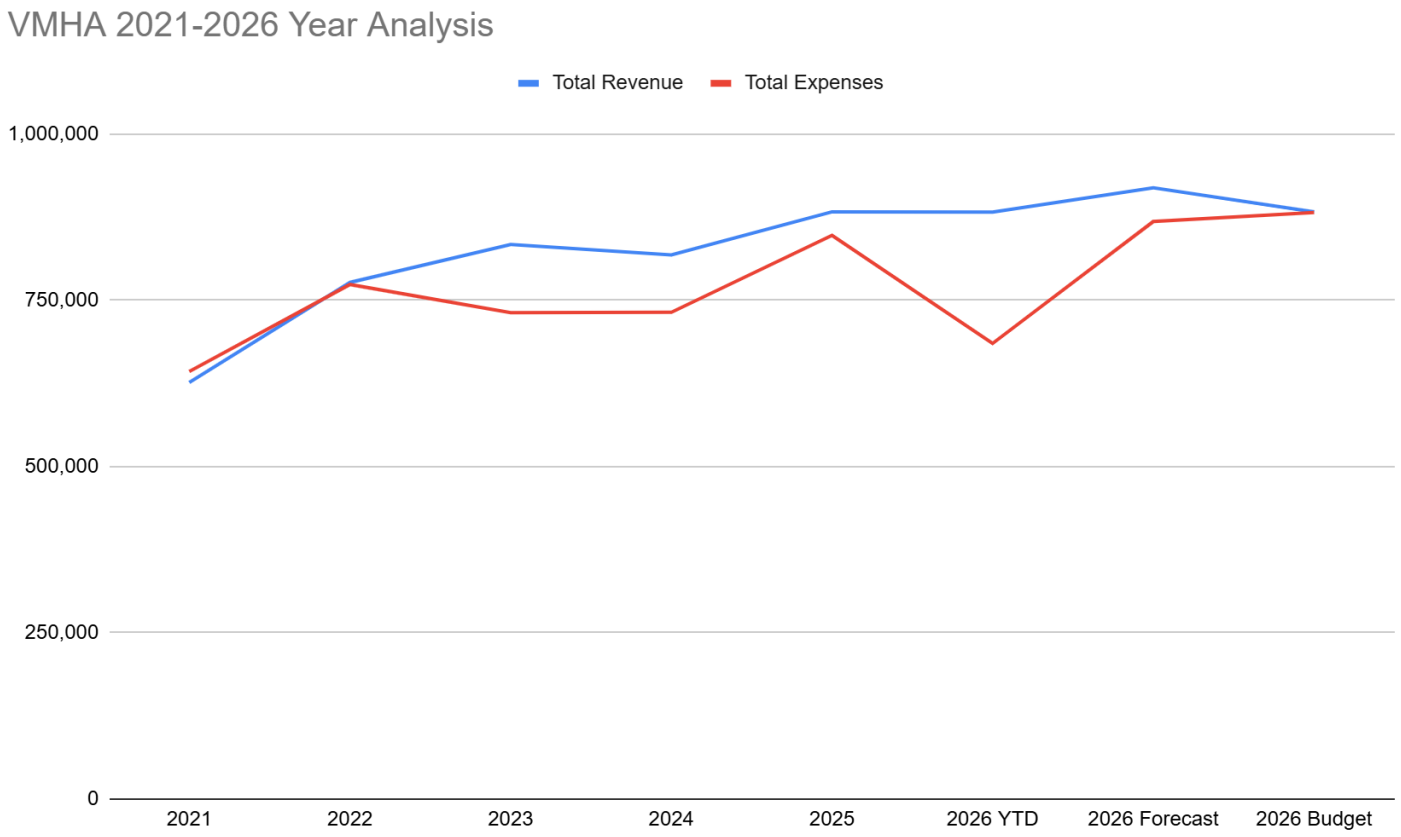


2026 Financials





Financial Comparison 2021-2026



Questions on 2026 operat

2027 BUDGET

Budget questions?

Moving Forward into 2027-

BOD held a work session last winter and came up with 4 ideas which quickly became 3 with the strongest rising to the top

Status Quo

- impossible to maintain current conditions

New Building Construction

- too expensive

Renovate an existing building

- The Royal Center on Egan meets all our needs

Royal Center Renovation Means:

A single, unified museum experience	Improved communication among staff	Eliminates duplication of operations	Increases square footage from 13,280 to 20,000
• Visitors can better understand the story of Valdez	• No traveling between buildings to communicate	• Utilities • Security system • Gift shop • Staffing	• Enables steady collections & exhibit growth

Royal Center Renovation Means:

Fire Marshall happy	Artifacts can be moved around facility easier- weather no longer a consideration in installations	Better able to accommodate growing visitors
• We exceed capacity throughout the summer	• No longer moving exhibition items between 2 buildings	• 20,553 visitors in 2023 • 21,140 visitors in 2024 • 29,171 visitors in 2025 • 30,776 visitors as of Sept 15 in 2026

Royal Center Renovation Means:

Increased event and meeting space	Expansion of existing educational programming	Expanded Storytelling opportunities	More flexible exhibit design and rotation	Increased opportunity for community collaboration
• For entire city	• More space means more capacity for learners	• Community members share collection and heritage with visitors	• More repeat visitors and community engagement	• Destination Valdez interested in renting a small space

Royal Center Renovation Means:

Maintaining operations and revenue during construction- no interruption in visitor services

Revitalized building on Egan Street in downtown district

A fully ADA compliant 21st century facility

Royal Center Renovation Costs:

Estimated at $15-16 million for project

Current tenants and leased space would be vacated before renovation

Long-term operating costs currently being evaluated

- Royal Center cost estimated at $4.80 per square foot
- Current Museum cost estimated at $5.83 per square foot for both buildings

Royal Center renovation que