

Nonprofit Analysis Project

Robert Forto, DSL

BMAL 602

Liberty University, School of Business

Christian Worldview

A key component of this project was to gather information on the definition of a Christian worldview by examining the materials provided (Focus on the Family, 2024), the author's own view, particularly his understanding of this topic in his doctoral project work, and a review of the scholarly literature. The focus is on the importance of a Christian worldview in nonprofit management and whether it should be considered a primary factor in the organization's day-to-day operations. Secondly, it was examined what the potential positive or negative effects of basing the management of a nonprofit on this Christian worldview might be.

A Christian worldview provides insight for believers to interpret reality, rooted in Scripture and the conviction that all truth originates from God. It emphasizes honesty, integrity, justice, stewardship, and service. Faith is linked to disciplined inquiry and management in biblical wisdom. As Jesus taught, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find" (Matthew 7:7, NIV, 1978), underscoring curiosity and persistence in discovering truth. Likewise, Solomon described wisdom as a treasure to be sought diligently (Proverbs 2:4–5, NIV, 1978). Within nonprofit organizations, these principles shape a leader's pursuit of truth and integrity.

Christian worldviews encourage leaders and managers to make decisions based on biblical principles rather than merely pursuing profit or expansion, modeled after Christ, who emphasizes authenticity, humility, and covenantal faithfulness. The importance of accountability and ethical discernment in governance and stewardship is reinforced by Paul's advice to "test everything and hold fast to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21, NIV, 1978).

The worldview of an organization has a profound impact on its mission and practices. Tigney Jr. (2021) identifies theological commitments as a distinct characteristic of

faith-based nonprofits. In secular contexts, Christian organizations face challenges with sustainability due to their incorporation of spiritual practices and biblical values.

Central to this framework is stewardship, as Ojo (2025) defines Christian leaders as caretakers of God's resources, not owners, shaping fiscal integrity, staff relations, and community engagement. Biblical models, such as David's charge to Solomon (1 Chronicles 28, NIV, 1978), provide guidance for succession and leadership continuity (Poyner Jr., 2025). Theological frameworks that are too rigid, however, can limit adaptability and inclusion, warns Madson (2025). Therefore, faith-based management requires a balance between commitment to Scripture and consideration of cultural and legal factors.

There is strong justification for making the Christian worldview central in faith-based nonprofits. Essentially, this means that policies, hiring practices, program design, and budgeting should all reflect biblical commitments. Colossians 3:17 (NIV, 1978) says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." Such alignment prevents mission drift and reinforces credibility among stakeholders. However, not all operational decisions require explicit theological framing. A lack of efficiency or alienation from partners can result from over spiritualizing routine processes. The worldview should serve as a moral compass, guiding ethical behavior, motivation, and accountability without stifling professional excellence.

Integrity, transparency, and servant leadership can be achieved by grounding management in a Christian worldview. This approach promotes human flourishing by meeting physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, while also strengthening organizational identity and resilience. Still, the risks include isolation, rigidity, and tension with public policy or funding expectations. Leaders must discern when and how to apply biblical convictions faithfully yet wisely.

Nonprofit leadership can be shaped by a Christian worldview, which outlines missions, stewardships, and ethical practices. It supports organizations that are marked by integrity, service, and transformational impact when combined with sound management practices. According to Proverbs 2:6-8 (NIV, 1978), "For the Lord gives wisdom; knowledge and understanding come from his mouth." Faith-based nonprofit organizations grounded in this truth can thrive spiritually and operationally.

Organizations

In this section of the project, it will examine ten organizations from the nonprofit list website and include a description of the six characteristics outlined in Worth (2024). The author will examine how these chosen organizations incorporate a Christian worldview, as defined in the previous section, and identify any distinctive Christian characteristics in their vision, mission, purpose, and goals.

Catholic Social Service

Catholic Social Services (CSS) of Anchorage serves as the social service arm of the Archdiocese of Anchorage and Juneau in Alaska. Its mission is "to promote the physical, spiritual, and mental welfare of persons in need in the community. It has a vision to embody Catholic social teaching by mending society's safety net, alleviating suffering, and promoting positive change. CSS operates a wide range of programs that meet the essential needs of Alaskans facing poverty, homelessness, hunger, and displacement. These include emergency shelters such as Brother Francis Shelter and Clare House.

The nonprofit offers specialized housing and case management programs for individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions. Additionally, it provides food assistance through

the St. Francis House Food Pantry. CSS serves thousands of individuals and families through these initiatives each year, reinforcing its commitment to dignity, compassion, and community.

Catholic Social Services clearly exhibits all six characteristics defined by Worth (2024) as nonprofit organizations. It has a formal governance structure, a professional staff, and a board of trustees. To accomplish its mission, the organization may receive public or grant funding. CSS is a non-profit distributor, meaning surplus revenues are reinvested in programs and community services rather than distributed to owners or shareholders. Under the direction of its board and executive leadership, CSS makes its own strategic and operational decisions. The organization's work is non-compulsory, as clients, donors, and volunteers are all willing to participate. CSS exists primarily to uplift vulnerable populations, alleviate suffering, and enhance community well-being.

A Christian worldview is at the core of CSS, specifically Catholic principles. The organization emphasizes human dignity, compassion, and service to others in its mission, vision, and values. While serving all people regardless of religion, the organization references Scripture directly, such as John 10:10 (NIV, 1978). Each aspect of its purpose and operation is infused with Christian elements such as mercy, justice, and respect for human life.

New Hope Compassionate Ministries

New Hope Compassionate Ministry, located in Anchorage, Alaska, operates a community food pantry and related outreach programs dedicated to meeting both the physical and spiritual needs of residents in need. The pantry allows individuals and families to select their own groceries through a “client choice” model, promoting dignity and empowerment for those served. Delivery options are also available for elderly or disabled clients who are unable to visit in person. In addition to the pantry, New Hope offers recovery programs, educational services,

and partnerships with local churches. Through a Christ-centered approach to relief, rehabilitation, and development, the organization seeks to break the cycle of poverty in downtown Anchorage. Through compassion, faith, and practical support, the organization's work extends beyond charity to long-term transformation.

According to Worth (204), New Hope Compassionate Ministry exhibits the six defining characteristics of nonprofit organizations. For accountability and structure, it has formal programs, established policies, and defined leadership roles. An independent nonprofit distributing organization, it is privately owned and operated. The organization's financial surplus is reinvested in its programs, rather than distributed to individuals. The ministry has a self-governing board of directors and internal decision-making processes. As individuals, donors, and volunteers are not required to participate in its programs, participation is voluntary. By addressing food insecurity, poverty, and community health in Anchorage, the program serves a clear public benefit.

Christian principles guide New Hope Compassionate Ministry. Compassion, service, and dignity, values deeply rooted in Christian theology, are emphasized in its mission statement and programs (Tigney Jr., 2021). Its holistic approach to care, relief, rehabilitation, and development reflects a biblical worldview of stewardship, love for one's neighbor, and faith in action as a transformative force.

Stone Soup Group

Stone Soup Group, based in Alaska, provides information, training, and support to families raising children and youth with special needs. Founded in 1992 by a coalition of parents, healthcare professionals, and educators, the organization was established to address the fragmented nature of services available to families navigating complex health, education, and

disability systems. The Stone Soup Group believes that people should be able to live their lives as they wish, with the support they deserve. Its programs include family navigation, advocacy training, special education workshops, referrals to community resources, and mini grants to support children's activities. Even today, parents or caregivers of children with special needs make up the majority of the organization's staff. In this way, services are family-centered and grounded in personal experience. With partnerships across Alaska, Stone Soup Group helps families access healthcare, education, and community inclusion.

Worth (2024) outlines six characteristics of nonprofit organizations. An organization has a formal structure with a board of directors, staff, budgets, and clearly defined programs. Secondly, it is privately owned and operated, independent of government control, although it often collaborates with government agencies. Third, it reinvests surplus funds in its mission rather than distributing them to shareholders or individuals. As a fourth characteristic, it is self-governing, maintaining autonomy through its own leadership and decision-making processes. The fifth feature is that participation is entirely voluntary, non-compulsory, and involves families, volunteers, and donors. The Stone Soup Group offers education, advocacy, and resources that strengthen families and improve the quality of life for Alaskans with disabilities, serving as a public benefit.

There is no direct evidence that Stone Soup Group was founded on Christian principles. Scripture or religious affiliation is not mentioned on the organization's website or in materials. Inclusion, dignity, and empowerment are its core values, which align with many ethical and humanitarian traditions, including Christianity, but without an explicit theological context. Rather than being a religious organization, it appears to focus on social service and advocacy.

South Central Foundation

Southcentral Foundation (SCF) is an Alaska Native–owned nonprofit health care and wellness organization that provides comprehensive medical, behavioral, and community services to Alaska Native people throughout Anchorage, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, and numerous rural villages. Its mission is “Working together with the Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services,” and its vision is “A Native Community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual wellness.” SCF operates through its nationally recognized Nuka System of Care, a relationship-based model that emphasizes partnership, listening, and holistic wellness. Rather than focusing solely on medical treatment, SCF’s approach integrates traditional healing and community engagement to improve overall well-being. An Alaska Native Board of Directors governs the organization under Cook Inlet Region, Inc. It has grown into one of Alaska’s largest and most respected Native health systems.

SCF exemplifies the six characteristics of nonprofit organizations as outlined by Worth (2024). It is an organized entity, formally structured with a clear governance system, staff, and defined operational programs. It is privately operated, independent of the government, although it receives public funding. As a nonprofit-distributing organization, SCF reinvests all surplus revenue into community health programs and services. It is self-governing, with an independent board that determines policy and direction. Participation in its programs is voluntary, as individuals choose its services. Ultimately, SCF exists for the public's benefit, with a focus on enhancing the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of Alaska Native communities.

Despite SCF's emphasis on spirituality and holistic wellness, there are no clear indications that it follows Christian principles. Rather than relying on biblical or theological foundations, its values and mission are based on indigenous cultural traditions and community-

based care. There appears to be a cultural and inclusive spiritual dimension, rather than a distinctly Christian one, in this organization.

Food Bank of Alaska

The Food Bank of Alaska (FBA) is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Anchorage, with a mission to ensure no Alaskan is left hungry. Through partnerships with food pantries, soup kitchens, schools, and statewide agencies, FBA distributes millions of pounds of food each year to individuals and families in need. The organization also provides Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach, operates mobile food pantries, supports child and adult feeding programs, and coordinates rural food deliveries across Alaska's remote communities. Volunteers, corporate and individual donors, and collaborative community partnerships allow it to accomplish its goals. The Food Bank of Alaska also engages in advocacy to address the root causes of hunger, maintaining transparency through published reports and financial disclosures.

As described by Worth (2024), the Food Bank of Alaska exhibits all six characteristics of nonprofit organizations. It is an organized entity with a formal structure, a board of directors, and well-defined programs and policies. It relies on charitable support and grants to function independently of government control. As a nonprofit-distributing organization, it reinvests surplus revenue into hunger-relief efforts rather than paying shareholders. The board and leadership determine the policies and direction of the organization, making it a self-governing entity. Donations, volunteer work, and services are noncompulsory, which means individuals are free to participate. By addressing food insecurity and improving community well-being, its activities benefit the public.

From a Christian perspective, the organization's mission to alleviate hunger aligns with the moral and ethical principle of caring for one's neighbor. The organization's mission, vision, or values do not openly mention Christianity, scripture, or church affiliation. Food Bank of Alaska presents itself as an organization devoted to human dignity, equity, and community service, rather than as a faith-based organization.

Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department, a division of the Municipality of Anchorage, maintains and operates the city's extensive parks, trails, and recreation facilities. The department oversees more than 10,000 acres of municipal parkland, including over 220 parks, 250 miles of trails, and numerous community centers, athletic fields, and pools. Through its mission, "Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Healthy Futures," the organization strives to provide safe, accessible, and well-maintained public spaces that support the well-being of Anchorage residents. Through volunteer programs, youth employment programs, and partnerships with local organizations, the department fosters community engagement. Through this initiative, the municipality will improve its stewardship and sustainability efforts.

Anchorage Parks and Recreation demonstrates several of the six defining characteristics of nonprofit organizations, as outlined by Worth (2024). It is an organized entity with clearly defined departments, budgets, and leadership structures that guide operations and decision-making. Although it is not a private organization in the traditional sense, it functions independently of commercial enterprises and serves the public good rather than private interests. It is a non-profit distributor, as all revenue generated from programs, grants, and municipal funds is reinvested in maintaining and improving public resources rather than distributed to stakeholders. The department is also self-governing, operating with administrative authority over

its activities while remaining accountable to the municipal government. Participation in its programs and use of its facilities is voluntary, allowing individuals to engage in recreational and community activities at their discretion. Finally, its mission and programs exist for the public benefit, enhancing health, community cohesion, and environmental stewardship throughout Anchorage.

There is no indication that explicitly Christian principles guide the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department. Using secular and civic language, it emphasizes inclusivity, community well-being, and environmental responsibility. Despite its focus on service and stewardship, its mission and operations do not mention faith or religion. Instead, the organization presents itself as a civic entity committed to serving all residents equally.

American Red Cross of Alaska

The American Red Cross of Alaska is a regional division of the national American Red Cross. It serves communities across the state by preventing and alleviating human suffering in times of emergency. With offices in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Juneau, and Wasilla, the organization provides a wide range of services. These include disaster relief, first aid and CPR training, blood donation programs, and support for military families and veterans. More than 90 percent of its workforce consists of volunteers who dedicate their time and expertise to helping individuals and families prepare for and respond to disasters. The organization's mission is to mobilize volunteers and donors to bring care, shelter, and hope to those in need. Its work embodies compassion in action, ensuring that no one faces a crisis alone.

Communities throughout Alaska are better equipped to handle emergencies through preparedness education and direct assistance.

The American Red Cross of Alaska demonstrates the six characteristics of nonprofit organizations as defined by Worth (2024). Within the national Red Cross framework, it maintains structured leadership, governance, and operational systems. It is privately operated, independent of government control, and primarily supported by donations and volunteers. It appears that all funds are used to support the organization's humanitarian programs rather than distributing profits to individual donors. It is self-governing, with local boards and leadership teams managing its operations. All the organization's programs and services are voluntary, allowing both donors and recipients to participate. Ultimately, it serves the public interest by improving community welfare and providing relief during emergencies.

While the Red Cross upholds values such as compassion, service, and humanity, principles that align with Christian ethics, it does not explicitly identify itself as a Christian organization. Its mission, vision, and goals are rooted in universal humanitarian principles rather than a religious worldview.

Alaska Women's Leadership Forum

The Alaska Women's Leadership Forum (AWLF) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to engaging, connecting, and empowering women across Alaska to lead in their communities and professions. AWLF promotes leadership development and collaboration among women across diverse sectors through organized events, mentorship, and networking opportunities. As an organized entity with a clearly defined mission and purpose, the organization has a governing board, defined membership, and strategic initiatives. As a private organization, AWLF operates independently of government control, functioning as a non-governmental body. In addition to meeting the criteria for being a nonprofit distributor, its revenues are reinvested in programming and mission-driven efforts, rather than distributed to shareholders or individuals.

AWLF is self-governing, managed by a board of directors that oversees its direction and ensures alignment with its mission. Participation in AWLF is entirely non-compulsory, allowing women to voluntarily engage in its programs and events based on their personal interests and goals. Ultimately, the organization serves the public good by equipping women with the skills, confidence, and networks necessary to assume leadership roles. This contributes to Alaska's civic and economic vitality.

AWLF does not appear explicitly rooted in Christian principles. The organization's mission, vision, and goals are presented in a secular manner. They focus on leadership, empowerment, and professional development without referencing faith, scripture, or Christian values. There are no overt indicators of Christianity within its messaging, suggesting that AWLF is a non-sectarian organization committed to inclusive leadership development rather than faith-based outreach.

Alaska Tribal Conversation Alliance

The Alaska Tribal Conservation Alliance (ATCA) was a nonprofit organization based in Anchorage, Alaska, dedicated to enhancing conservation and promoting sustainable development of natural resources throughout the state. This nonprofit was chosen from the list because the author was familiar with its impact. This nonprofit, on a small scale, had done exceptional things for the community. Its work centered on supporting tribal conservation districts, integrating traditional ecological knowledge, and fostering collaboration between Indigenous communities and environmental partners. Funds from ATCA were used to advance program services and community-based conservation efforts, according to publicly available records. Although ATCA has since ceased operations, its legacy remains as an example of community-driven stewardship and Indigenous leadership in environmental preservation.

The Alaska Tribal Conservation Alliance demonstrated the six defining characteristics of nonprofit organizations outlined in the Worth text (2024). It was a formally incorporated entity with a governing board and a structured operational framework. It operated as a private organization, independently of government control, and was funded by voluntary contributions. Its non-profit distributing nature ensured that all income benefited the organization's mission rather than individuals or shareholders. ATCA was self-governing, as decisions were made internally by its board and leadership team, and noncompulsory, since participation and support were entirely voluntary. By protecting Alaska's lands, resources, and tribal communities, it served a public interest.

As far as the Alaska Tribal Conservation Alliance is concerned, there is no clear evidence that it was founded on Christian principles. Environmental stewardship, sustainability, and Indigenous collaboration were the organization's mission and goals, without reference to Scripture, faith, or Christian teachings. The focus of ATCA's work was community empowerment and ecological responsibility rather than religious doctrine, indicating that it operated as a secular nonprofit rather than a faith-based organization.

Alaska Trails

Alaska Trails is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to building and maintaining trails that connect Alaska's people, communities, and economy. Its mission, "Building trails for Alaska's people, communities, and economy," reflects a strong commitment to public access, outdoor recreation, and sustainable development. Guided by the vision of "Alaska connected by sustainable trails," the organization provides funding resources, technical assistance, volunteer coordination, and advocacy for trail projects across the state. In collaboration with local governments, user groups, agencies, and community organizations, Alaska Trails' flagship

initiative, the Alaska Trail Stewards program, mobilizes both volunteers and paid crews to construct and maintain trails throughout Alaska. The group also led significant efforts, such as the Alaska Long Trail project. This aims to create a continuous trail system linking communities across Alaska. Its strategic goals include expanding trail-building capacity, strengthening community partnerships, promoting safety and stewardship, and ensuring equitable access to outdoor spaces for all Alaskans.

Alaska Trails demonstrates the six defining characteristics of nonprofit organizations as outlined in Chapter Three of the Worth text (2024). It is an organized entity with formal governance, bylaws, and established programs. It operates privately, independently of government control, while collaborating with public partners. As a non-profit distributing entity, Alaska Trails reinvests all earnings into its mission rather than distributing profits to individuals. It is self-governing, with its own board and leadership structure responsible for decision-making. Participation in its programs is voluntary, relying entirely on community members and supporters. Ultimately, it serves the public benefit by promoting recreation, health, environmental conservation, and economic development throughout Alaska.

Alaska Trails is not founded on explicitly Christian principles. The organization's mission, goals, and language are secular and community-oriented, focusing on the stewardship of natural spaces rather than faith-based objectives. Its statements or materials lack distinctive Christian elements.

Organization Evaluation

In this section of the project, this author has chosen the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department to conduct an in-depth evaluation and assessment by identifying the vision, mission, and purpose. This author has an interest in this nonprofit, as he serves on the board of the

Chugiak Dog Musers Association, a nonprofit organization that provides dog mushing activities using Parks and Recreation land. Key concepts are examined that are relevant to the community that the organization serves, but also of interest to this author. Lastly, the contributors to the success of this organization are examined, and several strategic issues were identified as being in play for this organization.

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department plays a vital role in fostering community well-being, health, and environmental stewardship in Alaska's largest city. As part of the Municipality of Anchorage, the department's mission and purpose are both civic and social in nature. Its mission is to create, maintain, and enhance public spaces that serve both residents and visitors. By examining key concepts, this analysis examines how the department embodies its vision, mission, and purpose. Among these concepts are fiduciary responsibility, governance, strategic planning, fundraising, financial oversight, and volunteer management. It also assesses whether the department fulfills its purpose and identifies strategic challenges that may impact its future.

The department's guiding mission is summarized by the phrase "Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Healthy Futures," which reflects its overarching goal of improving quality of life through accessible, well-maintained, and inclusive public spaces. As outlined in Anchorage's municipal budget and planning documents, the department oversees more than 10,000 acres of parkland, 224 parks, and over 250 miles of trails. Additionally, the department manages athletic fields, playgrounds, pools, and other recreational facilities throughout the city. Its work emphasizes accessibility, safety, and sustainability. This ensures that residents, regardless of their age, ability, or location, can enjoy recreational opportunities throughout the year. There is more to the department's purpose than recreation. Anchorage's economic vitality, social connection,

and environmental health depend on it. As a foundation of public health, green spaces are preserved, community events are organized, and outdoor activities are promoted.

From a fiduciary standpoint, Anchorage Parks and Recreation displays accountability and responsibility in managing public resources. It operates within the city's broader budget and performance framework. As a result, taxpayer funds are allocated transparently and efficiently. Its 2025 operating budget identifies key performance measures, such as cost-efficiency in maintenance, volunteer engagement, and service delivery across all facilities. The department also diversifies its funding sources by combining municipal appropriations with grants, partnerships, and voter-approved bonds. Although sound, this fiscal model involves voter-approved bond propositions, such as Proposition 3 for park improvements, which are subject to public sentiment and election cycles. Nonetheless, this structure reinforces democratic accountability and encourages civic participation in decisions about community priorities.

Governance within Anchorage Parks and Recreation reflects a blend of administrative oversight and community partnerships. The department operates under the Anchorage Municipality. It is accountable to the Mayor's Office and the Anchorage Assembly, ensuring that strategic and fiscal decisions align with public policy. Complementing this formal structure is a network of advisory boards, community councils, and nonprofit partners, most notably the Anchorage Park Foundation. As an independent nonprofit, this organization advocates for park equity, secures grants, and fosters public-private partnerships to promote equitable access to parks and recreation. Utilizing volunteerism and philanthropy to contribute to the city's green spaces, the department and its partners ensure that residents have a voice in the decision-making process. A multilayered governance system can, however, create coordination challenges, especially when there are changes in political leadership or priorities.

Strategic planning remains a key focus of the department. In collaboration with community stakeholders and consultants, it has recently begun developing a comprehensive five-year strategic plan. This process includes park maintenance, recreation programs, environmental sustainability, and public engagement. A Performance/Value/Results (PVR) report, even without a finalized plan, reveals a clear operational strategy centered on efficiency, inclusivity, and proactive asset management. A performance-based approach to public management is exemplified by the department's efforts to enhance neighborhood parks, expand aquatic programs, and foster partnerships by aligning outcomes with departmental goals. Yet, without a long-range strategic plan, it is difficult to determine how emerging challenges, such as population growth and climate adaptation, will be addressed.

Fundraising and financial diversification are crucial to department resilience, along with municipal appropriations. Anchorage Parks and Recreation benefits from community partnerships. This foundation oversees the Community Challenge Grant Program, which supports neighborhood-led projects. These initiatives allow civic groups, businesses, and individuals to contribute financially and through volunteer labor to enhance local parks and trails. Public trust in the department's stewardship of community spaces has also been demonstrated through voter-approved bonds. A more sustainable financial model would eliminate the dependence on cyclical funding, whether through bonds, grants, or donations. Endowments and user-based fees could be used in the future to align with public values and interests, as well as corporate sponsorships.

Volunteer management represents one of Anchorage Parks and Recreation's strongest assets. Hundreds of volunteers participate in Youth Employment in Parks programs, Adopt-A-Trail initiatives, special events, and park maintenance initiatives each year. The volunteers save

the city money and build a sense of pride and ownership in the public space, reinforcing the community's connection to it. As part of its budget reports, the department quantifies the value of volunteerism to supplement staff resources. Recruitment, recognition, and training are still necessary to sustain this engagement over time. As a result, volunteer fatigue can be prevented, and quality standards can be ensured.

Based on a review of the department's overall effectiveness, it appears to be largely successful in serving the public good through parks and recreation. This department has demonstrated success through the breadth of assets it manages, the consistency of voter support for park bonds, and the integration of volunteerism and partnerships into its operations. Its commitment to inclusivity and health aligns with its mission of "Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Healthy Futures" through its performance measures. Its success can be attributed to sustained political and public support, effective collaboration with the Anchorage Park Foundation, diversified funding approaches, and performance-oriented management. It ensures community engagement and year-round use of the department's facilities due to Anchorage's strong outdoor culture.

Despite these accomplishments, several strategic issues pose a threat to the department's long-term sustainability. Municipal park systems face numerous challenges, including deferred maintenance and aging infrastructure. Anchorage's harsh climate accelerates wear on facilities and trails, which increases maintenance costs and complicates capital planning. In economic downturns, when public willingness to approve bonds may slow down, voter-approved funding creates further uncertainty. Access equity is also a persistent challenge. Anchorage neighborhoods vary in terms of proximity to parks, lighting, winter maintenance, and

recreational programming. This is despite the city's extensive trail network. To achieve the department's goal of accessibility for all residents, these inequities must be addressed.

In addition to climate adaptation and environmental sustainability, more sophisticated long-term planning is needed. The parklands of Anchorage are vulnerable to permafrost thaw, invasive species, and storm damage. The department must incorporate ecological resilience into its maintenance and development plans. Furthermore, as recreation trends evolve in response to shifting demographics and increased urbanization, the department must strike a balance between traditional and innovative forms of recreation. There are also off-leash dog parks, cultural gathering spaces, and outdoor fitness areas. The management of community-led projects requires ongoing training and coordination, despite being a strength.

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department is an exemplary model of a well-managed, community-oriented municipal organization that effectively fulfills its mission of providing healthy, accessible, and sustainable parks for the community. Its success stems from transparent financial stewardship, strategic partnerships, and a culture of volunteerism. However, the department faces critical challenges related to infrastructure, funding stability, and strategic foresight. A comprehensive strategic plan that prioritizes equitable access, climate resilience, and financial sustainability will be needed to maintain momentum. Anchorage Parks and Recreation can ensure that its vision remains more than just a slogan, but a living promise to its residents, by strengthening its partnerships, measuring its outcomes, and engaging residents in shared stewardship.

Recommendations

The Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department (APR) remains one of Alaska's most influential municipal entities, providing both social and environmental value through its stewardship of more than 10,000 acres of parkland, 224 parks, and over 250 miles of trails. Its mission, "Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Healthy Futures," reflects a holistic vision that incorporates wellness, recreation, sustainability, and civic engagement. Although APR effectively serves the community, it faces ongoing challenges related to infrastructure maintenance, funding stability, equitable access, and strategic planning. Eight specific recommendations are proposed to strengthen the department's operational excellence and sustainability over the long term.

Through research, it has been determined that APR recommends the development and implementation of a comprehensive, long-range strategic plan that includes measurable performance outcomes. The department currently utilizes Performance/Value/Results (PVR) to assess progress, but it lacks a unified strategic framework that integrates fiscal, environmental, and social objectives over time. Strategic planning is essential for aligning resources, priorities, and accountability in public and nonprofit organizations, as Morrison and Misener (2021) emphasize. To guide budget decisions and policy initiatives, APR requires a comprehensive five-to ten-year plan that includes specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound goals. Transparency, continuity during political transitions, and community confidence in the department would be enhanced by a public park scorecard.

A dedicated fund is another critical recommendation to address deferred maintenance and infrastructure deterioration. With Anchorage's climate, facilities and trails wear out far more quickly, making ongoing repairs and renewal a significant fiscal challenge for APR. Municipal

appropriations and voter-approved bonds are inherently unpredictable and subject to the vagaries of election cycles, placing the department at a disadvantage. Maintenance and renewal endowments will provide a stable, long-term funding source insulated from political and economic fluctuations, according to the Government Finance Officers Association, as cited in Nkwinika, E., & Akinola, S. (2023). It would be beneficial to jointly manage the endowment with the Anchorage Park Foundation to increase transparency, diversify investment strategies, and encourage contributions from corporations, community groups, and individuals who wish to support Anchorage's public spaces.

Equity of access remains another pressing issue for Anchorage's park system. The city boasts an impressive network of parks and trails, but not all residents benefit equally. In some neighborhoods, winter maintenance, adequate lighting, and recreational programming are not consistent, especially for low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities. According to research by the National Recreation and Park Association (2022), equitable park distribution leads to improved public health outcomes and increased community satisfaction. APR should develop a "park equity index" that evaluates accessibility and investment by neighborhood to close these equity gaps. Through this data-driven approach, Anchorage residents can enjoy safe, well-maintained, and inclusive public spaces throughout the year.

The operational strategy of APR must also incorporate environmental sustainability and climate resilience. The permafrost thaw, invasive species, and storm-related erosion pose threats to Anchorage's parklands. It would be beneficial for the department to develop a comprehensive climate resilience plan that protects these natural assets and contributes to the municipality's sustainability goals simultaneously. Local governments should adopt adaptive management approaches that combine conservation with infrastructure planning, according to the

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) as cited in Allan et al. (2023). Identifying risks to trails, trees, and facilities could be the first step in APR's vulnerability assessment. In addition to improving park aesthetics and biodiversity, wetland restoration, native vegetation planting, and low-impact stormwater systems would mitigate environmental degradation. University partnerships, environmental nonprofits, and citizen scientists could provide ongoing monitoring and education. Anchorage would become known as a leader in Arctic sustainability as a result.

It would be beneficial for APR to strengthen the leadership and governance capacity of its advisory boards and community partners in addition to infrastructure and environmental planning. Several community councils and nonprofit collaborators collaborate with the department under a complex governance structure. Additionally, this multilayered system can also lead to fragmented decision-making and misaligned priorities, discouraging participation. APR should provide leadership and ethics training for advisory board members and partner organizations based on Worth's (2024) governance framework for nonprofits. As a result of this training, fiduciary responsibilities will be clarified, transparency will be enhanced, and participants will understand how they can contribute to advancing the department's strategic goals. An investment in governance capacity will result in more consistent, accountable, and collaborative management across parks.

Structured management can also enhance APR's volunteer engagement practice, which has been highly successful and community-centered. Youth Employment in Parks and Adopt-A-Trail demonstrate the department's ability to mobilize citizens; however, volunteer fatigue and uneven coordination remain challenges. In nonprofit organizations and government agencies, Kaur et al. (2022) propose a systematic approach to volunteer management that encompasses

recruitment, training, recognition, and retention. Volunteers could be tracked, oriented online, and receive service awards through a centralized volunteer platform developed by APR. Public recognition of volunteers through city events or social media campaigns would reinforce civic pride and strengthen ties between residents and their parks. By engaging volunteers, Anchorage saves financial resources and strengthens its social fabric.

Financial diversification is another critical area of long-term stability. Currently, APR relies heavily on public appropriations and voter-approved bonds, both of which fluctuate according to economic and political conditions. A study by the Urban Institute, as cited in Faulk et al. (2021) on nonprofit finance, notes that public service organizations can significantly improve their fiscal resilience by generating earned income and forming private partnerships. To generate a modest but sustainable income, APR might consider implementing new strategies, such as event rentals, outdoor education programs, and guided recreation experiences. A corporate sponsorship can also fund specific amenities, such as trail maintenance or playground equipment, if it is managed transparently and ethically. To maintain public trust and preserve Anchorage's noncommercial integrity, sponsorship policies should guide these initiatives.

Lastly, APR should strengthen its commitment to data-driven decision-making and performance evaluation. A digital performance dashboard that measures results in real time would extend the PVR framework's accountability foundation. According to Benjamin et al. (2023), government performance measurement must go beyond simple output tracking to incorporate quality, equity, and community impact. Among the metrics APR could use are park usage rates by demographic, volunteer satisfaction, maintenance efficiency, and environmental indicators such as biodiversity and carbon footprint. Public access to this data would enhance transparency, engage citizens, and support evidence-based management. The department would

be able to align its internal performance systems with its external mission of improving the well-being of the community and protecting the environment.

Ultimately, Anchorage Parks and Recreation remains a model of municipal service that promotes public health, social connection, and environmental sustainability. An integral part of Anchorage's outdoor ethos is a volunteer culture deeply embedded in its fiscal management and effective partnerships. As climate change, urban growth, and budgetary uncertainty threaten this success, the department must adopt an integrated, sustainable, equitable, and resilient strategy. Creating a maintenance capability, addressing access inequities, enhancing climate adaptation, strengthening governance, refining volunteer systems, diversifying funding sources, and improving data-driven management will position APR as a national leader in urban parks innovation. As Anchorage takes these steps, it can ensure that its vision remains more than just an aspirational statement, but a measurable and enduring reality.

Professional Letter

Dr. Robert Forto

Strategic Analyst & Business Consultant
Dreamchaser Leadership and Peak Experience
Anchorage, Alaska
rforto@liberty.edu
907-841-1686

October 7, 2025

Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department

632 West 6th Avenue, Suite 630
Anchorage, AK 99501

Dear Anchorage Parks and Recreation Leadership Team,

My name is Dr. Robert Forto. I am writing to formally introduce myself and share with you the results of a recent academic and professional assessment I conducted on the Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department. As part of a graduate-level course in nonprofit management and strategic leadership, I was tasked with selecting an organization within my community to analyze

in depth. Having worked alongside your department through the Chugiak Dog Musers Association, an organization that utilizes municipal parklands for dog mushing and outdoor recreation, I chose Anchorage Parks and Recreation because of its profound and lasting impact on our community.

Over the past several weeks, I have examined the department's mission, governance structure, fiscal stewardship, volunteer management, and strategic planning framework. This evaluation reinforced what many in the community already know: Anchorage Parks and Recreation plays an essential role in supporting the city's health, livability, and environmental sustainability. The department's mission, "Healthy Parks, Healthy People, Healthy Futures," truly captures the spirit of what makes Anchorage such a remarkable place to live.

That said, this project also provided an opportunity to reflect on potential areas for continued growth and innovation. Drawing upon academic research, best practices from the *National Recreation and Park Association* and *International City/County Management Association*, and my own experience as a nonprofit board member and strategic analyst for several Anchorage-based organizations, I have developed the following eight recommendations that may be of benefit to your department:

1. **Develop a comprehensive long-range strategic plan** that establishes measurable goals, incorporates public input, and ensures continuity through administrative transitions.
2. **Establish a dedicated infrastructure renewal and maintenance endowment fund** to provide sustainable, non-cyclical funding for park and facility upkeep.
3. **Expand equity-based access initiatives** by adopting a "Park Equity Index" that guides investments and programming for underserved neighborhoods.
4. **Implement a climate resilience and sustainability master plan** that integrates environmental adaptation and conservation into every level of planning and maintenance.
5. **Enhance leadership and governance training** for advisory boards and nonprofit partners to improve collaboration, transparency, and fiduciary effectiveness.
6. **Strengthen volunteer recruitment and retention programs** through structured training, recognition systems, and a centralized volunteer management platform.
7. **Diversify funding sources** through earned income strategies, community sponsorships, and social enterprise initiatives that align with public values.
8. **Advance data-driven performance measurement** by expanding the PVR system into a publicly accessible performance dashboard tracking social, fiscal, and environmental outcomes.

Please note, these recommendations are presented not as criticism but as opportunities, practical steps that could further strengthen what is already a respected and high-performing municipal

department. The employees and volunteers at the Anchorage Parks and Recreation are an asset to our community. Continued strategic refinement will ensure their long-term sustainability and impact.

It has been a learning experience to study the organization's structure, successes, and challenges. I hope that this analysis makes a meaningful contribution to your ongoing efforts to build a healthy, active, and inclusive Anchorage for future generations. I would be glad to discuss these recommendations further or share additional details from my assessment. This is to determine if they would be of use to your leadership or planning team.

Thank you for your time and continued dedication to the parks, trails, and programs that make Anchorage a model for urban outdoor living.

Warm regards,

Dr. Robert Forto

Strategic Analyst | Nonprofit Board Member | Leadership Consultant
Anchorage, Alaska

References

- Allan, R. P., Arias, P. A., Berger, S., Canadell, J. G., Cassou, C., Chen, D., ... & Zickfeld, K. (2023). Intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC). Summary for policymakers. In *Climate change 2021: The physical science basis. Contribution of working group I to the sixth assessment report of the intergovernmental panel on climate change* (pp. 3-32). Cambridge University Press.
- Benjamin, L. M., Ebrahim, A., & Gugerty, M. K. (2023). Nonprofit organizations and the evaluation of social impact: A research program to advance theory and practice. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 52(1_suppl), 313S-352S.
- Faulk, L., Kim, M., Derrick-Mills, T., Boris, E., Tomasko, L., Hakizimana, N., ... & Nath, L. (2021). Nonprofit trends and impacts 2021. *The Urban Institute*.

- Kaur, M. P., Smith, S., Pazour, J. A., & Schumacher, A. D. (2022). Optimization of volunteer task assignments to improve volunteer retention and nonprofit organizational performance. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences*, 84, 101392.
- Madson, P. R. (2025). *The Steward Leader's Influence on Organizational Culture Within a Christian Nonprofit Organization: A Phenomenological Study* (Doctoral dissertation, Columbia International University).
- Morrison, K. A., & Misener, K. E. (2021). Exploring the conditions for strategic planning in nonprofit community sport. *Sport Management Review*, 24(5), 747-769.
- National Recreation and Park Association (2022). *Equity in Parks and Recreation: A Framework for Action*.
- New International Version Bible*. (1978; 2011). The NIV Bible. <https://www.thenivbible.com> (Original work published 1978).
- Nkwinika, E., & Akinola, S. (2023). The importance of financial management in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs): an analysis of challenges and best practices. *Technology audit and production reserves*, 5(4 (73)), 12-20.
- Ojo, S. O. (2025). From Shepherds to Strategists: The Intersection of Pastoral Ministry and Human Resource Management. *International Journal of Religions and Peacebuilding (INJOREP)*, 114.
- Poyner Jr, D. W. (2025). *Biblical and Philosophical Foundations for Steward Leadership Theory in Christian Ministry* (Doctoral dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary).
- Tigney Jr, A. W. (2021). *How Christian Leaders Describe Trust and Power on Successful Collaboration Among Christian Non-Profit Organizations* (Doctoral dissertation, Grand Canyon University).

What is a Christian Worldview? (2024, February 21). Focus on the Family.

<https://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/whats-a-christian-worldview>

Worth, M. J. (2024). *Nonprofit management: Principles and practice* (7th ed.). Sage. ISBN: 9781071884089.