

Front Porch Forum

2020 Annual Benefit Corporation Report

Leadership statements

"The team at Front Porch Forum continued to deliver on our mission in 2020, helping neighbors connect and increase community resiliency across all of Vermont, 30 towns in upstate NY and Williamstown, MA. Our work became even more important through the Covid-19 pandemic, racial justice struggles, economic challenges, and political upheaval. This report highlights our goals and accomplishments for 2020, and points toward our future goals."

- Michael Wood-Lewis
FPF Co-Founder and CEO

"I believe that Front Porch Forum has acted in accordance with its benefit purpose and demonstrated the Benefit Corporation standards during fiscal year 2020. I am pleased with FPF's continued commitment and progress, especially through such challenging societal times, and I look forward to additional improvements going forward."

- Susan A. Comerford, Ph.D.
FPF Benefit Director

Mission: FPF's reason for existence

FPF's mission is to help neighbors connect and build community, thereby increasing local resiliency. We do that by hosting a network of online local forums covering all of Vermont and parts of adjacent states, where neighbors share postings about a wide variety of topics. The resulting increase in social capital benefits citizens, public officials, local businesses, nonprofits and local media.

Vision: How communities served by FPF will appear in the future

FPF's vision is of thriving and resilient communities inhabited by citizens informed by facts who know and support their neighbors, participate in local democracy and community projects, support area nonprofits, and spend their money with local businesses. These communities are served by factually informed and engaged political and local government leaders, as well as mission-driven nonprofits, robust local journalism, and a thriving local economy.

FPF 2020 goals

- **Better results (benefit goals)**
 - Increased social capital for neighbors, leading to more resilient neighborhoods
 - More economically viable local businesses, leading to stronger local economies
 - More nonprofits fulfilling their social missions, leading to stronger local social safety nets
 - More local journalism, leading to sound local democracies
 - More transparent and inclusive local elections, leading to sound local democracies
 - More effective local government, leading to well-run municipalities
 - More effective local schools, leading to engaged and successful young people

- **More reach**
 - Solid growth in member count across all member types and across our entire region
 - Easy-to-use UI, regardless of tech skills, connectivity, demographics, or location
 - Modest expansion that demonstrates FPF's viability beyond Vermont's borders

- **Enhanced visibility and stature**
 - Increased FPF public visibility in current service area, with a focus on low-traction areas
 - Up-to-date public perception of FPF as a dynamic and creative business
 - Recognition of FPF as a necessary partner for those aiming to connect with Vermonters at the community level
 - Sustained engagement with a network of peers, across Vermont and beyond

- **Strong financial footing**
 - Diversified revenue streams
 - Increased revenue-to-member ratio
 - Increased profits
 - Affordable and timely access to mission-aligned capital

- **Effective and motivated team**
 - New hires that fill key gaps in our team
 - Competitive compensation
 - A healthy and supportive work environment
 - Tech tools that increase staff efficiency and reduce repetitive tasks

FPF 2020 accomplishments

Front Porch Forum continued to serve its social mission and the communities of Vermont through all of 2020. We did this work despite and because of the multiple crises that roiled the nation and Vermont during this year, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the struggle for racial justice, economic hardship, and disinformation campaigns and political upheaval and violence.

In response to these crises, FPF took many steps, including:

- Evolved our posting moderation model to fact check postings about challenging topics
- Engaged in multiple staff training sessions regarding racial justice
- Upgraded FPF policies to better address major issues that emerged in 2020
- Expanded staff by 25% to handle increasing load
- Discounted our advertising prices by 38% for small businesses (ongoing)
- Offered more free access to public officials and nonprofits to address pandemic issues
- Donated \$10,000 to the Vermont Community Foundation Covid-19 Response Fund

During 2020, FPF's service grew on many fronts, as demonstrated by these statistics:

- 198,000 members (For every 1,000 households in VT, FPF has 750 members)
- 23% growth in total number of postings submitted by members
- 71 million Email Forums sent to members (19% growth over previous year)
- 182% growth in clicks on local business advertisements
- 22% growth in website pageviews
- 92% increase in 1-day active users of mobile app
- 20-person engaged and stable staff

We hear thousands of stories from members about FPF's public benefit. Here are some samples from 2020:

"FPF is a dream come true for me... a way to share resources, keep in touch, get a ride, give a ride, give away a mattress, get a tool. I was just given 6 pallets and they are already turned into a compost bin! Fabulous!"

- Mary, Hardwick

"As we find ourselves more socially isolated than we could ever have imagined, the one thing we need most is up-to-date, factual information. Front Porch Forum is one of our BEST local resources. FPF keeps us connected in ways that provide a social lifeline as well. FPF, you rock!"

- Kathy, Rutland

"I think of FPF as the PBS of Social Media. Given how big business Social Media has failed our society, and has done more harm than good, we need... vehicles like this more than ever."

- Terri, Williston

"Think of all the ways FPF helps farmers and critter-owners! Tracking down wandering livestock, finding needed equipment, letting you all know about what we have for sale, inviting you to events and camps... FPF Promotes Farms!"

- Erica, East Montpelier

"The way Front Porch Forum is composed of local content, posted by neighbors and not-yet-met neighbors, lightly moderated, is of tremendous value. To know that each participating town in Vermont has the same web interchange is fantastic."

- Kim, Shelburne

"I have commented on local issues, endorsed candidates, announced events, asked for help finding my missing dog, advertised maple syrup for sale, and much more. Where else can you do all this for free?"

- Tom, Barre

"Front Porch Forum is simply the cat's pajamas! There is so much wealth here - looking for something and finding it, getting rid of something and finding a taker, learning important things in our community, and feeling the caring and concern we all show towards each other in trying times. It's such a valuable forum."

- Janet, Randolph Center

"I want to support a locally based neighborhood social network against competition like Nextdoor whose incentives are more complicated and is backed by Silicon Valley Venture Capital heavyweights. FPF is good for VT."

- David, Stowe

"I can't imagine navigating the current crisis without FPF, and we'll need FPF as we recover."

- Robin, Waterbury

"I've benefited in so many ways from having FPF in Richmond. A neighbor I'd never met brought me her leaves for mulch. I've learned of events, posted about meetings, given away things, learned about political candidates, read weird jokes, stayed abreast of local news. That's just this year. And probably most importantly, FPF helps me have a sense of who we are as a community--our diverse views and needs and priorities."

- Amy, Richmond

"Who can remember our community dynamics before FPF? For better or for worse, it has brought the Northfield community closer together."

- Mary Helen, Northfield

"We are so fortunate to have Front Porch Forum in our community. So much information right at our fingertips... events, lost and found, discussions, concerns, and so much more... keeping us tuned in both to our own community and neighboring towns. This is a terrific service for us all especially in this unprecedented time."

- Margie, Craftsbury Common

"I'm new to FPF this fall. Thanks to FPF, I feel more connected to what's happening here. This is a wonderful resource. Especially in the time of the pandemic, it's good to keep in touch."

- Bob, Warren

"Many thanks to FPF, and the community spirit it fosters. I basically owe my Handyman business' existence to FPF... leads and referrals."

- Robert, Cabot

"These are tough times. Over the years FPF has been there for me -- finding an apartment, borrowing unusual items, passing along useful things, starting a book club, and most recently finding new tires for my car. All of those are material things, but FPF creates more. It creates community."

- Pat, Burlington

"Thank you FPF for continuing to be an unbiased agent of information, and an outlet for connection for all of us. It is more important now than ever!"

- Marla, South Burlington

"Of all the STUFF that comes into my "in box", I know that an email from Front Porch Forum will provide me with a smile, or an appreciation of our community here in Central Vermont or a bit of good news. (I wish I could say that about ALL the mail I get.)"

- Karen, Braintree

"It would be an even more disconnected world than it already is without FPF to tie our neighborhoods together. Extra tomatoes, baby car seats, outgrown bikes all find a new home. It's an important part of our town."

- Janice, Charlotte

"We truly are so fortunate to have FPF. What an easy way to stay connected, have interesting "virtual" conversations and share what is happening in our area. A big thank you to all the staff at FPF - great job!!"

- Sandy, Burlington

"FPF... Pretty darn cool. Surprised to find myself promoting something that depends on electronic devices and the internet, but there it is. Works very well. Almost as good as sitting on an actual front porch!"

- Kimberly, North Middlesex

Additionally, FPF was recognized in 2020 by various organizations and publications for its work to make Vermont communities more resilient. These included:

- [How a Williston official's Front Porch Forum post spurred misunderstanding and conversation](#), April Barton, *Burlington Free Press*, Jan. 17, 2020
- Selected to participate in the [Knight Media Forum](#), Feb. 24-26, 2020
- [Vermonters Turn to Front Porch Forum to Help Their Neighbors](#), Sasha Goldstein, *Seven Days*, March 18, 2020
- [FPF on Across the Fence](#), WCAX television interview, April 22, 2020
- [Can't Find It at the Store? Try Bartering](#), AC Shilton, *The New York Times*, Aug. 5, 2020
- [Local Logic: It's Not Always a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood](#), Ethan Zuckerman and Chand Rajendra-Nicolucci, *Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University*, Nov. 30, 2020
- [Misinformation and Its Impact on Vermont Communities](#) presentation, Working in a Fractured Culture, Vermont Council on Rural Development webinar, Dec. 2, 2020
- [Using Local and Online Communications Tools](#) presentation, Vermont Community Leadership Network, skills workshop, December 8, 2020

2021 plans

In 2021, FPF will upgrade its organizational structure and capacity in order to successfully address recent growth and emerging challenges. With these improved abilities, we will transform FPF into a vibrant, modern multi-faceted platform -- including forum, directory, calendar, and other features -- on web, email and mobile. FPF will become the de facto way to connect and engage within every town in Vermont, filling the vacuum left by declining local institutions and overlapping widespread crises, and offering a positive alternative to Big Tech.

Specific goals in 2021 include:

- Develop the next iteration of FPF's organizational structure and make key hires
- Increase ability to respond nimbly and strategically to crises and opportunities
- Make Vermont demonstrably more resilient by FPF's efforts
- Evolve our model to help Vermont communities find common ground while navigating crises
- Increase member traction, engagement and satisfaction
- Upgrade member features and develop new ones
- Enhance FPF's profile as essential infrastructure in Vermont
- Explore expansion opportunities in states adjacent to Vermont
- Continually improve workplace for all employees
- Strengthen financials

FPF board of directors

- Michael Wood-Lewis, Board Chair, Owner, Co-Founder, CEO
- Valerie Wood-Lewis, Board Member, Owner, Co-Founder
- Susan A. Comerford, PhD, Benefit Director