

# Front Porch Forum

## 2021 Annual Benefit Corporation Report

### Leadership statements

*"The team at Front Porch Forum continued to deliver on our mission in 2021, helping neighbors connect and increase community resiliency across all of Vermont, 30 towns in upstate NY and Williamstown, MA. The current Covid-19 pandemic and socio-political upheaval in our country underscores the importance of FPF's community-building work. This report highlights our goals and accomplishments for 2021, 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 2021. 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 a few dozen towns in surrounding states, where neighbors share postings and engage about a wide variety of topics. We further our mission by providing other features, such as our paid ads, directory and community calendar. The resulting increase in social capital and community cohesion benefits neighbors, government, local businesses, nonprofits and local media.

### Vision: How communities we serve, and FPF itself, will appear in the future

FPF's vision is of thriving and resilient communities that consistently demonstrate a commitment to a shared future. These communities are filled with informed residents who know, support, and trust their neighbors without regard to their political affiliation, organize with neighbors in support of community goals, participate in local democratic processes, value and rely on local journalism, support area nonprofits, and spend their money with local businesses. Our vision for FPF itself is as critical civic infrastructure for every community in our coverage area, with an ownership, governance and financial model that supports this work for many generations to come.

## We made the following progress on FPF's goals in 2021

(as laid out in the FPF 2020 Annual Benefit Corporation Report)

- **Better results (benefit goals)**
  - Increased social capital among neighbors, leading to more resilient communities
  - Contributed to economic viability of local businesses, leading to stronger local economies
  - Helped nonprofits fulfill their social missions, leading to stronger local social safety nets
  - Supported local journalists, leading to vitality of local democracies
  - Contributed to better informed local elections, supporting local democracies
  - Helped local government be more effective, leading to well-run municipalities
  - Aided local schools, leading to engaged and successful young people
- **Develop the next iteration of FPF's organizational structure and make key hires**
  - Added a Division level to FPF's organizational structure
  - Expanded executive team to three and filled one new Division Director role
  - Split Online Community Management Team into Moderation Team and Accounts Team
  - Filled new Accounts Team manager role
- **Increase ability to respond nimbly and strategically to crises and opportunities**
  - Expanded organizational structure and made key hires
  - Invested in process, policies, and tools
- **Improve member satisfaction, and make Vermont more resilient**
  - Grew Vermont member count to 210,000 (in a state with 270,000 households)
  - Maintained multi-year engagement growth (postings submitted, web traffic, etc.)
  - Maintained and grew public official participation
  - Grew local business and nonprofit listings in FPF Directory to 11,000
  - Received hundreds of FPF community-building success stories from members
- **Evolve model to help Vermont communities find common ground while navigating crises**
  - Engaged in conversations with members, public officials, nonprofit leaders and others
  - Adjusted our policies to address increasing amount of disinformation circulating online
  - Supported VPR's One Small Step, bridging between self-defined liberals and conservatives
- **Upgrade member features and develop new ones**
  - Launched major upgrade to Directory and tiered options for businesses and nonprofits
  - Began series of upgrades to Calendar feature
  - Improved FPF Search Local
- **Enhance FPF's profile as essential infrastructure in Vermont**
  - Invested in telling FPF's story across Vermont
- **Explore expansion opportunities in states adjacent to Vermont**
  - Investigated modest expansion in adjacent states
- **Continually improve workplace for all employees**
  - Improved staff communications
  - Explored improving employee benefits and staff wellness
  - Invested in staff via pay raises and bonuses
- **Strengthen financials**
  - Increased revenue across multiple income channels
  - Kept expenses in check
  - Increased financial reserves
  - Diversified reserves among VT-owned financial institutions

## FPF 2021 accomplishments

Front Porch Forum continued to serve its social mission and the communities of Vermont through all of 2021. We did this work despite and because of the multiple crises that roiled the nation and Vermont during 2020 and 2021, including the Covid-19 pandemic, the struggle for racial justice, economic hardship, disinformation campaigns and political divisiveness, upheaval and violence.

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

- Continued to evolve our posting moderation model to fact check postings about challenging topics
- Upgraded FPF policies to better address major issues that emerged in 2020 and 2021
- Added staff to better handle increasing load
- Discounted our advertising prices for small businesses (ongoing)
- Offered free access options to public officials and nonprofits to address pandemic issues
- Participated in VPR's One Small Step program to bring Vermonters from the left and right side of the political spectrum into civil conversation

During 2021, FPF's service grew on many fronts, as demonstrated by these statistics:

- 210,000 members (for every 1,000 households in VT, FPF has 750 members)
- 15% growth in total number of postings submitted by members over past two years
- 72 million Email Forums sent to members (22% growth over past two years)
- 8% growth in clicks on local business advertisements over past two years
- 31% growth in website pageviews over past two years
- 24% increase in 1-day active users of mobile app over past two years
- 24-person engaged and stable staff

We hear thousands of stories from members about FPF's public benefit. Here are some samples from 2021:

*"FPF is public interest internet."*

- Jeremy, Montpelier

*"Thinking back over this past year I feel so grateful to FPF. It has been a link that connects me with folks across the community. It has helped me meet new folks. I have used it to put the word out in town about upcoming events and opportunities. When I think of the year to come I hope to read posts from more folks on a full range of topics. I believe FPF helps us have a more resilient community."*

- Laurel Green, Bellows Falls

*"THIS is why we support FPF! This Danville gal put up some free items on FPF... A local charity took all. Lots of folks benefited."*

- Wendy, Peacham

*"What would we do without the Forum?! And, amazingly, what we actually DO as a community WITH it!! Thank you, FPF leaders and all the members. You enrich my life."*

- Maxine, Montpelier

*"I happily support FPF. What a service to have neighbors known and unknown communicating with each other everyday! Buying, selling, asking advice, getting help, learning news and about events! You can't beat it! Thank you FPF. We are so lucky to have you in our community!"*

- Pamela, Randolph

*"My husband and I moved here from Michigan just over a year ago, and FPF has been very useful in helping us acclimate and get settled. We feel like we're part of the community!"*

- Diane, Essex

"Just think of what this Forum does for us all! It is the thread that stitches this community together, connecting us to one another in our hours of need and seasons of giving. It enables us to recycle what we no longer want to a home yearning for just that thing. When our beloved cats and dogs go astray, we have a way to cry 'help!' to listening ears. When wildlife comes a little too close to home, we know just how to warn our neighbors. When we have a complaint, we can write it large. When community issues require discussion, this is where we discuss them. And when we are filled and warmed with gratitude, we express it here, on FPF."

- Tami, Montpelier

"Although I read FPF everyday and admire the caring and resourcefulness of our community, it wasn't until I asked for help for my African friend that I felt truly swept away by the compassion and generosity that we experienced. FPF is an amazing resource. Chances are likely that if it hasn't made an impact on your life yet, it will at some point."

- Deborah, Charlotte

"FPF is run by real people who actually post on the forum and respond to suggestions and questions or questionable posts. I have gotten great stuff through FPF. I have sold or given away great stuff on FPF. I love hearing about how others who live near me feel about issues. I love being able to connect with others about issues I am concerned about. I love hearing about what's going on around me even if I don't participate. What's not to like?"

- Jane, North Ferrisburgh

"Local news does not inform on much of the local activities surrounding us, but we all want to know what is going on. FPF keeps you in touch with neighbors, who are experiencing those exact activities. It's good to know if suspicious events occur at your neighbors, so you can be more vigilant. It's good to know if your neighbor saw a black bear in their yard so you can be more responsible with your bird feeders and trash."

- Penny, Westford

"Through FPF, I have learned of issues in town government, sold and given away items I no longer needed, found things I did need, became aware of services offered in my community, had a forum to express an opinion that I felt strongly about (with respect, of course) and more. FPF is a vital asset to every Vermont community. We are so fortunate to have it."

- Martha, Swanton

"FPF is like a good neighbor; friendly, reliable, and always full of all kinds of news and juicy bits. Dogs and cats, lost and found; recommendations for outstanding house cleaners, appliance repairers; gardeners and dog sitters! City Councilor reports! Public Library updates! City Departments updates you didn't even know you needed to know! How else would we learn about all these things? Local printed media, and their digital sites offer important sources of information, but FPF offers help and wisdom and insight from our very own neighbors. And our neighbors are full of opinions and passion and generosity; we learn so much from each other."

- Angie, Burlington

"I feel a connection to my neighbors and town when I read or post on FPF."

- Vicky, Cambridge

"This Forum is a great community resource. I've gotten help, advice, and even some cool free stuff. And I've given away some things to others, including a huge bundle of kale that was left in our fridge after visitors went home. I still remember the look of joy on the woman who got lots and lots of kale, thanks to FPF."

- Jeffrey, Montpelier

"Imagine not having a local on-line bulletin board like FPF especially during this COVID challenge. Anyone reading this knows what an important role FPF plays in offering an effective means for staying in touch with residents of the town and area."

- Peter, Underhill

"Whether finding a foosball table, donating a bed, selling an exercise tower, handing off youth roller blades, or sending our kids to help our neighbors work on their property (and earn a few bucks), FPF has been so valuable for our family."

- Mike, Shelburne

"Yup, I love FPF too. It is access to a pulsebeat of what's going on around here. Sure, buying and selling, but also giving away, all sorts of generosity, human encounters and conversation, innovation, ideas. I have saved loads of money in getting free stuff--wild things, like an enormous yellow velvet couch which has become famous at my daughter's house. As well, I have given away lots of things I did not need but still had respect for. I meet great people I never would have met before. The whole package really enriches my life."

- Josie, Randolph Center

"Sometimes it seemed like our whole lives were playing out on FPF this summer, as we tried to empty out, repair, clean out, and sell my parents' house. We looked for plumbers, wallpaper fixers, buyers for this and that, antiques dealers, and people to mow the lawn; and posted about free stuff at the end of the driveway. Then we posted the house for sale. Folks would stop me on the street, or on local hikes, asking how the whole project was going. Profound thanks to FPF; and to the many, many people who replied to my posts with suggestions and offers of help; and to the amazing anonymous folks who took all the free stuff at the end of the drive. What a community!"

• Loring, Calais

"FPF - Our Community News & Views Network... I've used FPF to announce events, to ask for information, to offer things I no longer need, and to find out what's going on in our community. It started here ten years ago and has now become a valuable source of relatively unfiltered news and views about our home town."

• David, Middlebury

"A few days ago, I advertised on FPF for someone to help haul a heavy appliance across town. I'm posting today to say how pleased I was with the person hired as a result of that ad. A quick shout-out to FPF!"

• Becky, Wolcott

"I would like to express my gratitude for the people who founded FPF, and to all those in our community who contribute to making it such a success. FPF is a great source of community connection, and often is the easiest problem-solver there is!"

• Peg, Wallingford

"I have posted questions about where to get free air for my tires, questions about internet fees and service. I needed hangers for my closets - certainly could have purchased on my own cheap- but trying to reduce waste in the system - what a response I got to hangers! I read and note what all recommend for various services in area."

• Cathy, Brattleboro

"Thank you FPF for helping us find pets, buy and sell stuff for home and gardens, move stuff out and in, reach out to neighbors, share concerns, announce events, just to name a few benefits."

• Linda, North Ferrisburgh

"Some sites on the internet seek to divide people, but FPF unites us in our communities and our neighborhoods. Plus it's a great way to sell stuff and find stuff!"

• David, Middlebury

"I used FPF extensively this past December-January, while in the process of cleaning out my mom's Randolph home. It was an invaluable resource for stockpiling empty boxes and other packing materials; giving away huge quantities of books/linens/dishes/medical supplies/etc.; and selling some large pieces of furniture. In the process, it also gave me the opportunity to connect (or reconnect) with many members of the community."

• Paige, Randolph

"I regard FPF as an essential part of my life in the MRV. Its not only a great place to buy, sell or give away things that otherwise might go to a landfill but through it, I've connected with old friends and new neighbors. The community information and ongoing discussions have helped me to stay abreast of upcoming events and important town matters."

• Lani, Waitsfield

"I found my house AND my car on FPF! It could happen to you."

• Rene, St Johnsbury

"FPF is my go-to place for daily local updates, keeping me informed and grateful for our special place."

• Colleen, Hinesburg

"FPF is a dream come true. For many years I wished for a way to easily connect people and vegetables and mattresses. Here it is and much more than I had even dreamed."

• Mary, Hardwick

"I love this community in every way; and am so grateful for how FPF allows us to connect, stay informed and help one another in so many ways."

• Alexis, Morrisville

"FPF is truly amazing - finding the owners of lost pets and keys, exchanging free stuff, local events & services, contractor recommendations, town government, climate actions, farmers market, and so much more. In short, BUILDING COMMUNITY."

• Steve, Richmond

"FPF has certainly become required daily reading for me. Somehow i don't feel like my day is complete until i've seen what's up among my neighbors."

- Cassie, Barre

"Thanks FPF, you have been an incredible help to our community. Help wanted ads, recommendations for various needs, donations to people in need, among just a few things. We are so lucky to have this vehicle."

- Jackie, Barre

"FPF, created by a local couple that knows the value in neighbor connecting with neighbor, is a model for other communities throughout the nation... and beyond! We are all so fortunate to have this creative, simple-in-design, FREE, neighborhood connector."

- Pam, South Burlington

"FPF has been an excellent resource for helping my business keep going. This past year, a lady in Plainfield hired me from a post she had saved for over 2 years, and another job resulted from one saved 4 years. This forum makes one heck of an impact, when people save postings for that long!!"

- Robert, Cabot

"Like so many others, I so appreciate what FPF offers to all of us... with no requirement to pay any fee or buy anything. Let's do our part to keep this vital line of communication open and available for everyone."

- Sandy, Burlington

"FPF is an invaluable resource for our community. I learn about everything from the kitchen sink for sale to information about how to protect myself from Covid 19. I can't imagine how we navigated life without it."

- Alan, Calais

"As a newcomer to the NEK, FPF is an invaluable asset to find services, learn about opportunities, and connect to the community. I've lived many other places, and have never seen such a powerful, community-building network as FPF."

- Kate, St Johnsbury

"I'm so grateful for the local neighborhood news and views that show up for free everyday in my home. I feel connected, updated and yes, sometimes saturated. There's so much going on here, and everywhere these days. The local issues and info are what I can best relate to and what I can choose to participate in if I want."

- Sally, Bristol

"How do you put a dollar value on a connected community? Can price out/add up all the free stuff you've received over the years from folks through FPF? What is the combined value of all the (sometimes free) community events you've heard about through FPF? How much have you made by selling your stuff on FPF?"

- Laura, Waterbury Center

"From the Family Who Lost a Home in the Tornado... AND FOUND A COMMUNITY! OUR DEEPEST THANKS. We wouldn't have connected with so many in our community and around the state without FPF."

- Leslie, Middlebury

"FPF is an essential way to link together community members for our common good. I found myself blinking back tears when I read that Amanda has found her elderly cat. I thoroughly enjoy tips that are provided on all kinds of projects and local skills. During the election season, we learned more about the candidates via FPF at a time when we were unable to attend public events. FPF is the grout that holds our tiles together!"

- Sue, Barre

"The connection to community has been invaluable for me, as a newbie to the area in the time of COVID - even though I haven't been able to participate in person or meet many people because of the need to keep each other safe, I still feel like a member of a community. It has helped a lot to stave off loneliness and isolation, to have these small interactions."

- Anne, Montpelier

"Thank you so much, FPF, for helping me find things I need or want and give or sell stuff I don't. The true bonus is meeting so many fabulous folks, some who have become my friends."

- Betsy, Danville

"Quick on the Draw! FPF came through for us again today! Picked up free wide subfloor boards within 15 minutes of the FPF post today."

- Sharon, Morrisville

"Let's keep this valuable, useful, fun & entertaining, educational, community centered, and wonderful way to connect with so many people & businesses, up and running!!What a tremendous resource FPF is for us all!!"

- Deborah, East Hardwick

"We love FPF and as one person said recently, we look forward to the email every day! We found a beautiful Jotul gas stove, an antique jelly cupboard, a hardly-used lawn mower and a few other things we really needed. But even better than that, we met some wonderful people, both those selling to us and those picking up some free things we had to offer. FPF is an amazing gift to the community!"

• Kim & Peter, Johnson

"Throughout the pandemic, FPF has been invaluable for Vermonters-- and Woodbury is no exception."

• Merry, Woodbury

"As an owner of a small business, I've gotten a lot of work off from FPF and had many folks recommend me as others inquire looking for someone. I'm lucky to be sold out for 2021 and almost entirely because of repeat customer and I've done no advertising other than word of mouth..."

• Jim, Bristol

"What a Community Gem! I love FPF! I anxiously await that daily phone alert. Ping! No matter what I'm doing I stop and read the full gambit of discussions, news, what's for sale, what is someone offering for free, what treasure can't we live without? Bill and I haven't bought any new tires for years. Always find what we need here on FPF. Loved our free Martha Stewart Grand Teton rotating Christmas tree this year! FPF is such a great place to repurpose items."

• Sharon, Morrisville

"Folks, there is no going back. And I would not want to return to our community without FPF. I depend on FPF for my dual life (private connections AND my public life serving) in BARRE. Especially these days when looking in on a friend has been seriously curtailed, FPF makes a difference to me and her/them."

• Peter, Barre

"A few years ago I deleted my Facebook page. As I choose people and/or entities to deal with there is a quality that tops the list: Integrity. T'was the serious dearth of integrity that lead me to delete my Facebook account. The complete opposite of this: Vermont's own FPF. Connecting people to items, services, organizations, pets, and each other is good for everyone. This is accomplished on FPF without trashy ads and phishing. This is the platform by which all others may be measured ... essentially the Gold Standard."

• John, Barre

"I read FPF postings much more often this past year and found them informative and helpful. I suspect many others did as well. It was a great connection during a time when such connections were difficult."

• Marie, Barre

"Just a very warm accolade for the FPF founders and all who write, advertise and post on FPF. This is a crowd-funded local newspaper with all of the Community able to participate. It is like checking news for sales and pet escapes, opportunities and warnings... where it matters..."

• Clare, Waterford

Additionally, FPF was recognized in 2021 by various organizations and publications for its work to make Vermont communities more resilient. These included:

- [To Thrive. Our Democracy Needs Digital Public Infrastructure](#), Eli Pariser and Danielle Alle, **Politico**, Jan 5, 2021
- [Imagining Our Social Media Future](#), Brooke Gladstone, **On The Media, NPR**, Jan 15, 2021
- [These 14 principles could help big platforms create healthier social media](#), Steven Melendez, **Fast Company**, Jan 20, 2021
- [Reimagining the Internet](#), Ethan Zuckerman, **Institute for Digital Public Infrastructure**, Feb 10, 2021
- [How to Put Out Democracy's Dumpster Fire](#), Anne Applebaum and Peter Pomerantsev, **The Atlantic**, March 8, 2021
- [Virus in Vermont: In mutual aid groups, people help one another](#), Nora Peachin, **VTDigger**, March 10, 2021
- [Front Porch Forum Developing Search Tool: New policies born out of pandemic, racial reckoning](#), Jason Starr, **Williston Observer**, April 15, 2021
- [Why Won't You Be My Neighbor?](#) Stephanie Foo, **Home. Made** podcast, April 27, 2021

- [Panel: Reimagine the Internet](#), *Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University*, May 13, 2021
- [From Bangkok to Burlington -- The Public Interest Social Internet](#), Jason Kelley and Danny O'Brien, *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, Oct 20, 2021
- [It's Time for the Great Facebook Logout](#), Micah L. Sifry, *The Connector* on Substack, Oct 26, 2021
- [We Should All Know Less About Each Other](#), Michelle Goldberg, *The New York Times*, Nov 1, 2021
- [One Small Step: Courageous conversations between Vermonters finding common ground](#), Mikaela Lefrak and Connor Cyrus, *VPR and StoryCorps*, Nov 18, 2021
- [Commission for Information Disorder final report](#), *The Aspen Institute*, Nov 2021

## 2022 plans

In 2022, FPF will continue to upgrade its organizational structure and capacity to address growth and emerging challenges. With these improved abilities, FPF will step toward its full potential as a vibrant, modern multi-faceted platform -- including forum, directory, calendar, search and other features -- on web, email and mobile. FPF will become a de facto way to connect and engage within every town in Vermont, supporting existing institutions (and filling the vacuum left by those in decline) during overlapping widespread crises, and offering a positive alternative to Big Tech.

Specific goals in 2022 include:

- Develop the next iteration of FPF's organizational structure and make key hires
- Help Vermont's local communities become demonstrably more resilient
- Continue to help Vermonters 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 adjacent states
- 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