

Front Porch Forum

2022 Annual Benefit Corporation Report

Leadership statements

"The team at Front Porch Forum continued to deliver on our mission in 2022, helping neighbors connect and increase community resilience across all of Vermont, 30 towns in upstate NY and Williamstown, MA. This report highlights our goals and accomplishments for 2022, 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 2022. I am pleased with FPF's continued commitment and progress, and I look forward to additional improvements going forward."

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

Mission: FPF's reason for existence

Front Porch Forum's mission is to help neighbors connect and build community, thereby increasing local resilience. We do that by hosting a network of online local forums covering all of Vermont, 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 2022

(as spelled out in the FPF 2021 Annual Benefit Corporation Report)

- **Achieve 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 next iteration of FPF's organizational structure and make key hires**
 - Expanded leadership team
 - Created and filled Chief Revenue Officer role
 - Filled Operations Manager role
 - Filled roles in Online Community Management, Operations, and Software Development
- **Continue to help Vermonters find common ground while navigating crises**
 - Invested in process, policies, and tools
 - Expanded our Community Division to better meet growing needs
- **Increase member traction, engagement and satisfaction, and Help Vermont's local communities become demonstrably more resilient**
 - Grew Vermont member count to 220,000 (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 12,000
 - Received hundreds of FPF community-building success stories from members
- **Upgrade member features and develop new ones**
 - Made "Email Author" button optional on postings
 - Released major upgrades to Calendar feature
 - Overhauled Participating Local Officials web page and underlying code
 - Continued to upgrade Directory of businesses and nonprofits
- **Enhance FPF's profile as essential infrastructure in Vermont**
 - Invested in telling FPF's story across Vermont
- **Explore expansion opportunities in adjacent states**
 - Investigated modest expansion into adjacent state and declined to pursue
- **Continually improve workplace for all employees**
 - Improved staff communications
 - Implemented staff wellness program
 - Increased compensation rates across the board
 - Added health insurance benefit
 - Upgraded paid holiday benefit
 - Upgraded retirement benefit
- **Strengthen financials**
 - Increased revenue across multiple income channels
 - Kept expenses in check

FPF 2022 accomplishments

Front Porch Forum continued to serve its social mission and the communities of Vermont. This work continued even through a highly charged political climate nationally and throughout the state. Nearly every community in Vermont debated Proposal 5 "Right to Personal Reproductive Autonomy Amendment" for months leading up to the November 2022 election. This exceptionally difficult topic taken on during such a divisive political time was reflected through FPF postings and related feedback.

In response to these challenges, FPF continued to evolve our posting moderation model and member policies. We also added staff members to better handle increasing load, and invested in our staff training.

During 2022, FPF's service grew on many fronts, including:

- Members (for every 1,000 households in VT, FPF has 800 members)
- Postings submitted by members
- Email Forums sent to members
- Directory listings
- Calendar events
- Forum and Directory searches
- Ads for local businesses displayed in Forums
- Website pageviews
- Active users of mobile app

What better way to assess FPF's progress in delivering on its social mission than by hearing from Vermonter's themselves? We get thousands of stories from members about FPF's public benefit. Here are some samples from 2022:

"What a wonderful way to be in communication with your neighbors -- like talking over the fence."

- Paul, Moretown

"This is absolutely the single most useful resource for people new to the area."

- Kenneth, Tinmouth

"New friends, fun activities, business connections, and free and cheap stuff - all thanks to FPF and our neighbors!"

- Rebecca, Middlebury

"Yesterday I reached out to see if there were any other women in my new community that could use a walking partner and perhaps a new friend. I got 11 responses! I am so grateful to FPF for giving me a way to connect to others."

- Krista, Vergennes

"Thanks to FPF for keeping us connected as community members so we can reach out to seek help or offer assistance on a daily basis. A wonderful way to open doors to get to know each other. Thanks FPF for being the helping hands!"

- Carolyn, Bethel

"Thanks for all the wonderful FPF folks who responded to my request for a booster seat loan. FPF is a great resource & real community asset."

- Don, Saint Johnsbury

"I value the service this forum brings to our communities. From lost and found items to local services, meat, and veggies, I always look at the email when it comes. I appreciate FPF!"

- Brenda, Bakersfield

"I support FPF so it can keep doing what it does best: connecting neighbors."

- Kenric, Montpelier

"FPF is a valuable community asset. I happened upon this service and it so exemplifies the spirit of Vermonters."

- Stephan, Essex County

"Thanks to everyone who responded - cryo/cuff arrived. Not only did I have quite a few responses, I had one delivered!! Thanks FPF! Wonderful place to connect."

- Lyndall, Stowe

"FPF has kept us connected during these hard pandemic years."

- Caro, Woodbury

"FPF is a community resource in all the seasons."

- Mary, Calais

"FPF brings the community together. FPF has helped me feel like an active part of my community. I have found furniture, dog-walkers, volunteering opportunities and fun events through this forum."

- Faith, Burlington

"FPF is an amazing community resource. We recently celebrated Independent Bookstore Day at The Bookstore, and we lost count of the people who came in because they'd read about it on FPF! As a community-supported business, we are so grateful to be able to connect to the people we serve. Thanks to all who read, post, and otherwise support FPF!"

- Barbara, Brandon

"We ended our subscription to the Burlington Free Press more than 10 years ago. It stopped feeling pertinent to us. Not long after, FPF started in our town. I've thought about how much we used to pay for annual subscription to the BFP and about the value that FPF has brought to our lives. In my mind, this service & platform have become an integral part of our community."

- Chris & Eben, Underhill

"I cannot imagine life without FPF. This is social media that actually fosters in-person connection. I read every issue. FPF was key in starting and continuing to get the word out about our community garden. It helps with our massage practice and my copy editing business, as well as creating interest for people who didn't know Montpelier has an excellent training program for editors. It's where I offer, find, buy, and sell stuff. It's where I ask questions and get answers that help. FPF is where I learn what's going on in my town, from the mundane details I love to issues that affect us all."

- Sheryl, Montpelier

"Thanks FPF! For buying, selling; giving, receiving; sharing, caring; inviting, seeking, finding, supporting, connecting... helping a beloved pet find the way home... nothing compares to this wonderful community resource!"

- Jan, Ferrisburgh

"I love FPF! You all are amazing. I feel inspired, uplifted, and informed everyday! Thank you."

- Rain, Shelburne

"FPF is a Vermont treasure. I'm retired and we're so fortunate to have FPF connecting us to local communities. I've gotten recommendations, have given away and sold items, and learned so much of what's going on in the area, all through FPF. FPF is a valuable enterprise that keeps us all connected."

- Cindy, Westford

"I have expressed some opinions, bought and sold a few things, learned so much from others, and feel connected to my town government and general happenings. This is such an important service for all of us whether limited in our in-person contacts during covid or now as we learn how to gather and mingle safely once again."

- Judy, Shelburne

"I love and appreciate FPF! We're new to Vermont and it's been a valuable resource that shows us even more than we already knew just how wonderful Vermonters are, how much they value their communities and are willing to help out when needed."

- John, Charlotte

"After being unemployed for 4 years and finally being able to work again, my first donation with my new income went to FPF today. Worth every penny."

- Meg, Rockingham

"FPF is a wonderful platform. We have had incredible outreach from several kind people giving us hope and advice in trying to still get our kitty back home. This is a great community thread that truly weaves us together. Thank you FPF!"

- Karen, Vergennes

"In the year that I've been a member I've learned so much about this community and the wonderful people here -- it's really so great to be able to share information and resources with one another."

- Christine, Ferrisburgh

"Thank you, all eight of you, every single one of you, who within 24 hours sent me links to window washing help!"

- Anne, Mad River Valley

"As an older, perhaps less media-oriented Vermonter with lots of interests, I couldn't do many things as effectively without FPF. It is an invaluable resource for me, a homeowner and landowner, and it has an integrity that I value greatly. It ties me to my community during the uncertain times we're in, and makes me feel safer knowing I have a voice for all my queries, free tables, yard sales, little libraries, on and on. Thank you, FPF!"

- Gale, Northfield

"Lucky to Have FPF as a Community Resource. Where else can you ask advice, give away items that have remaining life to save our landfills, find stuff you need, and connect with friends you did not know you had? I have lent, borrowed, bought and sold items using this valuable tool, and learned about skilled tradespeople that might help me as a homeowner with lots of projects."

- Brenda, South Burlington

"I am so grateful for its existence. More than just another website on which to sell things, FPF is a fantastic on-line community where postings about wildlife sightings, lost pets, and local events exist cheek by jowl with announcements of personal milestones, employment opportunities, crime reports, and home repair advice. And, to be sure, politics - because, as Tip O'Neil was wont to say, all politics is local. Hooray for FPF and, if you appreciate its existence and service."

- Cecil, Brandon

"FPF is a wonderful resource. I feel so fortunate to live in this amazing small city and to have this exceptional community forum. I have sold/given things away, purchased others, and found recommendations very helpful, as well as timely information from city officials and departments. And pretty much all the time, the posts are respectful in tone and language. Hooray for that! Thank you FPF and all you neighbors!"

- Diane, Burlington

"Earlier this week I posted a request to borrow a cello for two weeks. I thought it was a long shot. I was wrong. Thank you to the FPF community for the many offers I received. Who knew there were that many cellos in the neighborhood - and that many generous people ready to loan them out to my visiting 14-year-old granddaughter. I'm so grateful to be part of this community."

- Carol, Ferrisburgh

I moved back to MRV last year - the main reason is community! From lost chickens and bear sightings... to finding new homes for tons of duplicate household stuff... to selling a car and a fridge... to scoring two beautiful glass pumpkins... and replenishing my garden with dahlias, iris, and hydrangeas, FPF has become an essential tool in my household. Along the way, I have met some wonderful people and often find myself laughing over creative posts."

- Carole, Mad River Valley

"If you're reading this issue of FPF, you already value this online venue that supports our community in so many ways."

- Christine, Woodbury

"Since moving here, it has helped me immensely connect with my neighborhood and broader community...giving away stuff, selling stuff, getting recommendations, wildlife sightings, and more. It's so much more effective than Facebook and Craigslist."

- Caroline, South Burlington

"Just imagine what it would be like without FPF: there wouldn't be an opportunity to post events, or to list garage sales, or to thank someone in the community, or to offer help or to discuss important issues to our towns."

- Catherine, Jericho

"Since we bought an older house just over a year ago, FPF has been our single, most valuable resource. Our online neighbors have responded to our requests for help in finding a contractor, roofer, mason, as well as a pet sitter. As newcomers to western Vermont, FPF provided a welcoming virtual community. I can't express enough gratitude."

- Karen, Fair Haven

"A Gem of a resource... FPF is an always available, steady resource adding much to our communities! Go, FPF!"

- Ginny, New Haven

"I wouldn't have been able to sell items, get notices out that are important for me to share, to not only the neighbors on my street but to a broader audience as well. I have also used the Forum to see items that are for sale or to read topics of interest from others. I would have missed going to activities if it hadn't been listed in FPF. I consider FPF a vital part of living in the South Burlington area."

- Betty, South Burlington

"I have not had time this year to read the discussions but I have enjoyed reading and sometimes contributing to them in the past. I also like being able to connect with neighbors in a secure way when I have something to give away or sell, or when I am looking for a dog sitter or an item I need, or a recommendation, such as a good painter or other contractor. Thank you FPF!"

• Lori, Hinesburg

"If not for FPF, how else would we find our wandering pets, locate a new home for our kids' old toys, or know when the Select Board is addressing an issue near and dear to our hearts?"

• Lenore, Hinesburg

"Finding lost animals and packages, alerting the community to freebies we'd love to re-home, selling things we no longer need, FPF is the answer to all this and more."

• Barbara, Middlebury

"FPF keeps me entertained. It's at least as entertaining as anything on Hulu. Thanks for keeping me chuckling, gasping, and if I'm being honest, judging a little."

• Elizabeth, Shelburne

"FPF is such a wonderful tool for connecting in our community. It is my go-to for sharing announcements and events, seeking, selling and donating items...thank you to the team at FPF!"

• Michelle, Shelburne

"Buying, selling or giving something away? Announcing an event? Lost and found? Expressing one's views on an issue? Catching up on neighborhood news? Expressing thanks? Seeking assistance? Whatever it is, FPF is there for us to use free of charge. I especially appreciate FPF's uncluttered format which is a pleasure to read."

• Monica, South Burlington

"I am new to Montpelier and found out about FPF quickly, and I signed up. In the less than three months I have been here, I have read every issue and posted material, and am grateful for this very useful website."

• Beverly, Montpelier

"Thanks to everyone who offered used tarps and friendly comments. I am now well supplied, and very relieved not to have to buy more friable plastic. Let's keep up the neighborly recycling. Isn't FPF a wonderful resource?"

• Megan, Bennington

"I've been on the forum since it became available to us in Jericho. Now I live in Huntington, and am on FPF here. It's hard to remember a time when we didn't have this wonderful mode of communication available to us all. Not only is it a practical tool, but it also helps foster community, which is so important to me, and I know to many others also. Thank you FPF, and all who participate in it!"

• Evergreen, Bolton

"Thanks to FPF for giving readers the opportunity to receive numerous free items, buy items at a discount, sell items, make and read announcements, and keep up to date with the heartbeat of Shelburne."

• Joyce, Shelburne

"I want to keep my neighbors in my life. I am grateful to FPF for keeping us abreast of what's happening in our communities, for giving us a forum for discussion, for alerting us to our neighbors' needs -- and for helping us sell and give away our too-good-to-throw-away stuff!"

• Penny, Underhill

"FPF really works. Every year around FPF's fundraising time, I think to myself, I don't knowww, maybe I don't need to give this year, but then, inevitably, I'll have a need myself for some such thing--babysitting services, a plumber recommendation, hand weights, or, this year, an event photographer in one of the busiest seasons, with five days notice. I post on FPF, and boom, within minutes, I have helpful neighbors showering me with suggestions or offers. I really value FPF."

• Rachel, Burlington

"FPF is more than a service which allows us to re-use what is still useful; it is also a community builder and a source of community news. I often sing its praises when I talk to people from other places that don't have such a wonderful service."

• Toni, Shelburne

"I'm grateful to FPF for all the assistance, humor, wisdom, connection, and education that comes into our email every day. Can't beat it."

• Kathleen, Montpelier

"What a great community asset. We've bought, sold, discussed, advocated, given, taken, and otherwise used all the services FPF has to offer. Keep up the good work!"

Peter, Plainfield

"FPF has been a lifesaver to me and my family! The past 6 months have been extremely challenging. It's been a hard patch, but FPF and the local community have helped us get through it. THANKS SO MUCH TO ALL OF YOU!"

- Judy, Shelburne

"This ability to connect to our neighbors through FPF is a gift. FPF keeps us connected as a community. Folks that chime in are respectful and thoughtful with their language. FPF is more than News; it's GOOD NEWS. Sightings of wildlife in different parts of Town, learning concerns of different residents, giving a shout out for a good deed someone has done or learning that someone needs extra assistance is what creates a healthy community. We are a healthy community looking out for one another and being there when needed. FPF helps make this all possible. Let us continue to thrive. To paraphrase Lee Krohn, A community is much like a family. There are valleys and mountains. We need to get through it together."

- Doris, Shelburne

"Feeling the abundance... I remember the way we heated our home last year when our firewood was wet... through the neighbors I found on FPF. And, also, a world where corporate social media is the only option is a world not worth heating."

- Cristina, Marlboro

FPF gives us a unique connection to community, neighbors and friends, helping us stay in touch and identify ways we can help each other. I have enjoyed seeing so many of you in person, sometimes meeting new members of our community, when I otherwise would not have because of FPF providing this platform for communication. FPF brings us together and makes our wonderful community stronger."

- Carol, Craftsbury

"Many thanks to FPF, for enabling me to connect with all sorts of people who most likely would not enjoy the pleasure of my company, but who have no choice here. I seek out reasons to love the Interweb, and this is one of them."

- Barbara, Middlebury

"Hurray for FPF! The Friends of the Charlotte Senior Center supports their hard working team. FPF builds connections as a community and we are grateful to be able to post information about our classes, events and the delicious lunch menus at the Senior Center. Thank you for keeping the local conversations and connections going. You provide an invaluable service!"

- Susan, Charlotte

"Remember when mom would send you next door to borrow a cup of sugar or maybe an egg? Wow, times have changed! Now, thanks to FPF we can borrow just about anything from all the neighbors far and wide! We can lend, sell, swap, comfort and complain too! Mom would be so proud that I support FPF!"

- Tammy, Underhill

"So many folks can get help from their neighbors about who to contact for any need from finding a lost pet to having your carpet cleaned as well as donating or selling household items at reasonable prices. And to keep up on what is happening in our town committees and meetings. It is the best community connection for needs of any kind."

- Ginger, Hinesburg

"Every once in a while there's a really amazing FPF posting title, that it just comes alive. Several years back, someone posted Beaver Has to Go. I honestly don't remember what the original posting was about, but to me it was the beginning of a great joke and a story that needed to be written. So, here it is:

<https://photos.app.goo.gl/gTnyhXUErQ6KDrXE9> Meet Beaver Has to Go, a board book about a beaver who really needs to go, but tends to procrastinate (like many of us do when we're just too busy to take a bathroom break). Thanks for keeping FPF alive and interesting."

- Deborah, Shelburne

"Thank you FPF for providing such an amazing platform on which Vermont's disparate communities can communicate peacefully - a much needed service in today's troubled world. Examples: FPF provided a digital space for open discussion about the proposed Elmore/Morrisville merger of school districts; Lost car keys, found on FPF; Two wing chairs, sold and picked up; Found a digital biographer!"

- Meike and Michael, Morrisville

"The algorithms that drive Facebook, Twitter and other Big Tech sites are intentionally fostering anger and outrage to keep people on the sites longer. As one former social media engineer said, 'enragement drives engagement.' FPF's business model is entirely different from the global social media platforms. If any of us is going to survive the multiple onslaughts of climate change and threats to democracy, the model of FPF must be nurtured. We need to be able to work together in trust to solve these huge challenges. Trust and commitment to community is a central value of FPF. FPF is a treasure that needs to be supported."

- Kate, Saint Johnsbury

Additionally, FPF was included in various publications and panels, based on its long-running work to help make Vermont communities more resilient. These included:

- [A Kinder, Gentler Social Network](#), Julia Angwin, *The Markup*, February 5, 2022
- Vermont Journalism Conference, Community News Service at UVM and Vermont Journalism Exchange, March 10, 2022
- Civility Conference Charrette, The Windham Foundation, September 15, 2022
- "Dialogue on Digital Discourse for a Thriving Democracy and Resilient Communities Meeting," Convergence, September 2022
- "Our Future Putney" Community Visit, Vermont Council on Rural Development, November 14, 2022

2023 plans

In 2023, FPF will invest to better fulfill its social mission and financial goals, and continue to be a great place to work for its employees.

Specific goals in 2023 include:

- Refactor neighborhood forum model to better align with municipal boundaries and identities
- Establish 2023 baseline of member experience via survey
- Launch refreshed member engagement program
- Add photos to FPF member experience
- Increase usage of FPF mobile app
- Update FPF Terms of Use and privacy policy to better protect mission and stakeholders
- Improve system of key performance indicators, goals and dashboards
- Launch marketing program for businesses, nonprofits and government agencies
- Implement premium advertising option
- Invest in Operations processes and tools

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