

# Front Porch Forum

## 2023 Annual Benefit Corporation Report

### Leadership statements

*"The staff at Front Porch Forum continued to deliver on our mission in 2023, 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 2023, and points toward our future goals."*

- Michael Wood-Lewis  
FPF Co-Founder and CEO

*"Front Porch Forum acted in accordance with its benefit purpose and demonstrated the Benefit Corporation standards during fiscal year 2023. 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 local Business Directories, Community Calendars, Search and paid ads. The resulting increase in social capital and community cohesion benefits neighbors, government, local businesses, nonprofits and local journalism.

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

FPF's vision for Vermont is a state full of thriving and resilient communities. These towns and neighborhoods 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 favor spending with local businesses. We envision FPF itself 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 2023

(These goals were previously listed in the FPF 2022 Annual Benefit Corporation Report.)

- **Achieve better results (benefit goals)**
  - Increased social capital among neighbors, thereby increasing community resilience
  - Contributed to economic viability of local businesses, which supports local economies
  - Helped nonprofits fulfill their social missions, thereby helping to strengthen safety nets
  - Contributed to better informed voters and journalists, supporting local democracies
  - Helped local officials communicate with constituents, improving town governance
- **Increase member traction, engagement and local community resilience**
  - Among Vermont's 270,000 households, grew member count to 230,000
  - Maintained multi-year engagement growth (member content submitted, web traffic, etc.)
  - Maintained and grew public official participation
  - Grew local business and nonprofit listings in FPF Directory to 13,600
  - Received hundreds of FPF community-building success stories from members
- **Refactor neighborhood forum model to better align with town boundaries and identities**
  - Rebranded Forum, Calendar, Directory and Search with town names
- **Establish 2023 baseline of member experience via survey**
  - Conducted member survey with New\_Public and University of Texas
- **Launch refreshed member engagement program**
  - Created new Head of Member Engagement role and filled it
  - Conducted many member engagement initiatives
  - Built "magic link" feature to ease logging into website
- **Add photos to FPF member experience**
  - Added images to postings for select posting categories and events
- **Increase usage of FPF mobile app**
  - Made many improvements to mobile app, including adding Calendar
- **Update FPF Terms of Use and privacy policy to better protect mission and stakeholders**
  - Rewrote and reorganized FPF Terms of Use and Privacy Policy
- **Improve system of key performance indicators, goals and dashboards**
  - Stopped click tracking and moved away from Google Analytics to improve privacy
  - Continued exploring mission-related KPIs, goals and dashboards
- **Launch marketing program for businesses, nonprofits and government agencies**
  - Created ongoing B2B marketing program
- **Implement premium advertising option**
  - Built and launched Premium Ad feature with logo and longer ad body
- **Invest in Operations Team processes and tools**
  - Reviewed all operations processes and tools, upgraded most of them, and filled gaps
- **Continually improve workplace for all employees**
  - Launched health, dental and vision insurance benefit, 401(k) retirement benefit, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) benefit
  - Audited and improved Personnel Policies
- **Strengthen financials**
  - Increased revenue across multiple income channels
  - Kept expenses in check

## FPF's response to Vermont 2023 floods

Flooding in 2023 created tremendous difficulties for many Vermont towns and individuals. FPF stepped up to serve these communities during the active stage of the disaster, as well as the long recovery period.

In response to these challenges, FPF quickly built and launched "Regional Disaster Response Boards" to support flood response in every town in the state. We also made other accommodations to better serve our fellow Vermonters, including lifting posting limits for those impacted by the flood, donating paid posting inventory to state officials, and publishing daily emergency information.

Through the calamity of the floods, we witnessed people pitching in again and again. Here are examples drawn from Front Porch Forums across Vermont:

*"My house was slammed by the storms and I did not think I could get help anytime soon for repairs, but I got instant response from FPF and the job was finished in a day!"*

- Abigail, Middlebury

*"I have a spare submersible water pump. If anyone needs it, call or text."*

- Tim, Mad River Valley

*"A huge thank you to the 17(!) people who generously responded and offered me freezer space after the loss of mine in this week's storm."*

- Mark, Brookfield

*"If you are displaced by the flooding, my husband and I have a spare room in our home and would love to host you during this difficult time."*

- Katie, Bolton

*"I'd like to help out a family or business in need by cleaning or doing demolition. I've got tools for the job and a pick up truck. Let me know where I can be of service!!"*

- Raymond, Waterbury

*"If anyone needs support during the storm don't hesitate to message me. I have a large 4x4 vehicle and flexibility."*

- Dana, Morrisville

And after the flood, testimonials continued to pour in:

*"This summer we experienced one of the greatest natural disasters to hit Vermont. Thousands of people lost so much it is hard to comprehend. As with other challenging times, we have witnessed the community of Vermont reach out to help neighbors in need. Through it all, Front Porch Forum has been a beacon of information. FPF has proven itself to be a critical public service. During this tragedy, we have seen FPF used to express thanks to volunteers of all sorts. I think we also should give thanks to the team at FPF for providing critical and timely information to our community. Thank you FPF!"*

- Duncan, Huntington

*"I am desperately trying to find a young man who was relocated following the flooding of his mobile home. If you have any information regarding his whereabouts, please contact me."*

- Sheila, Johnson

*"After several fruitless hours on the phone, posting on social media, and visiting past employment sites, just one posting on FPF was all it took to find him! So, a huge 'Thank you!' to FPF and those members who so kindly helped me find this young man. I let him know that his pet is still alive and awaiting his return. Hopefully, he will soon be back in a home of his own, where Angel can join him."*

- Sheila, Johnson

*"My husband and I experienced near total loss at our homestead property just outside of Montpelier with the flood water rising over 6ft. As younger homeowners we have been completely overwhelmed with how to deal with this mess, and how to demo and rebuild our home. That said, the help we received from local volunteers and the town has been unreal. Feeling truly blessed to be a part of such a giving community. Even with the uncertainty of what tomorrow will bring, we are thankful to be safe and to be here with you all. Truly Vermont Strong."*

- Juliana, Montpelier

## Independent survey of FPF members

A new independent survey of FPF members found overwhelming evidence of FPF's success in delivering on its public benefit. The Center for Media Engagement at The University of Texas collaborated with New\_Public and FPF to send a survey to all FPF members, with 13,473 people starting the 15-minute survey and 11,465 completing it. Results from this 2023 survey include:

- Vermonters LOVE their local Forums:
  - 97% of members find FPF valuable for their community
  - 93% of members find FPF useful personally and for their family
  - 90% of FPF members report opening and reading their Forum often or always
  - 80% of members feel that people treat each other humanely on FPF (vs 20% for Facebook)
- Vermonters turn to FPF for trustworthy information:
  - 85% of FPF members frequently turn to their Forums for local news (vs 61% for radio and newspapers, 51% for TV, 37% for Facebook)
  - 80% of FPF members indicate they are more informed about local issues thanks to FPF
  - 78% of members see FPF as a reliable source of information (vs 16% for Facebook)
- FPF creates community connection:
  - 89% of FPF members take action multiple times per year in response to Forum postings
  - 84% of FPF members talk with neighbors many times per year about topics on their Forum
  - 56% of FPF members attended a local event in the past year due to their Forum
- FPF stimulates buying local:
  - 65% of FPF members report they are more informed about local contractors due to FPF
  - 48% of FPF members bought from a local business in the past year due to FPF

## FPF in the news

Additionally, FPF was included in various publications and panels in 2023, based on its long-running work to help make Vermont communities more resilient. These included:

- [Our digital public squares aren't so healthy. Can we fix that?](#), Leslie Stebbins, *Salon*, Jan 28, 2023
- [Winter's Bear](#), Erica Heilman, *Rumble Strip*, Feb 21, 2023
- [Front Porch Forum launches regional disaster response boards](#), P Fischer, *VTDigger*, July 23, 2023
- American Press Institute Tech Talk: Newsletters!, FPF featured in webinar, July 27, 2023
- [Championing Radical Neighborliness](#), Dr. Lynda Ulrich, *Conspiracy of Goodness Podcast*, Oct 4, 2023
- Vermont Council on World Affairs, training session for visiting Jordanian delegation, Oct 13, 2023
- Climate Resilience and Adaptation Conf, Vermont Community Development Assn, Nov 2, 2023
- Year-long multi-stakeholder dialogue on improving online discourse, organized by [Convergence](#)

## FPF members say it best!

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 2023:

*"Man, I love FPF and this Winooski community. Thank you to all of the people who reached out and sent photos and wishes for Charlie's return. Our orange tabby is back and happily ruling the house. He was trapped in a neighbor's space, so if your cat is missing, check nearby garages and sheds."*

- Mary, Winooski

*"I received so many tips for a walker after surgery. Thank you! I love FPF!"*

- Bernadette, Randolph

*"The 30,000 baseball cards were claimed within about 30 seconds of publication. Apologies to those of you who wrote one minute, and four minutes, and six minutes, and... thereafter. I had no idea the thrills of childhood would still be so popular! Here's to all the things that bring us joy."*

- David, Shelburne

*"While neighborhoods have changed considerably since many of us were young, thank goodness we have a wonderful substitute online in FPF. I have not had anything but positive, goodness-affirming experiences that have left me with a new friend or acquaintance!"*

- Diane, Burlington

*"At a time in this world where hatred and strife are rampant, I treasure the sense of community and belonging provided by Front Porch Forum. Today I donated to their mission of helping us stay connected."*

- Rick, Marshfield

*"FPF warms my heart when I read about wandering pets and neighbors who help connect them back to their owners."*

- Jackie, Essex

*"I support FPF for the sanity and connection I get from it. I am grateful to have the opportunity to be part of this caring community & get to know how we can support each other."*

- Jamie, East Montpelier

*"In my opinion, FPF is one of the best inventions of the past 20 years. I'm so thankful for the extraordinary service it has provided for our family and our community, time and again. From getting trusted recommendations for local businesses, to making us feel supported and hopeful when we lose our pets, to getting volunteers out for town events, and in so many more ways."*

- S.M., 15-year FPF member

*"Where would we be if FPF did not exist? It tells us what's happening in our area and who is in need of something. It's a place to advertise your unwanted stuff. It's a lost and found, and a great way to stay connected."*

- Sharon, Enosburgh

*"Having recently moved to the area, I find FPF invaluable for services and recommendations. But maybe more important is the overall feeling that people want to be helpful. During these times of divisiveness, FPF inspires hope."*

- Karen, Fair Haven

*"FPF makes us better neighbors. We've met and made new friends with folks who live right around the corner, but whom we'd never met until we connected about something on FPF. It gives us a true sense of belonging and community. I look forward to FPF hitting my inbox each day."*

- Matt, South Burlington

*"FPF connects people in our community, reduces costs and waste by allowing items to be reused locally, and keeps us informed about nearby events. It isn't free to operate this website, and I really value the service it provides."*

- Genevieve, NEK

*"FPF is better than google! When I searched 'pellet stove repair near me' on google not much surfaced that was applicable. When I asked for recommendations on FPF, I got many! Thanks neighbors."*

- Melissa, NEK

## **2024 plans**

In 2024, 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 2024 include:

- Improve moderation and accounts functions to handle greater load and challenges
- Significantly increase member traction and engagement
- Significantly increase FPF relevance to Vermonters
- Complete realignment of local Forum boundaries
- Prepare for future natural disasters
- Develop local news feature to support local journalism
- Build next iteration of member-to-member communication feature
- Develop classifieds feature
- Launch and improve Candidate Custom Access feature
- Improve advertising system

## **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