

# Report to Stakeholders

January-May 2020

## Letter from the Editor

Since the pandemic began, VTDigger has seen an unprecedented level of reader demand for trusted, in-depth news about the public health and economic impacts of the pandemic.

In response, VTDigger reporters have pressed officials on the state's handling of the Covid-19 crisis. We have launched new critical projects related to coronavirus, including daily emails, data reports, and live updates, and we continue to respond to dozens of tips and questions from readers.

Readership has exploded. The site saw about 1 million monthly readers during the months of March, April and May -- in a state with 625,000 residents.

VTDigger has received an outpouring of support from readers who have sent us thank you notes and have stepped up to support our much-needed public service.

Three months into the Covid-19 pandemic and in the midst of a national reckoning around racial justice, it's clear the daily in-depth, reader-driven journalism that is the hallmark of our reporting is more necessary than ever before.

The state is facing a projected \$430 million loss in tax revenue in fiscal year 2021, and economic strain and inequality is expected to deepen in the year ahead.

VTDigger is meeting the essential news needs of our community by providing the timely, accurate reports people need to make crucial decisions. You can count on us to continue reporting on public health developments and the impact of the pandemic on food insecurity, racial and socioeconomic equity, child care, joblessness, businesses, education, and the state's economy.

Steadfastly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anne Galloway".

Anne Galloway  
Founder and Editor, VTDigger



## By the Numbers

<b>1.6 million</b>	Sessions per month on average	Up 165% vs 2019
<b>664,100</b>	Average monthly active users	Up 133% vs 2019
<b>42,900</b>	Email subscribers	Up 38% vs.2019
<b>34,500</b>	Twitter followers	
<b>27,300</b>	Facebook likes	
<b>25,260</b>	Avg. monthly downloads of Deeper Dig podcast	
<b>8,000</b>	Donors in the past 365 days (under \$5k)	Up 60% vs 2019
<b>1,600</b>	Monthly donors	Up 78% vs 2019

## Impact

### Covid-19 Live Updates

In mid-March, the coronavirus pandemic hit Vermont. Our newsroom raced to cover the closings of businesses and schools, new cases and state preparations. VTDigger created a live update page, [Coronavirus in Vermont](#), where readers can access the latest data and breaking news in one place.

### Daily Covid-19 Roundup

With readers desperate for timely information in a volatile time, VTDigger responded by creating a new [coronavirus email list](#) daily Covid-19

developments. Over 8,000 readers have subscribed. These emails have a remarkably high open rate of 67 percent, signaling how reliant readers are on our reporting.

### Data Reporting

VTDigger's data reporter Erin Petenko has rendered visualizations of important Covid-19 data to help readers understand emerging patterns. Her graphics about the trajectory of coronavirus in Vermont, and Covid-19 cases by town and county, put the pandemic story in context.



### **Investigative Reporting**

Old-fashioned enterprise reporting has continued to define VTDigger's journalism throughout the pandemic. In addition to breaking dozens of daily stories about Covid-19, reporters have investigated [access to PPE](#), [test rationing](#), the state's [surge plans](#), [hospital capacity](#) and [ethics policies](#), and [nursing home conditions](#).

### **The Bright Side**

Vermonters have stepped up in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic to help their neighbors. A new series, "[The Bright Side](#)" highlights these stories. Some examples include the [Green Mountain Mask Makers](#), a UVM student coding [global coronavirus research](#), a photographer's '[porchtraits](#)' fundraiser for shelters, and therapists offering [free counseling](#) to Vermonters who are unemployed. Readers are encouraged to nominate people helping their communities.

### **Vermont Remembrances**

Due to hospital restrictions, family members may experience their loved one's final moments through a phone or video connection, in many cases calling from just miles down the road. Gathering for in-person memorial services, has become impossible for the time being. But those obstacles haven't stopped family members from celebrating their most cherished moments with loved ones who have

died. VTDigger has collected these stories on [Vermont Remembrances](#).

### **Business Directory**

With almost all businesses experiencing disruptions, VTDigger has developed a searchable business database to help support the local economy. The [online directory](#) has allows business owners to notify consumers about changes to services. Vermonters can search the statewide business directory by town, county or category, ranging from grocery and hardware stores to pharmacies and country stores. The directory hosts more than 550 listings.

### **FAQ Knowledge Base**

Early on, VTDigger set up a special [coronavirus tip drop email address](#) which began receiving hundreds of questions a week about Covid-19 and its effects. We developed a searchable [knowledge base](#) which holds the answers to more than 60 frequently asked questions that we've received from readers. The base is divided into different sections for testing and tracking, social distancing, 'Stay Home' nuts and bolts, business and unemployment, education and childcare and miscellaneous questions.



## Special Membership Update

VTDigger typically runs a six-week membership campaign every spring. This year we shortened our campaign to 30 days and asked 3,000 readers to support us. For every membership donation, we sent a cloth mask to area hospitals, in partnership with Vermont Glove. The response from readers and gratitude from the hospitals was utterly humbling.

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**3,000** Members gave to Spring 2020 Drive

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**3,000** Cloth masks sent by Vermont Glove

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**10** Hospitals received mask shipments

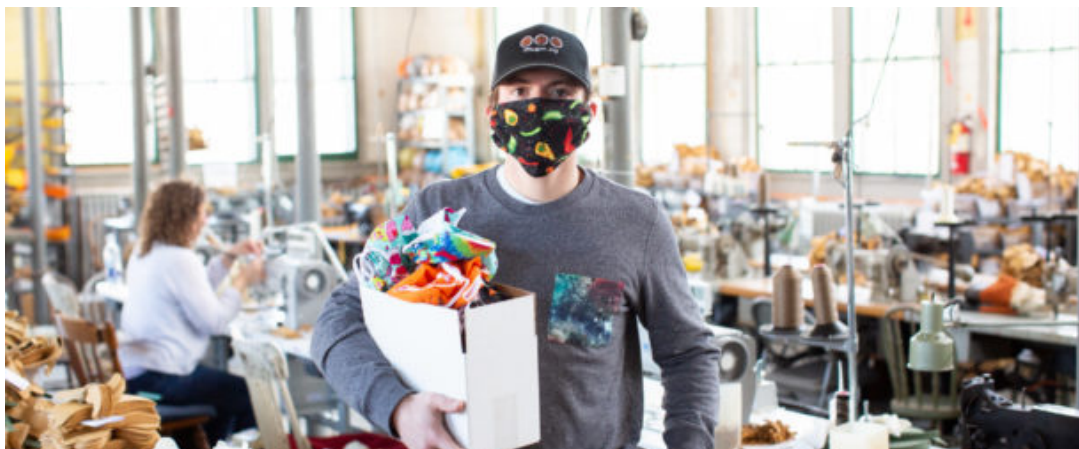
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**\$391,000** Raised to sustain VTDigger reporting

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We are grateful to every single person who made this membership drive a success. We have already undergone painful Covid-19-related budget cuts and newsrooms across the nation are bracing for 50 percent declines in both underwriting and major giving.

Our members truly make our work possible and we are so [grateful](#) for your support.



*Sam Hooper of Vermont Glove pivoted from manufacturing gloves to cloth masks. Vermont Glove shipped masks to hospitals as they were raised by VTDigger members. Photo courtesy of Vermont Glove*



## What People are Saying

Congratulations VTDigger community! That [mask drive] was an ambitious and worthy goal. It is heartwarming to help others in such a positive way. A simple expression of “I care about you as a person!” without judgement. Thank you.

- *Lorilla, Marshfield*

As always, you guys at VTDigger are doing a wonderful job of reporting Vermont’s news and finding the stories that might otherwise be kept under wraps. I have come to count on you for the digging and know that takes courage, patience, perseverance, and skill.

- *Cinda, Bennington*

You are truly invaluable, and an incredible example of what a driving force decent moral and civic values can actually be in the human experience!

- *Joanna*



*VTDigger health care reporter Katie Jickling reports from a medical surge facility at UVM's Patrick Gymnasium. Photo by Mike Dougherty/VTDigger*

Thank you and your team for being on the job with us on the frontlines of pandemic response. We are relying on VTDigger as a communications first responder. You are continuing to do excellent work.

- *Thomas Leavitt, President & CEO, Northfield Savings Bank*

Thank you so much for keeping all Vermonters up to date with the coronavirus status, right here in Vermont. If it were not for VT Digger, no one would know a darn thing. So, it is all up to you! Thank you so much! I know everyone is counting on VTDigger for the news of the day, and of Vermont.

- *Irene, Montpelier*