

ANNUAL REPORT 2020

MONTANA FREE PRESS



2020 IN REVIEW

Dear Montana Free Press Readers, Supporters,
and Funders,

I don't need to tell anyone that 2020 was a challenging year. From a global pandemic to civil unrest to a monumental and hotly contested presidential election, the start of this decade got off on some pretty rocky footing.



If there's one thing we learned during this period of uncertainty and instability is that when the going gets rough, the public desperately seeks out reliable, trustworthy information about the issues that matter most. That's why we invested heavily in our nonprofit newsroom to ensure we could help meet the public's unprecedented information needs.

We quickly grew our full-time staff from three to six, doubling our newsroom while investing in additional freelance resources to bring you on-the-ground reporting of the COVID-19 pandemic. We built a COVID-19 tracking dashboard to make it easy for our readers to quickly access the latest, most accurate information about how the virus was spreading, which communities were being hardest-hit, and what the public could do to help slow the spread.

While the pandemic was certainly the biggest story of the year, it was by no means the only significant news to unfold. The hotly contested 2020 election gave our team of reporters and editors the opportunity to innovate in the ways we deliver election-related coverage. Our interactive 2020 Candidate Tracker provided voters with detailed information on where the candidates stood on the issues, who funded their campaigns, and provided one-click access to comprehensive news coverage. On Election Night, Montana Free Press was the only in-state news source for up-to-the-minute results for every race from the U.S. Senate to individual legislative races. We also partnered with Montana Public Radio and Yellowstone Public Radio to produce Shared State, a 10-part radio series and podcast that bridges history, politics and the daily reality of Montanans in the lead-up to a landmark election.

The investments we made in growing our news organization and collaborating with other news outlets are a direct result of the support we received from our readers and the institutions that fund our nonprofit newsroom. We hope and expect 2021 will bring more stability and predictability to Montana, the nation, and the world. No matter what the year has in store, Montana Free Press is in a strong position to continue to expand on our innovative ways of reporting and delivering the news.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John S. Adams'.

John S. Adams
Founder, Executive Director, and Editor-in-Chief

OUR NEWSROOM



Montana Free Press is an innovative, nonpartisan, public-powered news organization dedicated to delivering the information needs of all Montanans.

We won't tell you how to think. We'll engage, listen and provide you with the tools to make informed decisions by producing independent, high-quality reporting that is free and accessible to everyone.

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Executive Director and Editor-in-Chief



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Reporter



Kristin Tessman

Director of Development
and Operations



Eric Dietrich

Reporter



Brad Tyer

Editor



Mara Silvers

Reporter

A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR



If change is the only constant life offers, we can all agree life has been very generous lately. Ground that once felt familiar beneath our feet has shifted in ways both momentous and minute. Montana Free Press has embraced a whirlwind of change in the past year, working hard to catch the fickle headwinds that have scoured the traditional media landscape.

You mostly hear from our fearless leaders, editor-in-chief John S. Adams and editor Brad Tyer, and the rest of our reporting team. But another force at work behind the scenes is our all-volunteer board of directors. I eagerly stepped in to serve as the new chair leading the board of directors earlier this summer. We worked to expand and develop our board, which oversees the organization and amplifies its voice. We are striving to cultivate a statewide crew of ambassadors who will bolster MTFP's reach and represent our broad array of readers.

Involved as a volunteer since MTFP's earliest days, I have been amazed and inspired as our nascent little nonprofit has built an avid audience and fostered strong cooperative relationships across our state and region. Thank you for tuning in, and we welcome your involvement and help.

Jessie Schandelson
Chair, MTFP Board of Directors

2020

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FINANCIAL REPORT

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITY

January 1 – December 31, 2020

Income

Foundation grants	\$1,364,000
Major gifts (>\$1,000)	\$106,807
Membership (<\$1,000)	\$193,639
Government grants	\$42,187

Total income \$1,706,633

Expenses

Personnel (salaries, benefits, taxes)	\$348,329
Advertising and marketing	\$15,453
Development	\$22,487
Editorial support	\$76,695
Occupancy expenses	\$30,090
Office expenses	\$8,451
Professional services	\$15,198
Technology infrastructure	\$30,770
Travel and meetings	\$3,261
Vacation expense	\$18,412
Special projects	\$500

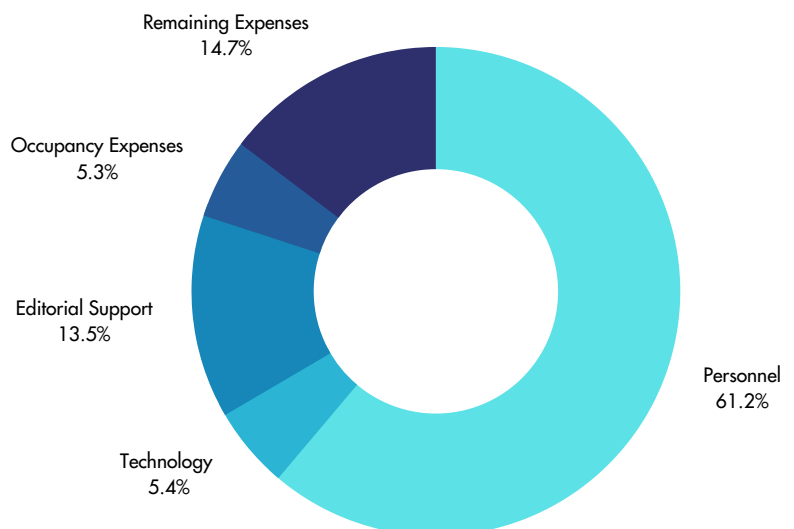
Total expenses \$569,646

**2020
NET
OPERATING
REVENUE**

\$1,137,063

2020 EXPENSES

As a percentage of the overall budget



AUDIENCE

In 2020, our readership skyrocketed — with room to grow, of course. By producing high-quality journalism that's accessible for all — free from paywalls and advertising — we're ensuring that Montanans have the information they need to make informed decisions and be engaged citizens.



BY THE NUMBERS

8,048

Newsletter subscribers

1,528

Donating members

61,116

Average monthly
website visitors

58%

Members who renewed
their support

SPECIAL PROJECTS



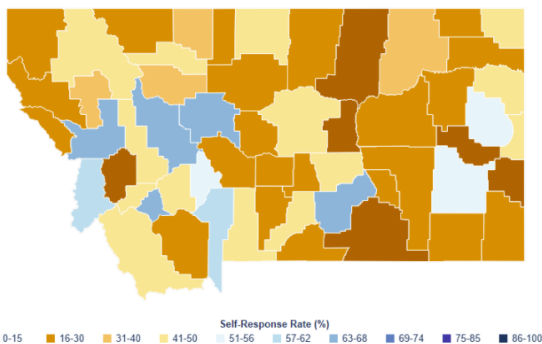
COVID-19 TRACKER

During the COVID-19 pandemic, reporter Eric Dietrich saw a distinct need to visually model the coronavirus case data for ease of accessibility. Updated daily, the COVID-19 tracker provides accurate information on the number of active cases and deaths per county.



SHARED STATE PODCAST

Released as a precursor to the Montana 2020 elections, Shared State is a collaboration between Montana Public Radio and Yellowstone Public Radio exploring Montana's history, politics, and daily reality for Montanans, and how they may influence the state's future politics.



Montana 2020 census response rates by county as of June 9. Credit: U.S. Census Bureau

LONG STREETS

The Long Streets Project continued in 2020, providing in-depth stories on the economic trends impacting Montana communities by leveraging economic data to share often untold stories about the people and places that make Montana feel, as many like to call it, "one big small town with really long streets."

REPUBLICATION

At Montana Free Press, collaboration is central to our business model — a rising tide lifts all ships, as they say. We offer free republication of our stories to all print outlets across the state and beyond, ensuring that our in-depth journalism is accessible to as broad an audience as possible, helping to fill the gap of shrinking newsrooms across the state.



48

Montana newspapers
published our stories

561

MTFP stories reprinted
in Montana newspapers

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Miles City Star | Havre Daily News | Whitehall Ledger | Independent Record | Valley Journal | Boulder Monitor | Billings Gazette | Missoulian | Bozeman Daily Chronicle | Big Horn County News | Sidney Herald | Lone Peak Lookout | Madisonian | Belgrade News | Montana Standard | Seeley Swan Pathfinder | Glendive Ranger Review | Daily Inter Lake | Choteau Acantha | Char-Koosta News | Tobacco Valley News | Independent Press | Mineral Independent | Judith Basin Press | Circle Banner | The Roundup | Ekalaka Eagle | Clark Fork Valley Press | Livingston Enterprise | Cut Bank Pioneer Press | Bitterroot Star | The Valierian | Shelby Promoter | Ravalli Republic | Fallon County Times | Daniels County Leader | Blackfoot Valley Dispatch | Western News | Valley Press | Silver | State Post | Phillips County News | Montana Pioneer | Lewistown News-Argus | Laurel Outlook | Independent-Observer | Flathead Beacon | Big Timber Pioneer | Yellowstone County News

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