



2020

ANNUAL REPORT



Resilience. Reach. Results.

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A Year of Challenges; A Year of Transformation

2020 was a year filled with challenges, particularly due to the impact of the pandemic on the Sign Research Foundation. The cancellation of our main in-person event resulted in lost revenue and sponsorship opportunities. Additionally, the uncertainty caused by the pandemic led to a decrease in individual donations. Despite these obstacles, the SRF Board of Trustees made difficult decisions regarding new grants, opting to commence projects in the fourth quarter when our financial situation seemed more promising.

However, amidst these circumstances, we found an opportunity for transformation. We were able to refine our core mission and discover new and potentially improved ways of delivering essential programs and services that promote effective sign strategies, systems, and codes within our communities.

Here are some noteworthy highlights from 2020:

- We introduced a new Model Sign Code, offering a clear framework for communities in developing or updating their local sign ordinances.
- We published the 2020 edition of the Urban Wayfinding Planning and Implementation Manual, which proved to be highly popular. Additionally, we conducted a four-part webinar series on the subject.
- We facilitated seven workshops for sign industry professionals, demonstrating how they can utilize SRF research to attract new clients and advocate for effective sign ordinances.
- We created five condensed research summaries to provide key findings in a quick and accessible manner to our busy audiences.

Looking ahead, we are excited about the progress we will continue to make in 2021. We have several new research reports in the pipeline. Firstly, we will present a critical analysis of the ANSI Sign Lighting Standard, highlighting its ineffectiveness and the harm it poses to businesses and communities. Secondly, we will release an updated resource for planners and city officials examining the impacts of Reed v Town of Gilbert in communities across the country, offering recommendations for future adherence. Lastly, we are developing a planning guide for parks and trail signage, which addresses a significant need expressed by planners, designers, and landscape architects.

Although 2020 tested our resilience, we have discovered new ways to engage stakeholders and achieve meaningful outcomes. We sincerely thank you for your ongoing support of SRF and our mission.



Sapna Budev
Executive Director



Ted Kiper
Chairman of the Board

Resilience

In the midst of the pandemic, the sign and graphics industry faced uncertainties about its future. However, many companies proactively adapted by shifting their production to meet the demand for critical supplies.

In the earliest days of the pandemic, the sign and graphics industry was deemed an “essential service” by the Department of Homeland Security’s Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. This allowed sign and graphics companies to continue working, delivering much-needed signage and other products to businesses that continued to operate.

The Sign Research Foundation captured those stories as both a way of marking this historical event and cataloging this important contribution of the sign, graphics, and visual communications industry. These case studies show our industry met the designation as “essential,” and build a strong argument for the future.

Some highlights:

Building Small Businesses

AZPRO shifted production to help small businesses communicate to customers in the midst of confusion. “We believe that small businesses are the backbone of this country, and we wanted to do everything we could to make sure fellow business owners had the resources needed to stay afloat during these turbulent times,” Tom Radz, AZPRO Group’s marketing specialist.

Keiffer Starlite found ways to meet demands for new products. “As customers are more likely to look for ways to keep their distance when inside a store or [QSR], kiosks are especially important in providing information from a safe distance,” said Kelly David, marketing manager. “Exterior electronic message centers will become more important as consumers look to minimize the number of store trips, and stores seek other ways to engage them.”

Providing Safety for Healthcare Facilities

Keen Sign & Graphics used some of its sign fabrication materials to create sneeze guards for local hospitals. “We were able to construct them without specifying any new materials or ordering new equipment,” Dana Keen Phillips, vice president of sales for Keen Signs & Graphics, said. ISG (Integrated Sign & Graphic) also found new avenues to serve, developing products like PPE face shields for healthcare workers and first responders, printed signs to help customers navigate remote ordering, and window graphics that outlined safety precautions. All virus-related products were sold at cost.

One key adjustment for ISG’s production process was developing a clean-room space that provided the sanitary conditions necessary to produce face shields for healthcare usage. “Configuring an assembly process that allows for mass production of thousands of the same item after a history of custom sign fabrication has been different, but at the same time the crisis has inspired a newfound ingenuity and flexibility in our team,” Aaron Anderkin, executive vice president, said.



Resilience cont.

Safety in Production

Sign shops were not immune from concerns over COVID. Ortwein Sign sanitized all surfaces twice a day and moved all nonproduction employees to remote work. However, as some supplies became inaccessible, the shop had to improvise.

“Isopropyl alcohol is pretty standard for cleaning metals prior to painting, and we found that we weren’t able to order any,” Teal said. “We weren’t sure how to get our paint crew what they needed. We realized we’d have to buy some yeast and sugar and make our own prep solution. These are strange times, and you have to think outside the box.”

Collaborative Idea Sharing

“In these challenging times, it’s important that sign shops remain classified as essential businesses,” said Teresa M. Young is the President of Sign Biz, a Dana Point, CA-based network of approximately 200 sign shops that provide training, support, and volume discounts to independent sign shop owners. “Signs are needed now more than ever. Sign Biz maintains a private e-mail group for the sharing of ideas, templates, and vendor information to support each other’s projects.”

Reach

SRF enhanced its relationship with key stakeholders over the past year, delivering more publications and research for sign industry professionals, urban planners, and other stakeholders.

With the launch of the 2020 Urban Wayfinding Planning & Implementation Manual—SRF produced four targeted webinars, each designed for a specific stakeholder group. This comprehensive guide to urban wayfinding, from planning to implementation, offers tips on financing, design, regulatory issues and maintenance. Each chapter now includes the latest data and contains a “New Trends” section with updates from the past seven years.

Breakouts:

- Total Revenue from Urban Wayfinding Webinar Series: \$8,175
- Total Attendance at Four Webinars: 467



Results

SRF's repository of research continues to be essential.

Top 3 Most Downloaded Reports

1

Retail Signage: Practices to Increase Return on Investment

- Most downloaded report
- More than one-third of the reports are downloaded by sign companies
- Half of those were company owners

2

Sign Codes after Reed v. Town of Gilbert

- Planners' top downloaded report

3

Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs

- 18% of downloads were from codes officials



Sign Company Favorites

- [The Retail Signage, Practices to Increase Return on Investment](#)
- [Consumer Perceptions of Retail Signage: 100,000 Shoppers Can't be Wrong](#)
- [Economic Value of On-Premise Signage](#)
- [Art and Science of Sign Design](#)
- [Retail Wayfinding Best Practices](#)



Planner Favorites

- [State of Sign Codes after Reed v. Town of Gilbert](#)
- [Best Practices in Regulating Temporary Signs](#)
- [Best Practices in Developing Sign Regulations](#)
- [A Framework for On-Premise Sign Regulations](#)
- [Model Sign Code](#)



Designers Favorites

- [Digital Print Trends and Technologies in the Sign Industry](#)
- [Arts and Science of Sign Design](#)
- [Digital Wayfinding Trends](#)
- [Retail Wayfinding Best Practices](#)
- [Typography, Placemaking, and Signs](#)

Breakouts:

Executive summaries of SRF research provide actionable data for key stakeholders. Those published in 2020 are:

- [Digital Wayfinding Trends – Lessons Learned from Museums, Healthcare, and Transit Experiences](#)
- [Signs and the Downtown Experience](#)
- [Illuminated Sign Conspicuity](#)
- [Model Sign Code \(2019 Edition\)](#)
- [Urban Wayfinding Planning & Implementation Manual \(2020 Edition\)](#)



Revenues

Without its annual conference, SRF's financial outlook was endangered by lost registration and sponsorships. Thanks to new avenues of revenue, a strong corporate donor base, and the Board of Trustees' cautious stewardship, SRF ended 2020 on solid fiscal footing.

Donor contributions remained a significant portion of SRF's income. While fundraising from donor groups was down 38.7 percent over 2019 figures, it was almost 18 percent higher than the budgeted goal.

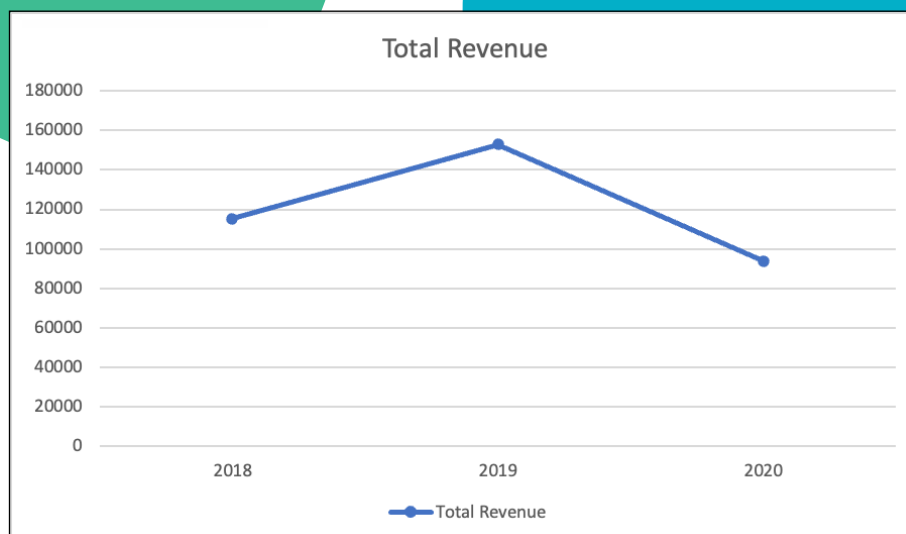
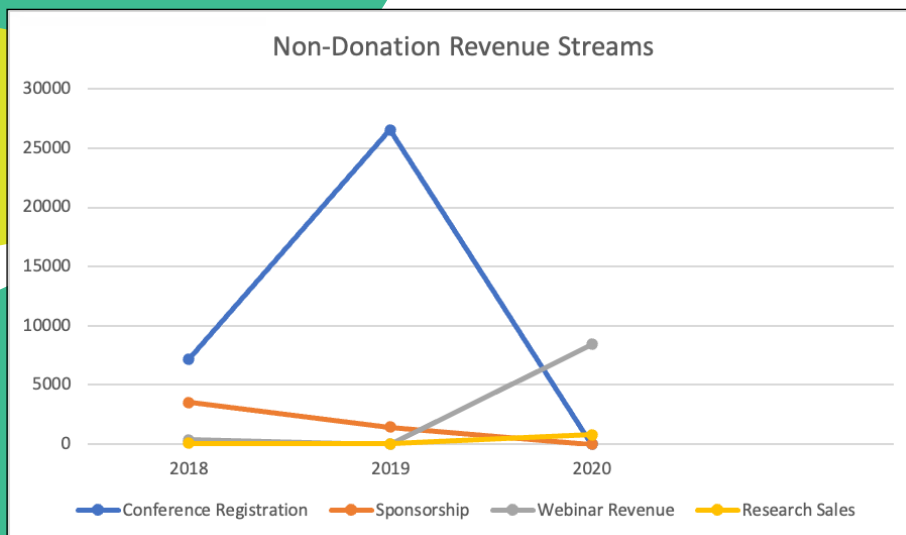
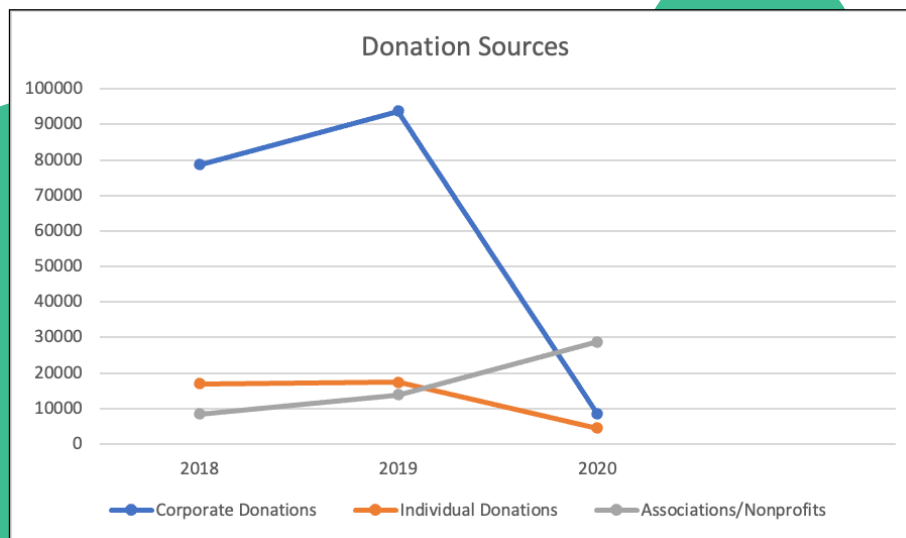
Revenue Breakdown

Revenue Source 2020	Amount
Corporate Donations	\$51,275
Associations/Non-Profits	\$28,750
Webinar Revenue	\$8,430
Individual Donations	\$4,505
Miscellaneous	\$805.10
Total	\$93,765.10

Revenue Source	2018	2019	2020
Individual Donations	\$17,030.73	\$17,405.19	\$4,505.00
Corporate Donations	\$78,620.51	\$93,713.06	\$51,275.00
Associations/Nonprofits	\$8,500.00	\$13,834.61	\$28,750.00
Total Donations	\$104,151.24	\$124,952.86	\$84,530.00
Research Sales	\$70.00	\$15.00	\$784.72
Webinar Revenue	\$375.49	\$0.00	\$8,430.00
Conference Registration	\$7,200.00	\$26,564.35	\$0.00
Sponsorship	\$3,500.00	\$1,416.00	\$0.00
Amazon Smile	\$12.54	\$6.18	\$20.38
Total Revenue	\$115,309.27	\$152,954.39	\$93,765.10

Revenues cont.

Revenue by Category, 2018-2020



Recharge SRF

DONATE!

Help SRF empower communities. Donate today at www.givetoSRF.org.

CORPORATE DONATIONS

Help double or triple your donation: ask your employer if they will match your gift or consider being the one to make a match.

MATCHING GRANT DONATIONS

Sponsor a matching grant and inspire others to give, or even increase their giving, knowing their donation will make a greater impact.

MONTHLY DONATIONS

Contribute on a monthly basis to SRF for the funding of research and hosting events.

PLANNED GIVING DONATIONS

Remember SRF in your will or as a beneficiary of investments/insurance. Why give more money to the IRS when you can leave a gift to SRF?

SPONSORSHIPS

Show your support at SRF events through sponsorships.



VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

1. APPLY FOR A LEADERSHIP POSITION
2. JOIN ONE OF OUR RESEARCH ADVISORY PANELS
3. BECOME ONE OF OUR SPEAKERS