



# 2020 - 2021 Annual Report

A Year of Progress



**We are in this together**

[www.fortessgroup.org](http://www.fortessgroup.org)

## FOREWORD

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The year that went by was not easy. The world reeled under the wrath of a pandemic that took lives and hit the livelihood of many. With personal losses, fears and anxieties engulfing everyone, the world has stood together to fight the demon and continues to do so. We, at FORTESS, are happy to have made contributions in this regard and to see a lot of our members having done their part in helping the society around.

With the Government imposed lockdown restrictions rendering movement impossible, we at FORTESS have faced challenges in executing some of our project plans. Having said that, Technology has brought us all closer with regular interactions, virtual knowledge sharing and growing together. Our monthly engagement programs were received with a lot of joy as much for the opportunity to meet and catchup with old friends as for the session itself.

We are happy to present the Bulletin of activities that have taken shape this year.

2021



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2021

# INTRODUCTION

FORTESS, an Association of former employees of TCS, was established in Nov 2016 to help us give back to the society. Using the experience and skills that the group has accumulated over the years, we intend to create various opportunities to empower people to help themselves.

**Our vision** is to be an agent of significant change in the social sphere across the areas we will focus - Education, Environment, Technology, Health, Culture and Heritage.

**Our Values** Inspired by the TCS culture of professionalism, competence, values and predictable execution.

Apart from the focus on societal activities, this group also works towards creating a forum which encourages networking, knowledge sharing and additionally to form communities of practice.

## Our Governing Body



President  
S Ramadorai



Vice-President  
S Mahalingam



Secretary  
R Chandrasekaran



Treasurer  
Vishwanathan Iyer



Anita Rajan



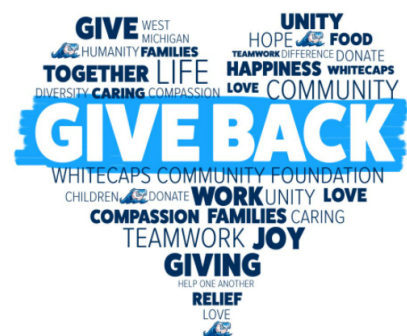
V Ravi



PVLN Rao



Ashok Mukherjee



## KEY HIGHLIGHTS - 2019-2020

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2019-2020 was a year of planning and seeding some key activities at FORTESS. After the untimely demise of Mr Jayant Pendharkar, one of the founding fathers of FORTESS, the Association regrouped and redirected themselves towards achieving their dream.

### Key highlights:

- The FORTESS website and Collaboration platform were launched last year. This provided a platform for updation of timely updates and discussion threads on various projects and events. These platforms not only serve to initiate and manage projects, but also served as knowledge repositories for the benefit of all members.
- Key projects
  1. FORTESS' most ambitious project – **Development of India's first IT & Computer History Museum project** was initiated last year by a core team of members who laid down the roadmap for the same. Preliminary discussions were held with experts across the country who have developed virtual museums and work on creating a blueprint for the prototype was initiated.
  2. **Digital Literacy** – One of the key areas identified for FORTESS to focus on was enabling Digital literacy in Govt schools, especially for Primary and Secondary grades. One of our members initiated this by setting up a Computer Laboratory in his alma mater – the Govt school in Sirkali. The Laboratory was set up with Desktops, laptops, printers and Network, aided with teachers who could impart basic Computer knowledge to students.
  3. **Preparing students for a Career:** Since the inception of FORTESS, our members have been working with the Mumbai based "Young Scholar Trust", which supports a number of students in the premier and one of the oldest Engineering colleges of India- VJTI. These students are from the economically weaker section and they come from rural areas. Through lectures, group discussions and one on one interaction, a group of FORTESS members prepare the students for a career in an Organization.

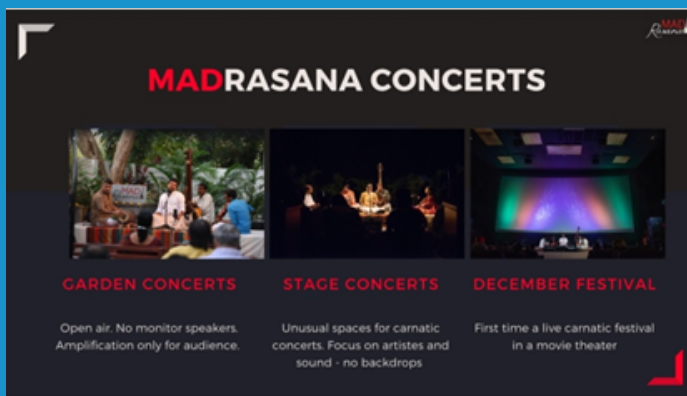


## KEY HIGHLIGHTS - 2019-2020




4. **Improving Engineering Education in India:** FORTESS volunteers along with the alumni association of IITs participated in a programme to improve the quality of engineering education in tier 2 and tier 3 engineering colleges spread over Tamil Nadu. Programs on driving Innovation, industry partnerships, quiz series and many more were supported by FORTESS members.

5. **Music as an experience:** One of our members has been spearheading an initiative called MadRasana, which addresses three areas namely, how to leverage technology to enhance the experience of enjoying the Indian Classical Music, how to enable young artistes to showcase their talent and finally how to leverage social media tools to have a better reach globally for this art form. FORTESS has been supporting him in getting sponsorship from our members and a plan to provide a community of FORTESS members to help him and perhaps branch off into other initiatives globally was discussed.

6. **Newer initiatives:** a) Focus on health via alternate medicine such as **Ayurveda** was taken up as part of FORTESS initiatives last year, with workshops being conducted for all members. B) One of the FORTESS members has been pioneering the field of **Bio-Mimicry**, with a focus to implement this as a subject across schools and colleges. FORTESS members were introduced to the topic that piqued the interest of many, and a plan to work together on driving Bio-Mimicry on a larger scale was discussed.



**MADRASANA CONCERTS**

		
<b>GARDEN CONCERTS</b>	<b>STAGE CONCERTS</b>	<b>DECEMBER FESTIVAL</b>
Open air. No monitor speakers. Amplification only for audience.	Unusual spaces for carnatic concerts. Focus on artistes and sound - no backdrops	First time a live carnatic festival in a movie theater



# STEPPING INTO 2020-2021

*Marching towards Bigger Dreams*

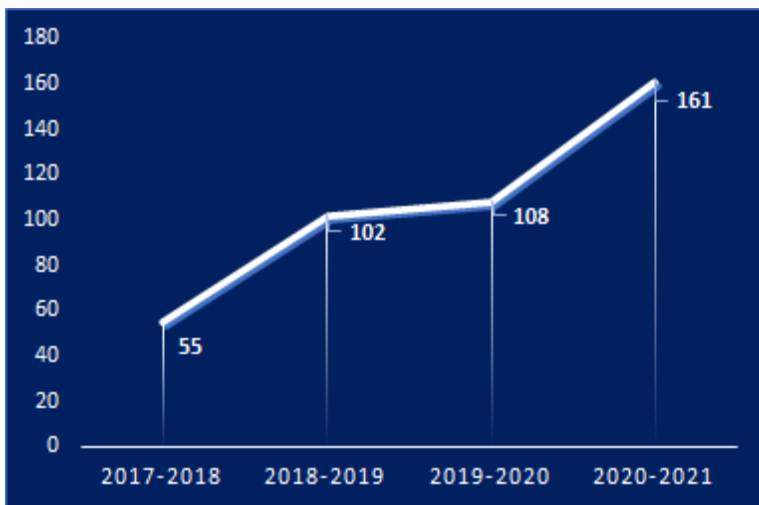


## MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

FORTESS has nearly doubled its membership count in the last year, thanks to our members who have taken the time out to reach out and refer their ex-colleagues to join this noble venture. As we grow and look at delivering more in the upcoming years, we hope the support from our members to bring in new members and make FORTESS a formidable force, continues.

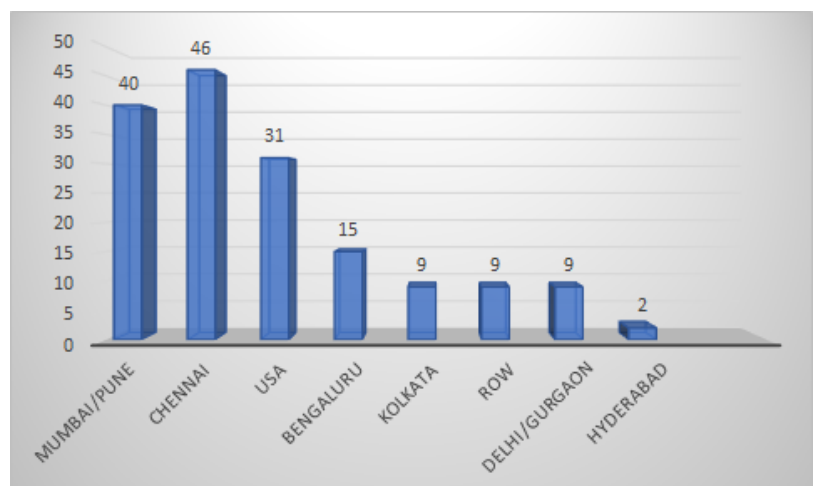
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PASSIONATE MEMBERS



HEADCOUNT INCREASE

LOCATION WISE HEADCOUNT





## PROJECT UPDATES

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One of FORTESS' main objectives as an Association is to implement projects that are impactful on the Society, leveraging the strengths, expertise, abundance of experience and passion that exists amongst it's members. The doors of FORTESS are always open to new ideas and prospective project plans that this exemplary group can bring forth. We are proud that all our projects executed till date have been seeded from the sheer passion and interest of one of our members; and bolstered by the robust support system of FORTESS, they have grown / plan to grow into something bigger, touching many more lives.

The umbrella under which we operate are the 5-pillars namely Education, Technology, Environment, Health and Culture & Heritage. Utilizing the depth of Technical expertise and Industry experience this groups possesses, we aim to deliver maximum impact through all our projects. Here is an update on the key projects that were rolled out/executed last year.

1. Roadmap to building India's first IT & Computer History Museum
2. Digital Literacy in rural schools
3. Career counselling for students
4. Promoting music and supporting upcoming music artists



The 5 pillars of FORTESS activities

FORTESS

## PROJECT UPDATES

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### 1. Roadmap for India's IT & Computer History Museum

#### Our Motivation

We should recall the prophetic words of **Mr. F. C. Kohli** in his address to the **Annual Convention of Computer Society of India** in Ahmedabad in 1976:

“Lastly, I want to say that many years ago, there was an industrial revolution. We missed it for reasons beyond our control. Today, there is a new revolution- a revolution in information technology which requires neither mechanical bias nor mechanical temperament. Primarily, it requires the capability to think clearly. This we have in abundance. We have the opportunity to participate in this revolution on an equal basis – we have the opportunity even to assume leadership in this revolution. If we miss this opportunity, those who follow us will not forgive us for our tardiness and negligence.” Indeed, a generation has participated, and it’s been both an exciting and a rewarding journey, exceeding all the expectations. The story must be told.

FORTESS, in the 1st AGM (Oct’ 2020) had decided to explore the possibility of **setting up a Computer History Museum (CHM) for India** that could take up the mantle of informing different segments of the population on the march of technology, explain what is achieved and help them envision the future to come. It felt **showcasing the evolution and adoption of IT and presenting it in a holistic manner** highlighting its huge impact, the benefits will be enormous. A core team of FORTESS members was set up to define the solution and lay out the roadmap.

The museum core team through numerous (over 30) discussions, internal and with other FORTESS members, experts and possible partners, and by putting significant effort (~1800 hours) has prepared the Vision and the Roadmap for India CHM, with significant contribution from the **TCS Interactive team** which has helped with the UI design. We have explored several alternatives for classifying and prioritizing the museum exhibits, artifacts, solution and realization options.



## PROJECT UPDATES

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### Scope and Characteristics of the Museum

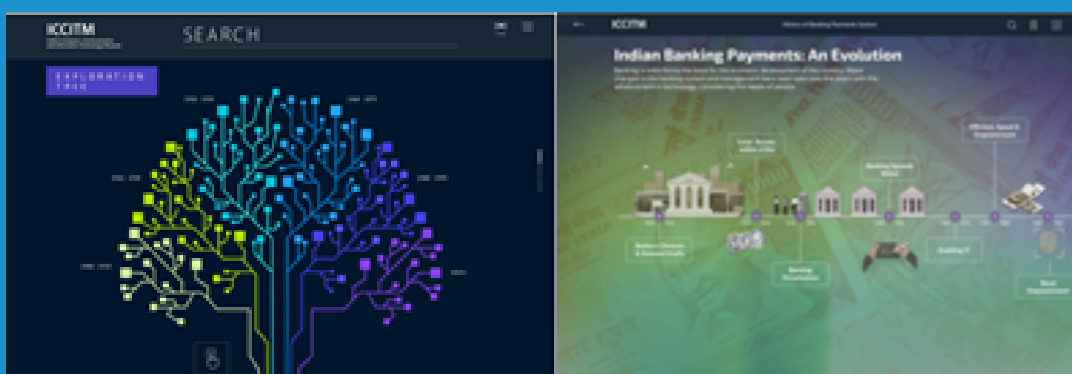
Briefly, the museum will be ‘smart’ and will have capabilities to evolve over time with more subject areas, **smart exhibits and artefacts by exploiting the current multimedia, immersive UI and user engagement technologies**. Some of the characteristics are:

1. Showcase the work done in India by academic, government, institutions, IT industry, research and the Iconic leaders, at each stage of the evolution. Stories will be told in a few Indian languages.
2. Museum will have several subject areas, with exhibits and artefacts covering the events their impact; for example the Payments exhibit will cover paper clearing to all things digital.
3. There will be a **virtual version and a Kiosk(s) (transportable)** with large display and touch screens focusing on the experiential nature of learning. Physical museum to be developed over time.
4. It will engage the visitors and help them to be a “co-creator” of the future.

### Taking this forward

As a next step, FORTESS is planning to **build a model (Prototype / 1st Version)** that can demonstrate some of the characteristics of the museum and **attract attention, participation and contribution from the visitors, sponsors, and the industry, and generate the buzz**. We have identified the scope, the exhibits, content sources, presentation and navigational capabilities, technology options and such. Discussions are underway with a few potential partners.

Please stay tuned for the details. **Your contributions, most critical.**



## PROJECT UPDATES

### Enhancing Digital Literacy in Government schools

Ensuring Digital literacy reaches all corners of our society is a vital requirement for its equitable development. It is best if every student coming out of school is Digitally Literate so that they are more productive in whatever vocation they pursue post school. Moreover, in these COVID-stricken times, it has become all the more imperative for students from all strata of the society to be Digitally literate and have basic computer knowledge.

One of our members has been working on driving Computer literacy with the Government school in his hometown, Sirkali. Last year, a **Computer Lab was inaugurated** with necessary infrastructure and staff. The objective was to ensure **every student from grades 6-8 has basic skillset in using computers**. The initiative was received with a lot of enthusiasm from the students and the school management alike. The **Head Master of the school was given an award** and he attributes one of the reasons for the recognition is the initiative taken to promote Digital Literacy. Though the Lab could not be used last year as the school was closed due to the pandemic situation, engagement with the school continued to further enhance Digital Literacy and also leverage technology to impart better education for the students. In addition to the Computer lab, three Digital class rooms have been set up to enhance learning outcome.

In partnership with Organizations promoted/ supported by FORTESS members, a comprehensive program has been put in place to :

- further improve Digital Literacy through tried and test model of **SEVALAYA**, promoted by Muralidharan
- conduct **Online Classes by some of the best teachers of SEVALAYA**
- enable **offline learning by having access to video based content created by Bumble Bee Trust**, mentored and supported by Hema Gopal



## PROJECT UPDATES

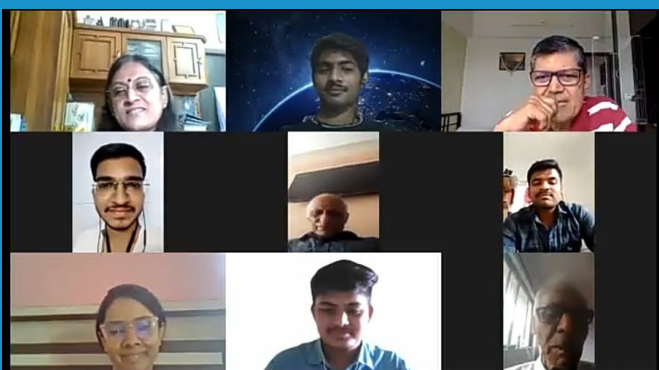
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### Career Counselling for students

A group of FORTESS members from Mumbai have been closely working with Ms Charu Gupta of the “Young Scholar Trust” since 2018, supporting final year students of VJTI, Mumbai for their career counselling. The sponsored students come from the rural areas of Maharashtra and have a weak financial background.

Students who are in the final year are identified every year for mock interview sessions with FORTESS volunteers. The general observation of volunteers during the mock interview sessions has been the wide gap between what the students have been specializing in and their desired career path. With rich industry experience behind them, FORTESS members have taken the efforts to counsel and guide the students in this regard and set them out on the path to successful careers. The initiative has been welcomed by and looked forward to by the students every year.

FORTESS



## PROJECT UPDATES

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### 4. Promoting music and supporting upcoming music artists

Supporting and promoting Arts & music is one of the main pillars of FORTESS' focus. In this regard, we are very proud to be a part of and support one of our members who runs **MadRasana**, a **hugely successful Association that lends a platform to upcoming artists, using technology to promote classical music globally**. MadRasana presents Carnatic music and other Indian classical art in an intimate setting, to bring the artistes, the art form and the listeners closer to each other. Their format of shows and presentations give a lot of importance to overall production, aesthetics and with the main focus on the art form. They keep pushing the boundaries and bring in newer ways by which the audience can enjoy Indian classical music.

Last year, their main event was the **year-end music festival held in Dec 2020, which showcased 6 unique artists and the virtual concerts were a roaring success with nearly 100K views**. Earlier this month, **MadRasana Academy** - which will be a boon to young music lovers and students, has been launched. A lot of other interesting projects like the “MadRasana Tinge” and much more, make this one of our most looked forward to projects for the upcoming year.

Each year they come up with unique productions that are different and attracts new listeners to the art form and FORTESS members continue to support, encourage and enjoy the unique experience that MadRasana brings to the world of music!



## MONTHLY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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The **Monthly Engagement program** was conceptualized as a platform to leverage the immense knowledge and expertise in various fields that existed amongst the FORTESS members. A topic of current interest and relevance was chosen every month and a subject matter expert from the field, who was either a member or a guest speaker, was invited to discuss on it.

These Engagement programs have proven to be a great platform for all members to **meet & greet their friends once a month**, what with distance and lockdowns rendering lives secluded and distant.

We are glad to present a report of the different Engagement programs that were hosted in the last year.

### THE MONEY SERIES

One of the marquee events initiated last Quarter was the **FORTESS Money series** – an idea that was borne out of the need to leverage the immense financial knowledge and expertise that existed amongst the FORTESS group. We had 6 different topics covered by eminent speakers from the relevant fields and it was only fitting that the Series caught on and generated great amount of interest among our members. **The FORTESS Money management group is one of most active and engaging groups**, with continued discussions and exchange of information ongoing on a regular basis.



## MONTHLY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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### Personal Finance

#### a. Retirement Planning by Dr.A.V.Senthil

Considering the fact that most FORTESS members are in the Retirement phase of their lives, a session on managing assets and other aspects of Retirement was arranged. The speaker was FORTESS member **Dr A.V.Senthil, Co-founder of Tejas and veteran Retirement planner**. The session primarily focussed on

- a) Long term care
- b) Estate planning
- c) Regular Income &
- d) Managing life and finances by the surviving partner

The session was very well received by the members and they shared their positive feedback and key takeaways. As a fallout, a Wealth management group was formed where members continue to actively engage in discussion threads and knowledge sharing on all aspects related to money management.

#### b. Legacy Planning by S.Balasubramanya

FORTESS member Bala, whose last role in **TCS prior to retirement was that of Chief Risk and Compliance officer, is currently a practising advocate in Bengaluru**. He conducted a two-part workshop on Trusts and Wills, which deep dived into and demystified topics like creation of Will, Succession Planning, Family Trusts and so on. Enjoying the benefits of assets created and ensuring smooth and hassle-free transition to the legal heirs was a topic of great interest and value to the FORTESS group. Needless to say, the session was very well received by the members. A session exclusively for the NRI community was also arranged and handled by Senthil and Bala.

#### c. Personal Investment Planning by Dr.A.V.Senthil

FORTESS members had their own IPL this year - The Personal Investment Planning for Lifetime! Dr A.V.Senthil handled a session for our members on proper Investment planning including effective Portfolio reviewing. A special focus on **real-estate investment** was covered as most of the members' assets were real-estate heavy. The session proceeded in a very interactive manner with valuable inputs for member's queries being shared.





## MONTHLY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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### Angel Investment

FORTESS is proud to have amongst itself, a group of members who are passionate and prolific Angel Investors. Our President Mr Ramadorai, Mr Lakshmi Narayanan, Mr Kiran Deshpande, Mr CS Murali and Mr R Chandrasekaran are a few of them. Under the guidance of this eminent group, Kiran has been championing the idea of a **FORTESS Angel Network** to support deserving start-ups.

We have had two sessions in this topic, conducted for our members till date.

1. **An introduction to Angel Investment** – Kiran handled a detailed session on the Basics of Angel investment, opportunities Angel investments provide and challenges Angels face. Real life feedback from angel investors including some TCS Alumni and startup founders who have got financing from angels and their input were also covered.
2. **Mentoring as a key to start-ups and Angels** – Post the first session on Angel Investment, Mentoring emerged as a key pillar in supporting successful start-ups. The second session covered key aspects of mentoring and delved into how mentoring is key to startups and founders. Real life cases and inspirational stories were shared by the key speakers.

The two sessions covered on Angel Investment led to a widespread interest amongst members on supporting the cause and as a fallout of the same, a **FORTESS Angel Network** group is proposed to take things forward in the right direction. A third part to this series focusing on “**Social Enterprise**” is being scheduled to happen shortly.



## MONTHLY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS

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### Cryptocurrencies & Bitcoins

In February, we hosted a session on the latest trending topic in the Financial market - BITCOINS. Mr Arjun Vijay, Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer (COO) of Giottus Cryptocurrency Exchange, enlightened FORTESS members on the topic. Giottus with over 150,000 customers is one of the leading exchanges in India. The session witnessed a lot of interesting conversation amongst the members who gave a big thumbs up to the session.

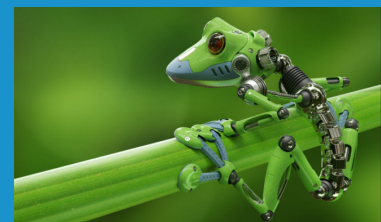
### OTHER PROGRAMS

#### The Inspiring journey of Sevalaya

The year started with an inspiring session by Muralidharan, founder of Sevalaya, a leading NGO based in Tamilnadu, which has served the society since 1988 in various fields including Education, Medicine & Agriculture among others. The Organization runs free school, medical centres, mobile medical services, community colleges for skill development of rural youth, organic farming, gaushala sheltering and homes for the orphan and destitute children and senior citizens. In 33 years of its operations, Sevalaya has transformed 40 villages from 100% child labour to 100% literacy, through quality education given free to 4000 rural children and providing higher education for 1000+ students, among other noteworthy achievements. Murali joined FORTESS as a member in January, 2021 and a roadmap of activities for FORTESS to work with Sevalaya in the field of Education has been chartered out.

#### Bio-Mimicry - Driving sustainability & Innovation

Bio-mimicry is a practice that learns from and mimics the strategies found in nature to solve human challenges. The goal is to create products, processes, and policies - new ways of living, that solve our greatest design challenges sustainably and in solidarity with all life on earth. FORTESS member Shiva, has been a pioneer in the field of Bio-Mimicry, and has been spearheading various activities in taking this to schools and colleges across the country, via his Company [www.biomimicrycompass.com](http://www.biomimicrycompass.com). He hosted a brilliantly engaging session to our members on the topic. FORTESS volunteers have been solicited to help teach the subject in regional languages to school children.



## ANNUAL MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY

FORTESS launched its first ever Member Engagement Survey in May 2021. Members' opinions and feedback on various initiatives of FORTESS, awareness of the group and inputs of their work in the fields that FORTESS operates, were obtained.

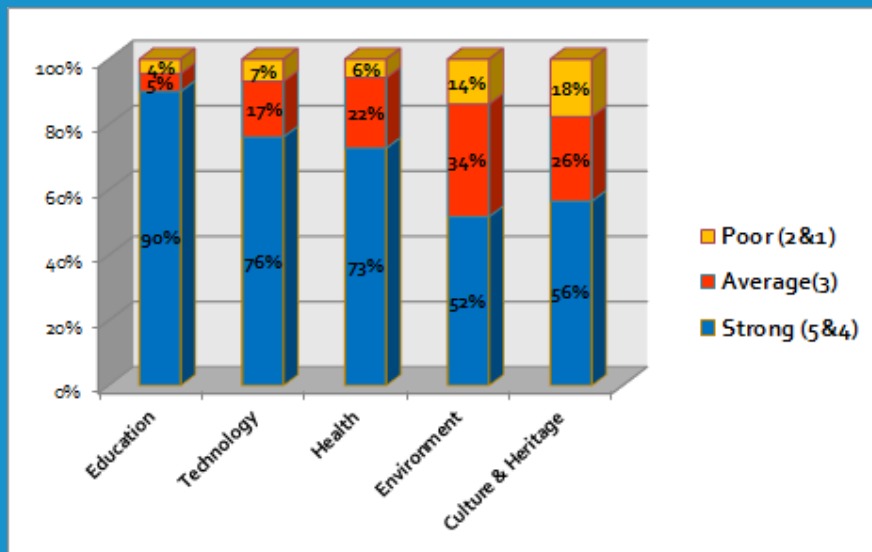
Thanks to all of you for your overwhelming participation and valuable inputs. We are happy to share some of the key inputs received and planned actionables on the same.



- Survey Response rate - **60%**
- **90%** of respondents said they received adequate information about FORTESS. Email was the most preferred mode of communication.
- **65%** of respondents had a clear understanding of the Organization's Vision, mission & objectives - Improved communication on the same via periodic Newsletters, monthly posters and projects are being planned.
- While **70%** of the respondents said they visit the Website, the Collaboration platform did not have a reach to nearly 75% of them. - A new revamped Collaboration platform which is more user-friendly and allows for formation of closed project groups has been developed and incorporated into the website.
- Membership drive - Based on member feedback on bettering the membership drive, various initiatives including leveraging Social media platforms is being actioned upon.

## ..MEMBER ENGAGEMENT SURVEY - MAY 2021

- Among the 5 pillars of FORTESS, Education was the area, most members were passionate about. Below is the overall response to members' areas of passion.



- Formalising SIGs under the 5 pillars with designated mentors and continuing our focus on each via monthly programs and projects are being actioned upon.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK!

*Every opinion counts. Together we grow.*



## OPERATIONAL UPDATES

### UPGRADED WEBSITE WITH OUR OWN COLLABORATION PLATFORM

The FORTESS website (<https://www.fortessgroup.org/>) that was launched last year as a Bulletin of events and updates for members and visitors and the collaboration platform for members is upgraded to support our growing needs to share information, discuss and collaborate on projects, lecture series and others, with features comparable to other social media platforms like FB, Slack, etc. Since this platform will be exclusive to FORTESS members only, privacy and security are ensured. Some of the features will allow members to:

- have their "own wall" - a place to voice out their ideas and opinions
- get alerted / participate in discussions on several topics with other members
- initiate, lead project discussions and share audio, video and documents with other members of the group, and the community
- be informed of and participate in other events / projects run by FORTESS members

We believe this capability for FORTESS members to collaborate effectively in a secure manner will go a long way meet our end-goal vis-a-vis making a difference to the society around us. Now, members will be able to contribute to the discussion or a project and create the 'network' effect. Operational details to follow.



### FORTESS on Ln

FORTESS launched its LinkedIn page – FortessOrg, and has been connecting with TCS Alumni across the globe.

### FORTESS email-ids

Post request from a few members, FORTESS members were given the option to procure personalized email ids on the fortess.org domain via a simple registration process on our website.



## OTHER UPDATES

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### COVID & OTHER SUPPORT

Mr Mahesh Menda, Patron member of FORTESS, donated 250 Oxygen cylinders for distribution to villages across Gujarat.

The leadership of FORTESS championed the "Oxygen for India Emergency Appeal" program and members contributed generously for the same.

FORTESS supported a donation drive for The Society for the Rehabilitation of Crippled Children (SRCC), seeking financial assistance to expand Asia's first Tertiary Care Referral Centre for children.

### PAYING TRIBUTES

FORTESS joined the Nation in mourning the loss of two of the greatest stalwarts of TCS, Dr F.C.Kohli and Prof. Kesav Nori. Virtual memorial services were conducted, which were attended by many FORTESS members and other TCSers from different locations across the globe, along with the families of Dr Kohli and Prof Nori.

FORTESS



## FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

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For the year under review, 52 new members were added in the Life Member category contributing Rs. 13,00,000 towards Membership Fee, which have been taken to the Corpus Fund. In addition we had one member joining in the category of Ordinary Member.

Income for the year ended March 31, 2021 was Rs 1,29,259 including Interest on Fixed Deposits of Rs 1,24,743 and Annual Membership Fee of Rs 4000. Total expenses for the year was Rs 7,38,974 resulting in a deficit for the year of Rs. 6,09,715, which was met from surplus carried from prior years.

As at March 31, 2021, FORTESS balance sheet comprised of Corpus Funds of Rs. 22,65,000, including Rs 13,00,000 added during the year by way of Entrance Fee from new members and surplus of Income over Expenditure of Rs.15,12,068, after considering deficit for the year under review. Total funds as on March 31, 2021 was Rs 38,27,068. Significant part of these funds are held in the bank, in Fixed Deposits (Rs 20,00,000) and savings accounts (Rs 16,70,341)

FORTESS is required to spend at least 85% of its Income on the objectives laid out for the Trust, within a period of five years in order to enjoy tax-free status. Amounts unspent at the end of five years would be liable to Income Tax. Amounts carried forward for the year ended March 31 2018, March 31 2019 and March 31, 2020 are Rs 2,92,646, Rs 6,64,804 and Rs. 25,044 respectively to be spent within five years from those dates. Deficit for the subsequent years, including amount spent on projects, will be adjusted against these carried forward amounts as permissible under the income tax. The cumulative amount carried forward as on March 31, 2021 is Rs 9,82,494.



## CONCLUSION

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In Conclusion, we would like to share the following message from our Vice-President, Mr. Mahalingam, on behalf of the FORTESS Governing Council.

"We have worked together to create an exciting industry-Information Technology. FORTESS was created to get us to work again - through projects which deliver societal value globally.

We need to be known widely- even amongst the community of people who worked at TCS, Tata Infotech or CMC. And we need to be known as an Organization with a social focus. Can each of us bring 5 of our former colleagues as members? That will take the membership to 1000 people. We would call it a major tipping point. Some of us were present when TCS reached the 1000 employees mark - and TCS grew and grew after that.

We hope to showcase some very interesting initiatives in the coming year - We hope to experience the pilot version of the Computer History Museum. Our program focusing on inclusiveness in Education - through our work in schools where students from economically weaker sections attend , should grab attention. Each of the projects we have described in the previous pages should scale up and make a difference.

And we will create more projects.

We will be a key agent of change globally."

