

VIRGINIA LOCAL NEWS — PROJECT —

Social Media Strategy

Overview

This social media strategy supports the launch of the Virginia Local News Project (VLNP) rebrand. The goal is to generate awareness, drive engagement, and establish VLNP's role in supporting local news across Virginia.

The plan includes a high-impact two-week launch campaign to maximize visibility, followed by a longer-term content strategy leading up to the Virginia Press Association Conference on April 12, 2025.

Messaging Priorities:

- The importance of local news
- Programs such as the Digital Accelerator Program and newsroom support
- Opportunities for community involvement
- Thought leadership on the future of local news
- Promoting the VPA Conference

Platform Selection:

Facebook – Best for engaging the general public, news readers, and local newsrooms.

- Ideal for sharing success stories, audience engagement, and educational content about the importance of local news.
- Strong community-building potential through likes, shares, and discussions in comment sections.

- Supports fundraising and subscriber growth efforts, such as promoting the Virginia News Reader.

LinkedIn – Best for reaching journalists, industry professionals, funders, and partners.

- Ideal for thought leadership, professional networking, and industry-related discussions.
- Effective for highlighting case studies, impact reports, and VLNP’s role in digital transformation for newsrooms.
- Provides a platform to connect with funders, academic institutions, and media leaders to expand VLNP’s network.

Target Audiences:

1. Funders & Partners

Who they are:

- Philanthropic organizations that support news sustainability
- Grant-making institutions focused on media innovation
- Strategic partners, academic institutions, and tech firms (monetization, automation)

How we engage them:

- Highlight VLNP’s impact through programs such as the Digital Accelerator Program
- Share data on why local journalism is essential for democracy and civic engagement
- Provide case studies of successful newsroom transformations
- Show how funding and partnerships can help expand these initiatives

2. Local Newsrooms & Journalists

Who they are:

- Virginia-based newspapers and digital news outlets
- Editors, reporters, and newsroom staff seeking industry support
- News organizations in need of digital transformation

How we engage them:

- Promote Digital Accelerator Program and newsroom success stories
- Share training opportunities, grants, and best practices
- Highlight VLNP’s role in strengthening local journalism
- Encourage them to follow VLNP and share our content

3. Journalism Students & Emerging Journalists

Who they are:

- Undergraduate and graduate journalism students in Virginia
- Early-career journalists looking for mentorship, internships, and industry connections
- Participants in student newspapers and journalism programs at Virginia universities

How we engage them:

- Highlight VLNP’s partnerships with universities like JMU and VCU
- Share internship and networking opportunities for students
- Feature mentorship programs, scholarships, and career-building resources
- Promote the Sierra Jenkins Scholarship Fund

4. General Public & News Readers

Who they are:

- Virginia residents who rely on local news for information
- Community members concerned about the future of local news
- Potential subscribers to the Virginia News Reader (VNR)

How we engage them:

- Promote the importance of local news and how it impacts communities
- Encourage people to subscribe to Virginia News Reader
- Share success stories about how local news informs and connects communities
- Educate on the consequences of losing local journalism

Content Themes:

Educational Content – Raising awareness about the importance of local news

- Industry insights, reports, and key statistics (e.g., the impact of local news on civic engagement)
- Highlights from the On the Pulse of Local News study
- Data-driven posts about local news and its effect on communities

Engagement-Driven Posts – Encouraging audience participation

- Polls and questions related to news consumption habits
- Interactive elements, such as “Tell us about a local story that made an impact on you”
- Calls to action for journalists and readers to share their experience

Promotional Content – Announcements and program updates

- Press release announcements, program launches, and key VLNP milestones
- Promotion of VLNP programs, such as the Digital Accelerator Program, and opportunities for participation
- VPA Conference events and sponsorship

Community Highlights – Showcasing partnerships and newsroom success stories

- Features on news organizations VLNP has supported
- Case studies on newsroom transformations, such as The News-Gazette
- Spotlights on VLNP partners, donors, and funding organizations

Thought Leadership – Establishing VLNP as a trusted voice in local news

- Articles and insights from VLNP Executive Director Betsy Edwards
- Discussions on the future of local news and industry trends
- Webinars, panels, and speaking engagements at events

Content Calendar:

Immediate Launch Plan (First Two Weeks After Press Release)

Goal: Generate buzz, engage audiences, and announce VLNP's renewed vision.

February 26: Press Release

- **Official Announcement (Morning)**
 - Graphic with new VLNP logo and tagline
 - Message: "Introducing the Virginia Local News Project." The new name reflects our purpose and aligns with our vision to sustain, support, and grow local news in every Virginia community."
 - Call to action: Read the press release; Visit the website to learn more
- **Leadership Quote (Afternoon)**
 - Graphic featuring Betsy's quote
 - Message: "Local journalism is the backbone of informed communities..."
 - Call to action: Encourage engagement and sharing

February 27: A Legacy of Supporting Journalism

- Before-and-after graphic or transition video: Virginia Press Foundation → Virginia Local News Project

- Message: "VLNP is the nonprofit division of the Virginia Press Association, building on more than 140 years of industry expertise to support news organizations as they expand their digital presence and sustainability."
- Call to action: Visit the website to learn more

February 28: What's at Stake

- Graphic with key statistics: "84% of publicly available information on community-specific issues comes from local newspapers."
- Message: "Without local news, accountability falters, civic engagement declines, and communities lose their connection. Here's why this matters."
- Call to action: Help us change the story—support local news.

March 1: How We're Changing the Story

- Graphic with key statistics: "74% of those with local news access vote, volunteer, and engage more."
- Message: "We're providing the tools, training, and collaboration needed to ensure a sustainable future for local journalism."
- Call to action: Support Local News

March 2: Digital Accelerator Impact

- Graphic with a quote from a Phase I or II success story
- Message: "Expanding digital products and growing audiences are essential for sustaining local journalism. Building on the success of Phases I and II, the Digital Accelerator Program provides Virginia newsrooms with the tools, templates, and milestone-based strategies they need to strengthen their digital presence."
- Call to action: Stay tuned: Phase III is launching soon -- A roadmap for sustainable digital growth.

March 3: Case Study

- Photo or links to The News-Gazette case study
- Message: "Like many local newspapers, The News-Gazette faced challenges reaching and retaining readers. VLNP's Digital Accelerator Program improved the paper's SEO, website performance, and analytics tools, making it easier for readers to find and engage with local news."
- Call to action: Join the Digital Accelerator Program

March 4: Meet the Team

- Head shots or group photo

- Message: "Meet the team behind VLNP."
- Call to action: Support Local News

Week 2 – Sustaining Engagement

March 5: On the Pulse of Local News – Link to the 2022 study on public attitudes toward Virginia newspapers

March 6: Strategic Plan at a Glance

March 7: Meet the Board

March 8: Sierra Jenkins Scholarship Fund – Honoring a journalist and supporting the next generation

March 9: ANTI-SLAPP Program – Protecting journalists

March 10: Call to Action – Subscribe to Virginia News Reader, donate, or support local journalism

March 11: What's Next – Teasing Phase III of the Digital Accelerator

Long-Term Content Plan (Leading Up to the VPA Conference - April 12, 2025)

Key Messages (March & Early April)

- Digital Innovation in Local News
- Success Stories from VLNP's Programs
- How to Get Involved – VNR subscriptions and donor engagement
- VPA Conference Sponsorship Promotion

March Posting Schedule

Like, Share, Win Post & Digital Accelerator Spotlight

- **March 12:** *Like, Share, Win Contest* – Encourage VPA members to follow, share, and tag for a chance to win VPA Conference tickets.
- **March 14:** *Deep dive into the Digital Accelerator Program* – How Phases I & II helped newsrooms, and what Phase III will offer.
- **March 16:** *Success Story Spotlight* – Feature a newsroom that benefited from VLNP's programs.

Why Local News Matters & Industry Impact

- **March 18:** *The Impact of Local News* – Share a key statistic on the role of local journalism in civic engagement.

- **March 20:** *Behind-the-Scenes Post* – A look at how VLNP supports newsrooms.
- **March 22:** *Call to Action: Subscribe to Virginia News Reader* – Encourage community engagement.

Countdown to the VPA Conference

- **March 25:** *What to Expect at the VPA Conference* – Overview of key sessions and VLNP's sponsorship.
- **March 27:** *Meet VLNP at the Conference* – Encourage attendees to connect.
- **March 29:** *Final Reminder: Like, Share, Win Contest Closing* – Last chance to enter before announcing winners.
- **March 31:** *Conference Prep* – Tease upcoming live coverage and engagement opportunities.

Sample Like, Share, Win Contest Post

Calling all Virginia Press Association members! Support local news – LIKE & SHARE the Virginia Local News Project page for your chance to win free tickets to the VPA Conference: Exploring Bold Models, Transforming Local News on April 12.

✓ **Follow Virginia Local News Project on Facebook**

✓ **Like & share this post**

✓ **Tag a journalist or newsroom** in the comments

TWO winners will be announced on [insert date]!

April Posting Schedule (Leading Up to VPA Conference)

April 1-5: What to Expect at the VPA Conference

April 6-9: Highlight VLNP's Role at the Conference

April 10-11: Final Call to Join Us at the Conference

April 12: Live Coverage from the Conference

Engagement and Growth Strategy

- Amplify press and partner mentions by tagging media, journalists, and newsrooms
 - Spend time daily engaging with other news outlets by liking, commenting on, and sharing their posts to strengthen connections and visibility
 - Encourage partners and supporters to share VLNP content
 - Consider paid social media boosts on key posts and sponsored ads to expand reach
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Performance Tracking & Optimization

Key Metrics to Track:

- **Engagement** – Number of likes, shares, and comments on Facebook and LinkedIn posts.
 - **Follower Growth** – Increase in page followers over time.
 - **Click-Through Rates (CTR)** – How many users click links to visit the VLNP website, sign up for Virginia News Reader, or learn about the Digital Accelerator Program.
 - **Reach & Impressions** – Total number of people who see VLNP content and how often posts appear in feeds.
 - **Conversion Rates** – How many people subscribe, donate, or take action based on social media content.
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Adjustments & Iteration

Social media strategies should be flexible and adapt based on performance insights. Regularly analyzing engagement and audience behavior will inform adjustments in the following areas:

- **Posting Frequency** – Increase or decrease the number of weekly posts based on audience responsiveness.
- **Content Formats** – Experiment with different types of content (e.g., graphics, short videos, infographics) to see what resonates most.
- **Optimal Timing** – Post at the most active times for VLNP’s audiences on Facebook and LinkedIn to maximize engagement.
- **Messaging Refinements** – Focus on the topics and messages that generate the most conversation, shares, and action from followers.