

**VIRGINIA**  
**LOCAL NEWS**  
**— PROJECT —**

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

2026-2028

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Virginia Local News Project (VLNP), formerly known as the Virginia Press Foundation, marks a pivotal moment with a new name, a new vision, and its inaugural strategic plan. These milestones reflect a renewed commitment to advancing and sustaining local journalism in Virginia, ensuring all communities have access to reliable news that informs and connects.

The new name, chosen to better reflect the organization's purpose and provide clarity of mission, is reinforced by a new vision:

**To sustain, support, and grow local news in every Virginia community.**

This strategic plan (2026–2028) provides a clear roadmap to address key organizational priorities: strengthening messaging, building operational capacity, and fostering long-term sustainability.

Developed collaboratively by the VLNP Board, it embodies a shared dedication to the mission and a bold vision for the future of local journalism in Virginia.

# CRITICAL PRIORITIES

The plan focuses on four critical priorities:

- 1** **Messaging/Re-Branding:** Establishing a clear and compelling identity to re-brand, build trust, increase visibility, and expand public awareness.
- 2** **People:** Strengthening organizational capacity through staff and board expansion.
- 3** **Funding:** Building sustainable revenue streams.
- 4** **Programming:** Expanding and enhancing initiatives like the Digital Accelerator Program to directly support and sustain local journalism.

# ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

This strategic plan is supported by an operations plan template, which outlines specific tasks, timelines, and milestones for each objective. The template can be used to load activities into project management software, ensuring accountability and streamlined execution.

VLNP has already begun laying the groundwork for success by advancing efforts such as rebranding, board recruitment, and preparing grant applications. Refer to Addendum II: Immediate Priorities and Early Progress.

To further support these goals, Blue Octopus Consulting has provided recommendations included in Addendum I.

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION: 2026

# YEAR 1 OBJECTIVES

### Objective 1: Finalize Rebranding and Strengthen Organizational Identity

#### Activities:

- » Complete the legal process for the name change (Q1).
- » Design and launch a new logo, website, and branding materials that clearly communicate VLNP's mission and vision and invite public support (Q1–Q2).
- » Develop a clear and concise description of VLNP's mission, vision, and programs to communicate consistently across all platforms (Q1–Q2).

### Objective 2: Build Public Awareness and Enhance Marketing Efforts

#### Activities:

- » Launch a rebranding campaign to ensure stakeholders and the public understand who VLNP is and what it does (Q1–Q2).
- » Develop marketing strategies to amplify VLNP's mission and vision and reach target audiences (Q1–Q2).
- » Create a shared content calendar to guide the year's campaigns and social media (Q1).
- » Launch targeted public awareness campaigns across digital platforms and media outlets to showcase VLNP's impact and engage stakeholders (Q1–Q4).

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION: 2026

# YEAR 1 OBJECTIVES

### Objective 3: Establish Governance and Operational Tools

#### Activities:

- » Set up a board portal for key documents and compliance materials (Q1).
- » Ensure GuideStar registration and compliance (bylaws, terms, etc.) (Q1).
- » Develop onboarding/training for new board members (Q2).
- » Target recruitment of at least two additional board members to expand capacity and diversity (Q1–Q4).
- » Establish clear expectations for board members, including annual donations and active participation (Q1).

### Objective 4: Secure Initial Funding and Prepare for the Future

#### Activities:

- » Submit the Press Forward LOI by January 15 (Q1).
- » Complete and submit the full grant proposal (if invited) (Q2).
- » Identify additional grant/funding opportunities (this will be a continuous effort) (Q1–Q4).
- » Participate in Giving Tuesday (Q4).
- » Create Annual Development Plan to strategically guide fundraising and donor engagement efforts for the upcoming year, ensuring alignment with the organization's annual budget and priorities (Q4).

## BUILDING A FOUNDATION: 2026

# YEAR 1 OBJECTIVES

### Objective 5: Lay the Groundwork for Staff Expansion

#### Activities:

- » Draft a comprehensive job description for a program director (Q3).
- » Develop and execute a recruitment plan (Q4).
- » Identify potential funding sources to support staff expansion in Year 2 (Q4).

### Objective 6: Expand Programming to Strengthen Newsrooms

#### Activities:

- » Launch Phase III of the Digital Accelerator Program to provide Virginia newsrooms with tailored mentorship, revenue diversification strategies, and audience engagement toolkits (Q1–Q4).
- » Develop training and workshop opportunities for local newsrooms, focusing on digital strategy, content engagement, and innovative revenue models (Q2–Q4).
- » Establish an ongoing newsroom support network, including peer mentoring, case studies, and best practices sharing (Q3).
- » Partner with academic institutions and industry experts to create journalism training resources and professional development opportunities for newsrooms and emerging journalists (Q2–Q4).
- » Assess newsroom needs through targeted research and surveys, refining future programming based on data-driven insights (Q2–Q4).

## CREATING MOMENTUM: 2027

# YEAR 2 OBJECTIVES

### Objective 7: Recruit and Diversify the Board

#### Activities:

- » Continue to expand the board, prioritizing diversity in race, gender, geography, and expertise (Q1–Q3).
- » Consider adding committees and/or a junior board to engage younger stakeholders (Q2).

### Objective 8: Strengthen Staff Capacity

#### Activities:

- » Hire a full-time program director to manage VLNP's operations and programs (Q1).
- » Develop partnerships with universities and nonprofits to supplement staffing needs (Q2–Q4).

### Objective 9: Expand Outreach through Public Awareness and Marketing Campaigns

#### Activities:

- » Create the inaugural annual VLNP Impact Report and publish widely.; repeat annually. (Q1).
- » Evaluate and refine public awareness efforts based on Year 1 outcomes to ensure alignment with VLNP's mission, vision, and goals (Q1).
- » Present at schools, universities, and industry conferences across the country to showcase VLNP's innovative work and solutions. (Q1-Q4).

## CREATING MOMENTUM: 2027

# YEAR 2 OBJECTIVES

- » Develop multimedia marketing content to engage broader audiences and highlight VLNP's initiatives (Q2–Q4).
- » Host community events and webinars to increase visibility, build relationships,

### Objective 10: Launch Statewide Educational Initiatives

#### Activities:

- » Host events at universities and community spaces to inspire interest in journalism careers and raise awareness about VLNP's mission and initiatives, fostering connections with students, educators, and local stakeholders (Q1–Q4).
- » Collaborate with academic programs to offer internships and mentorships (Q2–Q4).
- » Secure sponsorships for educational programs (Q2–Q4).

## SUSTAINING GROWTH: 2028

# YEAR 3 OBJECTIVES

### Objective 11: Evaluate and Sustain Grant-Funded Programs

#### Activities:

- » Conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Press Forward-funded initiatives (Q1–Q2).
- » Prepare a detailed impact report and share widely (Q3).

### Objective 12: Diversify Revenue Streams

#### Activities:

- » Develop an annual giving campaign (Q2–Q4).
- » Explore additional revenue opportunities outside of grants, including key mission partners, events, planned giving, etc. (Q3–Q4).

### Objective 13: Foster Community Connections and Journalism Pathways

#### Activities:

- » Partner with universities and community colleges to place aspiring journalists in local newsrooms, focusing on underserved areas and diverse candidates (Q3).
  - Create internship guidelines (Q3).
  - Provide funding and sponsorships to support stipends or resources for interns (Q3–Q4).
  - Develop a mentorship structure to connect interns with industry professionals (Q4).
- » Establish a volunteer program to provide opportunities for community members to actively support VLNP's mission, such as organizing events, amplifying campaigns, or contributing skills to specific projects (Q3).

# COMMITMENT

The board is committed to ensuring the strategic plan is finalized, adopted, and actively implemented, with clear milestones to guide progress and maintain focus. These milestones, drawn from the strategic objectives, include significant actions such as finalizing the rebranding, applying for multi-year grants, hiring staff, and evaluating grant-funded initiatives.

- 1 Board Meetings:** Conduct quarterly reviews with comprehensive updates provided to both VLNP and VPA board members to ensure alignment and transparency.
- 2 Monthly Reports:** Share email updates with VLNP board members to outline progress, upcoming tasks, and any challenges requiring attention.
- 3 Project Management Tools:** Implement software such as Microsoft Planner to track objectives, timelines, and deliverables, ensuring progress remains on schedule and responsibilities are clear.
- 4 Board Portal:** Utilize a dedicated Board Portal to centralize documents, reports, and resources, making it easier for board members to access materials, stay informed, and collaborate efficiently.

# CONCLUSION

This strategic plan charts a clear and transformative path for the Virginia Local News Project (VLNP), positioning the organization to achieve its bold vision through prioritized efforts in messaging, capacity, and sustainable funding.

While these priorities remain central, the board also recognizes the need to balance competing demands. Programmatic needs—such as continuing relevant workshops, supporting career pathways for new journalists, and promoting access to local news across communities—are critical to advancing VLNP's mission and vision. Over the next three years, maintaining strategic focus and adapting to evolving needs will be essential.

As VLNP implements this plan, it will address immediate priorities while building long-term systems and initiatives—such as ongoing fundraising, public awareness, and community engagement—that will grow over time. By 2028, VLNP will be synonymous with advancing local news in Virginia while inspiring the next generation of journalists and serving as a model for innovation and resilience.

## BLUE OCTOPUS RECOMMENDATIONS

# ADDENDUM I

To support VLNP's strategic goals, Blue Octopus Consulting provides the following tailored recommendations for enhancing organizational resilience, capacity, and impact:

- » Create a Leadership Succession Plan: Develop a detailed succession plan for board leadership and key staff roles to ensure continuity and stability as the organization grows.
- » Develop Core Values: Facilitate a workshop with board members and staff to define VLNP's core values. Integrate these values into branding, organizational decisions, and communications.
- » Enhance Grants Management and Outcome Tracking: Manage grant compliance, reporting, and outcomes tracking with a database like Salesforce Nonprofit Success Pack.
- » Develop a Crisis Response Strategy: Prepare a plan to address potential challenges to local journalism, such as misinformation campaigns.

## IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES AND EARLY PROGRESS

# ADDENDUM II

While this strategic plan focuses on a three-year vision, VLNP has already initiated several key activities in preparation for its implementation. These short-term priorities demonstrate VLNP's commitment to achieving its goals:

- » **Rebranding Efforts:** VLNP is designing its logo and drafting website content to align with its new vision (to include a board portal). State and federal filings are being updated to reflect the name change.
- » **Grant Preparation:** The team is actively gathering documentation, identifying partners, and drafting the Letter of Intent (LOI) for the Press Forward infrastructure grant, due January 15, 2025.
- » **Board Meetings:** Outreach has occurred to schedule quarterly board meetings for 2025.

These early actions set the stage for the successful execution of the broader strategic plan and position VLNP for strong momentum heading into 2025.