

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2024-25

Submission by the Local & Independent News Association
to the Australian Treasury



The best local news organisations introduce us to people we don't know, who share our concerns and aspirations. It connects people in a community to one another, and to the outside world. – Penny Abernathy, The State of Local News, Local News Initiative, August 2022

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"A strong and diverse media market helps promote pluralism and protect our democratic processes – ensuring Australians have access to a range of sources of news and information." – ACMA, A New Framework for Measuring Media Diversity in Australia

"LINA has connected Tasmanian Inquirer to a broader network of digital media startups, allowing us to learn from others experience, represent the emerging sector to government, share tips of our own and gain from shared programs and support we would otherwise not have time to develop on our own. LINA's work is invaluable" – Bob Burton, Tasmanian Inquirer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The decline of local news is a trend decades in the making. Audiences are increasingly shifting online while advertising models that had previously sustained news production are failing in many regions. As such, the consolidation of newsrooms has meant there are fewer journalists in regional and sub-metropolitan areas, and less representation of local news stories in the media landscape. Yet the need for relevant and trusted information has never been so great. The circulation of misinformation and disinformation is a significant challenge facing governments globally, as is increasing disengagement from news services. Local & Independent News Association (LINA)'s role is to help curb and reverse these trends by supporting the 'green shoots' of the journalism industry, hyperlocal and independent digital news publishers.

LINA is a fast-growing industry association seeking to strengthen public interest journalism and grow the diversity of news services available to communities across Australia. Our priorities strongly align with government policy objectives to foster access to locally and culturally relevant news services; enable the production of high-quality public interest journalism; grow social cohesion through increasing the diversity of perspectives available to audiences; and engage communities with timely, accurate and relevant news information.

LINA received government funding support in 2023-24 and has made significant progress in developing its membership and providing capacity building and networked services to those newsrooms. Feedback from newsrooms on the support provided by LINA to date has been overwhelmingly positive. Yet there remains significant work to do. No organisation can turn around a 40-year trend in six-months. This submission requests funding for three-years, separated into programs and activities that LINA can lead, and industry-led actions such as workforce development, support for emerging newsrooms and a media literacy program. LINA encourages the Government to resource the News Media Assistance Program for immediate implementation in 2024-25, and for the coming three-year period.

	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
LINA led activities	\$1,637,180	\$1,558,426	\$1,528,336
Industry led activities	\$3,677,670	\$5,471,980	\$5,901,100

"When asked what types of news people were interested in, nearly two-thirds chose local news (67%)." – Sora Park, Digital News Report: Australia 2022

"LINA has achieved a huge amount in a short space of time, created a productive collaborative network and built a lot of good will. Well done." – Summit delegate feedback, May 2023

CASE STUDY: NEWSPORT CYCLONE COVERAGE

Based in Port Douglas, Newsport is a digital-only publication serving the Douglas Shire and tropical Far North Queensland communities since 2007. Four journalists and two regular columnists cover breaking news in the region, along with sport, entertainment, business and tourism news. The site hosts 'Beachcam' allowing visitors to check live conditions on the Port Douglas beaches and they also publish a quarterly tourism magazine, Port Douglas Travel Planner.

When Cyclone Jasper hit the region in December 2023, Newsport provided live blog updates during the disaster on its website and social media feeds, including hour-by-hour emergency updates, road conditions and providing essential information about emergency services. The need for this information was demonstrated by the 5 x increase in traffic to the site during the week of the disaster, with 158,000 unique visitors to the site. Newsport Editor, Michael Warren says, **"Our role was to update, inform and engage in the moments when our community needed it most."** Newsport continues to report on clean-up actions, repairs and support to Help the community rebuild following the disaster.



INTRODUCTION & CONTEXT

About the Local & Independent News Association

The Local & Independent News Association (LINA) is a national industry association supporting hyperlocal and independent digital news publishers. LINA's role is to help news publishers provide local, diverse and trusted news sources to Australian communities and to grow workforce participation in sustainable local journalism in the process. To do this, we focus on capacity building support and generating economies of scale across a collective of independent businesses. LINA seeks to grow existing, and encourage new, hyperlocal media entrants by providing a deep level of hands-on support to its members.

LINA was established in 2021 in response to industry demand for representation and coordination to assist small digital publishers to build their sustainability and provide quality, public interest news services to their communities. As at January 2024, LINA has welcomed 61 publisher members, producing 99 mastheads across every jurisdiction. This represents over half of the estimated 100 digital-native hyperlocal publishers identified as potentially eligible for membership. A full list of LINA members can be viewed on our website's [Member Directory](#).

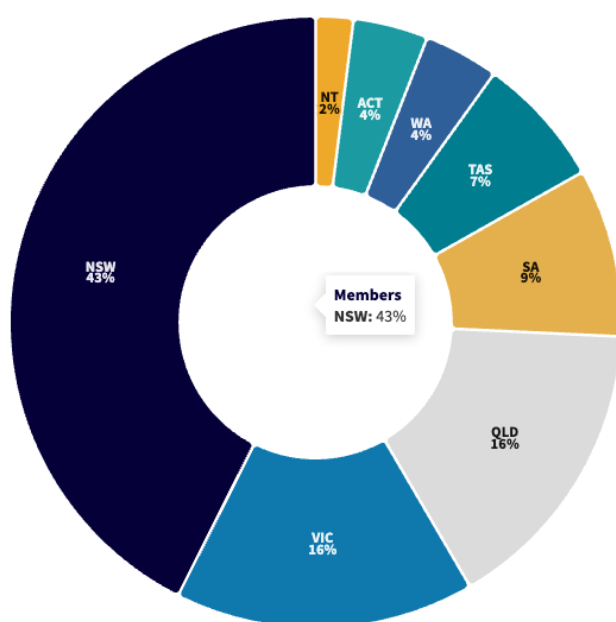
LINA is an incorporated, ACNC registered, not-for-profit association with an independent Board of seven Directors. Its work is supported by a broad range of industry partnerships, and by operational support from the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia to increase economies of scale across the media industry. While LINA draws limited income from its membership and is establishing a philanthropic partners network, it currently has no operational funding secured beyond June 2024.

About LINA Members

LINA members are locally owned and controlled news publishers, creating high-quality news content that meets the LINA Editorial Standards, by and for a defined community. While publishers might also have a print publication and/or other distribution platforms, LINA members are digital-native and our member services focus on strengthening online news distribution and responding to audience demand in digital spaces. LINA membership is open to all digital news publishers who meet our membership requirements, however most of our services are tailored to growing small businesses with the majority of LINA members having an annual income less than \$350k and operating with fewer than 5 staff.

MEMBER SNAPSHOT

Member Locations



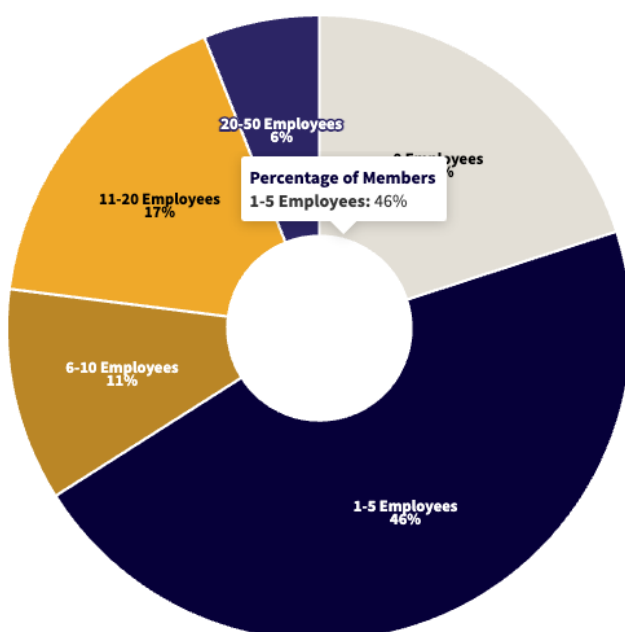
61 publishers
99 Mastheads

LINA members publish, on average, 1,589 stories per week and 76,268 stories in a year.

LINA members are equally distributed across metropolitan and regional areas.

Annual average income 2022-23 - \$350k

0 Employees 1-5 Employees 6-10 Employees 11-20 Employees 20-50 Employees



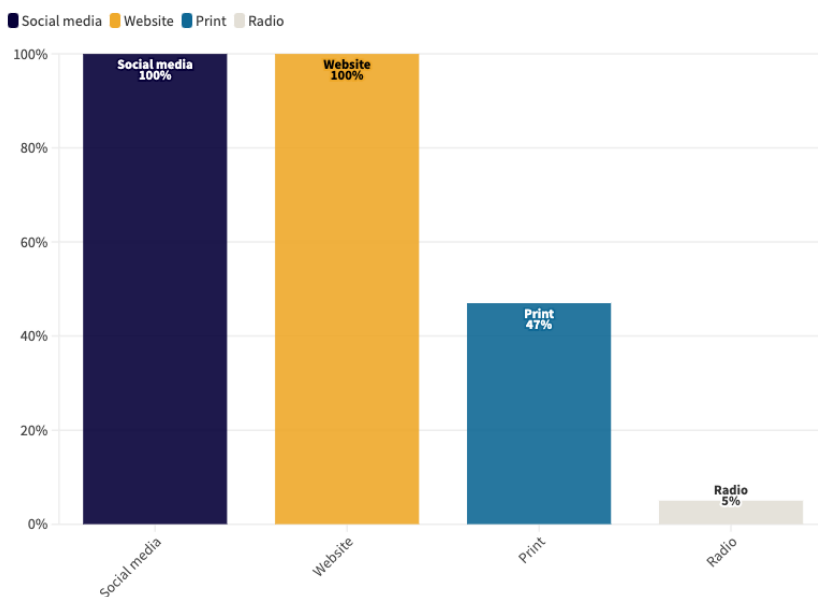
Employment rates

Average paid staff: 3 (FTE)

Average number of volunteers engaged: 8

A majority of LINA members (66%) operate with fewer than 5 paid staff.

Distribution mediums



Collectively, LINA members reach over 3.3 million unique viewers each month, with an average site visit rate of 58,397 readers.

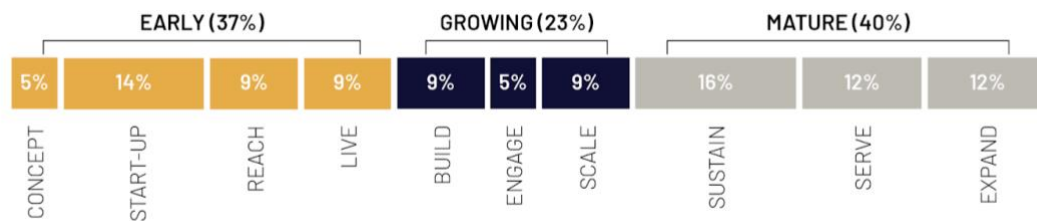
In addition, members collectively reach over 765,000 social media followers (13,204 average per masthead). 31 LINA members distribute an average 20,000 print copies each month.



LINA asked members to self-identify their position across 10 stages of the 'newsroom journey' illustrated below. LINA has used these broad stages, early, growing and mature to categorise traits of newsrooms focused on different development stages.

In 2023, LINA members identified themselves across the stages in their newsroom development journey. 37% are in the early phases where they are beginning to build an audience and setting up their business. 23% are in the growing phase where they are employing new staff members and strengthening their audience engagement. 40% are in the mature stage where they have built a

reliable income stream and are growing their content and expanding their services. This sets a benchmark from which to measure changes in the hyperlocal news industry moving forward.

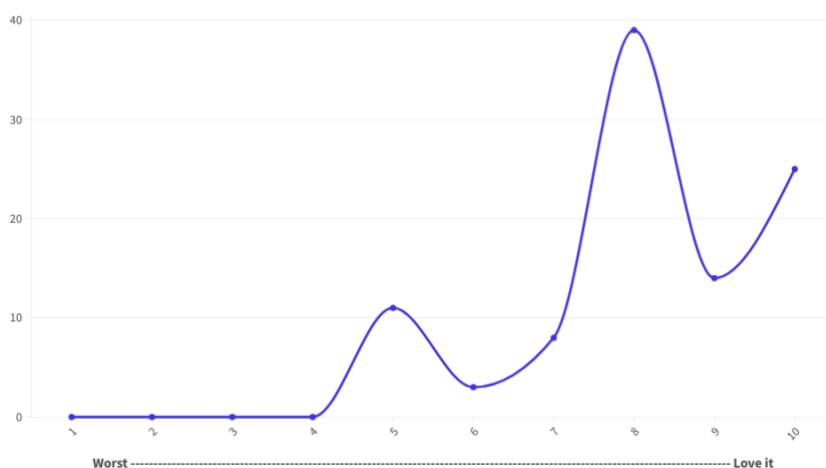


Member satisfaction

LINA is pleased to report high levels of member satisfaction with member services and programs to date. All resources and programs launched so far have been utilised by at least one newsroom and the inaugural Summit held in April 2023 proved particularly popular as a means of connecting local publishers, stakeholders and government.

How would you rate LINA's performance in the last 12 months overall?

Percentage of Members



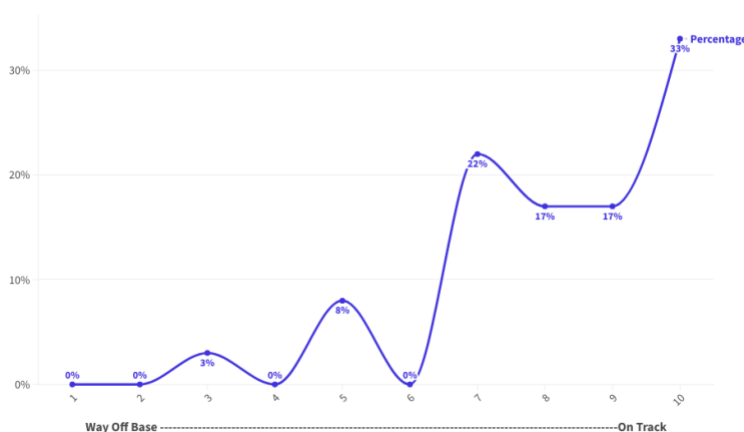
“High quality resources. Relational engagement. Member-centric support. Consistent growth. Persistent representation.” – member survey feedback, Sept 2023

“Training support and resources all excellent- shop-talks are great.” – member survey feedback, Sept 2023

“LINA has exceeded my expectations.” – member survey feedback, Sept 2023

How happy are you with the direction LINA is taking?

Percentage



“Being a sole operator, and one that does not have a journalism background, I have found the organisation particularly helpful in making me aware of things that may not be on my radar LINA has my back and I cannot be more grateful!” – member survey feedback, Sept 2023

Policy landscape

Local news publishers are under pressure globally as business models sustained by advertising and user-fees have weakened in all markets, compounded by COVID-19 pandemic disruptions, causing concern for Governments across the world.

It is widely recognised that Australia has one of the most concentrated media markets in the world, exacerbated in recent years by the continued retraction of newsrooms around the country. Nearly 300 Australian newsrooms have downsized or, more often, closed completely since the Public Interest Journalism Initiative started tracking newsroom changes in January 2019. At least 30 areas across Australia are considered to be news deserts with no local print or digital outlet at all (Dickson, 2022).

Government interventions across the globe have included grants supporting content production and/or journalist employment, tax breaks for public interest news publishers; and operational support grants for publishers in the form of grants, subsidies and tax offsets. The Australian Commonwealth has attempted to curb this trend through a variety of policy levers in recent years, including: creating the Regional and Small Publishers Innovation Fund; developing the News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code; the Public Interest News Gathering fund; tax relief measures for the commercial broadcasting sector; and a print relief assistance program for print newspapers. These actions have predominantly provided relief to large news corporations and regional print publishers to date.

The News Media Assistance Program (News MAP) currently in development provides an excellent opportunity for the Government to: enable emerging newsrooms to enter the market, particularly in areas of economic market failure where the need for local news is a public safety issue; to foster a skilled workforce of journalists producing strong public interest news services; and to address rising concerns about the spread of misinformation through media literacy. LINA encourages the Government to commit funding in 2024-25 to the implementation of the News MAP and to utilise the growing network of local digital news publishers to help turn the tide on newsroom closures in Australia and grow media diversity.

“The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth develop and implement a framework for extending deductible gift recipient (DGR) status to not-for-profit news media organisations in Australia that adhere to appropriate standards of practice for public interest journalism.” – Senate Select Committee on the Future of Public Interest Journalism, February 2018

OUR VISION

A vibrant and diverse local news landscape providing news services to communities across Australia.

OUR MISSION

Supporting hyperlocal and independent digital news publishers.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

**STRENGTHENING
PUBLIC INTEREST
JOURNALISM**

**BUILDING CAPACITY
OF NEWSROOMS**

**FACILITATING
NETWORKING AND
SHARED SERVICES**

GOALS

Increasing capability for public interest news reporting

Championing the work done by local independent publishers

Building news publishers' financial sustainability – including revenue generating actions

Growing audience engagement with local and diverse news sources

Facilitating peer-to-peer engagement

Generating economies of scale for small businesses

SUCCESS LOOKS LIKE

- LINA members are trusted sources of news for their communities
- LINA members have a voice on industry-wide issues
- The work of LINA members is recognised and rewarded for its quality

- An increasing number of sustainable member publishers with diverse income streams
- Audience numbers and engagement growing for member publications
- Workforce growth among LINA membership

- LINA members benefitting from shared communication and collaboration
- Increased access to shared and/or cost effective third party services
- Membership satisfied and number of members strong and growing

SHARED OBJECTIVES: GOVERNMENT & LINA PARTNERSHIP

LINA shares concerns expressed by consecutive Australian governments about the current and potential impacts of increasing concentration of media in Australia, the spread of misinformation and disinformation and economic barriers to essential information. The actions proposed in this paper directly address priorities of:

Access by supporting community-led news services that fill voids in local news, enabling coverage of public interest journalism essential to the functions of democracy and nurturing emergent newsrooms to provide services, particularly in areas of market failure.

Quality by enabling the amplification of local issues, supporting the provision of accurate and timely news services that encourage audience trust and act as a counterweight to misinformation.

Media diversity by enabling a not-for-profit news sector in Australia, taking a capacity building role alongside industry in addressing skills gaps and workforce barriers and promoting social cohesion through the sharing of diverse perspectives.

Engagement by growing media literacy and engaging with local news publishers as a mechanism for public policy engagement, information and consultation.

LINA members are well placed to support Government priorities to meet the information needs of geographically and culturally diverse audiences, address news deserts and increase media diversity. Connectedness with local communities makes hyperlocal news publishers uniquely placed to respond to increasingly frequent emergencies, as demonstrated by the pandemic and recent extreme weather events. Timely, locally relevant information is paramount for community safety in times of crisis. LINA members have capacity to provide this information services and offer significant return on investment.

Local media also provides a unique space to engage communities in the machinery of government, and this is the area of journalism most under threat (Cairncross, 2019). LINA members are well placed to bridge this information divide between communities and governments at all levels.

The Commonwealth, LINA and its members are strongly aligned in the ambition to increase the sustainability of a diversity of newsrooms providing quality news services to communities across Australia; and therefore the diversity of local news services available to audiences. The actions outlined in this submission will significantly contribute to the sustainability of local and diverse newsrooms and strengthen Australia's democratic functions through strengthening public interest news reporting at a community/local level.

"The fate of communities and local news organizations are intrinsically linked, journalistically and economically. From our very beginnings as a nation, newspapers have played a vital role in both educating us and building community. Researchers in disciplines such as political science, sociology and economics have identified three ways newspapers historically built a sense of community and trust in grassroots democracy. Each is under economic assault."

- Penny Muse Abernathy, *Why Local News Matters, and What We Can Do To Save It*, New York State Bar Association. New York. cited 23rd February 2023

Budget Request Summary

LINA led activities	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Operational support	\$403,075	\$408,401	\$431,874
Strengthening public interest journalism	\$481,974	\$412,244	\$350,611
Capacity building support	\$225,388	\$235,346	\$245,039
Networking, IT and shared services	\$526,743	\$512,435	\$500,812
Total LINA request	\$1,637,180	\$1,558,426	\$1,528,336
Industry led activities			
Media literacy program	\$527,000	\$600,480	\$749,100
Emergent newsroom program	\$3,000,000	\$4,250,000	\$4,500,000
Workforce development program	\$150,670	\$621,500	\$652,000
Total industry request	\$3,677,670	\$5,471,980	\$5,901,100

BUDGET ITEM DETAILS

Operational Support

A small staff team facilitates core services for LINA members and supports the development of industry partners and projects. Service support agreements allow LINA to operate with a lean budget, ensuring all activities deliver direct benefits to publishers. This team also facilitates sector leadership activities such as representing members in policy forums and centralised coordination of programs and activities. Operational support forms the base for the continuation of LINA's current activities and the expansion of programs to create greater impact in years ahead. Budget requirements for operational support include:

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Salaries & Wages for 2 FTE (including on-costs)	\$283,155	\$291,650	\$303,316
Subscriptions & Memberships	\$6,090	\$6,181	\$6,366
Administration	\$10,150	\$10,302	\$10,611
Office rental	\$12,180	\$12,363	\$12,734
Service support (accounting, legal etc)	\$42,000	\$44,100	\$45,423
Travel & meeting expenses	\$30,000	\$31,900	\$31,827
Website & hosting fees	\$1,500	\$1,550	\$1,597
IT & subscriptions	\$12,000	\$14,000	\$16,000
Promotion & marketing	\$6,000	\$4,000	\$4,000
Totals	\$403,075	\$408,401	\$431,874

"Reporters get to be eyewitnesses at the great moments in history, but they also get to be observers and storytellers of all the little moments that make up the varied and fascinating lives we share together as a community."

— Alan Sunderland, *Ten Rules of Reporting*

Strengthening Public Interest Journalism

LINA works to ensure that engaged local audiences are served with independent, accessible, original, high-quality public interest news reportage, covering issues and information important to communities. This work began in 2023-24 and remains a significant focus of LINA's work moving forward. Activities that are currently in progress and require support to continue progressing in 2024-25 include:

- facilitating shared learnings and content collaborations between newsrooms and editorial staff;
- providing direct support to members to nominate for Australian and international awards and recognition opportunities to build the profile of quality, independent journalism in Australia;
- providing support and upskilling to cover court-reporting and other sensitive topics some publishers are currently self-censoring due to a lack of confidence and skills;
- supporting access to and best practice use of design and software tools;
- arranging pro bono legal partners for specialist media law advice;
- providing best practice advice on website accessibility for readers with a disability;
- providing 'micro-grants' to local publishers to increase investigative journalism content and in particular, to focus on stories that identify and address misinformation and disinformation on a place-based basis as it emerges in local communities; and
- supporting sub-editing as a shared service to address an identified skills gap in the sector, providing centralised sub-editing functions and building capacity in this specialised skillset and identifying other areas where the processes established for this project can create economies of scale for local newsrooms.

In addition to continuing these activities, funding support will assist LINA to expand its services through:

- developing resources and learning tools relating to data and AI journalism, solutions journalism and expand investigative public interest journalism at a local level; and
- providing centralised digital design and SEO specialist services to increase audience reach.

LINA is requesting tapered support for these activities over a three-year period, during which we will grow project-based business models to increase fee-for-service activities and reduce reliance on government support.

Budget requirements to strengthen public interest journalism include:

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Salaries & Wages for 1 FTE (including on-costs)	\$108,974	\$112,244	\$115,611
Sub-editor service (inc training & mentoring)	\$198,000	\$150,000	\$110,000
Design and SEO service	\$75,000	\$50,000	\$25,000
Micro-grant program	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Totals	\$481,974	\$412,244	\$350,611

Capacity Building Support

LINA provides publishers with access to training events, resources, tip sheets, templates, guides to support local and diverse newsrooms. LINA provides best-practice advice, including templates on practical issues such as social media terms of use and relevant policies. In addition, LINA facilitates education and upskilling. This includes the continuation of successful programs from 2023-24, such as:

- annual cohorts of 10-15 newsrooms participating in a structured revenue growth program with one-to-one coaching from an industry expert;
- repetition of an annual coordinated fundraising campaign with digital campaign education built into the program design;
- regular development of resources focused on revenue generation, expanding technical knowledge and best-practice business management skills;
- tailored education resources on media law, creating content remotely, digital content marketing and multimedia content production;
- fortnightly online 'shop-talk' sessions providing facilitated networking opportunities and guest speaker presentations on operational topics, examples of news publishing business success, news product thinking and technical tools to enhance reporting;
- a partnership with the Digital Publishers Alliance to showcase emerging technologies across the memberships of both organisations, keeping members informed of best practice tech;
- information on grant and training opportunities, as well as significant dates for content ideas;
- access to guides, templates and videos in the 'members area' of the LINA website;
- invitations to training and networking events;
- media kit templates;
- coordination of an annual industry summit/conference event; and
- centralised HR support for small news businesses;

With funding support, LINA will grow this range of services to include:

- collective advertising sales representation (already in development);
- connecting members with international organisations offering training, learnings and services to hyperlocals in other regions; and
- advice on establishing subscription options.

Budget requirements for capacity building support include:

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Salaries & Wages for 0.6 FTE (including on-costs)	\$65,388	\$67,346	\$70,039
Third-party services	\$30,000	\$40,000	\$50,000
Conference expenses	\$60,000	\$60,000	\$60,000
Training & resources	\$15,000	\$18,000	\$20,000
Revenue development program	\$55,000	\$50,000	\$45,000
Totals	\$225,388	\$235,346	\$245,039

Networking, IT and Business services

LINA connects members with discount suppliers, expert advice and industry networks to save news businesses money and time and generate economies of scale. LINA seeks to expand its member service offering to collect and share aggregated data on local news engagement; help industry and government better understand opportunity and barriers relating to local news and information sources; and implement best practice technical tools across its membership to gain operational efficiencies.

Current member benefit examples include:

- discounted insurance packages through a partnership with KBI Group;
- a 25% discount on the VettNews Cx complaints and corrections tool;
- a 30% discount on the Newsletter Glue production tool;
- a 30% discount on registrations for Media Law conference events;
- a free Canva Pro 12-month subscription and support materials on Canva tools for journalism;
- facilitation of monthly member networking sessions to share learnings and insights;
- a facilitated Slack channel discussion covering topics such as content, operations, business development, revenue development, tools and tech, new resources and general queries; and
- on-call technical advice on websites and administrative systems.

With funding support, LINA will expand the following functions:

- Support an ad server platform for a collective sales representation to complement local advertising revenue;
- Offer centralised accounting and bookkeeping services;
- Negotiate further discount rates on other software licenses, equipment suppliers, digital design and tools;
- Search engine optimisation, communications and promotional support to engage broader audiences with local services;
- Grow the data suite and aggregated analysis tools to track reader engagement across the LINA membership; and
- Undertake an audit and research program to inform impact investing and key points of intervention for policy-makers, philanthropic stakeholders and industry.

Budget requirements for networking, IT and business support include:

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Salaries & Wages for 2 FTE (including on-costs)	\$239,743	\$246,935	\$256,812
Service providers/contractors	\$90,000	\$90,000	\$90,000
IT development and maintenance	\$100,000	\$80,000	\$60,000
Software & subscriptions	\$12,000	\$12,000	\$12,000
Training & resources	\$5,000	\$3,500	\$2,000
Research and survey program	\$80,000	\$80,000	\$80,000
Totals	\$526,743	\$512,435	\$500,812

Industry-led Actions

Media Literacy Program

LINA members have the expertise and trust due to their community connections to provide education services to local communities to grow media literacy among adults. LINA proposed a coordinated program whereby:

- LINA partners with a registered training organisation (eg Community Media Training Organisation) to develop a curriculum framework tailored for adult media literacy education;
- local newsrooms are engaged to deliver media literacy programs to their own communities, supported by a centralised curriculum and teaching resources;
- newsrooms partner with community organisations (eg schools, libraries, Councils) to deliver programs locally.

This program design has the dual outcome of increasing media literacy through trusted sources of information, as well as growing engagement with local newsrooms and partnerships with local organisations. It could be piloted with a small group of locations in 2024-25 and expanded in future years based on learnings and successes in year 1. Budget requirements would include:

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Program coordination	\$87,000	\$90,480	\$94,100
Resource development	\$120,000	\$30,000	\$15,000
Program delivery at \$30k per location	\$300,000	\$450,000	\$600,000
Venue and delivery costs at \$2k per location	\$20,000	\$30,000	\$40,000
Totals	\$527,000	\$600,480	\$749,100

CASE STUDY: ILLAWARRA FLAME DEBUNKS MISINFORMATION

The Illawarra Flame began as a printed business directory and expanded in 2022 into an online news service committed to sharing the voices and issues relevant to the Illawarra region on the New South Wales coast.

In October 2023, heated discussion was underway within the community about proposed off-shore wind farms. A Facebook post began circulating, claiming a University of Tasmania study had found wind turbines to be dangerous to whales. The Illawarra Flame investigated and found the entire report to be fabricated, combatting misinformation distributed through the community. The Illawarra Flame was featured on Media Watch for its role in uncovering the truth.

Whale of a tale proves to be fake news

Genevieve Swart

Oct 11 2023



Photo: Amanda De George

Emergent newsroom support

LINA urges the Commonwealth to provide operational support for news business start-ups, tapering across the first three years of operation. A significant barrier to addressing news deserts and increasing media diversity exists in a lack of wage support to allow businesses to launch successfully, with many operators hamstrung by attempting to operate news businesses outside alternative paid employment.

A state-funded support program to sponsor start-up news publishers could look like 20 x \$150,000 per annum grants supporting publishers with an identified market gap community and a developed business plan while audience and revenue development is underway to increase their opportunity to achieve sustainability. Such a program could be administered by the Department of Communications, or by LINA if preferred as per the example below.

Item	No of businesses	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Start-up group 1 – Year 1	20	\$3,000,000	\$2,000,000	\$1,500,000
Cohort 2 – Year 2	15	-	\$2,250,000	\$1,500,000
Cohort 3 – Year 3	10	-	-	\$1,500,000
Totals	45	\$3,000,000	\$4,250,000	\$4,500,000

Workforce development program

LINA is developing a pathways program to support emerging journalists into sustainable roles with news entrepreneurship training support in partnership with universities, digital publishers and other community media partners. An itemised budget is available for this project on request.

Item	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Emerging journalist pathways program	\$150,670	\$621,500	\$652,000
Totals	\$150,670	\$621,500	\$652,000

Equipping citizens with the necessary skills and awareness to be responsible producers and consumers of content and supporting fact-based, rigorous, and independent journalism are key elements of building sound media and information environments. Media diversity, particularly at the local level, has suffered with the rise of social media platforms and the related decline in advertising revenues, whereas clickbait and sensationalistic reporting has grown (Matasick, Alfonsi and Bellantoni, 2020). This trend aggravates the vulnerability of the information ecosystem and undermines an essential avenue for trustworthy news and government accountability.

- OECD Public Governance Policy Papers N30, Good Practice Principles for Public Communication Responses to Mis- and Disinformation. OECD. 2022

Policy support requirements

LINA is pleased to acknowledge the Commonwealth's focus on establishing complementary and joined-up news media policy interventions through the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP). LINA encourages the government to allocate budget to the immediate delivery of programs and supports associated with the News MAP and to ensure any availability of funding associated with the News MAP is available to small news publishers distributing public interest news online.

In addition to a budget allocation, on behalf of its members LINA seeks the following policy and legislative actions from Government:

A pathway to DGR eligibility

Community-based digital newsrooms in Australia are disincentivised from establishing themselves as not-for-profits and/or charitable organisations by a lack of recognition for public interest news services as a public good. LINA encourages the government to enable the development of a not-for-profit news sector in Australia, following successful international examples. The U.S., France, Tunisia, Lebanon, Colombia, Indonesia and Canada (to name a few examples) have implemented varying tax credits and concessions to support donations from both the philanthropic sector and individuals supporting public interest journalism.

In the U.S. where journalism is recognised as a public good attracting tax deductibility for donors, the industry has been highly successful in drawing philanthropic support. The Institute for Non-Profit News runs an annual NewsMatch program pairing gifts from community members with family, local and national foundations. The program has raised \$227 million since 2016.

In February 2023, LINA sent a response to the Treasury's draft DGR Registers Reform requesting the introduction of public interest journalism to the Charities Act with an aligned DGR category to support donations from individuals and philanthropists to local news services. The Future Foundations for Giving Draft Report was released in November 2023 which included a recommendation to create a DGR category for public interest journalism. LINA urges the government to act on that recommendation quickly.

Government advertising support

Many academics, industry bodies and stakeholders have recommended allocating a share of the nearly \$450 million spent in government advertising annually to local news organisations. While this can be undertaken through contracts between governments and media buying agencies, these actions are easily reversed or changed during contract negotiation or changes in government. LINA suggests a ratio of government spend should be legislated to provide media-term support to news organisations and ensure audiences are receiving key information from governments at all levels.

LINA members are well placed to deliver call-to-action campaigns, but also to keep communities informed of non-campaign announcements such as community consultations, road closures, recruitment, meetings and events which Governments are required to communicate broadly to residents. A legislated percentage of government advertising spend would:

- a) Increase return-on-investment for government campaign spends through reaching a broader audience;
- b) Incentivise government media buying agencies to familiarise themselves with local media outlets;
- c) Increase transparency and engagement with local Council activities; and
- d) Increase sustainability and engagement with local newsrooms.

Similar arrangements in New York and Chicago, where State governments signed Executive Orders to boost advertising spend through community media organisations (including print and digital publications, television, and radio outlets) have resulted in a significant increase in local reporting. While Victoria and New South Wales have each committed advertising expenditure in print publications, the focus on print distribution leaves many reputable digital news providers without access to potential revenue and excludes digital audiences from Government messaging reach.

If applied at all levels of government, a requirement of 10% of all government media advertising to be spent on locally produced media outlets would be enough to shift the media landscape and better inform audiences.

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