



PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION 2026-27

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



The Local & Independent News Association (LINA) is a national industry association supporting over 100 local and independent digital news publishers, which collectively operate over 170 news services for communities in all Australian states and territories. LINA's role is to support the quality, accessibility, diversity and relevance of news by strengthening public interest journalism and building the capacity of these newsrooms. This work focuses on providing practical support for business development, newsroom operations, and revenue growth, and generating economies of scale across the collective of independent businesses.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Independent news media delivers a critical public service to Australian communities. The sector is undergoing an extended transition driven by audience migration to digital platforms, the subsequent collapse of traditional advertising revenue models, and increasing pressures toward content syndication. Risks presented by Artificial Intelligence are fuelling further challenges and the growing global threat of misinformation and disinformation.

This submission requests funding for the 2026-27 financial year to scale LINA's proven initiatives and implement new programs aligned with the objectives of the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP). A medium-term approach is necessary to facilitate a genuine industry transition.

The budget requests outlined in this submission seek to provide programs to support publishers in four key areas:

1. Capacity-building support for stronger public interest journalism
2. Growing revenue and diversifying income streams for greater business sustainability
3. Engaging new audiences and enhancing accessibility to meet the information needs of Australians
4. Reducing operational costs through shared services and technological adoptions

All programs are focused on building newsrooms' long-term capability and resilience, equipping them with the skills and systems to operate sustainably rather than relying on ongoing financial support.

LINA has engaged significantly with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts to inform grant and policy development and funding opportunities for the sector. Should it meet eligibility criteria, LINA intends to submit an application for funding of activities under the proposed News MAP's News Innovation Fund (NIF). However, the timing of the proposed competitive grant opportunity remains unconfirmed and LINA's current funding agreement ends on 30 June, 2026. Additionally, many of the activities within this Pre-Budget Submission are unlikely to fall under the scope of the NIF. As such, LINA urges the Treasury to support LINA's ongoing work for Australia's local and independent news sector, and efforts to build long-term sustainability for the not-for-profit organisation.

"Look up 'public interest journalism', and that definition explains the backbone of LINA's membership base. They are not high-flying businesspeople, or empire builders. **They are people who are genuinely engaged with their communities.** Large media organisations have a core group of experts to lean on - lawyers, accountants, HR, sales and editorial management teams. LINA provides the comfort of a similar support network, the knowledge that if something goes awry, there's a body of expertise ready and waiting to have your back. **If the growth of independent news outlets is a way of the future, this type of support will be critical to our existence."**

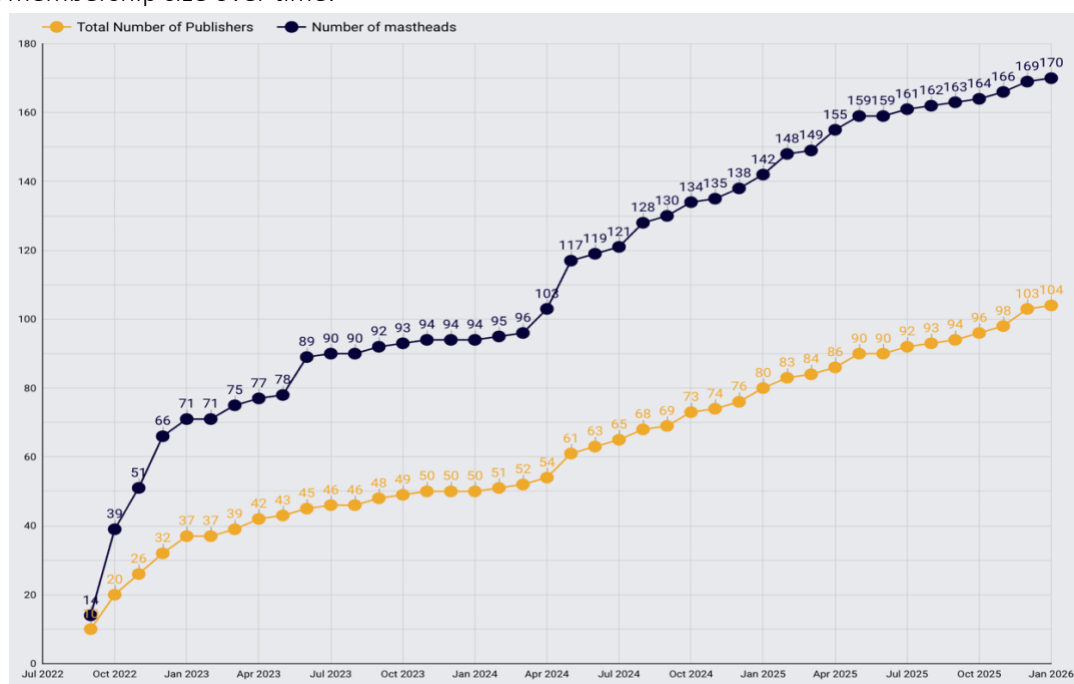
Simon Holt, Local News Publications

About LINA Members

LINA's members are locally owned and operated news publishers creating high quality public interest journalism that meets professional editorial standards. While the average LINA newsroom operates with a very small staff team, collectively members publish more than 10,000 stories each month and reach a cumulative total of over 12 million unique website visitors. Some of these newsrooms are legacy print publications which LINA is supporting through their transition to digital platforms, while many are digital-first publications formed by local community members to address news deserts and support social cohesion through greater media diversity. The median age of LINA member newsrooms is nine years of operation. All members must meet a set of eligibility requirements¹, ensuring they are producing high-quality public interest journalism that is produced independently by and for the community in which they operate.



LINA membership size over time:



¹ Local & Independent News Association. 2025. LINA Membership. <https://lina.org.au/membership/#hallmarks>

LINA's impact

Since LINA's launch there has been an acceleration in newsroom openings in Australia, with thirty-seven percent of LINA members formed since 2020. The Public Interest Journalism Initiative (PIJI) recorded the net contraction of newsroom closures also slowed significantly in 2023 and 2024, post LINA's emergence.

The following changes were recorded in the sustainability of LINA member publishers studied across the past three financial years:

- The median full-time equivalent staffing increased steadily from 1.2 in FY2023, to 1.7 in FY2024 and 2.0 in FY2025.
- The median revenue increased by 18% in FY2025.
- Average newsletter distribution size grew by 10% in FY2025.
- The median number of monthly website visitors almost doubled over two years between FY2023 to 2025.
- Fewer publishers identified as being in the "emerging" stage, with more identifying as being in phases of business growth or maturity.

While LINA is a relatively young organisation, the membership uptake since it opened for applications in September 2022 demonstrates significant demand for support services within this growing segment of the news media industry. LINA's vision is a sustainable news media industry offering diverse perspectives to the communities that publishers serve. As such, LINA's services are focused not on reinforcing legacy news models, but on helping newsrooms evolve to meet the information needs of communities, including transitioning business models, growing income streams and, most importantly, providing high quality public interest journalism. LINA has member satisfaction rate of 96%.

Timeline of Commonwealth funding for LINA to-date:

- September 2022: LINA accepts first member newsrooms.
- July 2023: Initial allocation of \$1.5 million received from Commonwealth.
- November 2024: Funding allocation of \$660,000
- August 2025: Funding allocation of \$2 million
- July 2026: LINA requests an allocation of \$3,682,000

LINA is working to reduce its reliance on Commonwealth funding as it becomes more established. In FY2024-25, Commonwealth grant funds represented 65% of LINA's total income, as compared with 90% in FY2023-24. Ninety per cent of funds requested will directly support newsrooms through subsidised programs, direct grants, program delivery and low membership fees, making LINA services and resources accessible to small and developing news publishers. LINA seeks slightly less than 10% of grant funds to cover operational costs.

Budget Request Summary

Total request = \$11,327,000 over three years

	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Capacity building	\$1,362,400	\$1,435,770	\$1,407,558
Revenue building	\$966,396	\$988,466	\$980,000
Audience growth	\$302,263	\$338,376	\$355,300
Reducing operational costs	\$668,959	\$702,388	\$657,143
LINA operational costs	\$361,982	\$380,000	\$400,000
TOTALS	\$3,682"	\$3,845"	\$3,800"

"Where to begin. **Without you guys I would have given up. The support is incredible.** The learnings amazing from our monthly experts. This past year I have gained a huge benefit, which is helping me feel more positive about the advertising future with options thanks to [LINA's tech support]. The entire LINA community makes me feel not alone."

Susie Williams, Fleurieu App

BUDGET ITEM DETAILS

Capacity-building for public interest journalism

LINA aims to strengthen quality public interest journalism, ensuring Australian audiences are served with original and accessible high-quality and locally relevant reporting. This is vital for combatting misinformation and disinformation, fostering civic engagement and public debate, and facilitating community connection and social cohesion.

LINA provides publishers with access to training events, resources, tip sheets, templates and 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 2024-25, such as:

- Tailored education resources on media law, creating content remotely, digital content marketing and multimedia content production;
- Facilitating shared learnings and content collaborations between newsrooms and editorial staff;
- Regular online 'shop-talk' sessions that provide facilitated networking opportunities and guest speaker presentations on journalism best-practice. Examples include emergency reporting, solutions/constructive journalism, and responsible reporting on mental health;
- Access to regularly updated and new guides, templates and training videos;
- Invitations to training and networking events;
- Coordination of an [annual industry summit/conference event](#). Last year's event hosted 51 different sessions in panel, workshop and keynote formats, for over 150 attendees;

- Developing resources and learning tools relating to data and AI journalism, solutions journalism and expanding investigative public interest journalism at a local level. For example LINA's [2025 AI in the Newsroom toolkit](#); and
- '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.

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

- Leading the expansion of internationally recognised training programmes in Australia;
- Establishing and administering an Emerging Newsrooms Program to support early-stage news organisations with small grants that address news deserts and improve capacity to produce public interest journalism. For example, supporting engagement of freelance journalists to deliver investigative reporting while building capacity to engage permanent journalist employees. These newsrooms are not yet eligible for direct support under the News Media Assistance Program and need guidance and mentoring to establish professional news services for underserved communities.

Budget requirements for these capacity building activities include:

Item	2026-27
Salaries & wages	\$147,628
Operational expenses	\$9,772
Emerging newsrooms program (management & grants)	\$1,065,000
Micro-grants (50%)	\$25,000
2027 Summit – Penrith TBC	\$60,000
Emerging journalists pathways program (Project Manager)	\$45,000
Training & upskilling	\$10,000
Totals	\$1,362,400

“Public interest journalism is essential to a democracy. Active citizenship requires access to reliable information, and democracy cannot flourish without a diversity of media sources and a regulatory regime that protects consumers against the spread of information.”

Senate Environment and Communication References Committee, Media Diversity in Australia report, 2021

Revenue growth and business development

Outlets that spend a significant portion of their total budget on revenue generation (including fundraising) typically report higher total median earnings, while outlets that spend less, earn less². This highlights the challenging cyclical nature of news revenue and uneven playing field between established outlets and small newsrooms and new startups. Expanding and diversifying revenue streams is critical for the long-term viability of news organisation, and LINA seeks to address this paradox through its ongoing programs, which include:

- Annual cohorts of 10-15 newsrooms participating in a subsidised structured Revenue and Sustainability Growth Program, with one-to-one coaching from an industry expert;
- Collective advertising sales representation;
- Coordination of the third annual collective fundraising campaign Our News. Your Voice³, including digital campaign education and assets for publishers. This campaign builds on the success of previous years: in 2025 over 1,500 community members contributed to the week-long donation drive (93% first-time donors), raising over \$131,000 for 32 newsrooms. Over 600 donors committed to ongoing monthly or annual donations, providing ongoing revenue stream for publishers.
- Regular development of resources focused on revenue generation, expanding technical knowledge and best-practice business management skills;
- Engagement of a philanthropy support contractor to bring new revenue into the industry;
- Media kit templates and guides to sales best-practice;
- Information on grant and training opportunities, and direct support for applications;
- Representation and engagement with philanthropic funding bodies; and
- Continued development of the LINA NewsREAM widget/website plug-in (for sales of ad listings to real estate and other advertisers).

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

- Media kit audits to review each LINA members media kit and update/optimize based on industry best practice;
- Shared representation and legal support for engagement with the News Bargaining Incentive, enabling smaller publishers the opportunity to engage in commercial deals with tech platforms (from which they were previously excluded) under a collective bargaining arrangement.
- Blue Engine Cohorts: working with Blue Engine Collaborative (US), running focus-group cohorts to support newsrooms through five programs focused on these key areas: implementation of sustainability audit recommendations; expanding marketing for engagement; understanding audience to boost engagement (analytics, surveying and community listening); developing boards and advisory groups (engagement); and geographic or product expansion. LINA estimates participation from 10 publishers in each cohort, with learnings shared across the LINA membership group.

² Institute for Nonprofit News, 2024 INN Index <https://inn.org/research/inn-index/index-2024/revenue-expenses/>

³ Local & Independent News Association. 2025. Our News. Your Voice: Collective fundraising. <https://lina.org.au/our-news-your-voice/>

- Level Up coaching program: LINA will establish a direct booking system for publishers to access mentor and coaching expertise with packaged programs to guide expectations and hours. The service will be available to the whole industry and at a subsidised rate for LINA members.

Budget requirements for this revenue growth support include:

Item	2026-27
Salaries & wages	\$121,192
Operational expenses	\$9,772
Media Kit audits	\$20,000
Collective Fundraising Campaign	\$45,000
Advertising revenue development	\$185,432
News Bargaining Incentive engagement	\$100,000
Blue Engine Cohorts (x5)	\$250,000
Revenue Growth Program	\$75,000
Level Up Coaching Program (management & subsidies)	\$100,000
Philanthropy support contract	\$60,000
Totals	\$966,396

Engaging new audiences

Australians say that they are interested in local news above all other topics⁴. 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. Newsrooms require support not only to engage new audiences, but transition away from reliance on third-party digital platforms, such as social media, to reach these news consumers. These platforms can be critical for building audiences and brand awareness, particularly for emerging newsrooms, but they have also constrained news visibility and subject users to opaque algorithms and fraught and unstable connections with their communities.

Much like revenue streams, to have long-term sustainability newsrooms must diversify their distribution methods, news products and audience connections. Further, access to relevant information must be enhanced for diverse groups and in news deserts. LINA's ongoing programs to support audience engagement include:

- Training and resources for multimedia content creation and delivery, including video and audio journalism;
- Training and guides to support social media best-practice for building audience and brand awareness, while also transitioning audiences onto other platforms less susceptible to disruption from tech/algorithmic changes, for example newsletters and apps;

⁴ University of Canberra. Digital News Report: Australia 2025.
<https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/centres/nmrc/digital-news-report-australia>

- Website development support, including assistance for print publications making digital transitions;
- Guides, training and on-demand support for news product development and distribution diversification. For example, LINA’s 2025 Newsletter Growth Kit;
- Content production support, such as LINA’s Micro-grant program, which is scalable to increase the representation of diverse perspectives and storytelling in news reporting. Micro-grants to news publishers bolster investigative journalism content and increased focus on stories that identify and address misinformation and disinformation on a place-based basis in local communities; and
- Direct support to news organisations to nominate for Australian and international awards and recognition opportunities to build the profile of quality, independent journalism in Australia.
- Site-monitoring service to alert LINA technical support team to website crashes or other IT issues and help stabilise web services.

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

- Support transitions in audience discovery (SEO to AI overviews); and
- Improve design features for news sites, including audience usability and accessibility (including for CALD audiences and people with disabilities).

Budget requirements for this audience building support include:

Item	2026-27
Salaries & wages	\$181,991
Operational expenses	\$40,272
Site monitoring service	\$5,000
Micro-grants (50%)	\$25,000
Tech support for advertising revenue project	\$50,000
Totals	\$302,263

“There is no doubt that LINA is helping to sustain a diverse news media ecosystem. The work of LINA and its members is vital to the communities they serve and what brings us together.”

The Hon Michelle Rowland MP, Former Minister for Communications

Reducing operational costs

One of LINA’s core functions is to generate economies of scale across independent businesses, saving news publishers money and time by leveraging shared services. Support for implementing new technological solutions and strategies can further reduce operational costs for news businesses, allowing revenue to be redirected into investments in business development and public interest journalism.

LINA's ongoing programs that reduce newsroom operational expenses include:

- Leading industry and stakeholder partnerships to gain discounted, group-rate access to services such as defamation and cyber-security insurance, newsletter distribution tools, conferences and events, access to design tools, memberships and subscriptions at significantly reduced costs.
- Centralised HR support for small news businesses;
- Specialised IT and technical support for websites and other newsroom operations, for example CRM platforms;
- Stakeholder partnerships across the industry and its suppliers to offer discounted access to services for news publishers (such as design tools, insurance packages, newsletter distribution platforms etc.), shared learnings and resources not available to newsrooms individually;
- Coordinating pro bono legal partners for specialist media law advice;
- Providing centralised sub-editing functions and building capacity in this specialised skillset;
- Supporting access to and best-practice use of design and software tools, through partnerships; and
- Developing and managing technical platforms to enable increased advertising revenue (e.g. display, listing, video) to publishers.

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

- Shared accounting and bookkeeping services for publishers;
- Negotiate further discount rates on other software licenses, equipment suppliers, digital design and tools;
- Develop and implement technical innovations to streamline platform support for group advertising revenue for publishers; and
- A Media Career Pathways program, supporting newsrooms to onboard and train key roles (including journalists) in response to industry recruitment challenges, particularly in regional locations, and grow these into sustainable roles through news entrepreneurship training.

Budget requirements for this support to reduce operational costs include:

Item	2026-27
Salaries & wages	\$78,187
Operational expenses	\$20,772
Emerging journalists pathways program (salary subsidies)	\$300,000
Tech platform infrastructure for revenue growth	\$195,000
Accounting & bookkeeping services	\$30,000
HR Services	\$30,000
Tech platform subsidies	\$15,000
Totals	\$668,959

LINA 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.

Operational support for LINA enables:

- Representation of digital news publishers in policy, research and industry forums;
- Contribution to the administrative expenses enabling program delivery;
- Collecting and sharing available data with policy-makers to help inform policy design, including continued data contribution to the ACMA's Media Diversity Measurement Framework and directly to department staff and the Minister for Communications; and
- Engagement with industry bodies, public institutions and comparable publishers in other countries to help inform continued leadership in shaping the global response, maintaining strong connections with global counterparts to understand best practice, industry and audience trends and emerging technologies.

Budget requirements for operational support include:

Item	2026-27
Salaries & wages	\$214,214
Subscriptions & IT licenses	\$20,000
Phone & internet	\$4,500
Small equipment	\$1,000
Workspace rental	\$5,772
Professional development and event attendance	\$2,500
Service support & legal expenses	\$50,000
Auditing	\$10,000
Travel & meeting expenses	\$30,000
Website & hosting fees	\$1,000
Promotion & marketing (incl. design)	\$15,0000
Other administration costs and utilities	\$8,000
Totals	\$361,968

"LINA is fantastic. **It is the best and fairest way to financial support independent news in Australia.** Plus, it provides invaluable moral support for good journalism."

Genevieve Swart, *Illawarra Flame*

POLICY SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS

LINA acknowledges the Commonwealth's focus on establishing complementary and joined-up news media policy interventions through the News Media Assistance Program (News MAP). In addition to a budget allocation, on behalf of its members LINA seeks the following policy and legislative actions from Government to form a pathway to increased sustainability for local and independent news publishers:

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 act on the recommendations of the Future foundations for giving philanthropy inquiry report⁵ and expand deductible gift recipient (DGR) status eligibility to include public interest journalism. This would enable the development of a not-for-profit news sector in Australia, following successful international examples⁶.

Government advertising support

LINA suggests government legislate a ratio of the nearly \$450 million spent in government advertising annually be expended on locally produced, community-focused media services publishing public interest journalism in both regional and metropolitan locations. This would allow government to reach a broader and more diverse audience group with messaging via trusted local news sources, while also supporting independent publishers. Audiences have increasingly transitioned to online platforms, and the government's News MAP (2024) policy principles outline a platform neutral approach. Therefore, this advertising budget must include allocation to digital publications. A flexible approach across platforms would allow government media buyers to schedule advertising in locally produced print, radio, digital and/or video formats on a place-based basis across all government portfolio messages. The commitment should be legislated to ensure continuity.

Public notices

LINA seeks to have the Local Government Acts of the various states and territories updated so that governments are required to publish public notices within local news services (where one exists) on a platform-neutral basis. This change would support increased government transparency and civic engagement with local decision-making and support consultation processes within local communities.

Grant eligibility

Government grant programs should be expanded to include eligibility for local and independent newsrooms, both regional and metro, wherever relevant. This includes the areas of small business, workforce development, emergency preparation and response, multicultural communities, social cohesion programs and technical innovation. Eligibility should be platform-neutral and defined by content production, rather than income, employment or other financial thresholds.

⁵ Productivity Commission. 2024. Future foundations for giving. <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries-and-research/philanthropy/report/>

⁶ Local & Independent News Association. 2025. Pre-Budget Submission, page 26. <https://lina.org.au/2025/02/13/pre-budget-submission-2025/>

CONCLUSION

In less than four years LINA has had significant impact supporting the work and sustainability of an industry critical to democracy, community connection and the health and livelihoods of Australians. To continue delivering and expanding its suite of services and resources for over 170 independent and local newsrooms, LINA requests funding of \$11,327,000 over three years, which includes \$3,682,000 for FY2026-27.

LINA's current funding contract concludes on 30th June 2025. While LINA has increased its self-generated revenue, government investment in LINA from 1st July 2026 is crucial to meet the urgency of the news industry crisis in Australia and provide reliable information services, particularly to underserved communities. LINA encourages the Treasury to make a direct funding allocation from the News MAP envelope and/or other relevant programs as there is no grant program opportunity available to apply to for this essential support currently.

Funded programs are to be fully aligned with the priorities of the News Media Assistance Program, while also supporting the work of other government portfolios and priorities, including emergency management and recovery, multicultural affairs and social cohesion, remote, regional and indigenous communities, small businesses and health. LINA welcomes investment from the Australian Treasury and encourages government to consider additional policy mechanisms summarised in this document, for the benefit of Australian communities.

“[LINA] is brilliant. We struggled for 10 years before LINA started. We now feel there is light at the end of the tunnel with LINA support and interaction with our office. **No LINA, no local news in small communities.**”

Sam Cullen, *Newsport*