



Summary Report

LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

**A SYMPOSIUM ON INCUBATING LOCAL NEWS IN
THE MARITIMES**

June 14, 2025
Mount Allison University
Libraries & Archives

bringbacklocalnews.ca





LOCAL NEWS MATTERS



How can we save local news coverage in the Maritimes? That's the question roughly 70 journalists, community leaders, media experts and citizens aimed to answer on June 14, 2025 at the Local News Matters symposium in Sackville, NB.

The event was part of the Canadian Association of Journalists' CAJ Unplugged event series, and brought participants together to talk about what communities need from their news, how new local projects are serving their communities, and what needs to be done to seed the growth of local news projects.

The symposium featured panellists from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and PEI, and beyond, ending with a workshop to help participants determine actions and next steps to bring back local news. That session produced calls for a variety of actions and next steps, and an acknowledgement of the need to gather again for further discussion.

Organizers propose the formation of two networking groups to gather in January 2026 to consider this report and decide on further actions. Those groups would be:

1. **Independent Local News Publishers & Reporters** (to share best practices, support each other, collaborate, develop policies)
2. **Friends of Local News** (to advocate, develop policy, and raise funds)



Symposium Objectives



Keynote speaker April Lindgren

- Bring together journalists, citizens, experts and community leaders from across the Maritimes to talk about the state of local news
- Understand what communities need and want from local news
- Showcase some successful examples of local news outlets; explore what makes them work

- Identify tools and resources that exist for local news outlets or for local news start-ups
- Provide a networking opportunity for local news professionals and interested citizens in the Maritimes
- Identify concrete actions that can be taken to strengthen local news



Meet & greet at Sackville's Bagtown Brewery



Summary of Sessions

Keynote: April Lindgren



Longtime journalist April Lindgren has documented the disappearance of community news outlets across Canada through the Local News Research Project. Lindgren provided a valuable overview of the state of local news across Canada, highlighting a net loss of local news outlets in 329 communities since 2008.

Lindgren said smaller, poorer communities have been disproportionately affected by the closures, and in many places, local coverage no longer exists.

Municipal governments are also feeling the impacts as they struggle to get their messages out without the aid of local media, she said.

Lindgren pointed to some examples where municipalities have helped fund local news, but acknowledges this is not a perfect model, and that outlets need to earn this kind of financial support by producing content that really matters to their communities.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Panel 1

What do communities need from local news?



Panellists L-R:
Paul MacNeill,
Jo-Ann Roberts,
Marcel Parker-
Gallant,
Darrell Cole

Paul MacNeill (publisher, Eastern Graphic and associated Island Press newspapers on PEI)

- Strong local papers survive by being relevant, independent, and rooted in their communities.
- Emphasized “boots on the ground” journalism.
- Quoted his father (founder of the Eastern Graphic, Jim MacNeill): “A good community paper covers its community, warts and all.”
- Key values for local papers: autonomy, accountability, trust, personality.
- Corporate media may be dying, but independent print can still thrive if relevant

Jo-Ann Roberts (author and former CBC journalist)

- Praised the Eastern Graphic as a model for community journalism.
- Trained journalists are still needed, even as citizen journalism grows on social media.
- Media literacy education is vital to help the public discern reliable sources.
- Called for CBC to archive its local journalism and offer a platform to local, non-CBC reporters.
- Newsletters in place of local journalism can create silos rather than serve broader community interests and goals.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Panel 1 cont. – What do communities need...

Marcel Parker-Gallant (assistant GM, Radio Beauséjour)

- Community radio thrives when content is locally relevant — call-in participation drops when topics drift from local issues.
- Listeners want to be seen and recognized, including getting names and pronouns right in local news coverage.
- Interactive formats and personal connection are key to good community broadcasting.
- Local media need to be aware of the need to serve different generations with information that resonates with them.

Darrell Cole (former Amherst News reporter)

- Corporate takeovers of Amherst, NS and Sackville, NB newspapers by Transcon and then Saltwire meant staffing dropped from approx. 50 or 60 to two people by 2017.
- Newspaper revenues are affected by big-box stores: Small, mom and pop businesses bought ads, but were replaced by big-box stores that do not advertise in local papers.
- Young people now get news via phones and social media, not newspapers.
- Highlighted the historical role of local papers as the “heartbeat” of the community.

Panel 2

What are you doing and how are you doing it?

Maureen Googoo (Kukukwes.com)

- Frustrated with mainstream media’s neglect of Indigenous stories.
- Launched her site in 2015 after earning an MA in digital media from Columbia; funded initial work through E.I. and Patreon.
- Defines success as being able to pay her rent and utilities while having money to pay for gas to get out and cover stories.
- Stories offer perspectives on important issues that Indigenous readers want.
- Co-founded the Indigenous Media Association of Canada (IMAC) to support Indigenous journalists.

Larry Lynch (Miramichi Online)

- Founded site after the collapse of the forestry sector; has had a paywall since 2013.
- Between 9,000–10,000 unique subscribers from Miramichi and expats.
- Facing challenges from Facebook’s limitations, so built a custom news app.
- Concerned with long-term sustainability and succession planning.
- Majority of readers are older; harder to attract younger audiences.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Panel 2 cont. – What are you doing / how are you doing it?



Panelists L-R: Maureen Googoo, Larry Lynch, Vicki Hogarth, David Gordon Koch, Theresa Blackburn

Vicki Hogarth (CHCO-TV & Saint Croix Courier)

- Returned from Toronto to find a thriving non-profit TV station funded by community bingo.
- Station run by local volunteers, including youth (teenagers operate the control room).
- COVID daily briefings grew their online presence—30,000 daily followers in a town of 3,000.
- Meta (Facebook) news block led to migration to their website; retained 20,000 followers.
- Rescued St. Croix Courier (est. 1865).
- Covers four municipal council meetings regularly.
- Emphasizes youth engagement through co-op placements and digital content creation.

David Gordon Koch (NB Media Co-op & St. Thomas University)

- NB Media Co-op is volunteer-run and also receives Local Journalism Initiative (LJI) funding; close to 25,000 monthly web visits.
- Supported by unions and specializes in fact-based journalism rooted in social justice movements.
- Works with anti-poverty and disability rights groups to help them represent themselves.
- Published on underreported topics (e.g., union opposition to arms shipments to Israel and stories submitted by Elsipogtog students).
- Part of Unrigged.ca, a coalition of independent news outlets sharing content and ideas.

Theresa Blackburn (River Valley Sun)

- Publishes 6,000 free print papers monthly (24 pages), covering six municipalities as well as daily, online news.
- \$102,000 in ad revenue; \$3,000 in donations; relies on LJI and Google media funds.
- Handles nearly all operational roles herself—editor, designer, ad sales, delivery, etc.
- Started with \$5,000 inheritance; no physical office—operates from her basement.
- Believes print is still crucial: advertisers prefer it and local readers engage with it.
- Says free papers are necessary because people won't pay for news.
- Argues good content—not just sales—is key to sustaining community journalism.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Panel 3

Tools & resources for existing & new outlets



Panellists L-R: April Lindgren (Local News Research Project), Ariel Freiman (rural news strategist), Tim Bousquet (editor & publisher of Halifax Examiner), Terra Tailleir (professor of digital journalism and business of journalism, University of King's College)

Foundational Models and Funding:

- Tim Bousquet launched the Halifax Examiner using personal savings; now a half-million-dollar operation with six staff, three regular freelancers and about 3,000 paying subscribers.
- Stresses the importance of paying staff and contributors well and producing good journalism.
- Ariel Freiman is developing Freiman Media to serve rural and remote communities with publishing tools and ideas for diversified revenues.

Audience and Value Proposition:

- Terra Tailleir stresses knowing your niche: "You can't be everything to everyone."
- Outlets must ask: What value are we creating? Who is it for?
- Community engagement (e.g., live events) builds support and trust, helping to convert audiences into paying supporters.

Journalism and Publishing Tools:

- Freiman emphasizes investing in publishing tools and archiving, especially as traditional ad revenue declines.
- Preserve journalism for future generations by planning for story archiving.



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Panel 3 cont. – Tools / resources for existing & new outlets

AI and Emerging Technologies:

- April Lindgren's team is experimenting with AI tools (e.g., summaries, transparency in usage) to support under-resourced newsrooms.
- Caution urged: AI should be transparent, include human oversight, and be disclosed to readers.
- Bousquet warns about AI-generated content and government-subsidized “crappy media,” potentially eroding public trust.

News Literacy and Education:

- Tailleir underscores the importance of news literacy education, drawing on successful Scandinavian models.
- Encouraging media literacy from elementary school onward correlates with higher trust and stronger local journalism.

Partnerships and Collaboration:

- Tailleir and Lindgren promote partnering with academics to experiment, train, and share innovations.
- Lindgren suggests collaboration between CBC and local outlets—starting small and building trust is key.
- Relationship-building is essential to sustainable partnerships between outlets.

Training and Mentorship:

- Tailleir laments the loss of institutional knowledge from retired journalists.
- Emphasizes the need for mentorship and support for young journalists, who often report solo with limited guidance.

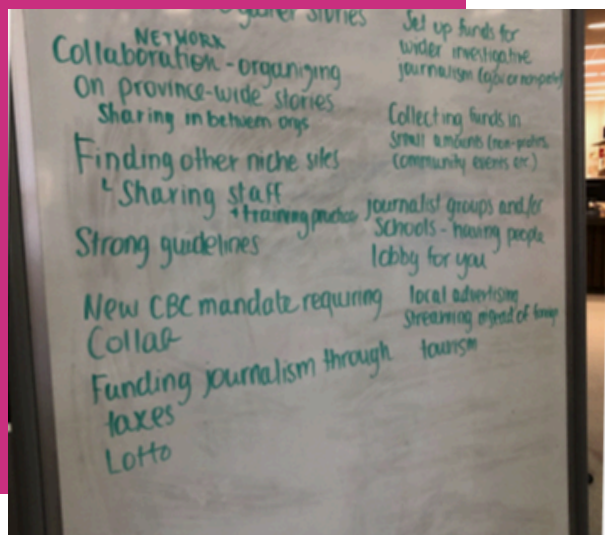




LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Facilitated Session: What's next / needed?

Annika Chiasson led participants in a facilitated “so what” discussion. She asked participants to break into groups and discuss the three questions below.



1

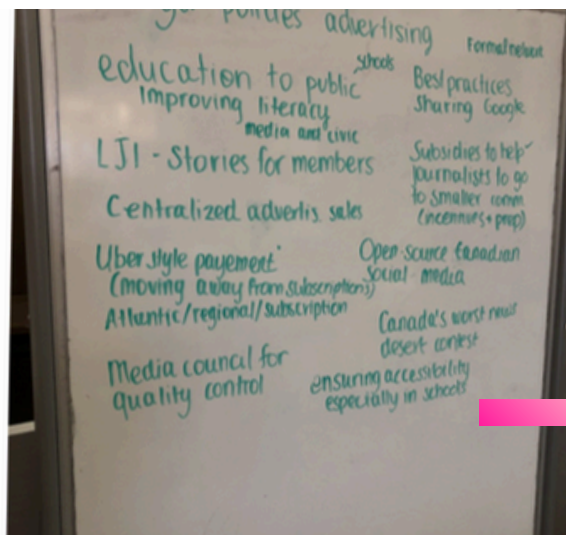
Where do you see opportunities for action—big or small—that could support or revive local news?

2

What roles can individuals, organizations, governments or communities play in these actions?

3

What is needed to make these actions happen?



Participants raised the following points and ideas:

- “Door to door” journalism to gather story ideas and support for local news
- Collaboration (NETWORK) on province-wide stories, sharing between indy organizations
- Finding other niche sites, sharing staff and training practices
- Develop and share strong journalistic guidelines
- Lobby for new CBC mandate requiring them to collaborate with local outlets
- Funding journalism through taxes
- Funding through lotto



LOCAL NEWS MATTERS

Facilitated Session: What's next / needed? cont.

Participants' ideas cont.

- Set up a fund for wider investigative journalism projects (gov or non-profit)
- Collecting funds in small amounts (non-profits, community events, etc.)
- Journalist groups and schools, having people lobby for you
- Local advertising in streaming (instead of foreign)
- Government policies re: local advertising quotas
- Education to public schools, improving media and civic literacy
- LJI stories for members
- Collaboration: centralized advertising sales
- Uber-style, clearing-house-type payment system (moving away from individual piecemeal subscriptions)
- Atlantic or regional subscription system
- Media council for quality control
- Formal network
- Best practices sharing
- Subsidies to help journalists go to smaller communities (incentives and preparation)
- Open source Canadian social media
- Canada's worst news desert contest
- Ensuring accessibility of news media, especially in schools

Metrics

- We expected around 50 participants and ended up with about 70
- Participants included a range of journalists, citizens, academics and students
- Local news outlets from rural and urban NB, NS and PEI represented
- Local Tantramar MLA Megan Mitton was present for parts of the event, as were several other community leaders
- Networking: participants had opportunities to mingle and form new connections
- Facilitated "so what" session: identified potential next steps and actions to revive local news
- Positive comments from participants
- News coverage of the event from various media outlets (see next page)



News coverage

- Bousquet, T. (2025, June 16). Morning file: Here's what I think of Halifax Examiner readers. *Halifax Examiner*. <https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/morning-file/heres-what-i-think-of-halifax-examiner-readers/>
- Dupuis, J. & Lord-Giroux, X. (2025, June 15). Des citoyens inquiets l'avenir des medias locaux en mode solution a Sackville. *Radio Canada*. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/2172156/journalisme-sackville-medias-locaux>
- Elliott, W. (2025, June 25). Wendy Elliott: Local news does matter. *Annapolis Valley Register*. <https://www.saltwire.com/nova-scotia/annapolis-valley/wendy-elliott-local-news-does-matter>
- New Brunswick Media Co-op. (2025, June 14). Local news matters – Incubating local news in the Maritimes [Video]. <https://nbmediacoop.org/2025/06/14/livestream-local-news-matters-incubating-local-news-in-the-maritimes-video/>
- Telejournal Acadie. (2025, June 14). Des citoyens inquiets l'avenir des medias locaux en mode solution a Sackville [Video]. *Radio Canada*. <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/info/videos/1-10405313/citoyens-inquiets-pour-avenir-medias-locaux-en-mode-solution-a-sackville>
- Wark, B. (2025, June 16). Local news matters, but 'these are desperate times,' says journalism researcher. *The New Wark Times*. <https://warktimes.com/2025/06/16/local-news-matters-but-these-are-desperate-times-says-journalism-researcher/>
- Wark, B. (2025, July 11). 'Warts and all,' the need for community-based journalism. *The New Wark Times*. <https://warktimes.com/2025/07/11/warts-and-all-the-need-for-community-based-journalism/>





What's next?



The Local News Matters symposium was the beginning of what we hope is an ongoing network and conversation about how to ensure local news survives and thrives. Next step: Development of two possible networking groups to meet two to four times yearly to discuss shared practices, ideas, and projects.

1. Independent local news publishers and reporters
2. Friends of Local News (advocacy, policy development, and fundraising)

These groups can then discuss whether to host a second symposium or other initiatives.

Thank you to everyone who made the Local News Matters symposium happen: To our panellists for generously donating their time and expertise; to our sponsors for donating funds and merchandise; and to participants who travelled across NS, NB and PEI to attend and make the event meaningful.

Symposium organizers,
Erica Butler, journalist
Mira Dietz Chiasson, journalist
Laura Landon, teaching & research librarian,
Mount Allison University Libraries & Archives

October 26, 2025

