



## NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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### **Virginians See Local Newspapers as Most-Trusted Source of News**

*Just-released survey of 6,000+ Virginians reveals attitudes toward news outlets*

**Richmond, Va., June 6, 2022** – Despite a challenging fiscal environment and changing demographics, local newspapers are the most trusted and useful sources of news among readers of Virginia newspapers and the general public, according to one of the largest research studies into attitudes about the news media in the commonwealth.

*A Quantitative Look at Attitudes Toward Virginia’s Newspapers*, a comprehensive survey of more than 6,400 Virginia adults, found that three in four readers of Virginia newspapers (75%) regard local newspapers as useful sources of news, besting TV/radio news (71%), national newspapers (69%) and other outlets. At the same time, almost two-thirds (63%) of Virginia readers rank local newspapers as the most trusted news source among all kinds of news outlets.

“The news media has undergone a seismic shift over the past quarter-century, but through it all there has been one notable constant: the trust in local newspapers among a vast majority of Virginians,” said Betsy Edwards, executive director of the Virginia Press Association, which retained Richmond-based SIR to undertake the broad-ranging research. “Virginia’s newspapers have quietly pivoted to new revenue models and harnessed digital resources, all while objectively serving local communities with facts, information and insights.”

Among other key findings from the study:

#### *Trustworthiness*

- While 63% of readers of Virginia newspapers find local newspapers trustworthy, only 50% of the general public does. Those figures are higher than the trustworthiness percentages among other categories of news outlets such as podcasts (13%) and social media sites (4%) as ranked by Virginia news readers.

- 92% of Virginia news readers and 75% of the general public believe local news is a vital source for keeping citizens informed about their local community. Similarly, 90% of Virginia readers and 73% of the public agree that local newspapers keep elected officials accountable.

### *Community Engagement*

- More than four in five Virginia news readers see local newspapers as a necessary part of the fabric of the community, a finding that ranges from 84% among urban/suburban weeklies to 89% among small/rural dailies.
- While 90+% of local news readers look to local newspapers as a general source of “local news,” the percentages dip when it comes to coverage of “local politics” (28%-51%, depending on the category of paper) and “local business” (36%-46%, depending on the paper category).

### *Performance*

- The high levels of trust and engagement are not reflected in more specific questions related to transparency and fairness, particularly among readers of small/rural dailies where only 53% said reporting is accurate, 43% thought coverage is transparent and 38% believe that papers cover all sides fairly.
- About three in five (58%) of Virginia news readers believe that local newspapers reflect the diverse viewpoints, stories and individuals in the local community, while 43% think that the local papers represent people like them and 36% say they have a lot of influence in the community.

### *Subscription Rates*

- 77% of Virginia news readers subscribe to a local newspaper vs. 26% of the general public. The single biggest reason cited for not subscribing is the availability of free local news, a rationale given by 42% of the general public and 50% of Virginia news readers.

### *Use of Mobile Devices*

- One in two (54%) of the general public say that it’s easy to read news on their mobile device compared to just 43% of Virginia news readers.

“While the research results underscore the vital role that newspapers play in their communities and in a democracy in general, it also exposed some areas where the public believes newspapers can do better,” Edwards said. “These are important findings as local newspapers continue to find ways to fulfill their mission in a way that provides value to their readers.”

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## **Methodology**

An online survey was developed for two comparative groups: (1) the general public, a group of 1,444 Virginia adults who read the news at least weekly as identified and recruited from SIR's online survey panel providers; and (2) 5,014 readers of Virginia newspapers whose email addresses were provided by many of the 108 VPA member publications. The surveys were conducted in summer 2021.

### **About SIR**

SIR was founded in 1964 as the Southeastern Institute of Research, making it one of the longest-tenured market research-based strategic consultancies in the country. Throughout its history, SIR has conducted more than 16,000 research studies and has supported many of America's leading companies including GE, Polaroid, Johnson & Johnson, Lincoln Financial, Google, AARP, the American Chemical Society, the Public Relations Society of America, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and hundreds of other Fortune 1,000 companies, national associations and nonprofit organizations. Based in Richmond for its entire history, SIR has also been privileged to serve a variety of state agencies, municipalities, and organizations working to serve and advance the Commonwealth of Virginia.

### **About VPA**

Founded in 1881, the Virginia Press Association supports the common interests of Virginia newspapers and the ideals of a free press in a democratic society. The VPA represents more than 170 member publications, from large daily metropolitan newspapers to small rural weeklies to specialty publications throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information, visit [www.vpa.net](http://www.vpa.net).

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