

vadogwood.com

A site covering Virginia politics from an undisclosed, partisan Democratic perspective that does not acknowledge that it is funded by Acronym, a liberal nonprofit.

Ownership and Financing

VADogwood.com, which is named after Virginia's state tree and flower, says it is owned by the privately held For What It's Worth Media, Inc. "We tell you the news you want to know," the company states on its website. "We produce original content focused on everyday Americans and the issues that matter to them." However, no information about who controls For What It's Worth Media is provided on either VADogwood.com or on the company's website, and NewsGuard could not find a company registered under that name in the U.S. or elsewhere.

Acronym, a progressive nonprofit, said in July 2019 that it would invest more than \$1 million in VADogwood.com over two years, according to news site Axios. Acronym states on its website that it is "focused on winning elections through innovative digital advertising and organizing programs." It earned nearly \$1.3 million in revenue in 2017, nearly all of which came from contributions and grants, according to the organization's IRS documents.

Tara McGowan, founder and CEO of Acronym, told Axios that Acronym is seeking to fill a void created by a decline in local news. She tweeted in July 2019 that Acronym had "started a nonprofit-owned media company to invest in local journalism" — presumably For What Its Worth Media.

In addition to VADogwood.com, Acronym has invested in for-profit companies including Shadow Inc., a political technology company, and Lockwood Strategy, a digital consulting firm that lists McGowan as the founder and CEO, Axios reported.

VADogwood.com does not run conventional advertising, although all of its content could be considered advertising secretly paid for by a partisan political organization.

Content

VADogwood.com publishes news about Virginia and the U.S. from a partisan Democratic perspective. On its About page, the site describes itself as a nonpartisan media outlet that aims to fill gaps in local coverage. "We produce original reporting focused on everyday Virginians and the issues that matter to them," the site states. "As the number of local news outlets declines in Virginia and across the country and the amount of digital information surges, it's hard to know where to turn. We want to fill the gap — and your social feeds — with content that is thoughtful, engaging, inspiring and motivating."

All stories are published in the site's News section, which contains categories including environment, economy, healthcare, education, transportation and infrastructure, and housing. Typical articles have run under headlines such as "Republicans try to pull a fast one, renominate delegate who withdrew from race," "What it means to be undocumented," and "78% of Virginians worried about affording healthcare in the future."

Credibility

Articles on VADogwood.com are typically fact-based, citing government reports, reputable media outlets, and other credible sources. Headlines accurately reflect content. However, the site does not disclose that it has a liberal agenda or that it is funded by a progressive organization, and stories typically support that agenda. VADogwood.com does not generally include content that reflects negatively on liberals, while reporting critically about conservatives. Articles frequently advance liberal policies.

For example, a series of articles published in June 2019, under the headline "How the 'mother of states' treats women," reported on how Virginia's laws affect issues such as poverty, the gender wage gap, and abortion rights. "Women make up 51% of the population in Virginia, but only 26.4% of the General Assembly," a description of the series stated. "With that disparity in mind, we decided to take a look at how the laws passed (or not passed) by a predominantly-male, Republican-led General Assembly have affected women in Virginia."

Coverage on the site also frequently supports policies such as universal healthcare and stricter environmental regulations. For example, an August 2019 article, noting that "more than 300,000 people have signed up for Virginia's expanded Medicaid program," extolled the potential benefits of the expansion.

A July 2019 story reported on research from the Union of Concerned Scientists, a progressive science advocacy organization, that found that "virtually the entire United States [will] be plagued by extreme heat by midcentury unless global action is taken to reduce emissions." An August 2019 article covered a Virginia Commonwealth University study that found that "Richmond-area schools suspend black students four times more often than white students, a gap that exceeds the national average."

Another article from August 2019 reported that a Republican state senator who has proposed to ban out-of-state political donations has accepted \$28,000 from out-of-state donors.

VADogwood.com presents itself as a news site, but one of the site's reporters, Davis Burroughs, says on his online resume that he creates "engaging, social-first, and fact-based content including videos, feature stories and ad campaigns that promote progressive policies and candidates for a Virginia-focused media property." Burroughs lists his position as a "multimedia content producer and strategist" at For What It's Worth Media, the company the site lists as its owner.

Because VADogwood.com does not disclose its perspective or its funding by Acronym, yet advances an agenda through its story selection, NewsGuard has determined that the sites does does not gather and present information responsibly and that it does not responsibly handle the difference between news and opinion.

Meghan McCarthy, the site's managing editor, agreed with NewsGuard's assessment that the site has a progressive viewpoint. "The Dogwood's mission is covering state and local news in Virginia with a progressive lens and to meet readers where they are



Proceed with caution: This website fails to meet several basic standards of credibility and transparency.



Does not repeatedly publish false content



Gathers and presents information responsibly



Regularly corrects or clarifies errors



Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly



Avoids deceptive headlines



Website discloses ownership and financing



Clearly labels advertising



Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest



The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information

*Criteria are listed in order of importance.
[More information.](#)*

on social and email," McCarthy told NewsGuard in an email.

However, she did not address NewsGuard's questions about why that perspective and the site's funding by Acronym is not disclosed.

Although VADogwood.com does not articulate a corrections policy, the site typically publishes corrections in the form of a note at the bottom of the story, explaining the error and how it was corrected.

Transparency

VADogwood.com articles typically include the name of the writer. The site provides biographies, email address, and Twitter handles for its content creators on the About page.

The About page also identifies the site's editorial leadership and lists a general phone number and email address.

The site states on the bottom of each page that it is owned by For What It's Worth Media, with a link to the company's website. However, no information about who controls For What It's Worth Media is provided, and the site does not disclose that is funded by the liberal advocacy group Acronym. Therefore, the site does not meet NewsGuard's standard for disclosing information about ownership and financing.

The site does not run display advertising. However, because VADogwood.com publishes content from a progressive Democratic perspective, is funded by progressive organization Acronym, and does not appear to have any other revenue sources, NewsGuard has determined that all of the site's content can be considered unlabeled sponsored content on behalf of Acronym. Therefore, the site does not pass NewsGuard's criteria for labeling advertising.

McCarthy did not respond to NewsGuard's questions about why information about the site's funding is not disclosed. Instead, she directed NewsGuard to the above-mentioned Axios article about Acronym's investment in the site, which she confirmed. McCarthy added that "more detailed information will be up on the FWIW Media site soon (we are a new company!)"

History

VADogwood.com was launched on March 14, 2019.

Written by: [Melissa Goldin](#)

Edited by: [Kendrick McDonald](#), [Eric Effron](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

Sources

Ownership and Financing

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Credibility

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Transparency

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