

2026 Better Newspaper Contest General Information-News Media Individual

Entry Deadline:

Entries must be uploaded by 11:59 p.m.,

Friday, October 2, 2026

2026 dues must be paid in full to enter the contest.

**Contest Period:**

August 1, 2025, through July 31, 2026

Contest File Submission Requirements:

All digital files must be uploaded through the Michigan Press Association BNC contest website.

You can access the contest site here:

<https://www.newspapercontest.com/Contests/MichiganPressAssociation.aspx>

You may also access the contest through the Michigan Press Association website by going to Events & Training > Contests and Awards > Enter Contest.

All URLs, links, passwords, and other access information must be functional. If judges cannot access the submitted materials, the entry may be disqualified.

Photos must be submitted in high-resolution JPG format.

Help: Call Diana's cell at **517-610-4813** or Don at **616-275-0444** or email **bnc@michiganpress.org** for questions about the contest or rules.

Presentation of Awards:

Judges shall award first, second and third place in all contest categories, editorial and advertising—with the option of awarding honorable mention if they deem necessary. Judges reserve the right to award fewer or no awards if a category does not have adequate entries with sufficient merit.

An out-of-state press association will judge all three contests. Contest results will be announced in 2027 at the Annual Convention. Many awards will be presented at the awards ceremony. Certificates will be mailed to the winning newspapers shortly after.

An Overview of the Editorial Contest

Any newspaper that is an active member in good standing of the Michigan Press Association is eligible to participate in the MPA Better Newspaper Contest

Entry Fee:

The base fee to enter the contest is \$30 with an additional \$10 fee for each entry. These fees are non-refundable. **Full payment must accompany your entries or be received at MPA by the contest deadline, or your entries will be disqualified.** MPA will not invoice newspapers for their contest fees.

PAYMENT OPTION: Once you have completed all of your entries and uploaded all required files, click "Entry Billing" to pay for your contest entries.

⚠ Do not pay until you are completely finished entering the contest. If you pay before all of your entries are completed, you will be charged for all entries and the base fee again. There is no way to pay for entries separately.

At the bottom of the Entry Billing page, you will see your total amount due and the available payment options:

 Credit Card/PayPal: Payment is confirmed after the transaction is completed.

 Check: Your payment will be marked as paid once the check has been received.

Be sure to log in and check your account before the contest deadline to confirm that your entries and payment have been properly submitted.

MAILED PAYMENTS SHOULD BE POSTMARKED ON OR BEFORE October 2, 2026, and sent to:

**Michigan Press Association
James Tarrant
1642 Yosemite Dr.
Lansing, MI 48917**

Deadlines

Work must have been published between August 1, 2025, and July 31, 2026.

All entries must be uploaded by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, October 2, 2026.

The deadline will not be extended

Contest Circulation Classes (for editorial entries only):

Individual: Individual Members

Individual Members:

If an individual member also freelances for or works for a newspaper or news media member, all work completed for that newspaper or news media member must be entered under that organization.

How to submit entries online: These rules are on the contest website.

BASIC INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1—The Association Code needed to register is **MPA26** (CASE SENSITIVE). Register on the contest website using your email address. You will receive a confirmation email, which you will need to complete registration. Use the link above to register.

Step 2—Login [here](#) (or use the link above). You will see a page showing any entries you have already submitted. Complete rules for College, General (Newspaper), News Media and News Media Individual contests are available above (click links). Some browsers, such as Safari, will open the rules in a new window; others will require you to download the PDF file to your computer.

Step 3—Click on the “Add New Entry” link.

Step 4—On this page, select your newspaper name. A lot of information will autofill. If that information is incorrect, please email bnc@michiganpress.org or call **517-610-4813** or Don at **616-275-0444**. Your Division/Circulation Class will be selected for you based on MPA Assignment. Fill in the preparer’s name.

Step 5—Select the contest class. These are drop-down menus for your convenience. This field will clear each time you save an entry, so you must select a class for each new entry. When you select the class, special instructions will appear below it.

Step 6—If necessary, provide an explanation of your entry. The explanation/cutline box is limited to 3,000 characters. It is a good idea to write your explanation in another program, such as Word, and copy/paste into the explanation box. If a URL is required, fill in the URL box; there is no need to type “http://.”

Step 7—Include the name of the entry. If uploading full-page PDF files, it will be helpful if the entry name matches the headline on the page so the judges can find it easily. If the judges cannot tell what is to be judged, the entry will be discarded without refund. **Remember what you put in here is what appears on the certificate.**

Step 8—Include the name of the person or people who should be credited for any award. This is generally the writer, reporter, photographer, graphic artist, cartoonist, etc. It is not necessarily the name of the person submitting the entry nor the person picking up the award at the awards ceremony. **Remember what you put here is what appears on the certificate. Make sure you have something in the credit field, if nothing is there, we will either leave blank or put staff.**

Step 9—Add your file or files. You can drag and drop files or use the “Add files” button to navigate your files. Generally, files should be in PDF format except photos, which should be in high-resolution JPG format. Other files and URLs may be acceptable as noted in the special instructions. Upload as many files as are necessary to complete your entry but refer to the special instructions for any limitations.

Step 10—When you have completed your submission, click the “Save” button. If you click the “Back to list” button, you will lose the entry you just completed. After clicking “Save,” you will be directed back to the list of your entries.

Step 11—To submit another entry, click “Add New Entry.” As long as you have not logged out of the system, your newspaper name will still be in place, and you can simply start at **Step 6** again. You may log out and log back in later to continue adding entries. You will need to select your newspaper name each time you log in.

Step 12—If you are done submitting entries, please review the list. You may not change an entry, but you may delete an entry and resubmit it.

NOTE: Please try to keep file sizes under 5mb to aid judges in accessing entry content. For larger files such as Special Sections, options include Dropbox, Google Drive, or any service that lets you “share” files via URL. Please make sure the file is public, or a password is provided and that it can be printed. If a file cannot be easily accessed, it could be skipped over for judging.

IF APPLICABLE: To add digital-only content or audio/video entries, copy and paste the content’s web address into the provided website URL field. To host your content online, either upload it to a free streaming content website (e.g., YouTube) or talk to your IT person about adding it to your website. Make sure the content will be accessible online throughout the contest and awards process.

Here are some examples of free streaming content websites where you can upload audio and video content: Audio: www.kiwi6.com, www.tindeck.com; Video: www.youtube.com.

IMPORTANT: Ensure that items are not behind a paywall or a password-protected area. If they are, you must provide username/password info in the Comments section of your entry. Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible.

How to Enter

1. **Select the best entry for each competition.** Choose the best issue, story, or photo for each category. Be sure to review the judging criteria and any special rules for the category you are entering.
2. **Do not submit the same entry in more than one similar category.** For example, the same story may not be entered in both Sports Writing and Sports Feature.

Exception: A Local News entry may also be entered in a special section or special contest, such as the Public Service Award.

3. **Provide background information when helpful.** Entrants may include brief information about the community or communities they serve, the newspaper's publishing conditions, or the entry itself. Use the **Comments** section when submitting your entry to provide this information to the judges. Any communication intended for the judges must be included with each individual entry rather than in one letter covering multiple entries.
4. **Open Categories.** Any entry in Categories 37–61 may also be entered in the Open Categories.
5. **Enter the correct newspaper.** Make sure each entry is attributed to the correct newspaper.
6. **Review entry information carefully.** Make sure the headline, entry name, and credit information are exactly as you want them to appear on certificates and in press releases. The information submitted with the entry will be used for these purposes.
7. **Provide access information when required.** If an entry requires a login, make sure the login information is included and works for the judges. Do not submit a paywall that requires judges to create their own account. If the required login information is not clearly provided, the entry may be disqualified.
8. **Make sure all URLs, links, and passwords work.** If judges cannot access the submitted materials, the entry may be disqualified.
9. **Submit photos correctly.** Photos entered in photo categories must be submitted as high-resolution JPG files. Do not submit a PDF or URL for photo category entries.
10. **Include all required attachments.** Make sure every file and attachment needed to complete the entry is included before submitting.
11. **New for 2026:** Everyone who enters the contest will be signed up to serve as a judge in 2026.

Open Class Contests

*All Michigan Press Association members can enter these open class contests entries will be judged against each other regardless of circulation or platform. Open class contests do **NOT** count toward the "Newspaper of the Year."*

All submissions should be in PDF or URL and under 5 MB. All URLs, links, and passwords, etc., must be functional. Inability to access the data, the entry will be disqualified.

62. Best Podcast

Submit your **best one** and let the judge select first, second and third place from ANY MPA member. This is limited to "Podcast reporting." Other than that, there are no limits. **One entry per paper or publication.**

63. Best Writing

The judge will select a first, second and third place winner from ANY MPA member publication or website based on writing clarity and style. Anything is eligible. It is OK if you enter the work in another MPA contest category.

64. Best Headline

An entry consists of one headline (and, if you want, subhead). Submit your best one and let the judge select first, second and third place from ANY MPA member publication or website.

65. Best Photo

Submit your best photo and let the judge select first, second and third place from ANY MPA member publication or website. The entrant must do the work. Wondering what will determine the winner? Is it storytelling quality, impact, reader interest, relevance? Simple: all those elements. Or none of them. The best photo will... speak for itself. It is OK if you enter the photo in another MPA contest category. The photo should be in high-resolution JPG format.

66. Most Innovative Story Telling

To a newspaper or website that uses any combination of methods to tell a story for maximum impact using multiple forms of media, including the main print product. Project may include stories, photographs presented in various forms, video, blogs, audio files, etc. Judging will be based on how the individual elements add to a total package without being merely duplicative. Please provide specific URLs for all postings and include a

username and password in the comment box for the entry if your site is subscription only. All URLs, links, and passwords, etc., must be functional. Inability to access the data, the entry will be disqualified. Entrants are responsible for Web availability of entries between the deadline date and the following three months. Incorrect URLs will NOT be judged. Please verify that the URL you enter works, and that it will be “live” for at least three months.

67. Best Education Beat

To a writer for their best articles on education issues. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting. The judge will select a first, second and third place winner from ANY MPA member publication or website based on writing clarity and style. It is OK if you enter the work in another MPA contest category.

68. Best Newsletter

Submission will be judged on overall narrative quality and value to readers. The best original newsletter produced by a reporter or editor and distributed to readers via email. Newsletter should contain original work and not be created via automated aggregation. Awards go to the author or authors of the newsletter. Newsletters can be on any topic. Submit up to three examples.

Special Awards, Contests & Instructions

Special Contest Details

There is no fee for special contests other than the initial \$30 entry fee. Entries should be submitted ONLINE. Finalists will be notified in 2027. The winners will be announced in 2027 at the MPA Annual Convention.

Newspaper of the Year Award

The Newspaper of the Year Award honors the newspaper winning the most points awarded for placing in each editorial class. There will be one award in each of the eight editorial circulation classes. Editorial classes 37-61 count toward the award.

Points are awarded as follows:

First Place 100 points

Second Place 70 points

Third Place 40 points

69. Best FOIA Story

An award for the best story using FOIA as the main tool to gain information. This award will shine a spotlight on the importance of FOIA in getting information about what is going on in the government.

70. MPA Rookie Writer

Skillful writing and reporting are critical to the success of newspapers. That requires good writers and reporters. In order to recognize exemplary efforts of new writers just breaking into the field of journalism, MPA has established a Rookie Writer Award. Reporters who have less than three years' experience in the newspaper industry are eligible for consideration. Winning writers will not be eligible in future years. Only one entrant per newspaper.

An entry consists of the following:

- At least three, but no more than five stories. Stories should be solely written by the entrant and can be hard news, features, or published commentary.
- A letter of nomination from the editor is required explaining what sets the writer apart.

These should be uploaded online at www.betterbnc.com as an entry in the Rookie Writer Award Category.

71. Public Notice Journalism Award –

Entries must consist of a news story or series (not an editorial or opinion piece) initially prompted by a public notice that drew attention to the subject, or in which a public notice or the omission of a public notice figured heavily in the reporting. Stories should reference and/or provide a link to the notice; or if the story is based on a public notice requirement that was not met or was deficient, it must describe the deficiency.

Editorials or opinion pieces about public notice DO NOT qualify.

Entries may be accompanied by a brief explanation (one single-spaced page or less) that provides context about the story and/or a description of its impact. \$200 prize to the winner, sponsored by Detroit Legal News Publishing.

The winner of this category will automatically be entered into the National Newspaper Association contest for consideration as a national winner.

NEW! 72. The First Amendment on the Front Line: Is Press Freedom in Peril?

Entries should consist of news stories or series that examine, document, or illustrate threats to freedom of the press and the public's right to know.

Coverage may focus on government actions, legal challenges, restrictions on access to information, attacks on journalists, censorship, public records, open meetings, or other developments that serve as a warning that First Amendment protections and a free, independent press could be at risk.

Judges will evaluate:

- The quality of the reporting
- The depth of coverage
- The use of sources
- The impact on the community

How effectively the entry demonstrates the importance of protecting press freedom

73. Community Impact Award -This will highlight work in and for the community with testimonials from three community members.

Frequently Asked Questions

These are located on MichiganPress.org site under Events & Training > Contests And Awards Contests FAQs

<https://michiganpress.org/contests-and-awards/>