

2026 Better Newspaper Contest

General Information

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 sent 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):

Circulation figures that were given on the 2026 Information Update forms will be used to determine class. Weekday circulation of daily and multi-day newspapers will apply.

Daily A: Over 20,000

Daily B: 11,001 – 20,000

Daily C: 5,001 – 11,000

Daily D: 5,000 and under.

Weekly A: Over 15,000

Weekly B: 7,001 – 15,000

Weekly C: 3,001 – 7,000

Weekly D: 3,000 and under.

Group Newspapers

A writer, copy editor, page designer, or photographer may not compete in more than one class.

If an entry was written, edited, designed, or photographed for one publication but appears in more than one publication within the same group, the entry must be submitted by the original publication, regardless of circulation.

Example: An article written by the Greenville Daily News (circulation: 4,331) and published in the Huron County View (circulation: 18,187) must be entered in the contest by the Greenville Daily News. 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 be 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: Please ensure that all submitted items are publicly accessible and not located behind a paywall or within a password-protected area. If access requires a username and/or password, please include the necessary login information in the Comments section of your entry. Judges may disqualify entries 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.

2026 BNC Editorial Classes

37. Spot News Story

To a writer or team for entries that consist of coverage of one spot or breaking news event, which could include sports coverage. Judging will be based on news or sports value, writing clarity and style, depth of reporting and immediacy. A letter may be included explaining factors like access to the site, enterprise of the reporter, when the event happened vs. the next publishing deadline and conveyance of the info from the scene to the newsroom.

38. News Enterprise Reporting

To a writer for a single story or series (No more than eight articles in a series) that demonstrates in-depth exploration of an issue with strong news value that helps the reader better understand a facet of life, the community or issues surrounding news events. Strong writing, thorough research, and good presentation are critical. A letter explaining the story's background to justify its entry in this category may be included.

39. Government/Politics News

To a writer or team for entries covering a government or political issue. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

40. Education/Schools News

To a writer or team for entries covering education or school issues. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

41. Business News

To a writer or team for entries covering a business issue. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

42. Agriculture News

To a writer or team for entries covering an agriculture issue. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

43. Feature Story

To a writer for a story that demonstrates unusual literary excellence, originality, and insight (either humorous or lighthearted). All Serious stories need to be entered in Enterprise categories.

44. Best Opinion

This award is presented to a writer for an editorial, column, or opinion piece that demonstrates a strong understanding of reader concerns, as well as editorial initiative, enterprise, and courage. Syndicated columns originating from another source are not eligible. Each columnist may submit one entry. An entry may include multiple attachments of the columnist's work.

45. Best Editorial

To a writer for an editorial that demonstrates a high regard for reader concerns, editorial initiative, enterprise, and courage.

46. Best Columnist

This award is presented to a local writer whose column is published on an ongoing basis. Editorials and syndicated columns originating from another source are not eligible. Each columnist may submit **one entry**. Each entry must include **three columns** written by the columnist.

47. Best Newspaper/Publication Design

To a newspaper for excellence in typography and graphics. Overall graphic design, typography and use of photographs will be considered, as well as special applications in news columns. Submit your best issue from the contest period.

48. Best Page or Pages Design

To a newspaper/publication for best use of excellence in typography and graphics in a news story or spread. Overall graphic design, typography, and use of photographs will be considered, as well as special applications in news columns. Submit your best page or pages related to a specific editorial topic.

49. Special Section

To a newspaper/publication for initiative, enterprise, and creativity for a special news section. All entries will be judged on news content, originality, customer appeal, creativity in conception and layout. Emphasis is on locally produced art and copy. An entry consists of one section. A newspaper may submit up to three entries in the contest.

50. News Photo

To a photographer for a published news photograph. Entries will be judged for their storytelling quality, impact, reader interest, technical quality, and evidence of special initiative. A statement explaining factors that might not be apparent from the picture itself, for example, circumstances under which the picture was taken or the reader's reaction to the picture may be included. The photo should be in high-resolution JPG format.

51. Feature Photo

To a photographer for a published feature photograph of exceptional quality. The photo should be in high-resolution JPG format.

52. Photo Story

To a photographer for a published photo story or series on one subject. Entries will be judged for their story-telling quality, impact, reader interest and composition.

53. Sports Writing

To a writer for a story that covers a specific sporting event and shows originality, news value and reader interest considering deadline pressure.

54. Sports Photograph

To a photographer for a published sports photo of exceptional quality. The photo should be in high-resolution JPG format.

55. Best Sports Column

To a writer for a column that covers a sports-related issue.

56. Sports Feature

To a writer for sports features not covering a specific sporting event that displays exceptional development, creativity, and enterprise.

57. Best Video Presentation

Submit your videos and let the judge select first, second and third place from ANY MPA member. This is limited to "video and picture story reporting." Other than that, there are no limits.

58. Best Digital Presentation

MPA member newspapers/publication entering this contest will have their websites/social media randomly visited between November 1, 2026 – January 13, 2027. Please provide a username and password for your website, if necessary, so that judges may visit all areas of your site. If not clearly identified, the entry will be disqualified. Judges can also evaluate the newspapers social media along with the websites. All URLs, links, and passwords, etc., must be functional. Inability to access the data, the entry will be disqualified. Please make sure to include a link to any social media you would like judged (i.e., Facebook, twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, or TikTok). Websites and social media will be judged on the following:

- **Content:** Quality of the news & editorial matter, timeliness, selection, and organization of the items.
- **Visual/Design:** Layout, use of graphics, photographs, animation, color
- **Advertising:** Innovative strategies and/or evidence of revenue generation.
- **Community:** Demonstration that the website fulfills a "gatekeeper to the community" role.
- **Interactivity:** Incorporation of elements that take advantage of the medium.

59. Public Service Award

MPA members are encouraged to submit entries in this annual contest that recognizes excellence in public service. Community service groups are also encouraged to nominate newspapers or newspaper people. Newspapers may nominate themselves or their employees.

Work completed between August 1, 2025, and July 31, 2026, is eligible. Work may have started before August 1 or continued past July 31, but the majority of the project must have occurred during the time frame given. Ongoing projects are acceptable.

- **An entry consists of a compilation of no more than fifteen news stories, features, editorials, or photographs on a related subject AND/OR a letter outlining the contribution in detail. These should be uploaded online at www.betterbnc.com as an entry in the Public Service Award Category.**

60. Environmental/Climate Change/Weather News

To a writer or team for entries covering an environmental, climate change or weather issue. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

61. Crime/Justice News

To a writer or team for entries covering a crime or justice issue. Judging will be based on news value, writing clarity and style, and depth of reporting.

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.

An Overview of the Advertising Rules

Any newspaper that is an active /news-media member in good standing of the Michigan Press Association is eligible to participate in the MPA Advertising Contest.

Advertising Contest Entries are broken into Daily and Non-Daily (Weekly/News Media) circulation classes.

How to Enter:

- Submit full-page PDFs. If not clearly identified, the entry will be disqualified. All URLs, links, and passwords, etc., must be functional. Inability to access the data, the entry will be disqualified.
- All ads must have been produced by MPA member newspaper ad staff or art department.
- No outside agency or account-produced material will be accepted.
- All entries will be judged on design, layout, illustrations, creativity, and adaptability.
- Make sure all entries are attributed to the correct publication.

2026 Excellence in Advertising Award

The Excellence in Advertising Award honors the Daily and non-daily (weekly/news media) newspaper winning the most points awarded for placing in each advertising contest. Contest categories 1-17 count towards the award.

Points are awarded as follows:

First Place 100 points

Second Place 70 points

Third Place 40 points

1. Community Business Promotions

Any ad featuring multiple advertisers from one location, a mall, Shopping Center, Shopping District, Downtown or Community.

2. Home Services Ad

Any ad involving professional sales and services relating to the mechanical or physical structure of a home or business. Roofing, Siding, Heating and Cooling, Electrical, Plumbing, Remodeling or New Construction, Interior Design (not furnishing), or Architectural.

3. Home Furnishings Ad

Any ad dealing with Furniture, Appliances, Kitchen and Bath Design or Equipment, Carpeting, Flooring, Painting, Television Services or Home Theater, Cleaning of Homes or Offices and Disaster Restoration Services.

4. New and Used Autos. Recreational Vehicles and Boats

Any ad dealing with the sales of new and/ or used cars, trucks, recreational vehicles, boats, or cycles.

5. Real Estate

Any ad relating to the sale of new or previously owned Homes, Businesses or Land.

6. Entertaining Services

Any ad relating to programs of Dance, Theater, Music, or Movies, whether live or recorded, for personal enjoyment. This would include TV (satellite or cable), Cinema and Live Concerts, Dinner Theater, or in conjunction with drinking and/ or eating, performed by professionals or amateurs.

7. Restaurants

Any ad pertaining to dining out. Upscale to Fast Food.

8. General Retail

Any ad dealing with the direct sale of food (wine, candy, fudge), hard goods, or any consumer item, clothes to computers.

9. Small Ads Work

This category will take only ads six column inches or smaller. The ad may also be submitted in one of the aforementioned categories as well, but all ads in this category will be judged on the use of space and overall impact.

10. Best Digital ad

Ads can be static or animated, paid or house ad. Creativity and effectiveness of design and message will be criteria for judging. Upload file OR enter URL. The URL must remain active and accessible until

January 1, 2027. All URLs, links, and passwords, etc., must be functional. Inability to access the data, the entry will be disqualified. *Ad may be .jpg, .gif or Flash. Must have an animated or dynamic element.

11. Best Health/Fitness

Any ad pertaining to mind, body, and health.

12. Best use of Color

Based on the visual appearance of the ad layout.

13. Best Special Section

Minimum 4-page section or feature that has header or cover page and must have unique content specific to advertising. You cannot enter the same one in this category as you did in the editorial one.

14. Best Ad Grouping

Any sig ads, or group ads, no content needed.

15. Best in House Circulation Ad

Any promotion to add to circulation whether it is print or digital ads.

16. Best in House Content Promotion

Any digital or in print promotion to promote your content, including editorial, advertising or events.

17. Best Community Cause Marketing

To include a group of ads or sigs, which include content for local unique causes or awareness, such as cancer, literacy, autism, etc.

[Frequently Asked Questions](#)

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

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