

NEN&PA

NEW ENGLAND **NEWSPAPER & PRESS** ASSOCIATION

CONNECTING | EDUCATING | ADVOCATING

2026 Better Newspaper Competition

ENTRY PACKAGE

**TELL
YOUR STORY.
SHARE YOUR
EXCELLENCE.**

The Better Newspaper Competition celebrates the outstanding work of New England's newspapers — from powerful journalism and compelling storytelling to innovative design and community impact. We invite you to submit your best work and be part of this tradition of excellence.



GREAT
JOURNALISM
STRENGTHENS
OUR
COMMUNITIES.

*Your Work
Deserves to
Be Recognized.*

REAL NEWS.
STRONGER COMMUNITIES.
A BRIGHTER TOMORROW.

*New England
News Matters.*

Your best work deserves to be recognized.

Great journalism takes many forms. It informs communities, holds institutions accountable, tells compelling stories, sparks conversation and finds new ways to connect with audiences. This year, we've updated the New England Better Newspaper Competition to better reflect the work being done in today's newsrooms.

Our 2026 competition features 84 categories and honors across Editorial, Digital Journalism, Photography and Special Recognition. We've refreshed category descriptions, broadened eligibility in several areas and introduced new opportunities to recognize emerging forms of journalism. Whether your newsroom is large or small, print, digital or both, we want to celebrate the work you're proud of.

WHAT'S NEW FOR 2026?

New categories. New opportunities.

We've introduced four categories to recognize important areas of contemporary journalism:

- **Explanatory Journalism** Recognizes reporting that makes complex subjects understandable and accessible.
- **Data Journalism** Celebrates reporting that uses data to uncover stories, reveal patterns and deepen public understanding.
- **Nature & Wildlife Reporting** Creates a home for outstanding journalism about the natural world.
- **Digital Innovation** Recognizes creative digital projects, products, tools and approaches that improve journalism or the audience experience.

Broader categories for today's newsrooms

We've also updated several established categories to reflect how journalists report, tell stories and serve their communities:

- **Breaking News Coverage** (*formerly Spot News Story*) Recognizes journalism produced as unexpected events unfold.
- **Investigative & Accountability Reporting** (*formerly Investigative / Enterprise Reporting*) Acknowledges work that uncovers wrongdoing and holds institutions accountable.
- **Community/Audience Engagement** (*formerly Community/Audience Involvement*) Recognizes meaningful efforts to connect with audiences and encourage participation.
- **Reporting on Diverse Communities & Issues** (*formerly Racial, Ethnic or Gender Issue Coverage*) Offers broader opportunities to recognize journalism exploring the experiences and concerns of New England's communities.
- **Business Reporting** (*formerly Business/Economic Reporting*) Recognizes coverage of businesses and the people behind them.
- **Economic Issues Reporting** (*formerly Business/Economic Reporting*) Recognizes journalism about the economic forces affecting communities.

FIND YOUR BEST WORK. ENTER IT. CELEBRATE IT.

The Better Newspaper Competition is an opportunity to recognize the journalists and teams whose work makes a difference every day – and to showcase the creativity, commitment and excellence of New England's news organizations.

Explore the updated categories, revisit the work your newsroom produced during the contest year, and submit the journalism that deserves recognition.

Contest year: August 1, 2025 – July 31, 2026 **Entry deadline:** Friday, October 30, 2026

Enter online: www.newspapercontest.com/nenpa **Association code:** NENPA

We look forward to celebrating your best work!

2026 CATEGORY LINEUP

84 categories and honors across reporting, opinion, design, digital journalism and photography.

NEWS REPORTING

- Arts & Entertainment Reporting
- Business Reporting
- Economic Issues Reporting
- Climate & Weather Reporting
- Crime & Courts Reporting
- Critics Award
- Education Reporting
- Energy & Utilities Reporting
- Environment & Conservation Reporting
- General News Story
- Good News Award
- Government Reporting
- Health Reporting
- History Reporting
- Home & Garden Reporting
- Housing News
- Human Interest Feature Story
- Immigration Reporting
- Investigative & Accountability Reporting
- Local Election Coverage
- Local Personality Profile
- Obituaries
- Protest & Demonstration Coverage
- Reporting on Diverse Communities & Issues
- Religion & Faith Reporting
- Science & Technology Reporting
- Social Issues Feature Story
- Sports Feature Story
- Sports Story
- Breaking News Coverage
- Transportation Reporting
- Community/Audience Engagement
- Headline Writing
- Press Freedom & Right-to-Know
- Explanatory Journalism
- Data Journalism
- Nature & Wildlife Reporting

PAGES & SECTIONS

- Arts & Entertainment Section
- Food Page or Section
- Front Page
- Special Section
- Sports Section

EDITORIAL

- Editorial Writing
- Commentary
- Editorial Cartoon

COLUMNS

- Humor Columnist
- Political Columnist
- General Columnist
- Sports Columnist

DESIGN

- Illustration & Infographics
- Overall Newspaper Design
- Special Section Design
- Niche Publication Design

DIGITAL JOURNALISM

- Multimedia Coverage
- Outstanding Newsletter
- Best Website Home Page
- Best Overall Website
- Best Podcast
- Video Journalism
- Social Media Engagement
- Social Media Portfolio
- Digital Innovation

PHOTOJOURNALISM

- Contemporary Issues Photo
- Feature Photo
- General News Photo
- News Feature Photo
- Personality Photo
- Photo Series
- Scenic & Pictorial Photo
- Photo Story
- Portrait Photo
- Sports Action Photo
- Sports Feature Photo
- Breaking News Photo

SPECIAL RECOGNITION & TOP HONORS

- 250th Celebration Coverage
- Trust & Misinformation
- Excellence in Newsroom Collaboration & Partnerships
- Solutions Journalism
- Innovator Award
- Best Niche Publication
- Rookie of the Year
- Reporter of the Year
- Photojournalist of the Year
- General Excellence

QUICK START: HOW TO ENTER

Entering should be simple: choose your best work, match it to the right category, and give judges what they need to evaluate it.

1 CHOOSE YOUR STRONGEST WORK

Review the category list and identify the journalism you are most proud of from the contest year.

2 PICK THE BEST-FIT CATEGORY

Read the full category description before submitting. Some work may fit more than one category when it demonstrates different strengths.

3 GATHER THE WORK

Prepare the stories, issues, photographs, videos, audio, URLs or other materials required by the category.

4 ADD CONTEXT WHEN IT HELPS

Where a supporting statement is allowed or requested, briefly explain the reporting effort, collaboration, impact or other information the judges need to understand the entry.

5 CHECK NAMES AND CREDITS

Enter names, affiliations and credits exactly as they should appear on awards.

6 UPLOAD AND SUBMIT

Go to the **contest portal**: www.newspapercontest.com/nenpa, register for the 2026 contest and enter
Association code: NENPA

Please note: The portal is wiped clean each year. Even if you have entered in the past, you must register on the portal for the current contest.

Once registered, select your categories and upload your entries. Before submitting, check that files open, links work, and publication names, entry titles and individual credits are accurate.

IMPORTANT The contest portal resets each year. Entrants should register for the 2026 competition even if they entered previously.

CONTEST YEAR

Aug. 1, 2025 -
July 31, 2026

ENTRY DEADLINE

Friday,
Oct. 30, 2026

GENERAL EXCELLENCE

Designated period:
May 17-23, 2026

RULES & GUIDELINES

Submit entries at newspapercontest.com/nenpa | Association code: NENPA

1. COMPETITION YEAR

Work produced or published between August 1, 2025 and July 31, 2026 is eligible. A series that began before August 1, 2025 but continued into the contest year may be entered in its entirety when work published during the eligible period represents a meaningful portion of the entry.

2. ELIGIBILITY

NENPA member news organizations in good standing are eligible to enter. Membership dues must be current before entries are submitted.

3. GROUP PUBLICATIONS

A group may enter work that appeared in more than one of its publications only once. When the same work appeared in publications in different competitive classes, it should be entered in the class of the publication with the highest applicable circulation.

4. COMPETITIVE CLASSES

Circulation class is determined by the most recently published circulation figure.

Daily 1 - up to 12,999 weekday circulation

Daily 2 - 13,000+ weekday circulation

Weekly 1 - up to 4,999 weekly circulation

Weekly 2 - 5,000+ weekly circulation

Specialty and Niche Publications

News Services and Online News Sites

5. INDIVIDUAL ENTRIES

Individuals whose work appeared in a NENPA member news organization may submit eligible work independently if the news organization has not already submitted the same work.

6. FEES & DEADLINE

Entries must be submitted by Friday, October 30, 2026. Extensions will not be available. An overall competition entry fee of \$25 per publication is required, plus \$22 for each entry. If a publication enters multiple professional divisions, the \$25 publication entry fee is paid only once. NENPA will generate and send an invoice after the contest deadline.

7. INSUFFICIENT ENTRIES

If too few entries are received in a category or class, NENPA reserves the right to combine classes, cancel a category and/or adjust the number of awards presented.

8. ORIGINAL WORK

Entries must represent journalism produced by the submitting NENPA member news organization or originally published by or produced for the organization. Eligible contributors may include staff members, freelancers, interns, fellows and other journalists or contributors working for or with the news organization.

Syndicated, wire-service, licensed or republished material produced primarily by another news organization or content provider may not be entered as the submitting organization's own work.

Journalism produced through a collaboration or partnership is eligible when the submitting news organization made a substantive journalistic contribution to the work.

9. NUMBER OF ENTRIES

There is no general limit on the number of entries a news organization may submit in a category unless the category description states otherwise.

10. AWARDS

Awards will be presented in the name specified in the entry. Entrants are responsible for entering names, affiliations and other credit information accurately. Reporter of the Year and Photojournalist of the Year are Top Honors determined through the competition and are not entered separately.

CATEGORIES & CRITERIA

Complete entry descriptions and judging criteria

NEWS REPORTING

Arts & Entertainment Reporting

Judges will be looking for lively, readable coverage of the local arts and entertainment scene.

Business Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting and analysis of businesses, industries, employers, entrepreneurs or other business activity relevant to the community. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, writing, context, significance and audience value.

Economic Issues Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting and analysis of economic issues and trends affecting communities and their residents. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, writing, context, clarity, significance and the entry's ability to help audiences understand economic forces and their impact.

Climate & Weather Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on weather events, climate change or climate-related trends and their effects. Entries may consist of a single story or a series. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, accuracy, context, writing, relevance and overall impact.

Crime & Courts Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on crime, courts and the justice system. Entries may consist of a single story or a series of stories that are part of ongoing coverage. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, writing, accuracy, context, analysis and significance to the community.

Critics Award

An article, essay, column or review on an entertainment or culture topic. Entries must be written by full- or part-time members of the news organization's staff, or written exclusively for the organization submitting the entry.

Education Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting that deepens public understanding of education. Entries may consist of a single story or a series. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, writing, context, relevance, impact and the entry's ability to illuminate issues affecting students, families, educators and communities.

Energy & Utilities Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on energy, utilities and related issues affecting communities. Entries may consist of a single story or a series. Judges will consider quality, accuracy and depth of reporting, context, writing, analysis, relevance and community impact.

Environment & Conservation Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on environmental and conservation issues affecting communities and the natural world. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, accuracy, context, analysis, writing, relevance and overall impact.

General News Story

Judges will be asked to consider the quality of the reporting and writing, and the significance of the story, as well as its presentation.

Good News Award

For outstanding journalism that highlights uplifting, heartwarming and hopeful stories that remind us of the good in the world. Whether spotlighting acts of kindness, everyday heroes, resilient communities or creative solutions, these stories should be thoughtfully reported and beautifully told. Judges will look for originality, emotional resonance and storytelling that goes beyond clichés, leaving readers informed, inspired and maybe even smiling.

Government Reporting

A story or series that focuses on local or state government news or issues. Judges will be asked to consider how well the report clarified governmental process for the reader, depth of coverage and quality of writing.

Health Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting that leads to a better understanding of health, health care or public health issues. Entries may consist of a single story or a series. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, accuracy, context, writing, relevance and community impact.

History Reporting

Recognizes outstanding journalism that explores history relevant to a community or region. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting and research, clarity and originality of writing, historical context, relevance and presentation.

Home & Garden Reporting

This award honors home and garden writing that combines creativity, service and storytelling to inspire and inform readers. It recognizes work that offers fresh perspectives on how people live, design and grow, whether through practical advice, design features, cultural insight or profiles of local homes and gardens. Entries should demonstrate excellence in writing, visual presentation and relevance to contemporary lifestyles.

Housing News

This category highlights impactful coverage of housing-related issues such as affordability, development, zoning, homelessness, displacement, tenants' rights, and the politics and economics of housing. It recognizes journalism that delivers clear, in-depth coverage relevant to the local community.

Human Interest Feature Story

A descriptive story that focuses more on people, places or things rather than issues. Judges will be asked to consider choice of topic, quality of writing, and the presentation.

Immigration Reporting

Recognizes outstanding journalism that illuminates immigration with accuracy, depth and humanity. Judges will consider journalistic rigor, quality and clarity of writing, context, fairness, relevance to the community and the entry's ability to deepen public understanding.

Investigative & Accountability Reporting

Recognizes outstanding investigative or accountability journalism that uncovers important information, scrutinizes institutions or people in positions of responsibility, or reveals problems affecting the public. Judges will consider the significance of the subject, depth and originality of reporting, documentation and verification, use of sources and data where appropriate, clarity of writing, persistence and demonstrated or potential impact. A brief supporting statement may describe the reporting effort and results.

Local Election Coverage

Recognizes outstanding coverage of a local election. Entries may include reporting, candidate profiles, issue coverage, analysis, editorials or other journalism that helps voters understand the choices before them. Judges will consider depth and breadth of coverage, quality of reporting and writing, fairness, usefulness to voters and overall presentation.

Local Personality Profile

Recognizes an outstanding profile of an interesting or significant person in the community. Judges will consider choice of subject, depth of reporting, quality and originality of writing, storytelling, character development and presentation.

Obituaries

Recognizes an outstanding staff-produced obituary about a local resident. Judges will consider reporting and background research, quality and originality of writing, use of community voices and details, storytelling, presentation and the entry's ability to help readers understand and appreciate the life of the person who died.

Protest & Demonstration Coverage

Recognizes outstanding journalism covering protests, demonstrations or other forms of civic action. Judges will consider depth and accuracy of reporting, fairness and context, quality of writing and storytelling, attention to community voices, journalistic judgment and overall impact.

Reporting on Diverse Communities & Issues

Recognizes outstanding journalism that deepens understanding of communities, experiences or issues involving race, ethnicity, gender or other forms of diversity. Judges will consider news value, quality and depth of reporting, fairness, sensitivity, context, writing and presentation. Foreign-language entries should be accompanied by an English translation.

Religion & Faith Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on religion, faith communities or issues involving belief and religious life. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, clarity, context, fairness, news value and relevance to the community.

Science & Technology Reporting

Recognizes outstanding reporting on science, technology, research, discovery or innovation and its relevance or impact. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, accuracy, analysis, clarity, context, writing and presentation.

Social Issues Feature Story

A story that focuses more on issues than on individuals. Judges will be asked to consider the quality of writing, depth of analysis, and the presentation.

Sports Feature Story

This award recognizes a descriptive story that focuses more on people, events or issues in any sport. Judges will be asked to consider choice of topic, the quality of writing, and presentation.

Sports Story

The story can be about any sport, athlete, or team at any level. Judges will be asked to consider the quality/originality of the subject matter and its treatment.

Breaking News Coverage

Recognizes outstanding coverage of an unexpected or rapidly developing news event for which there was little or no advance notice or opportunity for planning. Judges will consider quality, accuracy and speed of reporting, writing, news judgment, depth and development of coverage, presentation and overall service to the audience. A brief explanation may be submitted when helpful.

Transportation Reporting

Recognizing a story or series about transportation issues or related developments. Judges will be asked to consider the quality of writing, timeliness, comprehensiveness, and the presentation of the subject matter.

Community/Audience Engagement

Recognizes an effective journalism initiative that meaningfully engages a news organization's community or audience in the journalistic process. Judges will consider the purpose and creativity of the effort, quality of execution, level and quality of participation, value to the community and demonstrated results or impact. Entries should include examples of the work and a brief statement describing the initiative, how audiences were invited to participate and the results.

Headline Writing

Each entry submitted should be for an outstanding headline written for a single story and must include the story. Judges will consider accuracy and fairness, clarity, creativity and originality, effectiveness in drawing readers into the story, and how well the headline reflects and enhances the story.

Press Freedom & Right-to-Know

Recognizes outstanding journalism or advocacy by a news organization or individual demonstrating persistence in defending the public's right to know, access to public information, open government or freedom of the press. Entries may include a story, series, editorial or body of work. Judges will consider significance, persistence, journalistic quality, public benefit and demonstrated or potential impact.

Explanatory Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism that helps audiences understand a complex subject, issue, process or development. Judges will consider depth and accuracy of reporting, clarity, context, organization, writing and storytelling, and the entry's effectiveness in making complicated information understandable and useful.

Data Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism in which data plays a significant role in reporting, analysis or storytelling. Judges will consider the quality and originality of the reporting, accuracy and appropriate use of data, analysis, clarity, presentation and the entry's ability to reveal or explain information of value to the audience.

Nature & Wildlife Reporting

Recognizes outstanding journalism exploring nature, wildlife and the natural world. Judges will consider quality and originality of reporting, writing and storytelling, depth of understanding and the entry's ability to inform, engage or deepen readers' appreciation of the natural world.

PAGES & SECTIONS**Arts & Entertainment Section**

Judges will be looking for lively, readable coverage and critique of the local arts and entertainment scene.

Food Page or Section

Judges will be looking for lively, readable coverage of cooking and food-related topics.

Front Page

Recognizes excellence in the presentation of a publication's front page. Judges will consider news judgment and story selection, visual hierarchy, design and typography, headlines and subheads, use of photography and graphics, readability and overall visual impact.

Special Section

Recognizes excellence in an editorial section or supplement devoted to a particular topic, theme or event. Judges will consider topic choice and audience interest, quality and originality of journalism, organization and structure, writing, photography and visual elements, and overall presentation.

Sports Section

Recognizes excellence in a sports section or sports package, including regularly published sections and special sports sections. Judges will consider breadth and depth of coverage, quality of reporting and writing, photography and visual journalism, creativity, audience value and overall presentation.

EDITORIAL

Editorial Writing

Entry should consist of three editorials. Judges will consider quality and clarity of writing, strength of argument, fairness, significance of the subject matter and relevance to the community.

Commentary

Recognizes an outstanding piece of commentary or opinion journalism addressing a newsworthy issue or subject. Judges will consider quality and clarity of writing, originality and strength of argument, significance of the subject matter and the entry's ability to engage readers and stimulate thought.

Editorial Cartoon

Recognizes an outstanding original editorial cartoon addressing a newsworthy issue or subject. Judges will consider originality, effectiveness and clarity of the message, visual impact and the cartoonist's skill.

COLUMNS

Humor Columnist

Entry should consist of two regularly published columns by the same writer. Judges will consider quality and originality of writing, voice, wit and entertainment value.

Political Columnist

Entry should consist of two regularly published columns by the same writer addressing politics, government, or public affairs. Judges will consider quality and originality of writing, insight and analysis, strength of perspective and the columnist's ability to illuminate issues of importance to readers.

General Columnist

Entry should consist of two regularly published columns by the same writer. This category is intended for columns that do not primarily fall within the Humor, Political or Sports Columnist categories. Judges will consider quality and originality of writing, strength of voice, insight, reporting where appropriate, and the columnist's ability to engage readers.

Sports Columnist

Entry should consist of two regularly published columns by the same writer. Judges will consider quality and originality of writing, strength of voice, insight and analysis, knowledge of the subject and the columnist's ability to engage readers.

DESIGN

Illustration & Infographics

Recognizes outstanding visual journalism that uses illustrations, maps, charts, diagrams, data visualization or other graphics to tell, explain or clarify a story or topic. Entries may have appeared in print, digital or other platforms. Judges will consider clarity, accuracy, creativity, visual impact, design and the effectiveness of the graphic in helping the audience understand the subject.

Overall Newspaper Design

Recognizes excellence in the overall design and visual presentation of a print publication. Submit one complete issue published during the contest year. Judges will consider visual organization and hierarchy, typography, use of photography, illustrations and graphics, presentation of stories and headlines, readability, creativity, consistency and overall visual impact.

Special Section Design

Recognizes excellence in the overall design and visual presentation of a one-time or occasional editorial section or supplement devoted to a particular topic, theme or event. Submit one complete section published during the contest year. Judges will consider visual organization and hierarchy, typography, use of photography, illustrations and graphics, presentation of stories and headlines, readability, creativity, consistency and overall visual impact.

Niche Publication Design

Recognizes excellence in the overall design and visual presentation of a distinct publication created for a particular subject area or audience. Unlike a special section or supplement, a niche publication has its own identity as a standalone product and may be published once or on a recurring basis. Submit one complete publication from the contest year. Judges will consider visual organization and hierarchy, typography, use of photography, illustrations and graphics, presentation of stories and headlines, readability, creativity, consistency and overall visual impact.

DIGITAL JOURNALISM

Multimedia Coverage

Recognizes outstanding journalism that effectively combines multiple storytelling formats to enhance the audience's understanding and experience of a story or topic. Entries may incorporate text, photography, video, audio, graphics, data visualization, interactive elements or other digital formats. Judges will consider quality of journalism, creativity, integration of the various elements, ease of use and the effectiveness of the overall presentation.

Outstanding Newsletter

Recognizes excellence in a regularly published newsletter that provides valuable journalism, information or audience service. Judges will consider quality and originality of content, writing and presentation, usefulness to the audience, engagement and the newsletter's effectiveness in serving its intended purpose. Submit three editions and a brief statement describing the newsletter's purpose, intended audience and, where available, relevant audience or engagement results.

Best Website Home Page

Recognizes excellence in the presentation and organization of a news organization's home page. Judges will consider news judgment and hierarchy, headlines, visual presentation, navigation, usability, audience experience and the effective presentation of news and other content.

Best Overall Website

Recognizes excellence in the overall digital news experience. Judges will consider quality and timeliness of journalism, presentation and visual appeal, navigation and usability, effective use of photography, graphics and multimedia, audience engagement and the overall value of the website to its community. Entrants may submit a brief statement describing the site's strategy, significant improvements or innovations, and relevant audience or engagement results.

Best Podcast

Recognizes excellence in journalistic storytelling through podcasting. Entries may be an individual episode or one episode from an ongoing series. Judges will consider quality and originality of the journalism, storytelling, writing and/or interviewing, effective use of audio, production quality, audience value and overall impact. A brief supporting description may be submitted.

Video Journalism

Recognizes excellence in journalistic storytelling through video. Entries may cover news, sports, features, entertainment, community events or other subjects. Judges will consider quality and originality of the journalism, storytelling, visual and audio quality, editing, production, audience value and the effectiveness of the video in telling the story. Submit one video per entry.

Social Media Engagement

Recognizes an effective use of social media to engage audiences, encourage participation, build community or extend the reach and impact of journalism. Judges will consider the strength and creativity of the engagement strategy, execution, audience response and measurable results or impact. Entries should include examples of the social media activity and a brief statement describing the strategy, intended audience and results.

Social Media Portfolio

Recognizes consistent excellence in journalistic storytelling created or adapted for social media. Submit three examples of work published on one or more social platforms. Judges will consider quality and originality of the journalism, creativity, effective use of the platform and its features, visual and/or multimedia storytelling, and overall execution.

Digital Innovation

Recognizes an innovative digital project, product, tool or approach that enhances journalism, improves the audience experience or creates a new way of serving a community. Judges will consider originality, execution, usefulness, audience value and demonstrated results or impact.

PHOTOJOURNALISM**Contemporary Issues Photo**

Recognizes an outstanding photograph that documents or explores a significant issue affecting individuals or communities. Judges will consider journalistic significance, storytelling, composition, visual impact and the photograph's ability to deepen understanding of the issue.

Feature Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph that captures an interesting, unusual or memorable moment, subject or scene outside of a specific news event. Judges will consider storytelling, composition, creativity and visual impact.

General News Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph from a scheduled or anticipated news event or assignment. Judges will consider news value, storytelling, composition, timing and visual impact.

News Feature Photo

Recognizes an outstanding feature photograph captured in connection with a news event or newsworthy situation. Judges will consider storytelling, composition, timing, creativity and visual impact.

Personality Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph of a person or group of people that reveals something about who they are, what they do or their significance to the community. Judges will consider storytelling, composition, timing, expression and the photographer's ability to convey personality and character.

Photo Series

Recognizes a series of two or more photographs documenting the same subject, issue or event over time. The photographs should be related but need not form a continuous narrative. Judges will consider the strength of the individual images, consistency and depth of coverage, visual storytelling and the effectiveness of the series as a whole.

Scenic & Pictorial Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph in which the scene itself is the primary subject rather than a person or specific news event. Examples may include landscapes, natural scenery, architecture, streetscapes, weather scenes and other visually compelling views. Judges will consider composition, creativity, use of light, visual impact and the photographer's ability to capture the character, beauty or interest of the scene.

Photo Story

Recognizes a collection of two or more photographs that work together to tell a cohesive visual story. Judges will consider storytelling, sequencing, composition, visual variety, emotional or journalistic impact and the effectiveness of the images as a complete narrative.

Portrait Photo

Recognizes an outstanding portrait in which a person is the primary subject of the photograph. Judges will consider composition, lighting, expression, creativity, visual impact and the photographer's ability to create a compelling representation of the subject.

Sports Action Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph capturing action during an athletic or sporting event. Judges will consider timing, composition, technical quality, storytelling, visual impact and the photographer's ability to capture a decisive or compelling moment.

Sports Feature Photo

Recognizes an outstanding sports-related photograph captured outside the action of competition. The image may focus on athletes, coaches, spectators, traditions, celebrations, emotion or other moments surrounding a sporting event. Judges will consider storytelling, composition, timing, creativity and visual impact.

Breaking News Photo

Recognizes an outstanding photograph of an unexpected or breaking news event for which there was little or no advance notice or opportunity for planning. Examples may include fires, accidents, severe weather, disasters, public disturbances or other rapidly developing events. Judges will consider news value, timing, composition, storytelling, technical execution and visual impact.

SPECIAL RECOGNITION & TOP HONORS**250th Celebration Coverage**

Recognizes outstanding journalism exploring the significance of America's 250th anniversary. Entries may examine the nation's history, identity and future through local, regional or national perspectives. Judges will consider quality and originality of the journalism, historical context, relevance to the audience, depth and accuracy of reporting, storytelling and overall impact.

Trust & Misinformation

Recognizes outstanding journalism or newsroom initiatives that address misinformation, strengthen public understanding or build trust between a news organization and its community. Entries may include reporting that verifies or corrects inaccurate information, efforts that increase transparency about the journalistic process, or initiatives designed to strengthen audience trust. Judges will consider journalistic quality, accuracy, effectiveness, audience value and demonstrated or potential impact. A brief supporting statement may be submitted to explain the purpose and results of the work.

Excellence in Newsroom Collaboration & Partnerships

Recognizes outstanding journalism produced through meaningful collaboration between two or more news organizations or between a news organization and another organization or institution. The partnership should involve substantive contributions to the reporting, production, distribution or impact of the journalism rather than simply sharing or republishing content. Judges will consider the quality of the journalism, effectiveness of the collaboration, contributions of the partners, creativity and innovation, audience or community value and overall impact. Submit the work along with a brief statement describing the partnership, each participant's role and what the collaboration made possible.

Solutions Journalism

Recognizes outstanding journalism that examines responses to community problems or challenges. Entries should go beyond identifying a problem to report on how people, organizations or communities are attempting to address it, including evidence of effectiveness and limitations where appropriate. Judges will consider quality and depth of reporting, use of evidence, insight, storytelling, relevance to the community and the journalism's ability to deepen understanding of possible responses to the issue. Entries may consist of a single story or a series.

Innovator Award

Recognizes an innovative idea, initiative or approach that strengthens a news organization or improves how it serves its community. The innovation may involve editorial operations, workflow, staffing, audience service, community engagement, distribution, partnerships or other aspects of the organization. Judges will consider originality, execution, effectiveness, demonstrated results or impact, and the potential for the idea to provide lessons for other news organizations. Submit a brief statement describing the challenge or opportunity, the innovation, how it was implemented and the results.

Best Niche Publication

Recognizes excellence in a publication created for a specific subject area, interest or audience. Eligible publications may be produced in print, digital or both and may be published once or on a recurring basis. Judges will consider the quality and originality of the journalism, content mix, effectiveness in serving its intended audience, overall presentation and the strength and cohesiveness of the publication as a whole. Submit one complete issue or edition published during the contest year.

Rookie of the Year

Recognizes outstanding work by a journalist who is early in their professional journalism career. Eligible journalists must have begun their professional journalism career within two years of the beginning of the contest eligibility period. Submit three to five examples of the journalist's work, which may include reporting, writing, photography, video, audio, data, graphics or other forms of journalism. Judges will consider the quality and originality of the work, journalistic skill, versatility, initiative and demonstrated potential. A brief supporting statement from an editor or supervisor should provide background on the journalist and their contributions.

Reporter of the Year

Recognizes outstanding achievement by an individual reporter during the contest year. This award is not entered separately. Finalists will be identified based on points earned through first-, second- and third-place awards in eligible reporting categories throughout the competition. Finalists may be invited to submit additional examples of their work from the contest year for final judging. Judges will consider the quality and depth of reporting, writing and storytelling, range and versatility, initiative, journalistic impact and overall contribution to the communities served. NENPA may recognize one overall Reporter of the Year or, when warranted by the strength and breadth of the competition, separate Reporter of the Year honorees representing larger and smaller news organizations.

Photojournalist of the Year

Recognizes outstanding achievement by an individual photojournalist during the contest year. This award is not entered separately. Finalists will be identified based on points earned through first-, second- and third-place awards in eligible photography categories throughout the competition. Finalists may be invited to submit additional examples of their work from the contest year for final judging. Judges will consider visual storytelling, technical skill, composition and creativity, journalistic judgment, range and versatility, and the overall quality and impact of the photographer's work. NENPA may recognize one overall Photojournalist of the Year or, when warranted by the strength and breadth of the competition, separate Photojournalist of the Year honorees representing larger and smaller news organizations.

General Excellence

Recognizes news organizations that demonstrate outstanding journalism, strong news judgment and a consistently high level of service to their communities.

Entry requirements: Submit two representative examples of the news organization's journalism from the contest year. One submission must be from the NENPA-designated period of May 17-23, 2026; the second may be selected by the entrant. Print publications should submit complete issues. Digital-only news organizations should submit representative journalism from May 17-23, 2026 and from a period of their choosing. Entrants should also provide access to their primary website and may provide access to other regularly published digital products.

Judges will consider the quality, depth and range of reporting; writing and storytelling; news judgment and selection; photography and visual journalism; design and presentation; community relevance and public service; originality and enterprise; and the overall value of the journalism to the audience. Judges should evaluate each news organization across the platforms it regularly uses to deliver journalism, recognizing that the mix of print, digital and other products will vary by organization.



2026 NENPA Editorial Contest Entry Planner

What journalism made a difference this year? Use this checklist to identify your strongest work.

NEWS REPORTING

- ☐ Arts & Entertainment Reporting: _____
- ☐ Business Reporting: _____
- ☐ Economic Issues Reporting: _____
- ☐ Climate & Weather Reporting: _____
- ☐ Crime & Courts Reporting: _____
- ☐ Critics Award: _____
- ☐ Education Reporting: _____
- ☐ Energy & Utilities Reporting: _____
- ☐ Environment & Conservation Reporting: _____
- ☐ General News Story: _____
- ☐ Good News Award: _____
- ☐ Government Reporting: _____
- ☐ Health Reporting: _____
- ☐ History Reporting: _____
- ☐ Home & Garden Reporting: _____
- ☐ Housing News: _____
- ☐ Human Interest Feature Story: _____
- ☐ Immigration Reporting: _____
- ☐ Investigative & Accountability Reporting: _____
- ☐ Local Election Coverage: _____
- ☐ Local Personality Profile: _____
- ☐ Obituaries: _____
- ☐ Protest & Demonstration Coverage: _____
- ☐ Reporting on Diverse Communities & Issues: _____
- ☐ Religion & Faith Reporting: _____
- ☐ Science & Technology Reporting: _____
- ☐ Social Issues Feature Story: _____
- ☐ Sports Feature Story: _____
- ☐ Sports Story: _____
- ☐ Breaking News Coverage: _____
- ☐ Transportation Reporting: _____
- ☐ Community/Audience Engagement: _____
- ☐ Headline Writing: _____
- ☐ Press Freedom & Right-to-Know: _____
- ☐ Explanatory Journalism: _____
- ☐ Data Journalism: _____
- ☐ Nature & Wildlife Reporting: _____

PAGES & SECTIONS

- ☐ Arts & Entertainment Section: _____
- ☐ Food Page or Section: _____
- ☐ Front Page: _____
- ☐ Special Section: _____
- ☐ Sports Section: _____

EDITORIAL

- ☐ Editorial Writing: _____
- ☐ Commentary: _____
- ☐ Editorial Cartoon: _____

COLUMNS

- ☐ Humor Columnist: _____
- ☐ Political Columnist: _____
- ☐ General Columnist: _____
- ☐ Sports Columnist: _____

DESIGN

- ☐ Illustration & Infographics: _____
- ☐ Overall Newspaper Design: _____
- ☐ Special Section Design: _____
- ☐ Niche Publication Design: _____

DIGITAL JOURNALISM

- ☐ Multimedia Coverage: _____
 - ☐ Outstanding Newsletter: _____
 - ☐ Best Website Home Page: _____
 - ☐ Best Overall Website: _____
 - ☐ Best Podcast: _____
 - ☐ Video Journalism: _____
 - ☐ Social Media Engagement: _____
 - ☐ Social Media Portfolio: _____
 - ☐ Digital Innovation: _____
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2026 NENPA Editorial Contest Entry Planner

continued

PHOTOJOURNALISM

- ☐ Contemporary Issues Photo: _____
- ☐ Feature Photo: _____
- ☐ General News Photo: _____
- ☐ News Feature Photo: _____
- ☐ Personality Photo: _____
- ☐ Photo Series: _____
- ☐ Scenic & Pictorial Photo: _____
- ☐ Photo Story: _____
- ☐ Portrait Photo: _____
- ☐ Sports Action Photo: _____
- ☐ Sports Feature Photo: _____
- ☐ Breaking News Photo: _____

SPECIAL RECOGNITION & TOP HONORS

- ☐ 250th Celebration Coverage: _____
- ☐ Trust & Misinformation: _____
- ☐ Excellence in Newsroom Collaboration & Partnerships: _____
- ☐ Solutions Journalism: _____
- ☐ Innovator Award: _____
- ☐ Best Niche Publication: _____
- ☐ Rookie of the Year: _____
- ☐ General Excellence: _____

Reporter of the Year and Photojournalist of the Year are determined from contest results; do not enter them separately.

General Excellence: Include an example from May 17–23, 2026, plus one selected by your publication.

\$25 publication fee, paid once across professional divisions, plus \$22 per entry.

Firm deadline: Friday, October 30, 2026

To enter: www.newspapercontest.com/nenpa • Association code: NENPA

