



2026 PROFESSIONAL CONTEST CATEGORIES AND SPECIAL AWARDS

NEW! Investigative reporters are trained to follow the money, but it takes resources to follow the money. That's why the PNA Foundation and the A-Mark Foundation have created a new competition with cash prizes for Pennsylvania reporters and their newsrooms (see category S12).

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation is partnering with the A-Mark Foundation to present the **A-Mark Prize for Investigative Journalism in Pennsylvania** with cash awards totaling up to \$15,000.



**PENNSYLVANIA
NEWSMEDIA
ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION**



PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES AND SPECIAL AWARDS

1. INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING A single entry should include an investigative story, series, section or ongoing story, in any format, on a single subject that exposes wrongdoing or provides a public service by exploring a community problem. Must show extraordinary effort and research into a previously unexplored or unknown issue resulting in a significant original story. Entry should include cover letter, showing how the story developed, investigative methods used and evidence of the ultimate impact of the story.

2. ENTERPRISE REPORTING A single entry should include a special project or series published, in any format, on a single subject with non-deadline coverage. Must show in-depth treatment and break new ground. May be an integrated effort with print and various types of multimedia utilized. Entry must include cover letter.

3. NEWS BEAT REPORTING A single entry should include up to six news stories, in any format, by the same writer where emphasis is placed on thoroughness of reporting, enterprise, diversity of coverage and sources and mastery of subjects. This award will recognize specialty reporting and writing in one beat such as, but not limited to: education, courts, government, health, religion, police, environment, history, etc. Entry must include cover letter defining the beat and why all stories entered are reflective of that beat.

4. BREAKING NEWS A single entry should include one day's news coverage, in any format, of an unplanned and unanticipated event reported within 24 hours or less of the event's initial occurrence. Entries may include digital news bulletins as well as any multimedia or social media elements used to develop the story within a 24-hour news cycle such as video, audio, photo galleries, sidebars, and updates on Twitter, Facebook and other social media sites. Entries should include a cover letter explaining the time frame and proximity of the event to the organization's deadlines as well as execution methods and encountered obstacles.

5. ONGOING NEWS COVERAGE A single entry should include up to six days' worth of continuing coverage, in any format, of any news event too extensive to be handled in one day's reporting; ongoing coverage of a developing news event. Should demonstrate commitment to ongoing coverage. Coverage does not need to be from consecutive days. Entry should include cover letter.

6. NEWS FEATURE STORY A single entry should include one day's in-depth examination of a recent or ongoing event, in any format. Can include non-breaking news from weeklies. The entry will be judged on its timeliness, thoroughness, and the writer's enterprise and initiative in explaining the event. Multiple related elements, such as sidebars, social media, etc., may be included.

7. BUSINESS OR CONSUMER STORY Any story on any single business or consumer subject is eligible. A business or consumer story must be published, in any format, on one day. Multiple related elements, such as sidebars, social media, etc., may be included. Should demonstrate high achievement and dedication to the craft of business writing.

8. EDITORIAL A single entry must include three editorials, in any format, by the same author. Entry must be a regular editorial or special expression of opinion, signed or unsigned. Columns are not eligible. Three editorials count as one entry. Should demonstrate high achievement and dedication to the craft of editorial writing.

9. COLUMN A single entry must include three columns or blog entries by the same author. Signed comments that demonstrate a variety of subjects or subject matter are eligible. Editorials are not eligible. Three columns or blog entries count as one entry. Should demonstrate high achievement and dedication to the craft of writing opinion, commentary, criticism, mood, humor, etc.

10. SPORTS BEAT REPORTING A single entry should include up to six stories, in any format, by the same writer where emphasis is placed on thoroughness of reporting, enterprise, diversity of coverage and sources and mastery of subjects. This award will recognize specialty reporting and writing in one beat such as, but not limited to: high school football, track and field, the NBA, Penn State, scholastic sports, etc. Entry must include cover letter defining the beat and why all stories entered are reflective of that beat.

11. SPORTS/OUTDOOR COLUMN A single entry must include three bylined columns or blog entries by the same author about sports or outdoor activities. Three columns or blog entries count as one entry. Should demonstrate high achievement and dedication to the craft of writing columns related to sports.

12. SPORTS FEATURE Entries can be a single story or series on a topic or person. Any non-game story on any topic or ongoing issue is eligible. Multiple related elements may be included. Demonstrates high achievement and dedication to the craft of sports feature writing.

13. SPORTS ENTERPRISE A single entry should include a special project or series published, in any format, on a single subject with non-deadline coverage. Must show in-depth treatment and break new ground on a sport subject. May be an integrated effort with print and various types of multimedia utilized. Entry should include cover letter.

14. SPORTS BREAKING NEWS/EVENT COVERAGE A single entry would include one day's coverage, in any format, of a game or event reported within 24 hours or less of occurrence or in the next edition when a publication doesn't publish every day of the week. Example: A Saturday football game being reported for the Monday print edition because the organization does not publish a Sunday print edition. Entry may include a cover letter explaining the time frame and proximity of the event to the organization's deadline.

15. FEATURE STORY Any story on any single feature subject other than a personality profile is eligible. A feature story must be published, in any format, on one day. Multiple related elements, such as sidebars, social media, etc., may be included. Should demonstrate high achievement and dedication to the craft of feature writing.

PROFESSIONAL CATEGORIES CONTINUED...

16. PERSONALITY PROFILE Any story profiling a person or family published on one day, in any format, is eligible. Multiple related elements may be included.

17. LIFESTYLE/ENTERTAINMENT BEAT A single entry should include up to six feature stories, in any format, by the same writer where emphasis is placed on thoroughness of reporting, enterprise, diversity of coverage and sources and mastery of subjects. This award will recognize specialty reporting and writing in one lifestyle or entertainment beat which could include travel, drama, fashion, food, culture, society, music, movies, TV, art, reviews, etc. Entry must include cover letter defining the beat and why all stories entered are reflective of that beat.

18. BREAKING NEWS PHOTO One photograph published, in any format, of a single news event as it occurs, is eligible. Shows the photographer's skill in capturing the essence of a breaking news event where no planning was possible. PDF, JPG, URL and/or screen shot of photo as published counts as entry.

19. NEWS EVENT PHOTO One photograph published, in any format, of a non-breaking news event is eligible. PDF, JPG, URL and/or screen shot of photo as published counts as entry.

20. FEATURE PHOTO One photograph published, in any format, where emphasis is placed on imagination, presentation and subject matter, is eligible. PDF, JPG, URL and/or screen shot of photo as published counts as entry. Shows the photographer's skill and imagination as enterprise or in covering a planned assignment.

21. SPORTS FEATURE PHOTO One sports-related photograph published, in any format, where emphasis is placed on imagination, presentation and subject matter, is eligible. PDF, JPG, URL and/or screen shot of photo as published counts as entry. Shows the photographer's skill and imagination as enterprise or in covering a planned assignment.

22. SPORTS ACTION PHOTO One photograph published, in any format, of a single sports event as it occurs is eligible. Shows skill and imagination capturing a moment at a game or sporting event. PDF, JPG, URL and/or screen shot of photo as published counts as entry.

23. PHOTO STORY/ESSAY A series of photos published, in any format, that tells a story. Judges will review overall photo quality as well as story-telling qualities. Shows skill and imagination in multiple photos that develop a story line with unique and complementary images. Submit no more than 10 photos per entry. PDFs, JPGs, URL and/or screen shot of photos as published counts as entry.

24. NEWS PAGE DESIGN A single entry should include three to six pages of news design where emphasis is placed on planning and overall organization, typography and the use of graphics, readership appeal, content balance, readability and originality. Front pages or any other pages published during contest dates are eligible and should be submitted as one entry.

25. FEATURE PAGE DESIGN A single entry should include three to six pages of feature page design where emphasis is placed on planning and overall organization, typography and the use of graphics, readership appeal, content balance, readability and originality. Three to six different pages published during contest dates are eligible and should be submitted as one entry.

26. SPORTS PAGE DESIGN A single entry should include three to six pages of sports page design where emphasis is placed on planning and overall organization, typography and the use of graphics, readership appeal, content balance, readability and originality. Three to six different pages published during contest dates are eligible and should be submitted as one entry.

27. HEADLINE WRITING A single entry should include three headlines with accompanying story or cutline. Judging will be based on whether headline fulfills the mission of the story or photo, clarity and creativity. Online headlines are permitted.

28. GRAPHIC/PHOTO ILLUSTRATION A single entry should include a stand-alone locally-produced graphic, graphics package, illustration, editorial cartoon or an informational graphic using artwork and/or photo(s). Online graphic/photo illustrations are permitted. Should present information in a clear, useful or compelling fashion.

29. DOCUMENTARY A longform video with in-depth coverage. Judges will consider the innovative use of original content as well as production quality and the value, creativity and impact of the storytelling. Videos will be reviewed for how well they conveyed a story and if readers/viewers were engaged. One video or a series constitutes one entry. Please include a cover letter to explain the use, background and impact of the piece.

30. NEWS VIDEOS A video on a single news subject published online. Judges will look for innovative use of original content, storytelling, technical and journalistic quality, and value to the viewer. Entry may include supporting stories from the print or online publications for context. One video constitutes an entry.

31. SPORTS VIDEOS A video on a single sports subject published online. Judges will look for innovative use of original content, storytelling, technical and journalistic quality, and value to the viewer. Entry may include supporting stories from the print or online publications for context. One video constitutes an entry.

32. FEATURES VIDEOS A video on a single feature subject published online. Judges will look for innovative use of original content, storytelling, technical and journalistic quality, and value to the viewer. Entry may include supporting stories from the print or online publications for context. One video constitutes an entry.

33. PODCAST A single entry can include up to three episodes of a podcast series. Judges will look for innovative use of original content, storytelling, technical and journalistic quality, and value to the listener.

34. SPECIAL SECTION A single entry can include up to three examples of a publication dedicated to one subject that is distributed with the newspaper, which must be produced by an editorial staff, in any format. Will be judged on how well the content reaches its target audience as well as presentation. A cover letter must be included.

35. EXCELLENCE IN REPORTING ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION A single entry should include up to five different stories, in any format, from news, features, sports, business, etc., that inform on diverse elements in the community, encourage awareness and reflect an ongoing effort to cover inclusive integration of diverse populations within your community. Diversity, equity and inclusion includes, but is not limited to, factors such as: age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, race, religious creed, sexual orientation, veteran status and economic status. Entry must include cover letter explaining the diversity of the community covered.



SPECIAL KEYSTONE AWARDS

S1. JOHN V. R BULL FIRST AMENDMENT AWARD This award, in honor of the retired Philadelphia Inquirer editor who also was a founding member and leader of the First Amendment Coalition, recognizes a journalist or newspaper for exceptional work advancing or upholding the cause of Freedom of Information during the past year of 2025. Presented for distinguished contribution to freedom of the press, exemplifying the spirit and intent of the First Amendment. Entries might include, for example, stories, editorials or special projects about open government, open meetings, open records, censorship or secrecy in government. Journalists and news companies in all circulation divisions may compete. Entrants must provide a letter of explanation that contains the background. Please provide any supporting material that documents the issue tackled and what the work has achieved. There is no limit on the number of entries from any newspaper or journalist; however, no more than one award will be given each year. Winner will receive a personalized award.

S2. DISTINGUISHED WRITING AWARD The purpose of this award is to showcase quality writing. The award is judged solely on the quality of writing, without regard to circulation or category. The rules for entering this category follow the general entry rules of the Keystone Media Awards contest. The following also apply: The contest is open to individual writers only; no team entries. Winner will receive a personalized award. Entries must include three pieces of work, and may include various types of articles, produced and published in 2025. Work that has been entered in any other category (news, column, series, etc.) is acceptable. Any type of article may be entered, including those not listed in the entry categories. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award, sponsored by PNLA.

S3. PAUL VATHIS MEMORIAL PHOTOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO AWARD This award honors the late Pulitzer-Prize winning AP photographer from Pennsylvania. The award recognizes one photographer, across all circulation divisions, whose portfolio entry of published spot news, feature and sports photography shows the strong journalistic instinct, all-purpose skills and dedication that were the hallmarks of Paul Vathis' 56-year-career with the AP. Entries are to consist of five photographs with at least one spot news photo, one feature photo and one sports photo, produced and published in 2025. Work that has been entered in any other category, including those not listed in entry categories, is acceptable. The contest is open to individual photographers only; no team entries. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award, sponsored by PNLA.

S4. CALKINS FAMILY DISTINGUISHED VIDEO AWARD This special award will recognize one entry package – across all circulation divisions – for the best use of video by an individual. This recognition is open to individuals only; no team or staff entries. Videos can involve breaking and ongoing news, features and/or sports and can be supplements to print coverage and/or online only productions. Please submit three different videos, produced and published in 2025. Work that has been entered in another category of the keystones is acceptable. Judges will consider content and production quality as well as the value, creativity and impact of the videos. Videos will be reviewed for how well they conveyed a story and if readers/viewers were engaged. Please include a cover letter to explain the use, background and impact of the videos. Please provide working URLs for judges' review of each video. There is no limit on the number of entries from any newspaper or journalist; however, no more than one award will be presented each year. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award, sponsored by the Calkins Family.

S5. LENFEST INSTITUTE DIVERSITY CHAMPION AWARD This special award recognizes a talented journalist, of an underrepresented, marginalized, diverse group, for outstanding contributions to their newsroom. The underrepresented group may be based on, but is not limited to, factors such as: age, ancestry, color, disability or handicap, language, race, religious creed, sexual orientation, veteran status and economic status. Entry should include three examples of work produced and published in 2025. Could include stories, photos, videos, special projects, use of various platforms and other examples of person's impact on their newsroom and how they bring a unique voice and perspective from their diverse community. Entries also can be submitted in other categories. Entries will be judged together for overall excellence. Nominating letter (unlimited words) from supervising editor required. There is no limit on the number of entries from any news organization or journalist; however, no more than one award will be given each year. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award, sponsored by The Lenfest Institute.

S6. LENFEST INSTITUTE EMERGING JOURNALIST AWARD This award encourages talented young journalists to continue in their careers. This is open to professional journalists with two years or less experience (excluding internships or fellowships). Submit three stories or story packages produced and published in 2025. Entries also can be submitted in other categories. Entries will be judged together for overall excellence in writing, reporting and use of storytelling platforms. Nominating letter (unlimited words) from supervising editor required. There is no limit on the number of entries from any newspaper or journalist; however, no more than one award will be given each year. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award, sponsored by The Lenfest Institute.

S7. FREELANCE JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR This special award recognizes a talented freelance journalist for outstanding contributions to a newsroom. Freelancers may be parttime or fulltime, but must not be employees of the news organization. They may be independent writers, photographers, videographers or designers who work on a contract basis only. Work must be published through an eligible PNA member or non-member news organization and that organization must nominate them for this special recognition. Entry should include at least three examples of work produced and published in 2025. Could include stories, photos, videos, special projects, use of various platforms and other examples of the entrant's outstanding work. Nominating letter (unlimited words) from supervising editor required. Entries will be judged together for overall excellence. There is no limit on the number of entries from any news organization or journalist; however, no more than one award will be given each year. The judges reserve the right to give no awards at all based on the number of entries. Winner will receive a personalized award and a \$500 cash award.

SPECIAL KEYSTONE AWARDS

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S8. PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD Continuing the tradition of the news media as the “fourth estate,” the PNA Foundation Public Service Award is presented to the news company that has helped improve the community through public service leadership. Entries will be judged on the following:

- Demonstration of significant effort by the company beyond the scope of its normal routine
- Development of public service initiatives and activities
- The results of the public service leadership efforts

A community service project relating to one specific subject may be entered. Entries should include description, goals and outcome of the project. Attach any news articles or materials and include working URLs that support the nomination. Winner will receive a personalized award.

S9. G. RICHARD DEW AWARD FOR JOURNALISTIC SERVICE The G. Richard Dew Award, PNA’s most prestigious honor for outstanding journalism, was established in memory of G. Richard Dew, former general manager of PNA and former executive director of the PA Society of News Editors. This award is given to an individual or organization that has made an outstanding contribution to the community or state through an article or series of articles published in print and/or online, that demonstrate:

- Improvement in the quality of community life
- Enhancement of public understanding of the role of the news media
- Journalistic responsiveness to matters of public interest

The entry must include a description of the activities and contributions made to the community or state. Please be direct and specific in your narrative. Attach any news articles or materials and include working URLs that support the nomination. Winner will receive a personalized award.

S10. READER INITIATIVE AWARD The Reader Initiative Award honors news companies that continue to accept the challenge of growing readership through innovative initiatives. Some projects have transpired into success stories while others have been learning lessons; but everyday, newspapers continue to seek new ways to touch readers. This award may honor projects that are both revenue makers and budget breakers. Entries submitted for this Award must clearly exemplify the efforts made to successfully achieve at least one of the areas of growth listed under each category below.

- I. Growth: New Readership, Young Readership, Existing Readership, Non-traditional Readership
- II. Innovation: Events, Print Product(s), Niche Product(s), Online Product(s)
- III. Interdepartmental Cooperation: Inclusion of multiple departments in project design and implementation

Entries must clearly describe the initiative, goals, outcomes and quantifiable results. Narratives must include details regarding how interdepartmental cooperation was achieved and how such cooperation contributed to the project. Attach any news articles or materials and include working URLs that support the nomination. Winner will receive a personalized award.

S11. PUBLIC NOTICE AWARD This award recognizes excellence in journalism that draws reader attention to public notices. For purposes of this award, newspaper public notices are defined as those announcements or disclosures the law requires a private party or governmental entity to publish in or through a statutorily qualified newspaper. Stories must cite the public notice requirement and refer readers to the publication in which it appeared. Online references must include links. If the notice requirement was not met or was deficient, story must explain how and why notice was deficient. Stories may have been published in print or digitally or both in 2025. Include a short cover letter introducing the story and/or stories being submitted. PA winner will receive a personalized award. Winning entry from Pennsylvania will be entered into the national competition to vie for the national award of \$500, in conjunction with the Public Notice Resource Center. Presentation of national winner will be made at a recognized national association event.

S12. THE A-MARK PRIZE FOR INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM IN PENNSYLVANIA These awards recognizes an investigative story or series by a reporter or team of reporters on a single topic. Entries may include a single investigative story or multiple stories over a period of time. Entries should display original reporting revealing information otherwise not generally known that individuals, governmental agencies, businesses, elected officials or organizations do not want under public scrutiny. Stories may have been published in print or digitally or both in 2025. Judging criteria include depth of research, initiative, obstacles overcome, use of databases and public records, analysis of documents and records, use of multiple sources and impact on public policy. Entries must include a brief letter of explanation describing the actual or potential impact of the report. There is no limit on the number of entries from any news organization or journalist; however, no more than three awards will be given each year. There is **no entry fee** for PNA members to enter this competition; non-members will be charged the non-member entry rate. The judges reserve the right to give no awards at all based on the number of entries. Winners will receive personalized awards and cash prizes as follows: **First Place:** \$5,000 for the journalist(s) and \$2,500 to the news organization; **Second Place:** \$3,000 for the journalist(s) and \$1,500 to the news organization; **Third Place:** \$2,000 for the journalist(s) and \$1,000 to the news organization, sponsored by the A-Mark Foundation.

The A-Mark Prize for Investigative Journalism in Pennsylvania is open to all journalists and all news organizations in Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association represents the state’s newspapers and online news publications. The A-Mark Foundation is a nonpartisan 501(c)3 nonprofit organization incorporated in 1997. A-Mark is dedicated to supporting and encouraging journalism and investigative reporting through grants to organizations that offer awards recognizing journalistic excellence. One of A-Mark’s flagship initiatives is the A-Mark Prizes program, which recognizes and rewards the best investigative journalism in each state.

AP BROADCAST CATEGORIES

B1. BEST NEWSCAST A locally originated, unedited, regularly scheduled newscast. Entry limited to 30 minutes of real time.

B2. BEST SPOT NEWS COVERAGE Coverage of a breaking news event that is unplanned, unscheduled and requires immediate news department response. Entry limited to 15 minutes.

B3. BEST CONTINUING COVERAGE Continuing coverage by a news department on a single developing subject. Entries should demonstrate how a station covered a story over a period of time. Entry limited to 30 minutes.

B4. BEST SERIES For a series of individual reports pertaining to one topic. (Unlimited entries permitted; 30 minutes maximum each entry; remove commercials.)

B5. BEST INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING Entry should show extraordinary effort and research into a previously unexplored or unknown issue resulting in a significant original story. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B6. BEST ENTERPRISE REPORTING A single story or series that demonstrates ability to develop in-depth, explanatory treatment of a topic and breaks new ground. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B7. BEST FEATURE A story or series covering an event or topic that is not hard news. Report must have aired during a regularly scheduled news program. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B8. BEST DOCUMENTARY In-depth coverage of a community problem or a significant news event. Entries may be a single report or a series of reports. Entries limited to 30 minutes.

B9. BEST PUBLIC SERVICE Comprehensive, informed and effective public service reporting. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B10. BEST REPORTER/ANCHOR Entry should reflect a reporter or anchor's work during the year. The entry may include samples from newscasts as well as other work broadcast on your station (i.e., news or live special report, reporting from a special out-of-town assignment, etc.). An individual nominee may only be submitted once. A station may nominate multiple nominees. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B11. BEST WEATHERCAST For the best regularly scheduled weathercast. Judging will be based on content, format, overall appeal to the audience, pacing, graphic presentation and comprehensiveness in the presentation. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B12. BEST REGULARLY SCHEDULED NEWS OR SPORTS TALK PROGRAM For the best local, live news or sports talk or interview program, based on relevance of subject matter, focus of the host or hosts, involvement of audience and overall appeal. (Unlimited entries permitted; 60 minutes maximum each entry; remove commercials.)

B13. BEST DIGITAL PRESENCE Judges will be asked to view a station's website(s), social media feeds and apps. A station will be judged on its entire digital presentation, including content, overall appearance, ease of navigation, success at building an online audience and whether the site appears to be a valuable resource to the community.

B14. BEST SPORTSCAST A locally originated, regularly scheduled sportscast. Entry limited to 30 minutes.

B15. BEST SPORTS COVERAGE To recognize outstanding reporting on a sports topic. Entry can be a story or a series of reports on a single subject. Entries are limited to 15 minutes.

B16. BEST SPORTS FEATURE For excellence in special sports feature material contained within a regularly scheduled sportscast. Entries are limited to 15 minutes.

B17. BEST USE OF PHOTOGRAPHY For excellence in news photography. Entries may cover a single news story or several stories.

B18. BEST USE OF SOUND For best use of sound to tell a news story. Entry will be judged on technical quality, editing and contribution to the news story. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

B19. PODCAST A single entry can include up to three episodes of a podcast series. Judges will look for innovative use of original content, storytelling, technical and journalistic quality, and value to the listener.

SPECIAL BROADCAST AWARD

SB1. FIRST AMENDMENT AWARD This award is presented for a distinguished contribution to freedom of the press. Entries will exemplify the spirit and intent of the First Amendment and should demonstrate the news organization's ability to fulfill its public service role and to overcome obstacles in gathering information. The recipient committed all necessary resources to overcome obstacles on behalf of the unrestricted flow of information vital to free society. By so doing, the recipient has served the public and has honored journalism. You are encouraged to nominate your own news organization, or another news organization whose work is visible to you, for the First Amendment Award. The award will be presented to individuals or news organizations that made a major contribution during the past year of 2025 on behalf of the First Amendment or Freedom of Information. If your news organization or an individual was engaged during the past year in an effort to advance or protect the First Amendment concerns of the media and the public, or waged a battle on behalf of Freedom of Information, please attach a letter outlining the details with your entries for the judges to consider.

