



2026 PROFESSIONAL CONTEST RULES

The Keystone Media Awards reinforce excellence by individuals in the news media profession, by recognizing journalism that consistently provides relevance, integrity and initiative in serving readers and audiences, and faithfully fulfills its First Amendment rights/responsibilities. Further, the Keystone Media Awards stimulate journalists to improve their craft and ultimately improve their community.

**PENNSYLVANIA
NEWSMEDIA
ASSOCIATION
FOUNDATION**

2026 PROFESSIONAL CONTEST RULES

ELIGIBILITY: The contest is open to the editorial staff and regular contributors and freelance journalists of Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association member organizations and wire services who are in good standing, as well as non-member Pennsylvania news organizations that meet the following criteria: at least six months of continuous publication, availability to the general public, regularly updated content, adherence to ethics and standards of journalism, and no promotion of special interests of groups, individuals or causes. All AP member news organizations are eligible to enter the contest. Freelance work must be submitted through an eligible publishing news company or increased entry fees will result. **Entries eligible for competition must have been produced and/or published digitally or in print, between Jan. 1, 2025, and Dec. 31, 2025.**

DEADLINE TO ENTER: Entries must be received online by 11:59 p.m. on **Friday, February 27, 2026.**

ABOUT THE COMPETITION: The work of one individual and/or one team is eligible in each category and the same exact entry may not be entered in any other category or division; however, part of a specific entry may be used in more than one category (i.e. a Breaking News Photo or Feature Photo may be used as part of a Photo Story). An individual may enter a category in only one division determined by the newsroom in which the individual works. In the case of newsrooms with multiple publications, entry must be submitted into the division with the publication that the work appeared that has the highest circulation. *Visual and digital elements may be included with the writing entries including apps, videos, audio, photos and graphics.* Duplicate entries will be disqualified except for Special Awards; see those rules for details. **There are no limits on the number of entries each person or team per category may submit.** The PNA Foundation cannot determine into which category specific entries should be submitted; nor can we confirm entries submitted (*you will receive an Official Entry Form after each successful entry which confirms your entry was submitted correctly*).

ENTRY FEES: For non-broadcast entries, the fee for each entry is \$18, for PNA members and \$150 per entry, for non-PNA members. Broadcast entry fees are \$35 per entry for television and \$29 per entry for radio. Freelancers entering through a non-member publication/broadcaster or as an individual, without approval of the publication/broadcaster in which the work appeared, will pay the non-member entry fee of \$150. **Online payments preferred. Online payments must be received via the online contest system by 11:59 p.m. on Friday, February 27, 2026.** Visa, Mastercard or American Express are accepted. Online payments are recommended and preferred. If you must mail a check, mail-in payments must be received at the Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association Foundation, by Wednesday, March 4, 2026. Make check or money order payable to PNA Foundation. No refunds will be given. No invoices will be processed. Entries without submitted payment will not be judged. Mail-in payments must be submitted with the online entry report by selecting the Calculate Entry Fee button on the Manage Entries page and printing the report of your entries (see instructions on Payment Calculation). A penalty may be added to any late payments. Payments should be mailed to our new address: PNA Foundation, 4000 Crums Mill Rd., Ste. 101, Harrisburg, PA 17112.

Payment questions? Contact the PNA Foundation at foundation@pa-news.org or 717-703-3003.

COVER LETTERS: Cover letters are mandatory for some categories as noted in the category descriptions and may be included for others, if deemed helpful. A cover letter should include brief background information on the community(ities) the reporter serves, and any other information that might be helpful to the judges. The statement must not exceed 100 words and should be submitted in DOC or PDF formats.

WINNING ENTRIES: Winners will be announced in May. Keystone Media Award winners will be presented with first place, second place and honorable mention awards. The judges reserve the right to not award the number of specified awards per each category or give no awards at all based on the number of entries. Sweepstakes Awards will go to the news companies winning the highest total points in each division. Points are tallied: 10 points for each first place winner, 5 points for each second place winner and 2 points for each honorable mention. Special Awards accrue points and will be counted in the Sweepstakes calculation as well as News Organization of the Year determinations.

Outstanding News Operation awards will be given in each Broadcast division based on points earned by winning in other categories. Three points are awarded for each first-place win, two points for each second-place win. All broadcast contestants are eligible based on their overall entries.

Any winning freelance entries submitted by an individual, without approval of the publication/broadcaster in which the work appeared, will not be counted in Sweepstakes, Outstanding News Operation or NOY totals for that organization.

Winners will be honored at a Keystone Media Awards Luncheon to be held in Harrisburg on October 8, 2026. More details will be available when winners are announced. The PNA Foundation will supply plaques to all first place winners and certificates to all second place and honorable mention winners in attendance at the awards presentation. Certificates for non-attendees may be picked up at the conclusion of the awards presentation. Certificates not distributed at the event will be mailed the week after the event.

DIVISIONS: The circulation figures as stated in the 2025 PNA News Media Directory should be used to determine circulation division. Or accurate circulation figures from a recognized auditing agency, a sworn Post Office statement, or a duly notarized statement must be provided. **Please be sure your circulation division is accurate before submitting your entries.** Email foundation@pa-news.org with any updated information.

NON-BROADCAST DIVISIONS:

- I Multi-day publications – **over 25,000** circulation
- II Multi-day publications – **10,000 to 24,999** circulation
- III Multi-day publications – **5,000 to 9,999** circulation
- IV Multi-day publications – **under 5,000** circulation
- V Weekly general news publications – **over 5,000** circulation
- VI Weekly general news publications – **under 5,000** circulation
- VII Niche publications – **all circulations** for weekly, biweekly or monthly publications that focus on specialty areas such as business, government, farming, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, etc.

CONTEST RULES CONTINUED...

If you work for a weekly newspaper from a group you should enter according to the individual newspaper's circulation, not the combined group newspaper circulation. Weekly newspapers should submit entries under individual newspaper name, not group name.

Combinations – If your news company publishes a Sunday edition, you should compete in the circulation division based on your daily circulation plus a 10 percent fraction of the Sunday circulation. Example: The Morning Bugle has a daily circulation of 35,000. The Sunday Bugle has a circulation of 45,000. To determine division, add 35,000 plus 10% of 45,000 or 4,500. Total is 39,500.

PREPARATION OF ENTRIES

All entries must be uploaded as electronic files or linked to a working and accessible URL. Printed tearsheets are not acceptable as an entry format.

1. Entries are accepted in these formats: PDF, DOC, TXT, JPG, GIF, and PNG.
2. When uploading files, any filename may be used. The BetterBNC website uses information entered (newspaper name, division, category, etc.) to assign a unique code to each file. These codes assign your entries to the proper categories and circulation groups for judging.
3. Newspapers must upload a PDF of the entire page on which the entry appears - not the column or article alone - *or submit a permanent link with a working URL*. For examples with more than one page, please combine all pages into one PDF. For entries that contain more than one example, combine the pages of all examples into one PDF.
4. The maximum single uploaded file should not exceed 5 megabytes. It is strongly recommended to compress files to under 3MB so judging can be done more efficiently. Judges will view your files on their computer screens, so 300-resolution files are not needed (or helpful - they just hog server space). You can reduce your JPG or PDF file size by re-distilling to 72 dpi. For larger files, you may create more than one PDF (i.e. create a separate PDF for each page or section) and attach all pertinent PDFs to that specific entry. There is no limit to the number of attachments per entry.

NOTE: It is recommended that for extremely large files and for video and audio entries, you host your content online, either by uploading it to a free streaming third-party content website, such as www.Issuu.com, www.YouTube.com, www.vimeo.com, kiwi6.com, tindeck.com, etc., or talk to your IT person about adding it to your organization's website. Make sure your content will be accessible online throughout the contest and awards process.

Also, be sure all attachments for a specific entry are submitted under one entry headline in the online system. This will ensure you are only billed once for each entry.

IMPORTANT: Please ensure you provide a username/password in the Comments section for each entry that is behind a paywall or a password-protected area. **The username/password must be valid and allow "subscriber only" access, if applicable, through the time of the awards presentation.** Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible.

HELPFUL TIP

The online contest system, BetterBNC, is optimized for Google Chrome for PC and Macintosh. Please have a recent version downloaded and installed for the best contest experience.

BROADCAST DIVISIONS:

TV I/Large Market: TV stations licensed to cities in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh markets.

TV II/Small Market: TV stations licensed outside of the TV I market.

RADIO I: AM/FM, AM only or FM only stations licensed to cities in the Philadelphia and Pittsburgh markets

RADIO II: AM/FM, AM only or FM only stations licensed outside the Radio I market.

LOGIN INSTRUCTIONS

1. Go to www.betternewspapercontest.com.
2. Select "Contestant Login" (located on top bar menu).
3. Select the appropriate contestant type from tabs:
 - a. If you are the single point of contact for your organization, select Contestant Manager. Note: Once you have submitted two entries, you will receive an email validating your Contestant Manager account, enabling you to create Authorized Entrant accounts to make entries on behalf of your organization. You must click the link provided in the email and follow the online instructions to activate your account, authorize other people to submit entries on your organization's behalf, and/or to submit more entries.
 - b. If you received an email authorizing you to submit entries for your organization, select Authorized Entrant. Click the link provided in the email and follow the online instructions to activate your account which allows you to submit entries.
4. Select the appropriate Contest – "2026 Professional Keystone Media Awards."
5. Select the appropriate News Media Organization. Weekly newspapers should submit entries under individual newspaper name, not group name.

NOTE: If you haven't entered this contest before, or if your media company is not currently listed on the drop down menu, please contact the PNA Foundation at foundation@pa-news.org or 717-703-3003, so that your organization can be added to the menu. Please allow 48 hours for this process to be completed.

6. Authorized Entrants only - enter your email address.
7. **Enter your personalized password (if you entered the contest last year) OR enter the temporary password provided to you by the PNA Foundation. Passwords are case sensitive.** Temporary passwords are provided for your first login only; once logged in, you will be required to create a personalized password to use going forward. If your designated Contestant Manager has left your organization, please contact the PNA Foundation at foundation@pa-news.org to have your account updated with new contact information.
8. Click Login.
9. **Click on the "My Account" tab to ensure all pertinent information (contacts, mailing address, etc.) is listed correctly.** Make any necessary changes and click Submit at the bottom of the page. If anything needs to be changed that you do not have access to change, contact the PNA Foundation at foundation@pa-news.org.

ENTRY INSTRUCTIONS

TO SUBMIT ENTRIES:

1. On the Manage Entries page, click Submit Entry. Please be sure your news organization is shown in the correct circulation/market division. If your circulation division is listed incorrectly, contact the PNA Foundation at foundation@pa-news.org.
2. Select "general" from the division drop down menu.
3. Select the appropriate Category from the drop down menu. Be sure to read the Category Note which describes the category's requirements. Be sure to enter by category name, not category code number.
4. Complete the Headline/Title field. Use an entry title that will clearly identify your entry for the judges. Be specific; don't make the judges guess what they are looking for! Use a story's headline or the first several words of the headline. **DO NOT USE ALL CAPS, DATES, CATEGORY NAME OR CREDIT NAME(S) IN THIS FIELD.**
5. Upload all attachments and links for the entry. Be sure all links and attachments for a specific entry are submitted under one entry headline/title. This will ensure you are only billed once for each entry. Click Browse to select a file from your file menu and then click open. Allowed file types are PDF, DOC, TXT, JPG, GIF, and PNG. If more than one attachment is desired for this entry, click on "browse and attach more files" and repeat these steps.
6. Website/URL(s)/Link attachments: If you were unable to create and attach a PDF for this entry and needed to provide a website URL, or if the category asks for website presence for web/audio/video content, enter the URL/Links in this section. Be sure these webpages remain available through the awards ceremony.
7. Optional: You may add any comments about your entry which may assist in the judging process. If any links for the entry are behind a Paywall or password protected area, you **MUST** include a username and password for the judges in this comments box (or on a separate attachment).
8. Add Credits for those responsible for the entry content. If there are more than four names, please enter Staff. Should the entry win an award, these names will be merged into winners' reports and award certificates as you submitted them, so be sure names are spelled correctly.
9. Answer reCAPTCHA and click Submit Entry.
10. After each successful entry, the Official Entry Form will appear. This is confirmation of your entry. (See Login Instructions about Contestant Manager validation, if necessary.)
11. Select Submit Another Entry to submit more entries, or Manage Entries which will allow you to review the entries you've already submitted, or Logout.

IMPORTANT NOTE!

Participation in the Keystone Media Awards Contest is essential to winning the coveted PNA News Organization of the Year Awards. In order to accumulate points toward NOY, your company **MUST ENTER BOTH** the Keystone Media Awards **AND** the PNA Foundation Advertising Contest. You must enter both contests in order to earn points and to demonstrate your outstanding efforts across all facets of your news company. Companies not entering both contests will not be considered for NOY honors. Don't be left out when the NOY Awards are determined!

TO MANAGE ENTRIES:

1. Review your entries on the Manage Entries page – "entries" are enabled and will be judged; "disabled entries" will not be judged. Be sure your attachments or URLs are shown in the "existing attachments" column.
2. Use the "Action" links for each individual entry which allow you to view your Official Entry Form/Label, edit an incomplete entry or make certain changes, and toggle any entry between enable/disable.

NOTE: Every enabled entry will be billed to you, so be sure to disable or delete any duplicate entries.

PAYMENT CALCULATION:

1. On the Manage Entries page, confirm your news organization name, circulation/market division and number of entries submitted in the upper right corner.
2. Click Calculate Entry Fee.
3. A list of all your enabled entries will be displayed, with the appropriate entry fee. Review the list of entries for accuracy. The Total Entry Fee Due is calculated at the bottom of the list.
4. Select the check boxes for the entries for which you want to pay, then:
 - a. If paying online with PayPal or credit card (preferred), click the Pay Now With Card box at the bottom of the page. If you have a PayPal account, you can log in to complete payment. Or you can pay using a credit card by entering your credit card information. There is no requirement for you to establish a PayPal account. Be sure to strictly follow the instructions provided online. After clicking Pay Now, you will receive a confirmation. **During the PayPal process, do not hit your "back" button!** Also, be sure the billing name and address information you enter exactly matches your debit/credit account.
 - b. If paying by check, click the Pay By Check box at the bottom of the page. You will be taken to a page where you will enter your check details (check number and amount). You will then be able to view a report that indicates which entries are paid, as well as the status of the payment (i.e., paid ck). Please print this report to submit with your check. After your check is received in the mail, your entries will be marked paid as indicated by a "confirmed" status.
5. You may return to your Manage Entries page to confirm your online payment. Payment status will indicate "confirmed" for each entry paid via credit card online. Any other payments will be manually confirmed by PNA Foundation staff upon payment receipt. **NOTE:** The online system will not be available to you after the deadline date, so be sure to print your receipt(s) prior to that date.

QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about the contest rules, visit the PNA website, www.panewsmedia.org, or contact the PNA Foundation at 717-703-3003 or foundation@pa-news.org.