



North Carolina Press Association  
Fighting for **your right to know** since 1873

## 2026 News, Editorial, Photojournalism & Advertising Contest

---

### RULES

- Although you may have participated in the past, all newspapers must re-register in the contest system at <http://newspapercontest.com/>. **Use the SEC code 'ncpress'**. After you register, you'll receive an email. Once you respond to the email you should be able to login to the contest system.
- The deadline for all uploaded entries is 11:59 p.m., Friday May 1, 2026. Upload entries at <http://newspapercontest.com/>
- **Entries can be submitted as a PDF or a URL link to the entry.** Please make sure the entry is clearly identifiable on the page, do not assume the judge will know what story/photo/ad to judge.
- All entries must have been published between April 1, 2025, and March 31, 2026.
- **Paywalls** - if the entry is behind a paywall, you must create a username and password for the judge to use. Enter that information in the notes section of the individual entry. It will not be judged if the judge cannot access the entry. It is not the responsibility of the judge to create an account, even if free, or to notify the newspaper that they cannot view the entry.
- Each item (article/photograph/etc.) can only be submitted in one contest category. If the same item is found in two categories, it will be disqualified. The only exception to this rule is found in categories where an entry consists of multiple different items. When an item appears as one element within one of these composite categories, it may also be entered into another eligible category for judging individually on its own merits. Composite categories in the editorial contest include:
  - General Excellence
  - Sports Coverage
  - Community Coverage
  - Headline Writing

- Ledes
- Editorial Page
- Special Awards
- Magazine or Special Section

If the entry appeared in multiple publications, it can only be entered by one of them. Publishers have the final say over which newspaper submits an entry appearing in multiple publications.

The entry fee for each individual entry you submit is \$9. Click “Entry Billing” to view your total. Credit cards payments can be made via PayPal. Checks should be made payable to the North Carolina Press Association, postmarked by the entry deadline and mailed to NCPA, PO Box 90246 Raleigh, NC 27675

All entries must be from newspapers or online news sites that are members in good standing as of the contest deadline of the North Carolina Press Association. Entries may not be submitted from sister publications unless they are also members of NCPA. Print members must have proven circulation numbers on file with NCPA to determine proper division, from either a published statement of ownership or a sworn statement signed by the publisher.

Materials published exclusively online can be submitted in appropriate categories and do count against the total each entrant is allowed per category. *Online material must be published on the newspaper’s website during the time frame of the contest when submitted, must be submitted from the first time it appeared on the web, and must not have been altered for contest entry purposes. An online link to the material must remain active during the judging period and must not require paid access to view the entry. For ease of judging, the URL should be as brief as possible.*

---

## General Info

**WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO ENTER?** Any North Carolina newspaper or online news site that is a member of the NC Press Association and has paid its 2025-26 annual dues by the deadline may enter this contest. Entries must be submitted through the newspaper, not by individuals.

At the time the entry was written/shot/created, a contestant must have been a full-time or regular part-time employee or exclusive contributor to the newspaper.

Journalists who worked at more than one newspaper during the contest year may enter work from more than one newspaper (community, daily or both), but the person will still have to obey the maximum entry rules for the category. In case of doubt, entries from the current employer will take precedence.

All contest entries may be used for promotional, display, and news purposes.

**YOUR DIVISION: NCPA has combined print circulation and digital-only subscriptions to determine your division.**

### Divisions (NEW in 2026)

Division A - Under 1,500 subscribers

Division B - 1,501 - 3,000 subscribers

Division C - 3,001 - 6,000 subscribers

Division D - 6,001 - 20,000 subscribers

Division E - 20,001 +++ subscribers or multi-day publications in cities with a population of greater than 120,000 \*

*\* Eligible publications in Div E are those whose total circulation is greater than 20,000 or whose primary editorial focus is a single municipality with a population of 120,000 or more, and distribute a print product multiple days per week.*

*“Primary editorial focus” means the main city or community the publication covers and identifies as its core market. Total circulation area, multi-county distribution, or regional audience size will not be used for classification.*

### Magazine

Division M - Magazines will compete in their own division and are eligible to enter any category.

### Online

Division O - Online members will compete in their own division and are eligible to enter any category.

For any questions about your division, please contact Phil Lucey at (919) 516-8013 before uploading any entries.

**NUMBER OF ITEMS IN AN ENTRY:** For newspapers/websites in all divisions, each entry may contain no more than the number of items specified. Sidebars are considered separate stories; jumps are not considered separate stories. See each category for the number of items allowed in an entry.

**LIMIT ON ENTRIES PER PERSON:** There is NO limit per person on the number of entries per category.

**THE ENTRIES:** Pay careful attention to each category's instructions to ensure you are entering the appropriate item(s). Also pay particular attention to the need to combine multiple files into one before submitting. Remember, judges will view your entries online, so make the file sizes as small as possible before combining them. PDFs and URLs are accepted for judging.

- *Maximum of 5 articles/stories/photos per entry where applicable.*

**The name of the entry and writer/photographer name that you enter into the contest system is what will appear on printed certificates and plaques should you win. Make sure the entry title and name of the author(s) are correct on every entry!**

Each entry must be uploaded to the contest site. **For entries that include URLs, make sure the links will remain active through June 2026**

- *Please provide specific URLs for all postings, and passwords for paywalls.*
- **Ensure URL's are active through June 2026.**

Any entry discovered to contain plagiarized material in any form will be disqualified. Any award will be automatically rescinded if it is later discovered that the original entry contained plagiarized material.

*Entries with multiple bylines:* A person's name may appear only once as an entrant for any category in which only one entry per person is allowed. If the entered story is "by Joe Brown and Joan Green," neither Brown nor Green can enter anything else in that category, whether or not they did the additional story by themselves or with anyone else.

- In categories that allow two entries per person, an individual's name may appear only twice.
- Up to four people who collaborate on an entry may be listed in the contest system. More than four people must be recorded as a "staff" entry.
- Being part of a "staff" entry does not count toward the total number of entries an individual may submit.
- In categories where only one individual entry is allowed, the newspaper may enter only one staff entry. In categories where two individual entries are allowed, the newspaper may enter two staff entries.

*Photography categories:* In addition to uploading PDFs of full-pages, individual photo files *may* be uploaded as part of an entry but not as a replacement for the full page. These uploaded photos should be cropped exactly as they appeared in print. Entries that do not include the uploaded full newspaper page will be disqualified. To aid the judges in the photography category, indicate the photo entered by adding an arrow pointing at (but not on) that photo on the tear sheet.

NOTE: Photojournalists have the responsibility to document society and preserve images as a matter of historical record. Electronic technologies provide new challenges to the integrity of photographic images. The guidelines for fair and accurate reporting should be the criteria followed in judging what can be done electronically to a photograph. Images may not be digitally altered beyond traditional cropping, lightening, darkening and color balancing.

*Pick a month:* In any category that specifies months for eligible entries, entrants may pick from any dates in one (but not both) of the listed months. Entries that include items from more than one month will be disqualified.

**JUDGES AND AWARDS:** Entries will be judged by newspaper professionals from the Wisconsin Press Association. Their decisions are final. If there are fewer than five entries in a category, the category will be combined with the next highest division until more than five entries can be judged together. Magazines would be combined first into the highest available category available.

Certificates will be awarded to first-, second-, and third-place winners in editorial categories. Certificates will be awarded to first-place winners only in all advertising categories. Plaques are awarded in several categories, including General Excellence. Each winning entry will receive two copies of the certificate: one for the newspaper and one for the individual. Additional certificates may be purchased for \$20.00 each; additional plaques at \$75.00 each. Awards will be presented at the 2025 Annual NCPA Convention.

**HAVE QUESTIONS?** If you have any questions after reading this brochure or of any of the terms used in category descriptions, please call Phil Lucey at (919) 516-8013 or email [phil@ncpress.com](mailto:phil@ncpress.com).

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What file formats are accepted for uploading?** The contest system accepts many file formats. However, uploading PDF or JPEG files ensures our judges will be able to view your entries. A URL bringing the judge directly to the item, without paywalls or registration required, is also accepted.

**How can I make my PDFs smaller?** Most newspaper PDFs include high resolution grayscale or CMYK images for printing. However, PDF contest entries will be viewed and judged on a computer monitor, which displays at low resolution (72-96 dpi) in RGB color. Changes in resolution and color mode of images are the most effective ways to reduce file size without sacrificing quality.

In PDFs, text is always clear regardless of resolution. Resolution only relates to photos and rasterized graphics. Reducing resolution by half reduces image file size by 75 percent. The recommended maximum resolution of 96 dpi can be enforced by Distiller settings.

Color Mode: Converting from CMYK to RGB color will reduce image file size by another 25 percent. This color conversion can again be enforced by Distiller settings.

If you reduce image resolution and/or convert color mode in your entry PDFs with a PDF editor (Enfocus Pitstop or Quite A Box of Tricks) or use the native profiling/editing tools in Acrobat 6 or later, you will NOT gain the expected reduction in file size unless you redistill the PDF afterward.

**What is the most efficient way to collect entry files?** Extract entry-related pages from any multi-page PDFs or delete non-entry pages. Give each resulting file a clearly descriptive name. Combine into a single PDF file the pages that compose each article. See below for instructions on extracting/combining PDFs.

Once you've created all your entry PDFs, redistill each one as explained above to reduce it to the smallest practical size. It is not productive to try to reduce sizes of individual files before combining them into complete entries. Like all changes, combining pages can increase overall file size. **You may also upload a URL link to your entry.**

**How do I extract pages from full-issue or full-section PDFs?** Open the PDF file in Acrobat and choose "Extract Pages..." from the Document menu. This will allow you to save individual or sequential pages in separate files anywhere on your computer.

**How do I combine PDFs into a single file?** Open the PDF that you want to appear first in the entry. Choose "Save As..." from the File menu and give it the name of the final entry. Choose "Insert Pages..." from the Document menu, choose the file that you want to appear next in the entry, then specify where that file should be inserted. When all insertions have been made, save and close the PDF. You'll need to redistill the final PDFs.

**How will NCPA prevent fraud?** We prefer to trust our member publishers not to submit embellished or edited entries. However, NCPA members have pointed out that electronic contest entries will not necessarily represent published pages because they can be changed before submission. It is true that ads and articles can be re-edited, photos can be retouched or replaced, and page layouts can be changed. However, major deception probably would be noticed, if only because winning PDFs will be available to the public and NCPA members on the NCPA website. If fraud is suspected with any entries, a full investigation will follow.

## Editorial CATEGORIES

### **General News Reporting**

A hard news story or stories covering a single event (except sports). Judges will consider timeliness, impact, community interest and clarity of approach.

### **Breaking News Coverage**

Overall work on a breaking news story in print and/or online within the first 24 hours after the story breaks. Entries can include the use of online, print and social media in reporting breaking news. Judges will consider the speed at which the postings were made, updates, timeliness, impact, community interest and clarity of approach of overall coverage and supplementary information such as photographs, videos, audio files, PDFs or any other form of multimedia. Incorrect URLs will not be judged. If a story is unavailable on website, screenshots or print version may be submitted. A short statement of fewer than 200 words that details specific circumstances surrounding your entry may be submitted

- *Please provide specific URLs for all postings, and passwords for paywalls.*
- *Date of content must be verified by online time stamp or signed statement from the publication's editor.*

### **Beat News Reporting**

A single news article or series of articles about any news subject within a consistently monitored "beat" other than education, government, election/political, arts or business, which have their own categories. Judges will consider the effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach, timeliness and community interest.

### **Investigative Reporting**

A single article or series of articles based on the newspaper's extensive investigation of an event or issue; not a report about an investigation led by a party other than the newspaper. Evidence of probable impact will weigh heavily in judging.

- *A statement of not more than 1 page in length, summarizing what preceded and followed the article or series, must accompany the entry. Entries without a statement will be disqualified.*
- 

**The A-Mark Prize for Investigative Journalism will award a first-place prize of \$5,000 to the winning journalist and \$2,500 to their news organization. Second place awards \$3,000 to the journalist and \$1,500 to the news organization. Third place awards \$2,000 to the journalist and \$1,000 to the newsroom.** *This category and cash award are open to all news media organizations based in North Carolina and their staff members and include newspapers, broadcast outlets, and digital-only platforms. Freelance journalists based in North Carolina whose reporting is published or aired by North Carolina news media organizations are also eligible to enter.*

**NCPA Members: The first and second place winners in the category of Investigative Reporting of the NCPA 2026 Better Newspaper Contest (all divisions) will be automatically entered into this A-Mark Prize contest at no additional fee.**

### **News Enterprise Reporting**

One or more stories on the same subject that go beyond routine reporting and demonstrate initiative and thoroughness in examining and explaining a trend, issue, or social problem. Judges will consider resourcefulness, clarity and depth.

### **City, County Government Reporting**

A single article or series of articles about city or county government. Judges will consider the effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach, timeliness and community interest.

### **Election/Political Reporting**

A single article or series of articles about any electoral or political issue in North Carolina.

### **Education Reporting**

Any single article or series of articles (hard news, feature articles or editorials) on any single education subject. Coverage may include pre-school through community college, including home schooling. Does not include coverage of state or private universities or colleges. Judging will be based on quality of writing, timeliness, impact and community interest.

### **Business Writing**

A single article or series of articles on any single business and/or consumer subject. Judging will be based on quality of writing, timeliness and community interest.

### **Arts and Entertainment Reporting**

Any single article or series of articles on any single local or regional arts or entertainment subject, including reviews or criticisms, is eligible. Judging will be based on quality of writing, timeliness, impact and community interest.

### **Religion & Faith Reporting**

A single article or series of articles that covers religion, faith or spirituality issues and provides clarity of explanation to a secular audience. Judges will consider quality of writing, clarity and depth.

### **News Feature Writing**

A single feature article or series of articles about any news subject except sports, lifestyles or personalities. Judges will especially consider effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach, timeliness and community interest.

### **Beat Feature Reporting**

A single feature article or series derived from a consistently monitored "beat" that falls outside of education, government, election/political, arts or business. No profiles will be considered. Judges will consider effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach and human interest.

### **Feature Writing**

A single article or series of articles (except sports and personality profile features). Judges will consider effectiveness of writing style, originality of approach and human interest. No profiles may be entered in this category.

### **Profile Feature**

A single feature article profiling a person or persons. Subjects can be from any walk of life - a celebrity, philanthropist, a local "character" or a neighbor. Judging will be based on local appeal, originality and quality of writing.

### **Sports News Reporting**

A single story or stories covering a single sports competition or hard news event in the world of sports. Judging will be based on the quality of writing, originality, and effectiveness of presentation.

### **Sports Enterprise Reporting**

A single article or series of articles on the same sports subject going beyond routine reporting and demonstrating initiative and thoroughness in examining a trend, issue or problem. Judges will consider resourcefulness, clarity and depth.

### **Sports Feature Writing**

A single article or series of articles on the same sports topic or a sports personality. Judging will be based on quality of writing, originality and effectiveness of presentation.

### **Sports Columns**

Three columns about sports by the same writer. Competition is open to any writer whose column is regularly published. Judging is based on writing quality and the writer's ability to uplift, inform and entertain.

- *Combine the three columns into a single file for entry.*

## **Ledes**

Three ledes highlighting your best work. Judging will be based on accuracy, cleverness, creativity, impact, originality and the ability to grab the attention of the reader. *This is a composite category. The stories from which the ledes come may be entered in other categories.*

- *Each lede must be clearly marked.*

## **Headline Writing**

Three headlines highlighting your publication's best work. Judging is based on accuracy, cleverness, creativity, impact, originality and the ability to grab the attention of the reader. *This is a composite category. The stories from which the headlines come may be entered in other categories.*

- *Each headline must be clearly marked.*

## **Lighter Columns**

Three locally-written columns devoted to the lighter side of life by the same writer. No restrictions on subject matter. Judging is based on originality, local appeal and writing quality.

- *Combine the three columns into a single file for entry.*

## **Serious Columns**

Three locally-written columns on serious topics by the same writer. Judging is based on originality, writing quality, significance of material presented to the community and suitable handling of the topic.

- *Combine the three columns into a single file for entry.*

## **Photography, General News**

One published picture or series of pictures of a single news event. This category is not for spot photos (photos of events not planned in advance), or feature photos. All photos must have been published in your newspaper or on your website.

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

## **Photography, Spot**

A single picture or series of pictures of a single unplanned news event taken "on the spot." This category is not for general news or feature photos. All photos must have been published in your newspaper or on your website.

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

### **Photography, Feature**

A single picture or series of pictures on the same subject published in your newspaper or on your website. May include portraits, but excludes hard news, sports or spot photos (photos of events not planned in advance).

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

### **Photography, Sports Feature**

A single picture or series of pictures on the same sports-related subject published in your newspaper or on your website. Note: Sports events go in the Photography, Sports category.

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

### **Photography, Sports**

A single published picture or series of pictures of a sports event. All pictures must have been published in your newspaper or on your website.

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

### **Photo Page or Essay**

A single page or series of pages of related photos that tell a story and were published in your newspaper or on your website. Entry will be judged on photo quality and layout of page, as well as overall impact of page.

- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

### **Illustration/Photo Illustration/Print or interactive graphics**

A single illustration, series of illustrations hand-drawn or computer-generated, a graphic or a photograph where the reality has been altered to clarify or dramatize a particular idea or editorial concept. Judging will be based on overall attractiveness and creativity as well as interpretation of the accompanying article.

- *Entry must accompany a single story or series.*
- *Page e-tear sheet(s), screenshots or URLs accepted. If needed, add arrow(s) indicating the photo(s) submitted.*

## **Video**

Awards single online video. How the video adds to the publication's overall coverage of the story and/or how well the video itself tells a story is of primary importance to the judges. The quality of the video is of secondary importance.

- *Please provide specific URLs and include a username/password if your site has a paywall.*
- *Entrants are responsible for web availability of entries through June 2026. If the story is unavailable on the website, screenshots may be submitted.*

## **Multimedia Project**

Overall work on a news story that is presented using multiple forms of media, including but not necessarily the main print product. Project may include stories, photographs presented in various forms, video, blogs, audio files, etc. Judging is based on how the individual elements add to a total package without being merely duplicative. Quality of video work will be secondary to how the video helps users better understand the story.

- *Upload items from printed products.*
- *Provide specific URLs for all postings and include a username/password if your site has a paywall. Entrants are responsible for web availability of entries through June 2026. If the story is unavailable on the website, screenshots may be submitted.*

## **Email newsletter**

Three examples of email newsletters produced by newsroom staff. Judging will be based on efforts to engage readers in a way that goes beyond merely sharing links to articles.

- *Screenshots of email newsletters should be combined into a single file*
- *Where available, newsletter urls can also be submitted*

## **Use of social media**

Recognizes innovation and effectiveness in offerings from social media account(s) associated with the publication or website. Entries can include the url for a single social media account or multiple accounts. A statement detailing digital strategy and tools should accompany each entry and can include screenshots or url(s) of previous work. Entries will be judged live during the judging period.

- *Please provide specific social media accounts for judge to follow. List accounts to be judged and statement on digital strategy on a document and upload as PDF.*
- *Entrants are responsible for web availability of entries through June 2026.*

## Editorials

Three editorials written by the same writer. Judging is based on general excellence of writing and clarity of thinking.

- *Combine the three editorials into a single file for entry.*

## Editorial Page

Entry consists of three editorial pages in their entirety from newspapers published in either **June 2025** or **November 2025**. Judging will be based on writing, clarity of thinking, layout, variety and local impact of this page. Only locally-generated content will be considered by judges. *This is a composite category*

- *Upload three editorial pages from either month but not both.*

## Community Coverage

This category recognizes what only great news organizations do - reporting news that matters locally to readers and chronicles the essence of their community. Judges will evaluate the quality of reporting and writing; coverage of local schools and education issues; human events, people, places, festivals, celebrations, reunions, etc.; aspects of local health and medical care; the arts, including music, drama, theater, art, and dance in the community; coverage of religion in the community; and community history and retrospectives. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry.* Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.

- *Upload two complete editions published in either **August 2025** or **February 2026**. Choose an entry from either month, but not both. (Magazines chose an edition from only one of those months)*

## Sports Coverage

Judging considers overall sports coverage. Judges will evaluate the quality of reporting and writing; coverage of local sports, events and people. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry.* Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.

- *Upload the complete sports section for any two consecutive publication days in either **September 2025** or **March 2026**. Choose an entry from either month, but not both. (Magazines chose an edition from only one of those months)*

## Special Section

Entry consists of one full pdf of a special section **published by and included in the general run of the newspaper, whether broadsheet, tabloid or glossy insert**. It can cover any industrial progress, fair, celebration, fashion, centennial, patriotic, anniversary or other special event. Examples: annual hunting tab, "15 community leaders under 40" or general-run broadsheet section dedicated to a

one-time special topic such as a hurricane. The entry must be an individual newspaper's own efforts - locally produced and not a canned section written by a news or content service. The section will be judged as a whole with emphasis on editorial content, makeup and photographic excellence. Judges will consider the excellence and depth of written material and use of photographs. A statement explaining circumstances connected with the section may be included with the entry. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- Upload entire section.
- Maximum 3 entries per newspaper.

### **Magazine or Niche Publication**

**Any member's periodically printed publication, not necessarily distributed in a newspaper.**

May be printed on glossy paper or newsprint. Contents are not current-events-focused news but more leisurely, in-depth reads with excellent photos. Contents must be written, photographed and laid out by the NCPA member (although it may be printed out-of-house) and not material from a content service. The overall publication does not focus on a special event, but individual articles may do so.

*NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- You must upload a complete publication with a proof of publication that indicates the run date.

### **General Excellence**

Judging is based on the following criteria: mechanical excellence, general and departmental news coverage, literacy excellence, promotion of community interests, graphics, and appearance and design, editorial vigor, use of photographs and advertising enterprise.

Appearance and design criteria: attractiveness and consistency of layout, typography, use of photos, effective headlines and overall impact of the newspaper's appearance. Judges will review the appearance and design of ALL sections of the newspaper

Use of photos criteria: based on the best use of local news pictures.

Website Criteria: based on how effectively the publication serves its audience, maximizes the unique abilities of the internet, and represents the highest journalistic standards. Sites will be judged on the excellence of local content, interactivity, audience development and community engagement tools.

To the best of the judge's ability points will be given based on how the newspaper uses the website to

serve its local audience and not on design, navigation or any tool that may be produced by a vendor of a corporate design hub.

NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.

- *Upload complete newspapers for any two consecutive publication days in either **July 2025** or **January 2026**. Choose an entry from either month, but not both. Add link to website in contest entry. (Magazines chose an edition from only one of those months)*

General Excellence Winners in each division will be awarded based on a combination of 50% judged category results based on quality of production, writing, sections, design, front page, editorial page, appearance and design, use of photographs, and website (15 points to 1st place, 9 points to 2nd place and 3 points to 3rd place) and 50% point system for awards won in the editorial AND advertising contest (5 points for each 1st place, 3 for each 2nd place and 1 for each third place). The points will be added up to determine the GE winner. Special Editorial Awards will be worth double points. Tie-breaker is the number of 1st place awards, then the total number of 1st and 2nd combined, then the total number of all awards combined.

## **MAGAZINE CATEGORIES**

In addition to ALL editorial and advertising categories, Magazines (Division M) may also enter the following categories.

### **Overall DESIGN**

This category recognizes outstanding design excellence in magazines. Judges will evaluate submissions based on the quality and impact of the publication’s visual content, as well as the effectiveness of graphic design in supporting its editorial mission. For digital-only and multiplatform entries, additional criteria include design innovation, functional excellence, and user accessibility. Each entry must include complete print issues. A maximum of two complete print issues may be included per entry.

### **COVER OF THE YEAR**

This award celebrates the most exceptional magazine cover—whether print or digital—that demonstrates outstanding visual excellence. Submissions may be recognized for achievements in design, photography, typography, or illustration. Each entry must be submitted as a PDF, with one cover per entry. For split-run covers, flip covers, or gatefold covers from the same issue, submit a single file containing all related versions.

## **Advertising CATEGORIES**

### **Small Ad**

Any ad or campaign that is 1/8 page or smaller (broadsheet or tab).

### **Service ads (Things you use or experience)**

Any ad or campaign featuring a non-retail business such as hotels, banks, funeral homes, health clubs, gyms, political campaigns, restaurants, entertainment, festivals and/or sports, health care, or medical or therapeutic services.

### **Retail ads (Things you have to buy)**

Any ad or campaign featuring general merchandise sales and/or service such as motorized vehicles, food and groceries, drugs or beverages, home furnishings and appliances clothing, and jewelry.

### **Real Estate Ad**

Any ad or campaign featuring real estate, development, mobile home, condominiums, vacation, residential, farm, industrial or investment property. This category also includes home improvement/construction.

### **Use of Color**

Any ad or campaign using three or more colors in addition to black. No special section covers. Color ads only. One overall 1st place award will be selected.

### **Use of Humor or Best Blooper**

Any ad or campaign using humor (intended) or bloopers (unintended). One overall 1st place award will be selected.

### **Innovative Concept/Wild Card**

Includes booklets, other publications such as calendars, newsletters, posters, promotional materials, special rates, advertiser incentives or any one ad, a sample of materials, an entire section or other product that does not fit any other category. Does not include special publications not inserted into the newspaper. Entries are not required to be printed on newspaper. For items that can't be uploaded, please upload photos and a letter of explanation. One overall 1st place award will be selected.

### **Newspaper Promotion**

Any ad or campaign featuring newspaper advertising, circulation, editorial, etc. In short, a "house ad" or self-promotion of your newspaper's products or services. This may include rate cards and NIE ads.

### **Special Section or Publication**

Any special section that is published by, but not necessarily distributed in a newspaper. This includes progress, school sports, bridal, back-to-school, lawn and garden, holiday greetings, recipe/cooking, school graduation, mall or shopping center, downtown, fashion merchandising, classified or ROP.

Please upload the entire section. NOTE: This is a composite category where many ads contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual ads appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own, individual merits. Judges will be focusing on advertising, not editorial content.

### **Community Service Signature Page or Page**

Any ad featuring a public service (or similar theme) sponsored by two or more advertisers OR an ad featuring multiple advertisers organized collectively for such merchandising activities as a downtown sidewalk sale, moonlight madness sale, etc. Ads can be either color or black and white. NOTE: This is a composite category where many ads contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual ads appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own, individual merits.

### **Advertising Campaign**

Any series of ads showing continuity of idea for a specific product or service. May be any type of ad (retail, institutional, automotive, etc.) Each ad in series should be different. Campaign may also include ads featured online. Dailies: Requires a minimum of 7 ads combined into one file for each entry. Communities: A minimum of 4 ads must be combined into one file for each entry. Ads can be either color or black and white. NOTE: This is a composite category where many ads contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual ads appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own, individual merits.

### **Online Advertising**

Any ads appearing on the newspaper’s website or any online platform. Entries should be a direct URL or uploaded file of the ad. URLs must remain active through May 2025.

*Certificates will be awarded to first-place winners only in all advertising categories.*

### **\*\*\*\*\*Special Awards\*\*\*\*\***

***The following awards will be worth DOUBLE points in the General Excellence point system.***

#### **Public Service Award**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines

Recognizes a distinguished example of meritorious public service of a newspaper to its local community, reflecting exceptional courage or enterprise. The entry should be on one general subject. It may be a single day's effort, a series, or an extended campaign, including stories, editorials, features, cartoons, photographs, etc. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry.* Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits

- *Files should be combined into one file and uploaded.*
- *Upload a cover letter explaining the origin of the project, any major difficulties encountered and the results obtained.*
- *Include one follow-up story showing how the project/series impacted the community.*

### **Hugh Morton Photographer of the Year**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines

The award recognizes a photographer's body of work for the contest year. Judging of the portfolio will take into account the content and composition of the photographs, as well as their technical quality and story-telling impact. Cropped photos are eligible. Digitally or otherwise enhanced or altered photographs are not eligible. Minor adjustments, including slight contrast or color adjustments are acceptable. An entry consists of 10 photographs that must have run in the newspaper, taken by the same photographer during the contest year. Upload all photographs to the contest website. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a "whole" entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- *Maximum 1 entry per person.*

### **Mark Binker Public Notice Award**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines

A news article or series of articles triggered by the publication of a public notice in a newspaper. Judging will be based on the community-wide importance of the news being covered, quality of reporting, timeliness and impact. All daily newspapers will compete against each other for one award.

*NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- Upload a copy of the public notice.
- Maximum 3 articles per entry.

### **Duke University/Green-Rossiter Award for Distinguished Newspaper Work in Higher Education Reporting**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines

Sponsored by Duke University in cooperation with NCPA, the basis for the award is coverage of higher education through editorials, news or feature articles, photos or cartoons, or any combination thereof. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- Each entry must contain 5 items, of which only one can be a series.

### **Media and the Law Awards of Excellence**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines
- Best Overall Series - All Divisions

Sponsored by the North Carolina Bar Association, this award recognizes outstanding legal reporting. Judges will be looking for insightful coverage of law-related topics that foster greater public understanding of the legal system and the role of lawyers in today’s society. Depending on the number and quality of entries, awards may or may not be presented in each category *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

### **Henry Lee Weathers Freedom of Information Award Sponsored by the Associated Press**

One first-place award will be given in each of the following divisions:

- Division A-C newspapers
- Division D-E newspapers
- Online only Newspapers and Magazines

Originally created through a generous donation by the family of Henry Lee Weathers, former owner/publisher of *The Star* (Shelby), and NCPA president 1981-82, this award honors journalists or newspapers for exceptional work in advancing or upholding the cause of open government and freedom of information.

This is NOT an investigative reporting category. Entries can be a single report or collection of not more than five reports, a series, editorials or a special project produced by an individual or a team, that uses sunshine laws, the Freedom of Information Act, or the First Amendment (including access to public records, government meetings, court records and proceedings, censorship or secrecy in government) to shed light on an important community matter and to affect public policy change.

Quality of reporting and writing will be considered along with the outcome or result of the reporting efforts. *NOTE: This is a composite category where many items contribute to the value of a “whole” entry. Individual stories/photos/headlines appearing in these entries are eligible for judging in other categories based on their own individual merits.*

- *Upload entry and any supporting materials that document the issue tackled and any results the work has achieved locally or on a public policy or legislative platform.*
- *Upload letter summarizing obstacles encountered in obtaining access, how the issues were resolved, and why the information is of significant concern to readers.*

### **William C. Lassiter First Amendment Award**

The William C. Lassiter First Amendment Award is given to a citizen – not a member of NCPA – who has worked to keep our government open and accessible to citizens and the press, and who actively defends the principles of the First Amendment and the public’s right to know. Their contribution may come from any field such as business, government, education, research, science, art or literature.

The winner will be chosen by a special committee of the NCPA board of directors.

- *Upload a letter containing your contact information, and detailing the nominee’s name, address, phone number, occupation, and a brief biographical sketch. Please list ways the nominee has contributed to promoting freedom of the press, open government and the public’s right to know, as well as any papers or articles published, speeches made, public positions taken or any other specific instances of contributions.*