



## 2025 BETTER NEWSPAPER CONTEST RULES

Contest for OPA  
Legal Newspapers  
General News Media and  
College Publications

**ENTRY DEADLINE:**  
**February 9, 2026**

### CONTEST ENTRY RULES

**ENTRY DEADLINE:** All entries must be submitted online by **MONDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2026**. Entry materials that must be mailed to the OPA office for categories 1, 2, 3 and 7 must also be postmarked by the February 9 deadline.

**CONTEST PERIOD:** Content published from January 1, 2025, through December 31, 2025 is eligible.

**CONTEST WEBSITE:** To submit contest entries, visit <https://betternewspapercontest.com/OPA>. The publication's password is the same as last year. If your publication did not enter the contest last year, the password is "bnc". Contact Alexis Marshall at [amarshall@okpress.com](mailto:amarshall@okpress.com) or (405) 499-0035 if you need your publication's password.

**ELIGIBILITY:** The 2025 Better Newspaper Contest is open to current OPA Legal Newspapers and General News Media members in good standing, and all college news media. All legal newspaper entries: (a) must be published within a legal newspaper as defined by Title 25 O.S. 106, and (b) may not include content from TMCs and free distribution products. Content from other publications, such as magazines, real estate guides or niche publications are not permitted.

**ENTRY FEE:** \$10 per entry in each category.

**ELIGIBILITY PERIOD:** To be eligible, members' accounts must be in good standing. New members must have paid their annual dues in full by the contest entry deadline. (Members may submit entries published during the entire contest

period – Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2025 – even if they have not been members for the entire contest period.)

**PAYMENT:** Entry fees must be paid at the conclusion of entry submission.

Payment options:

- (a) Pay online with a credit card or debit card via Paypal (you do not need a PayPal account to pay). You will be given this option at the conclusion of submitting your entries online.
- (b) Call OPA at 405-499-0035 to provide credit card over the phone, or
- (c) Mail a check to OPA, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105.

**ENTRIES:** Every entry must be logged in the contest website. If you submit multiple entries in one category, each must be logged as a new entry. Entries will be judged only in the category in which they are submitted online. Judges are not permitted to move entries to other categories.

**ENTER ONLINE – [betternewspapercontest.com/OPA](https://betternewspapercontest.com/OPA)**

All entries become the property of OPA and may be reproduced in print or electronic format as educational material and/or exhibits.

**ENTRY FORM:** A completed “entry form” appears after logging an entry in the online contest system and clicking the “submit” button. Print the completed forms for categories 1, 2, 3 and 7 to mail with your print issues and materials.

## **ENTRY PREPARATION:**

- Most entries will be uploaded electronically as **DIGITAL FULL PAGES** in PDF format. Online-only news media should provide PDFs of content as it appears on the website. Detailed instructions of how to upload entries are provided in the Instruction Guide.
- Maximum file size allowed is 5 MB. Larger files (for categories such as Sales Promotion) should be reduced or uploaded to a third-party site, such as GoogleDrive or Dropbox. If you cannot upload PDFs, please contact OPA at 405-499-0020 or 1-888-815-2672.
- If an entry is comprised of multiple pages, combine all pages into a single PDF file. This makes it easier for the judge to review your entry.
- Three categories (News Content, Layout and Design, and Advertising) require that three full different issues of the printed newspaper or printout of the e-edition be mailed to the OPA office for judging. Log the entry in the online contest system, then print and mail the entry form with your issues to OKLAHOMA PRESS ASSOCIATION, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Online news organizations that do not have a print publication should mail printouts of ALL online content produced on three separate days for each category.
- Categories #10-25 allow multiple entries per member, but there is a limit on the number of entries allowed per publication or per person. These limits are indicated in each category description.

**HEADLINES/TITLES:** When submitting your entries, headlines assist judges in determining which story, photo or ad on a page is to be judged. Please use the following method for the “Headline” field. The title of a story entry should be the headline. The title of a photo entry should be the subject, headline or first few words of the cutline. The title of advertising entries should identify the business, organization or ad headline to be judged.

**IDENTICAL MATERIAL:** Members may submit identical material by only one publication – the publication that produced the majority of the content, or, if it was a shared responsibility, the publication with the largest city population.

**STAFF PRODUCED:** All contest entries must have been produced by the member publication’s staff or regular paid contributors. Outsourced work may be entered, but the work must have been done exclusively for the publication entering the material. Syndicated material cannot be entered.

**ADVERTISING ENTRIES:** All ads must be original work, conceived and sold by your staff. Clip art is acceptable, but no camera-ready ads should be submitted, such as those from advertising agencies or advertiser produced. All ads must be from your regularly printed newspaper/publication.

**ALTERING CONTENT:** Writing and photo entries should be the original work of the credited individual(s) and not created in whole or in part by AI (artificial intelligence).

All submitted content must be as it originally appeared in print or online, with the exception of color correction of photographs for print purposes.

Allegations that a submitted entry has been altered by AI or other means or is not the original work of the credited individual(s) must be reported to OPA in writing and signed by the person or newspaper submitting the allegation by December 31, 2026.

If the OPA Board of Directors finds the entry has been altered, the organization will be disqualified from the year of entry when the action occurred and suspended from participation in the OPA Better Newspaper Contest for two contest years immediately after the Board decision.

## **ALLOWANCE OF E-EDITIONS:**

Submission of content from a member publication’s e-edition is allowed. An e-edition is defined as a digital replica of the publication. Content published only on a website is not permitted, except by online-only news organizations and unless the category permits.

**LETTERS TO JUDGES:** Comment letters to judges are required in Category 7, Sales Promotion; Category 8, Community Leadership; and Category 9, Digital Media (if applicable). Letters to judges may be included in other events but are not required.



# DIVISIONS AND AWARDS

**DIVISIONS:** Division placement is determined by a news organization's publication frequency and city/town population as reported in the 2024 estimated census provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (in May 2025).

## Multi-Day and Online-Only Members

Three (3) Divisions

## Weekly Members

Four (4) Divisions

## College News Media Organizations

### POPULATION DIVISIONS ARE AS FOLLOWS:

- 3 divisions for Multi-Day and Online-Only members: Publications producing print editions and/or e-editions (digital replicas) two or more times per week. Division placement will be determined when all entries have been received. Participating publications will be sorted in order of city population and entries will be divided as equally as possible into three population divisions.
- 4 divisions for Weekly members: Publications produced one time per week or semi-monthly. Division placement will be determined when all entries have been received. Participating weekly publications will be sorted in order of city population and entries will be divided as equally as possible into four population divisions.
- College News Media Organizations

### ADDITIONAL NOTES:

(a) Members may elect to compete in a higher population division of the same publication frequency at the time of entry but may not compete in a lower division. Notify OPA to update your division prior to the entry deadline by sending an email to [Lsutliff@okpress.com](mailto:Lsutliff@okpress.com). An online-only member that wants to compete in a different frequency division should submit a request to the contest coordinator at least 10 business days prior to the entry deadline. If a member chooses to compete in a

different division, it must submit all entries in that division.

(b) If a publication changes its frequency during the contest period, it must have published at that frequency for a minimum of six full months immediately preceding the final day of the contest period, which is Dec. 31, 2025, to compete in the corresponding division. (Such publications may still submit entries published during the contest period – Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 2025.)

(c) In categories 10-25, which recognize individuals: If three or fewer entries are submitted in a single category within a population division, the entries may be judged as is or be moved into the next larger population division. Further, if three or fewer entries are submitted in a category in the division for large weekly members, the entries may be combined for judging with the entries in the same category of the next lower population division.

**AWARDS:** Judges may award first through third place winners in each category. Each division's Sweepstakes winner, which is determined by the amount of points accumulated in the first eight categories, receives the Sequoyah Award – the highest honor in the contest. Sequoyah Award and First

Place winners receive plaques; second and third place winners receive certificates. Each winning publication receives the privilege of publishing the 'Prize Winning Logo' for the entire year. Awards will be presented during the OPA Annual Convention.

**POINTS:** Points in the first eight categories are awarded on the following scale:

### CATEGORIES 1-3

1st Place	110 Points
2nd Place	80 Points
3rd Place	60 Points

### CATEGORIES 4-8

1st Place	100 Points
2nd Place	70 Points
3rd Place	50 Points

No points will be awarded in categories 9 through 25.

**TIES:** There will be no ties within categories.

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

For clarification of rules contact Lisa Sutliff or Jennifer Gilliland at (405) 499-0020 or 1-888-815-2672 (toll-free in Oklahoma). Contest rules are available on the OPA website at [www.okpress.com/awards](http://www.okpress.com/awards).

A list of participating organizations sorted by division will be posted on the OPA website within one week after the contest entry deadline.

## *Fly high like an eagle...*

Achieve great heights by entering the 2025 OPA Better Newspaper contest!

**ENTRY DEADLINE**  
**Monday, Feb. 9, 2026**



**Enter Online: [betternewspapercontest.com/opa](http://betternewspapercontest.com/opa)**

# 2025 BETTER NEWSPAPER CONTEST

## CATEGORIES

### CATEGORIES 1-9 (Recognizes Publications)

Categories 1 through 9 are limited to one entry per publication and awards are presented to the publication. Categories 1 through 8 award points for the Sequoyah Award.

#### 1. NEWS CONTENT

Print publication members should mail three full issues comprised of one issue from February 2025, one from September 2025, and one from anytime within the contest period. Online-only members should print all news articles produced during three different days, matching the required dates above.

Any sports pages or sections should be removed.

Log the entry in the online contest system, then print the entry form and mail it with your issues to OPA, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Limit one entry per member.

Judges will consider the extent and quality of the overall news product that is representative of the community. Criteria include: local coverage, balance, government coverage, headlines, organization, photos, graphics and writing.

#### 2. LAYOUT & DESIGN

Print publication members should mail three full issues comprised of one issue from April 2025, one from December 2025, and one from anytime within the contest period. Online-only members should print all content produced during three different days, matching the required dates above.

Log the entry in the online contest system, then print the entry form and mail it with your issues to OPA, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Limit one entry per member.

Judges will consider selection and effective use of typefaces, photos and graphic elements; headlines; general makeup; organization and advertising display.

#### 3. ADVERTISING

Print publication members should mail three full issues comprised of one issue from June 2025, one from October 2025, and one from anytime within the contest period. Online-only members should print all web pages featuring advertising appearing during three different days,

matching the required dates above.

This category recognizes a staff's overall advertising efforts in a regular issue. Issues in which the majority of content and ads follow a specific sales promotion theme should not be entered in this category as they are eligible in the Sales Promotion category.

Log the entry in the online contest system, then print the entry form and mail it with your issues to OPA, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Any inserted niche products, sales promotions or magazines should be removed from mailed entries. Limit one entry per member.

For display advertising, judges will consider the publication's advertising enterprise (wide variety of merchants), headlines, copy and layout, imaginative use of illustrations, apparent effectiveness and creativity.

For classified advertising, judges will consider the ease of finding classifications, display (use of type and attractiveness), enterprise and neatness.

#### 4. EDITORIAL WRITING

Submit THREE different editorials as one entry. Upload full-page tearsheet PDFs and list the headline(s) in the Title field for identification purposes when submitting your entry. Limit one entry per member.

##### DEFINITION OF AN EDITORIAL:

An article that persuades, informs and/or expresses an opinion of those in control of the publication on a matter of current interest. Personal columns may be entered if each is limited to one subject and fulfill the other qualifications of an editorial.

Judges will consider quality of writing, originality, logical construction, strong lead and conclusion.

#### 5. PHOTOGRAPHY

Submit SIX photos comprised of: two news photos, two sports photos and two feature photos. Upload full-page tearsheet PDFs. Identify the photos to be judged in the headline field when submitting the entry.

Photos may be black and white or color. A picture page or related photos of the same subject matter published in the same issue or calendar date may be considered as one photo selection. Limit one entry per member. The six photos will be judged as a package and not individual photographs.

Judges will consider subject composition, originality, technical skill demonstrated, and use of photographs.

#### 6. SPORTS COVERAGE

Submit THREE separate PDF full sports pages or sections from the following dates: one from January through June 2025, one from July through December 2025, and one from any date within the contest period.

Online organizations should upload PDFs of all sports-related content produced during three different days, matching the required dates above.

Judges will consider newsworthiness, overall coverage, writing skill, creativity, headlines, photography and organization of sports coverage. Limit one entry per member.

#### 7. SALES PROMOTION

Submit one revenue-producing promotion published **in print or online** anytime within the contest period. Submit entry by **uploading** a digital file of the entire promotion **OR mail** the printed promotion to OPA. A letter must accompany this entry explaining the promotion and amount of revenue produced. Include all sales support materials such as pre-publicity ads, news stories, direct mail, flyers and point of purchase materials used relating to the promotion.

Each entry must be logged in the online contest system. If mailing entry: print the entry form from the contest system and mail it with your promotion/letter to OPA, 3601 N. Lincoln Blvd., Oklahoma City, OK 73105. Limit one entry per member.

Judges will consider originality, organization, design and writing.

## 8. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

Submit one project, over and above the normal duties of a news media organization, that is aimed at service to the community rather than revenue. A letter (in PDF, TXT or other format) must accompany this entry explaining the project.

Upload full-page tearsheet PDFs of any articles and ads related to the project. List article and ad headlines in the Title field for identification purposes when submitting your entry. Limit one entry per member.

News Media staffs recognize and act upon specific issues or needs within their communities. This event seeks to recognize these efforts and promote the organization's commitment to civic responsibility. Projects should be developed through the organization's own efforts and

should be completed or have significant progress made during the contest period. Include all relevant information (i.e., news stories, editorials, advertising, reports of events).

Judges will consider relative importance of the topic, quality of effort, depth of research, degree of involvement and results.

**third-party website, upload a written statement describing how you make it unique and interesting to your readers and advertisers.** Place any passwords in the Comment field. Limit one entry per member.

No points toward the Sequoyah Award will be awarded in this category.

All multi-day and online-only members will compete together in one division.

All weekly members will compete together in one division.

All college news media participants will compete together in one division.

Judges will consider news content, navigation, advertising, community, design and visuals.

## 9. DIGITAL MEDIA

Submit the following: (A) your website address and any passwords required to access protected content and (B) your social media addresses to be considered. A letter (in PDF, TXT or other format) explaining your media's unique and valuable aspects is allowed.

**If you have a corporate-designed or**

# CATEGORIES 10-25 (Recognizes Individuals and Publications)

## 10. VIDEO JOURNALISM OR MARKETING

Single video that impacts storytelling in journalism or marketing efforts. Video must have been posted on the publication's website or the publication's social media. (A play-by-play sports game video may not be entered.) The entry may not include copyrighted material, including audio, from another source without written permission from the copyright holder.

Judges will consider: production quality, content, creativity and impact/effectiveness.

**Participants will compete together in one division.** Submit URL(s). One video per entry. Limit two entries per member. Place any passwords in the Comment field.

## 11. ONLINE PROJECT

Creation of engaging digital content through storytelling and multimedia features. Multimedia options include, but are not limited to, video, audio, podcast, webcast, photo galleries or animation as is appropriate for the content. The project may have appeared on the web only, and must include the use of multimedia. If the content also appeared in print, the project on the website must go beyond what appeared in the print edition.

Judges will consider: presentation, production quality, relevance of topic, content, design, creativity and impact/effectiveness.

**Participants will compete together in one division.** Submit URL(s). A short letter explaining your project may be submitted.

One project per entry. Limit two entries per member. Place any passwords in the Comment field.

## 12. NEWS STORY

Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s) of one story and jump, if applicable. Indicate the story to be judged by entering the headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. Entries may include a related sidebar in the same issue. One story per entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider importance to the community, organization, writing skill, and impact of lead and headline.

tearsheet PDF(s) of one story and jump, if applicable. Indicate the story to be judged by entering the headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. One story per entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider originality, style, organization and reader interest.

## 15. BUSINESS STORY

A news or feature story on one or more local businesses or general business in the community. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s) of one story and jump, if applicable. Indicate the story to be judged by entering the headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. One story per entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider news value, organization, writing style and clarity.

## 16. EDUCATION STORY

May include any aspects of education, policy, school boards, school activities or youth in your community. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s) of one story and jump, if applicable. Indicate the story to be judged by entering the headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. One story per entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider news value, organization, writing style and clarity.

## 17. IN-DEPTH REPORTING

May include a single story or series of stories on the same topic beyond routine news coverage. An entry may include a written summary to explain the topic and

## 13. FEATURE STORY

Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s) of one story and jump, if applicable. Indicate the story to be judged by entering the headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. One story per entry. Limit four entries per member.

**DEFINITION OF A FEATURE STORY:** A story of human interest. It may or may not be of a timely nature and it may or may not be news related. It is not a regular feature, i.e., personal column, and may or may not carry a byline and it may or may not have supportive pictures.

Judges will consider writing skill, clarity, a creative lead, human interest and organization of story.

## 14. SPORTS STORY

An entry may include a game story, general news, feature or profile. Upload full-page

## CATEGORIES 10-25 (CONTINUED)

coverage. A series of stories (maximum of 10) comprises one entry. Upload full-page tearsheet PDFs. List the topic in the Title field with publication dates and headlines in the Comments field for identification purposes. Limit two entries per member.

**DEFINITION OF IN-DEPTH REPORTING:** A story or series of stories that explores a significant topic in-depth with multiple sources.

Judges will consider completeness, thoroughness of research, excellence of writing, community-wide interest, execution and commitment of the organization to the project.

### 18. COLUMN WRITING

Submit THREE different columns by the same writer as one entry. Entries must have been produced by the member publication's staff or regular paid contributors. Upload full-page tearsheet PDFs. List the headlines in the Title field for identification purposes when submitting your entry. Limit one entry (of 3 columns) per person as this category will recognize the best column writer, not the best column. Limit four entries per member.

**DEFINITION OF A COLUMN:** Content that expresses a writer's own personal opinion or experience(s). It is usually written in first person. Columns may be humorous or serious and should include the writer's byline. A column is not a news article.

Judges will consider originality, writing, effective humor when appropriate, reader interest, organization, strong lead and conclusion.

### 19. SMALL SPACE AD

Newspapers may enter any one advertisement at a size SMALLER THAN one-quarter (1/4) page by uploading a full-page tearsheet PDF. Online-only news media may enter website ads of any size by uploading a PDF of the ad. Ads may be color or black and white. Entry must be a paid ad created by the organization's staff for a single advertiser, not a house ad. Ads published in niche publications, special sections or magazines are not eligible. Indicate the ad to be judged by entering the business name or ad headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider layout, typography, copy and originality.

### 20. LARGE SPACE AD

Newspapers may enter any one advertisement at a size EQUAL TO OR LARGER THAN one-quarter (1/4) page by uploading a full-page tearsheet PDF. Ads may be color or black and white. Entry must be a paid ad created by the staff for a single advertiser, not a house ad. Ads published in niche publications, special sections or magazines are not eligible. Indicate the ad to be judged by entering the business name or ad headline in the Title field when submitting your entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider layout, typography, copy and originality.

### 21. NEWS PHOTOGRAPH

May be black and white or color. A photograph entered in the News category cannot be entered in the Feature or Sports Photograph categories. Entries must have been produced by the member publication's staff or regular paid contributors. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s). Indicate the photo to be judged by entering the subject, headline or first few words of the photo caption in the Headline field. One photo per entry. Limit four entries per person. No limit per member.

Judges will consider newsworthiness, reader interest, originality and quality of photo.

### 22. FEATURE PHOTOGRAPH

May be black and white or color. A photograph entered in the Feature category cannot be entered in the News or Sports Photograph categories. Sports action photos are not eligible in this category. Entries must have been produced by the member publication's staff or regular paid contributors. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s). Indicate the photo to be judged by

entering the subject, headline or first few words of the photo caption in the Headline field. One photo per entry. Limit four entries per person. No limit per member.

Judges will consider quality of photo, originality and reader interest.

### 23. SPORTS PHOTOGRAPH

May be black and white or color. A photograph entered in the Sports category cannot be entered in the Feature or News Photograph categories. Entries must have been produced by the member publication's staff or regular paid contributors. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s). Indicate the photo to be judged by entering the subject, headline or first few words of the photo caption in the Headline field. One photo per entry. Limit four entries per person. No limit per member.

Judges will consider newsworthiness, reader interest, originality and quality of photo.

### 24. PHOTO ESSAY/PICTURE PAGE

A group of photographs on one topic that are arranged to tell a story in a single issue or date. Entries must be produced by the member's staff or regular paid contributors. Upload full-page tearsheet PDF(s). Indicate the photo topic/event in the Headline field when submitting your entry. Limit four entries per member.

Judges will consider quality of photos, layout, originality and reader interest.

### 25. FRONT PAGE DESIGN

Upload full-page tearsheet PDF of one newspaper front page per entry. Limit three entries per member.

Judges will consider use of photographs and graphics, headlines and body types, organization and overall appearance.

## QUESTIONS OR CLARIFICATIONS



Contact Lisa Sutliff or Jennifer Gilliland at (405) 499-0020 or 1-888-815-2672 (toll-free in Oklahoma). Contest rules are available on the OPA website at [www.okpress.com/awards](http://www.okpress.com/awards).

**OKLAHOMA PRESS ASSOCIATION**

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