

THE ALLIANCE 
OF AREA BUSINESS PUBLISHERS

2026 Editorial Excellence
A W A R D S



As judged by
The University of Missouri
School of Journalism



Categories

(Unless otherwise noted below, entries should consist of a single example.)

DESIGN

(Gold/silver/bronze awards)

1. **Best cover – magazine**
2. **Best feature layout – magazine**
Entries can involve a single feature story or a single feature and sidebars.
3. **Best overall design – magazine**
Mail in four issues of your choice (3 copies of each issue). Also upload PDFs of the covers into one single entry in the online system.
4. **Best front page – newspaper**
First news page of a regular edition only; does not include wraps or special section/special issue covers.
5. **Best feature layout – newspaper**
Entries can involve a single feature story or a single feature and sidebars
- 6a. **Best overall design: small tabloids**
- b. **Best overall design: medium tabloids**
- c. **Best overall design: large tabloids**
Mail in four issues of your choice (3 copies of each issue). Also upload PDFs of the covers into one single entry in the online system.
- 7a. **Best Use of Photography/Illustrations: Newspaper**
- b. **Best Use of Photography/Illustrations: Magazine**
Submit a portfolio of up to 10 examples of how photography and/or illustrations were used during the year. Can include infographics.

ONLINE

(Gold/silver/bronze awards)

- 8a. **Best use of multimedia**
Provide appropriate URLs on entry form. Entries may have run in connection with a story or editorial feature or be an independent project that is either one-time or recurring. Can use audio, video, slides and/or social media elements.
- b. **Best podcast**
Submit a brief written description of the entry along with one single audio file of maximum 15 minutes runtime (upload the file or include a link to it online). The submitted audio can be from a single episode or a combination of material from up to three episodes. Also provide an active link to the full podcast series.
9. **Best daily email**
Upload a PDF with live links from either your morning or afternoon daily emails from Jan. 21 and 23, 2026, or link to archived daily email on website. If necessary, provide a password for judges to gain access to password-protected content. Entries will be judged based in part on headlines that interest readers and maximize discovery by search engines and presentations that facilitate a fast scan.
10. **Best specialty e-newsletter**
E-newsletters whose content is organized around an industry or other specific topic are eligible. Upload a PDF with live links of two examples from January 2026 of your e-newsletter or link to archived newsletter on website. If necessary, provide a password for judges to gain access to password-protected content. Entries will be judged based in part on headlines that interest readers and maximize discovery by search engines and presentations that facilitate a fast scan.

JOURNALISM

(Publications will enter in small, medium and large categories that include newspapers and magazines. Gold/silver awards)

11. **Best scoop**
Recognizes coverage of an important story you were the first to write about. Please explain why the story was important. Include documentation that attests to the scoop if available. Entries can come from print or web. (For web entries, screen shots verifying the time you first posted, plus when competitors did are helpful.)
- 12a. **Best feature single story**
A single story that: a) does not require a time element to be relevant; and b) demonstrates creative approaches to writing and/or presentation. Print or web.
- 12b. **Best feature story series**
A collection of related stories that: a) does not require a time element to be relevant; and b) demonstrates creative approaches to writing and/or presentation. Print or web. Submit up to three articles from the series.
13. **Best profile on a person or company**
A single story that presents an insightful written portrait of an individual or company. Print or web.
14. **Best recurring feature**
Submit three examples of a short (two-page maximum) regular feature that appears at least once a month. Print only. Note: This is not a category for collections of in-depth stories; those go in category 12b: Best feature story series.
15. **Best coverage of local breaking news**
An entry should advance a breaking story within 48 hours of when it was first reported. Judges will balance the quality and extent of coverage against time pressures. Coverage can include stories from print and web. If print is included, the time at which the story is sent to the printer must fall within the 48-hour news cycle.
16. **Best investigative reporting**
In-depth, watchdog reporting that: a) presents important information that was unknown to the public and was unavailable from other sources before publication; and b) demonstrates an obvious need to change in law/policy/behavior. Can be a single story or series of stories, as long as the stories were identified as series at the onset of coverage. Print, web or a combo of both.
17. **Best explanatory journalism**
In-depth reporting that presents, defines, unpacks and simplifies a single important topic and/or news event that allows the reader to understand it more clearly. Print or web.
- 18a. **Best beat reporting: economics and finance**
Submit 3 examples of a regular beat story in print or web.
- 18b. **Best beat reporting: real estate**
Submit 3 examples of a regular beat story in print or web.
- 18c. **Best beat reporting: tech and innovation**
Submit 3 examples of a regular beat story in print or web.
19. **Best ancillary publication**
Mail in 3 copies of a single stand-alone editorial supplement that was distributed inside a regular issue. Also upload a PDF of the cover into the online system. Annual "Book of Lists" publications are not eligible in this category.
20. **Best bylined commentary**
Submit up to three dated examples. You may submit a brief statement of why the submitted examples are considered significant. Print or web.
21. **Best editorial** *Print or web.*

Categories (continued)

(Unless otherwise noted below, entries should consist of a single example.)

BEST OF SHOW

(Gold/silver/bronze awards, except for most improved publication and Journalist of the Year.)

22. Most improved publication

Mail in 3 copies of each of these four issues: Last (or only) issue from May 2024 and from May 2025, and the first (or only) issue from September 2024 and from September 2025. Also upload PDFs of the front pages into one single entry in the online system. Only one award in this category.

23a. Journalist of the year - small

23b. Journalist of the year - medium

23c. Journalist of the year - large

Submit up to three examples of excellent work by a single journalist. Include a Letter of Excellence from the nominee's editor or publisher about the impact the nominee has had on the publication and coverage area. Examples of work can

include materials entered in other categories. Examples can be from print, web, or a combination of both. Publications will enter in small, medium and large categories that include newspapers and magazines. Only one award per size category.

24. Best website

Submit URL and upload a screenshot of the website homepage. Publications will enter in small, medium and large categories that include newspapers and magazines.

25. Best magazine

Mail in four issues of your choice (3 copies of each issue). Also upload PDFs of the covers into one single entry in the online system.

26a. Best newspaper: small tabloids

b. Best newspaper: medium tabloids

c. Best newspaper: large tabloids

Mail in four issues of your choice (3 copies of each issue). Also upload PDFs of the covers into one single entry in the online system.

Contest Rules

1. All entries must be submitted through the online entry system (see instructions for online submissions). Some categories (3, 6, 22, 23, 25 and 26) also require materials to be mailed to the University. Enter information through the online system, print out the "Label" that is automatically generated when you hit "submit" and send 3 sets of each entry. A set consists of a.) an entry "label" from the online system; b.) the materials/issues to be judged; c.) an optional letter of no more than 150 words.

INCOMPLETE ENTRIES WILL NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR JUDGING. REMEMBER: YOU NEED THREE (3) SETS OF MATERIALS FOR EACH ENTRY THAT NEEDS TO BE MAILED BUT ONLY ENTER IT ONE (1) TIME IN THE ONLINE SYSTEM.

2. Three sets of entire original issues must be submitted for categories 3, 6, 20, 23, 25 and 26. For these mailed categories, publications should ALSO post an online image from that entry to be used in the contest presentation if it is a winner. The online system allows URLs to be included for categories 8, 9, 10 and 24 and you must provide passwords for judges to gain access to password-protected sites. Entries for category 24 must also include a color screenshot of the website's home page and uploaded in the online system.
3. A publication can submit multiple entries in the same category, but each must be entered separately and an entry fee paid for each. However, a publication can have only one winning entry per category. No entry can be submitted in more than one writing or reporting category. An exception is "Body of Work" entries, which can contain stories entered elsewhere.
4. Work to be judged must have first appeared in 2025, except for entries in categories 9, 10 and 24. Judging for category 24 will be based on content on the website at the time the judges examine it.
5. Entries will be judged in four categories: Design, Online, Journalism and Best of Show. At the judges' discretion, gold, silver and bronze awards will be given in the Design, Online and Best of Show categories, except for Most Improved Publication and Journalist of the Year, where only one award is given. In the Journalism category, gold and silver awards may be given in each of three size categories, based on revenue. Small is \$1 million and below, medium is \$1.01 million up to \$2.5 million and large is over \$2.5 million. Unless otherwise stated, categories include both newspapers and magazines.

6. Entries that call for a story or single story may include sidebars and other clearly related elements. They also allow for a construction that might be, for example, four points of view packaged together with a copy block or some other unifying device. A story is not a special section around a broad topic, where the stories are related to the theme, but not each other.
7. With the approval of the contest coordinator, judges can reassign an entry from one category to another if they believe that is appropriate. This should happen infrequently.
8. The online system will be available through the March 6, 2026, deadline. After that, no more submissions will be accepted. Materials that need to be mailed to the University (for categories 3, 6, 20, 23, 25 and 26) must be postmarked by March 7, 2026 (and already submitted online). Materials postmarked after this date will not be accepted.
9. The contest is open to all member publications of the Alliance of Area Business Publishers that are current with dues for the 2026 calendar year.
10. A fee \$60 per entry for small newspapers, \$70 per entry for all magazines and medium/large newspapers, and \$95 per entry for all Best in Show categories must be included with the entry materials. Please pay for your entries when completed using the URL provided on the awards platform or you can mail a check to:
AABP, 287 Richards Ave., Norwalk, CT 06850

All mailed entries;/materials should be sent to:

AABP Contest, c/o Ellie Newberry-Wortham
Missouri School of Journalism
Lee Hills Hall 216
221 S. 8th St.
Columbia, MO 65201

***Please use Fed Ex or USPS to mail your entries as UPS has issues delivering to the University of Missouri School of Journalism.**

THE ALLIANCE 

OF AREA BUSINESS PUBLISHERS

All entries must be postmarked by March 6, 2026.

Instructions for Online Submissions

Again this year, entries to the Alliance of Area Business Publishers Editorial Excellence Awards competition will be submitted using a web-based program at www.betterbnc.com. You can also find the link to the contest on the AABP website: www.bizpubs.org.

Below are directions for preparing and submitting entries.

IMPORTANT: Please make sure to use a recent version of Mozilla Firefox (3.0 or higher) or Internet Explorer, and that you have an updated Adobe Flash Player for the browser you will use to make entries. (We have found that Firefox is more efficient than Safari if you are using a Mac and that Chrome can be problematic.)

The deadline for all entries is March 6, 2026 – beyond this date, the online submission will no longer be available and no other submissions will be accepted.

1. Login:

- a. Go to www.betterbnc.com and click on the Contestant Login button at the top of the page.
- b. Select Contestant Manager
- c. Using the pulldown menu, select 2026 AABP Editorial Excellence Awards
- d. Select your publication from the Media Organization list. NOTE: For multi-publication companies, you will need to login and submit entries for each of your publications separately. If your publication does not appear on this list, contact sandersonmgt@gmail.com or 203-515-9294.
- e. If you entered award submissions last year, your account has already been set up and password established. If you have forgotten the password, there is a link for “forgot password” and it will be sent to the email on record. If you don’t receive and/or need to change the email/password, contact AABP (sandersonmgt@gmail.com). If you are a new member and/or have never submitted entries before, use the temporary password: bnc (lower case). When you first login, the system will prompt you to create a secure password (one per publication). Contact AABP if your publication is not listed or you have trouble with the password setting. (sandersonmgt@gmail.com)
- f. This year the system allows additional contacts to have access to submit entries. The Contest Manager is the one to add other Authorized Entrants. You can access additional instructions: http://betterbncsupport.com/images/ContestantManager_Instructions_4_3.pdf

2. Submit Entries:

- a. Login to your account. Navigate to the My Contest Button at the top of the page.
- b. Click on Submit Entry or Manage Entries if you wish to make changes to existing entries.
- c. Select the appropriate Division (Open, Online, or Best of Show).
- d. Select the appropriate Category (Cover, Layout, Scoop, etc.).
- e. Read the corresponding Category Note (directly below the Category selection box), describing what is expected for the category’s entry content. NOTE-for security purposes,

there is a need to verify/confirm the email address and change your password so the first time you log in to the account, a link will be sent to the email address on record for verification and to change your password.

- f. Complete the Headline/Title field. (Required field – if no title, include the category name as “title”)
- g. Based on the type of entry, add content:
 - i. To upload digital file attachments (other than audio/video), click Choose File, navigate to the desired file, select Open, and click Upload. Only send PDF files. If more than one attachment is desired for this entry, repeat these steps. If you reach a point where you cannot add any more attachments to an entry, you may have reached the attachments limit, set by the contest rules. Please try to keep file sizes to 5MB or less, to aid judges in accessing entry content. If your file size is larger than 5MB, please size the file(s) to fit this size requirement.
 - ii. To create an entry for a mail-in, hardcopy-only category (e.g., Overall Design or other categories that require entire issues), You should ONLY upload an image from that entry to be used in the contest presentation if it is a winner. DO NOT UPLOAD A FILE OR ADD WEBSITE URL CONTENT. Simply complete all other content fields.
- h. Add Credits for those responsible for the entry content.
- i. Add Comments (if needed), but keep them brief (e.g. 100 words). NOTE: Some categories require an Editorial Statement. You should attach a Word document with the entry.
- j. Click Submit.
- k. For hardcopy/mail-in entry categories, print and attach the entry label (which automatically appears after each entry is submitted) to each hardcopy item and follow contest shipping instructions. For mailed entries, you need to send 3 copies of each “set” of materials, but it should ONLY be submitted online 1 time. Entries should be mailed in such a fashion to track and ensure delivery. Lost or misdirected packages are considered incomplete submissions. There is no refund for incomplete entries.

Even after “submitting” an entry, you can still edit/change/add to an entry until the submission process closes on March 6. In this way, you can come back to your submissions over time rather than doing them all in one sitting.

SUBMITTING PAYMENT

The software will automatically calculate fees based upon how many categories a publication enters. Credit card payment is accepted through the online submission process. You will be directed to a secure site to submit credit card payment. Publications may also send a check payable to Alliance of Area Business Publishers and send to the **new AABP address: 287 Richards Ave., Norwalk, CT 06850**. Please note – ALL payments must be sent to AABP and not to the university with mailed categories. NOTE: Award submissions are not considered complete without payment. Entries will be pulled from judging if payment is not complete by the close of business on March 15, 2026.