

# 2025 Texas Better Newspaper Contest

The Texas Better Newspaper Contest is an annual competition sponsored by the Texas Press Association to recognize Texas newspapers for excellence in journalism and outstanding service to their communities.

The 2025 contest period is Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025. Awards will be presented at the TPA Convention and Trade Show, June 18-20, 2026, in Dallas.

## ELIGIBILITY

Members in good standing (2026 dues paid) who were also members throughout the contest period, the 2025 calendar year, are eligible to enter the contest.

Entries are made by member newspapers, not individuals. Each newspaper should have a contest manager who is responsible for uploading content and who will serve as the primary contact for the newspaper.

Group-owned newspapers that have content, such as a feature story, published in more than one title, may only submit the entry once, and it must be entered in the division of the newspaper where the content originated. However, if the content is a collaborative effort across several titles, it would be entered in the largest division of the newspapers where it was published.

Content submitted for competition should have been produced by full- or part-time members of the newspaper staff.

Newspapers may submit content produced by local freelancers or contributors provided the newspaper paid to have the content created and the content was created predominantly for the newspaper submitting the entry.

Syndicated or wire service content is not eligible for submission.

AI generated or AI modified/enhanced content is not eligible for submission.

## CONTEST PERIOD: Jan. 1 - Dec. 31, 2025

**ENTRY PERIOD:** Monday, Jan. 19, through Friday, Feb. 13, 2026, on the ACES contest platform, [www.newspapercontest.com/Texas](http://www.newspapercontest.com/Texas). **Code for registration on the ACES contest site is TXPRESS.**

## DEADLINE FOR ENTRIES: Feb. 13, 2026

All entries must be submitted on the ACES online platform, [www.newspapercontest.com/Texas](http://www.newspapercontest.com/Texas), before 10 p.m. Friday, Feb. 13, 2026. The platform will automatically close the contest to entries at deadline.

Note: Each newspaper's contest manager is encouraged to log onto the online contest platform at least two weeks before the deadline to ensure any challenges are resolved in advance. All registrations are new and contest managers will set their own new passwords. Instructions will be on the site. As noted above, **the Association Code for registration on the ACES contest site is TXPRESS.**

## FEES

The fee for each category entered is \$10. The contest platform will enable contest managers to print an invoice to pay by check or to pay online with a credit card.

**\*NOTE: Fees must be paid by Feb. 26, 2026, or entries will be disqualified.**

## DIVISIONS

Division 1 consists of the top five metro dailies — Austin American-Statesman, Dallas Morning News, Fort Worth Star-Telegram, Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News — which will compete exclusively in the General Excellence category.

Divisions 2 and higher will be divided based on total number of participating newspapers, frequency of publication (dailies, semiweeklies and weeklies) and by circulation.

When registering, newspaper contest managers will select their publications' frequencies. Circulation breakdowns will be based on newspapers' Statements of Ownership, Management and Circulation (PS Form 3526) published in October 2025.

## AWARDS

Newspapers that have won awards will be notified by email in May, without specific information as to the award(s) won.

Contest results will be announced at the annual contest awards luncheon on June 20, 2026, at the conclusion of the 2026 TPA Convention & Trade Show at the Hyatt Regency DFW International Airport. A condensed copy of the contest results will be available at the conclusion of the awards ceremony. The complete Winners Circle publication will be online at [www.texaspress.com](http://www.texaspress.com) after the luncheon.

- *Competition Class Winners*

First place winners receive plaques. In addition, award certificates will be presented to first, second, third and fourth place winners.

- *Sweepstakes Winners*

The Texas Better Newspaper Contest includes one Sweepstakes award for each division, except Division 1. Awards are earned by point accumulation in the 12 sweepstakes categories: Advertising, Column Writing, Editorial Writing, Feature Photography, Feature Writing; General Excellence, Headline Writing, News Photography, News Writing, Page Design, Sports Coverage and Sports Photography. Sweepstakes points are calculated on the following scale:

1st Place 100 points (plaque and certificate)

2nd Place 75 points (certificate)

3rd Place 50 points (certificate)

4th Place 25 points (certificate)

- *Sweepstakes Tiebreakers*

If a tie should arise in a Sweepstakes category, the newspaper with the most points in the General Excellence category will be declared the winner. If neither newspaper has won a General Excellence award, the newspaper with the most first place awards overall will be declared the winner. If the score remains tied, the newspaper with the most second place awards will be declared the winner.

## 2025 TEXAS BNC COMPETITION CLASSES

**\* Note: In addition to content in print and digital replicas (eEditions), some categories also allow content published on the newspaper website. Please read rules for each category closely.**

In all categories, the judges consider all the material submitted as one entry. For example, in each photography category, five photos are submitted and all five photos are considered one entry. While judges may comment about one or more photos, the award is based on all five as a select example of the quality of the newspaper's overall photography.

**Judges have the authority to disqualify any entry determined to be inconsistent with contest rules, including the rule regarding AI-generated content.**

### SWEEPSTAKES COMPETITION CLASSES

#### **ADVERTISING - Print edition only category**

Submit digital (PDF) tear sheets of three staff-produced advertisements originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper and/or digital replicas (eEditions) showing the dates of publication. Judges will consider all three ads as one entry. Judging will be based on selling power of copy, originality/creativity, layout/design, use of photos, graphics and typography. Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

#### **COLUMN WRITING**

Submit two columns originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. PDF tearsheets or links/ URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry. Judges will consider both columns as one entry. Columns may be written on any subject in any style. Judging will be based on subject matter, quality and style of writing.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **EDITORIAL**

Submit two editorials originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. PDF tearsheets or links may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider both editorials as one entry. Judging will be based on quality and style of writing, persuasiveness, subject matter and local significance.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **FEATURE PHOTOGRAPHY**

Submit five feature photos originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. PDF tearsheets or URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider all five photos as a representative sample of the quality of the newspaper's photography. Judging will be based on reader interest, composition, quality of cutline, enterprise and innovation.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **FEATURE WRITING**

Submit two feature stories originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. PDF tearsheets or URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider both feature stories as one entry. Judging will be based on subject matter, quality and style of writing and presentation, including layout, design, heads, typography and photos.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **GENERAL EXCELLENCE - Print edition only category**

Submit two complete editions. One edition should have been published in OCTOBER 2025. The second edition published may have been published in any month of choice during the contest period, Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, 2025.

The two entries should be PDFs from print editions or digital replicas (eEditions) of regular editions.

Judges will consider both issues as one entry.

*NOTE: Entries that do not include an OCTOBER 2025 edition will be disqualified in this category.*

Judging is based on news coverage, quality of writing, composition/display, headlines, use of photos and art work, front page and specialty pages such as editorial, family life, social and sports pages. Wire content will not be considered.

### **COMBINE THE PDF PAGES IN EACH EDITION - DO NOT UPLOAD INDIVIDUAL PAGE PDFs.**

Submitting individual pages of large editions is difficult on the ACES platform and judges might not see all of the pages together. If judges cannot see all pages of each edition submitted, they may opt to disqualify the entry.

For PDFs larger than 10 MB, please submit a link to the publication's eEdition on the newspaper's website, on Issuu or another online service and provide a password if needed for the judge to access the edition.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 1 and higher.

## **HEADLINE WRITING - Print edition only category**

Submit PDF tear sheets of three headlines originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions) showing the dates of publication.

Judges will consider all three headlines as one entry. Headlines can come from any section of a regular edition. Judging will be based on accuracy, cleverness, creativity, impact and originality.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY**

Submit five news photos originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. Digital tearsheets or URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider all five photos as a representative sample of the quality of the newspaper's news photography. Judging will be based on timeliness, composition, quality of cutline, enterprise and innovation.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **NEWS WRITING**

Submit two news stories originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. Digital tearsheets or URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider both news stories as one entry. Judging will be based on quality of writing, lede, news value and enterprise.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **PAGE DESIGN - Print edition only category**

Submit PDF tear sheets of four pages - one front page, one editorial page, one sports page and one page of your choice such as lifestyle, community or other type of feature content — originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions) showing the dates of publication. Pages need not come from the same edition.

Judges will consider all pages as one entry. Judging will be based on readability, innovation, color, graphics, design features, typography, photos and other artwork.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **SPORTS COVERAGE - Print edition only category**

Submit PDF tear sheets of two sports sections originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions) showing the dates of publication. Identify any sports writing or sports photos not produced by the newspaper staff.

Judges will consider both sections as one entry. Judging is based on selection of material, quality of writing, range of coverage, photos, layout/design and headlines.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **SPORTS PHOTOGRAPHY**

Submit five sports photos originally published during the 2025 calendar year in print editions of the newspaper or digital replicas (eEditions), *or on the newspaper website*. Digital tearsheets or URLs may be submitted, but the name of the newspaper and date of publication must be shown in the entry.

Judges will consider all five photos as a representative sample of the quality of the newspaper's photography. Judging will be based on action, composition, quality of cutline, enterprise and innovation.

Awards may be presented in Divisions 2 and higher.

## **NON-SWEEPSTAKES CLASSES**

### **BEST MAGAZINE**

Submit one complete staff-produced **magazine published quarterly or monthly**. Since most magazines will be too large resolution to submit as digital tear sheets, entry may be made through URL / link to the newspaper's website or to a platform such as Issuu.

Magazines submitted must have been published during the 2025 calendar year, as print editions or eEditions in conjunction with or in addition to the newspaper and under the auspices of the newspaper.

Judging will be based on theme, content and layout/design/presentation.

Awards may be presented in the following divisions: Daily, Semiweekly, Weekly, depending on the number of entrants.

*\*\*Please Note: If entry is submitted using a URL, please include a PDF of the magazine's front page.*

### **BEST WEBSITE**

Submit the web address and any passwords required to access all pages within the site. Entries must include a brief description of the site's unique aspects, how frequently it is updated and what makes the site vital to readers.

- To add an entry in the Best Website category, copy and paste the web address in the website URL field. Please provide username/password info in the Comments section of your entry.

- Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible.

Judging will be based on content, ease of use and navigation, page design, advertising, timeliness and consistency.

Awards may be presented in the following divisions: Daily, Semiweekly, and two Weekly divisions (based on total number of entrants.)

## COMMUNITY SERVICE

Submit PDF tear sheets of all evidence (e.g., news, photos, editorials, letters, programs) of your newspaper's sponsorship and/or support of one community project conducted during the 2025 calendar year. Items entered may have been originally published on the newspaper's website, in print editions and/or digital replicas (eEditions) and may also include online promotion on the newspaper's website and social media.

Attach a letter (required) describing the background and results of the project.

Judging will be based on subject matter, quality of coverage, extent of community engagement, layout/design/presentation and local significance.

Awards may be presented in the following divisions: Daily, Semiweekly and Weekly.

## ONLINE LIVE COVERAGE

This category recognizes online/breaking or live coverage of a single news, sports or entertainment event, planned or unplanned. Emphasis should be on the use of engaging digital content, including storytelling and multimedia features. Entry may include an online news report and/or links to other elements that contributed to the overall storytelling as the event unfolded in real time, such as videos, tweets, photos, livestream or Facebook Live video, community engagement efforts and comments. The entry must include a one-page cover letter along with a maximum of 10 links/elements. One entry per newspaper. Please be sure to include access to the newspaper's website and social media for the judges. Awards may be presented in the following divisions: Daily, Semiweekly and Weekly.

## SPECIAL SECTION

Submit PDF tear sheets of one complete special section produced by newspaper staff that consists of a complete and cohesive package of locally produced pictures, stories and advertisements emphasizing a central theme of special local interest.

**Special sections are regular publications, such as spring and/or fall sports editions, published once, twice or three times per year as print editions or as digital replicas (eEditions).** Entry must have been originally published in conjunction with or in addition to the newspaper and under the auspices of the newspaper during the 2025 calendar year. Entries may include a letter of explanation.

Judging is based on theme, content and layout/design/presentation.

Awards may be presented in the following divisions: Daily, Semiweekly and Weekly.

For PDFs larger than 10 MB, please submit a URL / link to the newspaper's website or to a platform such as Issuu.

\*\*If the entry is submitted with a URL, please include a PDF of the front page of the section.

***PLEASE NOTE: The same publication may NOT be entered in both magazine and special section categories. The difference between the Best Magazine and Special Section categories is frequency, not format. Magazines are published four times a year (quarterly) or more often. Special sections are published once, twice or three times a year.***

Questions/Assistance

Texas Better Newspaper Contest

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*(Assistance with questions about the contest is available seven days per week during the contest period.)*

## **The Center for Integrity in News Reporting Award of Excellence - Texas**

Texas is among the 14 states chosen to participate in the Center for Integrity in News Reporting Award of Excellence. Through a grant from the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation, each state prize includes a \$5,000 award.

Texas Press Association members may enter the CFINR contest through the Texas Better Newspaper Contest during the TPA contest's entry period Jan. 19 - Feb. 13, in the category called Center For Integrity in News Reporting Award of Excellence - Texas. This category is not part of the regular TxBNC but will be judged through the association's swap with the Washington Newspaper Publishers Association.

Representatives of CFINR and/or SNPAF will announce and award the state prize at the Texas Press Association Convention and Trade Show June 18 - 20 in Dallas.

Participants will enter one major news story or series of news stories that meet the following criteria:

- The entry must be a straight news report and not an editorial, opinion piece, or column.
- The work should focus on verifiable facts, balanced perspectives, neutral tone/language, transparency, and thoroughness of sourcing, while excluding opinion and emotional appeals.
- All factual claims should be supported by evidence and all information verified through multiple independent and reliable sources.
- The language used should be objective and informative, not sensationalized, or emotionally charged. Writing should avoid loaded adjectives, adverbs, or framing that tell the reader how to interpret the facts or feelings.
- Reporters should clearly identify their sources, ideally with verifiable details (e.g., name, position, institution) rather than vague references like "leading doctors say."
- The entry should be complete and within context, providing enough context and background information for the reader to understand the broader implications of the subject. The report should also cover "the whole story," not just the parts of a story that support a particular narrative.

Entries should be uploaded in the special category added to this year's Texas Better Newspaper Contest. Entry period is Jan. 19 through Feb. 13.

The name(s) of the writer(s) producing the story or series must be included as the award is presented to the reporter, not the newspaper. One state prize of \$5,000 will be awarded by representatives of the Center for Integrity in News Reporting.