



SPONSORED BY THE IOWA NEWSPAPER FOUNDATION

CALL FOR ENTRIES

DEADLINE - OCTOBER 10, 2025

All contest entry materials must be:

Uploaded to the contest entry website by October 10, 2025 at 4:30 p.m. **OR** Postmarked (for hard-copy entries)

All material must have been generated for publication between September 1, 2024 and August 31, 2025 for Editorial, Photography, Digital and Writing contests.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

It is the intent of the INA's Better Newspaper Contests to recognize and reward Iowa newspaper enterprises for content of a local nature, that content which is unique to the communities the newspapers serve. However, the INA Contest Committee and its boards of directors also recognize that the contests must reflect an evolving industry, one which is outsourcing and collaborating on content more than ever before. To better reflect how newspaper enterprises operate today, changes have been made in the eligibility guidelines to allow entries by those not on the staff of the newspaper company, if certain criteria are met (defined under eligibility). It is the INA's hope that each newspaper will critically evaluate those entries not produced by its own staff to ensure all the criteria are met and that the integrity of the Better Newspaper Contests is maintained.

All entries should be submitted online unless otherwise noted.

See the Entry Guide for instructions on using the online entry tool. Payments can be made online using a credit card or by mailing a check to the Iowa Newspaper Foundation.

Categories that allow mailed hard-copy entries:

- Total Newspaper Design *Entries in the Total Newspaper Design category must be submitted by hard copy*

For mailed entries, entry tags must be produced and printed through the BetterNewspaperContest.com online system. Each entry should be placed in its own separate envelope, and then all entry envelopes should be gathered together in one box or package.

Send contest fee payments (if not paying online) and hard-copy entries to:
Iowa Newspaper Foundation
319 East 5th Street
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

Judging. Judging for the 2026 Better Newspaper Contests will be provided by members of the Minnesota Newspaper Association.

Awards. First-place plaques will be awarded in each class. Certificates will be awarded for second and third place. There will be no honorable mention awards. Judges will be instructed to award a first, second and third place winner in all contest classes for which at least six entries were submitted; if a contest has five or fewer entries, it will be at the judge's discretion whether to select a third place. Awards will be presented during the Awards Ceremony at the Annual Convention February 5, 2026.

Entry Fees. There will be an entry fee of \$6.25 for each contest entry.

The entry fee must be paid online when submitting entries or mailed to the INF with mailed contest entries.



CONTEST ENTRY PROCEDURES

Eligibility

Any INA Active (newspaper) member in good standing may enter the contests. Eligible publications must meet the definition of an active INA member as outlined in section 3.2 of INA by-laws, including but not limited to having a paid circulation of at least 50 percent of total circulation, publishing 50 times per year and having completed one year of publication with a Periodicals mailing permit.

Entries not produced by a member(s) of the newspaper staff must meet **all of** the following criteria to be eligible:

- The newspaper paid to have the content created;
- The content was created as the result of a contract directly between the newspaper and the freelancer (no third party was involved in the transaction);
- The newspaper had substantial editorial and content control (syndicated or wire service material is not eligible for submission).

Entry Classes

There will be two multi-day entry classes and three weekly entry classes. Weekly classes will be determined by dividing weekly newspapers in thirds based on newspaper participation of the previous year. The 2024 Statements of Ownership will be used as the determinant of each paper's circulation. A newspaper that combines or changes class will be judged in the class in which it published the majority of the year. The newspaper will be responsible for submitting documentation to INA staff.

Multi-day and weeklies must compete in their respective divisions and class sizes.

Twin weeklies, semi-weeklies and tri-weeklies should be considered one newspaper for contest purposes. For these newspapers, the issue with the largest circulation published in the 2024 Statements of Ownership will determine the newspaper's circulation entry class.

See the box below for a breakdown of classes by circulation.

ENTRY CLASSES	
WEEKLY division	MULTI-DAY division
CLASS I - once/week - 700 and under	CLASS IV - Multi-day - 2,500 and under
CLASS II - once/week - 701-1,300	CLASS V - multi-day - 2,501 and above
CLASS III - once/week - 1,301 and above	

Collaborative entries appearing in more than one paid or unpaid editorial publication must be entered in what would be the contest class of the larger (or largest) publication.

However, a **non-collaborative** photo or story produced by a staff member(s) of one newspaper may be entered in that newspaper's class, even if it is also published in another newspaper. Advertising-only publications are not to be included in the determination of contest class. Entries from auxiliary publications of an active member — shopper, total market coverage product, special sections labeled as part of the newspaper, niche publications — will be accepted if the auxiliary publication is distributed with the member newspaper on a full run or zoned basis.

Entry Submission

All entries except Total Newspaper Design should be submitted online at BetterNewspaperContest.com unless noted with  symbol. For entries that can be submitted by mail, entry labels must be created through the online entry site. It is important that you use the required entry tags as they contain specific codes that judges will use to enter their results online.

For mailed entries, each entry must be placed in a separate envelope, with entry tags attached to each entry AND to each envelope.

Entries may be submitted as full-page (PDF) tearsheets or whole issues.

Digital Entry Submission

Content published on digital platforms is eligible for entry in select categories. The complete list of eligible categories is below. For these categories, your entry submissions may have been published in printed form, digital form or a combination of the two. All print entries must be full page tearsheets.

When submitting entries that have been published on digital platforms, provide a URL or a screenshot of the content as it originally appeared.

OVERALL RECOGNITION AWARDS

Newspaper of the Year

All newspapers entered in any contest will automatically be considered for this award.

The award will be presented to the newspaper which has accumulated the highest point totals from placing first, second or third in the following contests. ***There is no entry fee for this contest.***

The points will be awarded as follows:

FIRST PLACE: 6 POINTS • SECOND PLACE: 4 POINTS • THIRD PLACE: 2 POINTS

Best Editorial Page(s)	Coverage of Business
Best Front Page	Coverage of Courts and Crime
Best Sports Section	Best Special Section (Editorial Content)
Best Feature Page(s)	Total Newspaper Design
Coverage of Govt. and Politics	Community Leadership
Coverage of Education	Best Newspaper Website
Coverage of Agriculture	Best of Class Advertising

FIRST PLACE: 3 POINTS • SECOND PLACE: 2 POINTS • THIRD PLACE: 1 POINTS

Best Headline Writing	Best Sports Story	Best Use of Social Media
Best Use of Graphics	Best Sports Feature Story	Best Ad Featuring Grocery
Best News Photo	Best Series	Best Ad Featuring Financial
Best Breaking News Photo	Excellence in Editorial Writing	Best Ad Featuring Furniture
Best Sports Photo	Master Columnist	Best Ad Featuring Automotive
Best Sports Feature Photo	Best Sports Columnist	Best Ad Featuring Miscellaneous
Best News Feature Photo	Best Continuing Coverage	Best Special Section (Advertising)
Best Photo Story	Best Newspaper Marketing	Best Ad Series or Campaign
Best Photographer	Best Video	Best Ad Idea for Community Promotion
Best News Story	Best Slideshow	Best Ad Featuring Agriculture
Best Breaking News Story	Best Special Digital Project	Best Web Ad
Best News Feature Story	Best Podcast	Best Ad Designer
Best Personality Feature Story		

In the event of a tie, co-newspapers of the year will be awarded.

General Excellence

Winners will be determined by the same point accrual system used to name Newspaper of the Year.

The three newspapers in each class that accrue the most overall points will be named first-, second- and third-place

General Excellence winners. There is no entry fee for this contest.

All participating newspapers are automatically eligible for General Excellence.

Questions?

Having a hard time with contest preparation? Questions about uploading to the online entry system? Don't hesitate to ask! We are prepared to answer your questions. Call (515) 244-2145 or e-mail ina@inanews.com. You can also view an online tutorial at INAnews.com featuring information on submitting entries, what judges are looking for when selecting winners and tips for producing and selecting successful contest submissions.

EDITORIAL CONTESTS

E1. Best Editorial Page(s)

Judges will be looking for overall excellence in editorials and commentary, layout and design, **with emphasis on local content**.

Newspapers should submit the best editorial page(s) from any issue published during each of the following two weeks and one issue of their choosing (total of 3 issues):

Week ending February 22, 2025 - **Issue date must be 2/16/25 – 2/22/25**

Week ending June 7, 2025 - **Issue date must be 6/1/25 – 6/7/25**

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E2. Best Front Page

Judges will be looking for overall excellence in news, photography, layout and design **with emphasis on local content**.

Newspapers should submit the best front page from any issue published during each of the following two weeks and one issue of their choosing (total of 3 issues):

Week ending November 16, 2024 - **Issue date must be 11/10/24 – 11/16/24**

Week ending July 26, 2025 - **Issue date must be 7/20/25 – 7/26/25**

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E3. Best Sports Section

Judges will be looking for overall excellence in news, photography, and layout and design **with emphasis on local content**. Submissions can be one page or multiple pages depending on the length of the newspaper's sports section.

Newspapers should submit the best sports page/section from any issue published during each of the following two weeks and one issue of their choosing (total of 3 issues):

Week ending September 14, 2024 - **Issue date must be 9/8/24 – 9/14/24**

Week ending February 1, 2025 - **Issue date must be 1/26/25 – 2/1/25**

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E4. Best Feature Page(s)

Judges will be looking for overall excellence in layout and design, writing, photography and graphics **with an emphasis on local content**. The page may or may not contain advertising, but the advertising content will not be considered by judges.

Newspapers should submit the best feature page(s) from **three issues of their choosing**.

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E5. Coverage of Government and Politics

Judges will consider the quality of coverage of municipal, public school, county, state and national government and reporting and/or editorial comment that goes beyond the routine to give citizens insight into the operation, responsibilities and challenges of local, state and national governmental units. Submit five examples of coverage (which may include articles, photos, graphics, sidebars, special sections), enterprise reporting and/or editorials which help the reader understand local, state and national government issues. Special sections and stories designated, when published, as part of a series shall be treated as one example. Judges will consider photos, graphics and sidebars along with a balance of regular reporting, enterprise reporting and analysis.

Any explanatory information should be included in the "Comments" section. *The five examples to be submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.*

1 entry per newspaper | 5 samples

E6. Coverage of Education

Judges will consider the quality of coverage and/or editorial comment that goes beyond the routine to give citizens insight into the operation, responsibilities and challenges of education. Submit five examples of coverage (which may include articles, photos, graphics, sidebars, special sections), enterprise reporting and/or editorials which help the reader understand education issues. Special sections and stories designated, when published, as part of a series shall be treated as one example. Judges will consider photos, graphics and sidebars along with a balance of regular reporting, enterprise reporting and analysis.

Any explanatory information should be included in the "Comments" section. *The five examples to be submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.*

1 entry per newspaper | 5 samples

E7. Coverage of Agriculture

Judges will consider the significance, quality and depth of locally initiated news and feature stories and editorials which illuminate challenges and changes in Iowa agriculture. Entries that deal with social, economic, political, ecological or technological problems or innovations will be given more consideration than routine coverage of special agriculture editions or county fairs. Submit five examples of coverage (which may include articles, photos, graphics, sidebars, special sections), enterprise reporting and/or editorials which help the reader understand agricultural issues. Special sections and stories designated, when published, as part of a series shall be treated as one example. Judges will consider photos, graphics and sidebars along with a balance of regular reporting, enterprise reporting and analysis.

Any explanatory information should be included in the "Comments" section. *The five examples to be submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.*

1 entry per newspaper | 5 samples

EDITORIAL CONTESTS

E8. Coverage of Business

Judges will consider the quality of coverage and/or editorial comment that goes beyond the routine to help readers understand business issues. Submit five examples of coverage (which may include articles, photos, graphics, sidebars, special sections), enterprise reporting and/or editorials which help the reader understand business issues. Special sections and stories designated, when published, as part of a series shall be treated as one example. Judges will consider photos, graphics and sidebars along with a balance of regular reporting, enterprise reporting and analysis.

Any explanatory information should be included in the "Comments" section. ***The five examples to be submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.***

1 entry per newspaper | 5 samples

E9. Harrison "Skip" Weber Coverage of Court and Crime

Judges will consider the quality of coverage and/or editorial comment that goes beyond the routine to inform readers about court and crime activity. Judges will focus on the quality of the reporting, not the nature or severity of the crime(s). Submit five examples of coverage (which may include articles, photos, graphics, sidebars, special sections), enterprise reporting and/or editorials. Special sections and stories designated, when published, as part of a series shall be treated as one example. Judges will consider photos, graphics and sidebars along with a balance of regular reporting, enterprise reporting and analysis.

Any explanatory information should be included in the "Comments" section. ***The five examples to be submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.***

1 entry per newspaper | 5 samples

E10. Best Special Section - Editorial

Submit **up to three entries per newspaper**; *each special section constitutes one entry*. Judges will be looking for sections that are locally prepared, contain quality news content and are graphically pleasing. Judges will consider graphics and graphic design of the section. Advertising content shall not be considered.

3 entries per newspaper

E11. Total Newspaper Design

Entries in this category must be submitted in hard-copy format. Submit one issue from the week ending **October 12, 2024 - Issue date must be 10/6/24 – 10/12/24**, and any two other consecutive issues (total of 3 issues). Judges will consider the design of advertising and news elements and how they blend to create a total newspaper design. **Scoring will be on a 100-point basis as follows:**

Head & body dress, selection and effective use of type faces	15
General makeup	30
Use of photos	20
Advertising typography, selection and effective use of faces, illustrations, borders, ornaments, flags, mastheads and other units.....	20
Press work.....	10
Use of color	5

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E12. Community Leadership

This award will recognize overall outstanding contributions to community leadership. The category is intended to be broad and allow newspapers the flexibility to demonstrate their leadership in the community. Judges will give special consideration to promotion and activities that benefit the community outside of regular news coverage and commentary. Among materials that may be submitted, include: testimonials, news stories, editorials, etc., and description of public leadership projects. One entry per newspaper.

1 entry per newspaper

E13. Best Headline Writing

Submit the best overall issue demonstrating an effective use of ***non-advertising*** headlines from each of the following two weeks and one issue of choice (total of 3 issues):

Week ending December 7, 2024 - **Issue date must be 12/1/24 – 12/7/24**

Week ending March 8, 2025 - **Issue date must be 3/2/25 – 3/8/25**

Judges will consider whether headlines throughout the issues attract readers' attention and accurately reflect the stories.

Remember that your entry consists of three issues.

1 entry per newspaper | 3 samples

E14. Best Use of Graphics

Submit **up to six examples** of editorial information graphics and/or illustrations. Entries will be judged on design, with emphasis on usefulness to the reader.

Up to six examples submitted will constitute your newspaper's entry in this contest.

1 entry per newspaper | 1 - 6 samples

PHOTOGRAPHY CONTESTS

Photos must be submitted as a full-page PDF tearsheet or screenshot showing proof of publication. A jpeg of the photo also must be included in addition to the required full-page tearsheet. Editing should maintain the integrity of the photographic images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects.

The same photo may not be entered in more than one category P1-P5.

Multi-day newspapers may submit up to six entries for each of these contests. Weekly newspapers may submit up to four entries for each of these contests. Submit an entry fee for each entry.

P1. Best News Photo

A single image of a news event. Judges will consider news value, timeliness, story-telling impact, composition and overall quality.

P2. Best Breaking News Photo

A single image of a news event for which no advance planning was possible. Examples include, but are not limited to, fires, traffic accidents, police standoffs and some natural disasters. Unexpected occurrences at scheduled events and weather-related events that could have been anticipated (such as predicted snowstorms or floods) should be entered in Best News Photo. Judges will consider news value, timeliness, difficulty or danger in capturing the image, composition and overall quality. Entrants are encouraged to include brief written details about how the image was captured.

P3. Best Sports Photo

A single image of competitors during competition. Images of fans, cheerleaders and coaches, as well as athletes before and after competition, should be entered in Best Sports Feature Photo. Judges will consider news value, timeliness, story-telling impact, composition and overall quality.

P4. Best Sports Feature Photo

A single sports-related image taken outside of actual competition. Examples include reaction shots (celebration, dejection, etc.) as well as portraits of athletes and coaches. Judges will consider news value, story-telling impact, composition and overall quality.

P5. Best News Feature Photo

A single image not eligible for the News, Breaking News, Sports or Sports Feature categories. Examples include but are not limited to portraits or other posed images; "slice-of-life" scenes; humorous, tender or light-hearted moments at scheduled and unscheduled events; and landscapes. Judges will consider impact, composition and overall quality.

P6. Best Photo Story

Multiple images that tell one story about an event, person, scene or issue on any subject, including those covered in the other Photo Contest categories. The entry will consist of up to seven images. If the originally published or posted package consisted of more than seven images, only the images to be considered for judging should be submitted. Entrants are encouraged to include brief written details about their entry. Judges will consider news value, story-telling impact, composition and overall quality.

FOR CATEGORIES P1 THROUGH P6

Multi-day Newspapers: **Up to 6 entries per newspaper**

Weekly Newspapers: **Up to 4 entries per newspaper**

P7. Best Photographer

Individual photographers may submit a "portfolio" of 6-10 examples of their published photos from the contest year. Entries will be judged on technical ability and the breadth of work. Explanatory material is welcome but not required. One entry fee per photographer required. Photographers will be limited to one entry per photographer, regardless of the number of newspapers the individual shoots photos for. Portfolio submissions must be from the same newspaper.

FRANK NYE NEWSWRITING CONTESTS

W1. Best News Story

Judges will consider community-wide importance of the story and quality of writing. No consideration will be given to headlines, photos or artwork. Entry may be a single story, single story with sidebars or a series of articles marked "First of a series, Second of a series," etc., when published.

W2. Best Breaking News Story

A Breaking News Story is defined as one in which no advance planning is possible (examples: natural disasters, fires, accidents, etc.). Judges will consider community-wide importance of the story, **timeliness** and quality of writing. No consideration will be given to photos or artwork. Breaking News reporting emphasizes entries that, as quickly as possible, capture events accurately as they occur, and, as time passes, illuminate, provide context, and expand upon the initial coverage. Judges will take into consideration not only the quality of the work but the amount of time writer(s) had to prepare it before publication. Newspapers are encouraged to use the comments section of the entry website to briefly detail the timing of the event and publication of the article(s) being entered.

W3. Best News Feature Story

Entries will be judged on the basis of subject and quality of writing. No consideration will be given to photos or artwork. Entry may be a single story, single story with sidebars or a series of articles marked "First of a series, Second of a series," etc., when published.

W4. Best Personality Feature Story

A Personality Feature Story is defined as one in which the writer explores the characteristics of a person and presents his/her unique story. Entries will be judged on the basis of subject and quality of writing. No consideration will be given to photos or artwork. Entry may be a single story, single story with sidebars or a series of articles marked "First of a series, Second of a series," etc., when published.

W5. Best Sports Story

Entries will be judged on the basis of subject and quality of writing. Game coverage or sports-related news coverage that does not include features may be entered. No consideration will be given to photos or artwork. Entry may be a single story, single story with sidebars or a series of articles marked "First of a series, Second of a series," etc., when published.

W6. Best Sports Feature Story

Entries will be judged on the basis of subject and quality of writing. No consideration will be given to photos or artwork. Entry may be a single story, single story with sidebars or a series of articles marked "First of a series, Second of a series," etc., when published.

W7. Best Series

Entries **must be clearly marked as a series when published**. Entries will be judged on topic, with emphasis on local content or impact, depth of reporting, quality of writing, graphics, photography and page design.

FOR CATEGORIES W1 THROUGH W7

Multi-day Newspapers: **Up to 6 entries per newspaper**
Weekly Newspapers: **Up to 4 entries per newspaper**

W8. Excellence In Editorial Writing

Submit three editorials written by the same writer or writers. Entries to be judged on logic, persuasiveness, originality and manner of presentation with emphasis on local issues. **Three editorials constitute one full entry.**

The same entry may not be submitted in both (W8) Excellence in Editorial Writing and (W9) Master Columnist.

W9. Master Columnist

Submit three columns written by the same writer. **Journalists will be limited to one entry per person in this category. Three columns constitute one full entry.**

The same entry may not be submitted in both (W8) Excellence in Editorial Writing and (W9) Master Columnist.

W10. Best Sports Columnist

Submit three columns written by the same columnist. Entries are limited to columns written by sports writers.

Journalists will be limited to one entry per person in this category. Three columns constitute one full entry.

FOR CATEGORIES W8 THROUGH W10

Multi-day Newspapers: **6 entries per newspaper** | **3 samples per entry**
Weekly Newspapers: **4 entries per newspaper** | **3 samples per entry**

W11. Best Continuing Coverage

Entries must be for continuing coverage of an event of importance to the community that is not part of a previously planned series. Papers are allowed one entry of 3-5 items, which may include stories, editorials, columns, graphics and multimedia. Papers are encouraged to attach a note outlining how the issue is important to the community and how coverage had an effect. Entries will be judged on the depth of coverage and community-wide importance.

1 entry per newspaper | **3-5 samples**

DIGITAL CONTESTS

I1. Best Newspaper Website

The Best Newspaper Website contest is open to any member newspaper with an active website. Your website will be randomly visited by our judges on multiple occasions.

The contest will be judged on the following criteria:

- Content - Quality of news and editorial matter
- Navigation - Ease of finding and retrieving information from the website
- Visual/Design - Layout, use of graphics, photographs, animation, color and other visuals
- Advertising - Innovative strategies and/or evidence of revenue generation
- Community - Demonstration that the website fulfills a “community gatekeeper” role

Entries should be submitted as a URL.

1 entry per newspaper

I2. Best Video

Recognizes a video to tell a story and serve a community. Emphasis will be placed on visitor experience, quality of the story and use of the technology. It may be part of a larger project or stand on its own. The entry should include a description of the video and any information on the print story that it accompanied, if there was one. Newspapers have the option of crediting the newspaper staff or individual staff member(s).

Entries should be submitted as a URL.

I3. Best Slideshow

Recognizes a slideshow or narrated online image gallery to tell a story. Emphasis will be placed on quality of the images and visitor experience as well as on creative use of technology. It may be part of a larger project or stand on its own. The entry should include a description of the slideshow and any information on the print story that it accompanied, if there was one. Newspapers have the option of crediting the newspaper staff or individual staff member(s).

Entries should be submitted as a URL.

FOR CATEGORIES I2 AND I3

Multi-day Newspapers: **Up to 6 entries per newspaper**
Weekly Newspapers: **Up to 4 entries per newspaper**

I4. Bill Monroe Best Special Digital Project

Recognizes digital storytelling in a diversity of platforms. The project should be conceived, planned, and executed as a digital product where video, still images, data visualization, and timelines, and/or AI-enabled tools, among others, contribute to compelling and impactful storytelling. The judges will also consider the user experience. One winner will be selected.

1 entry per newspaper

I5. Best Use of Social Media

This contest recognizes the most effective use of social media by a news organization overall, or a for a specific news event. Judges will consider your use of social media to increase readership, drive revenue or engage with your community. They will look for new and novel uses of social media, better than expected response rates or even praise from readers received via social media. The judges also want to know if you have grown your followers or likes dramatically – and how. Judges will visit your social media pages/feeds on multiple occasions.

Entries should be submitted as a URL. Include links to all of your organization’s social media offerings that you would like judges to consider (Facebook page, Twitter feed, LinkedIn profile, etc.).

1 entry per newspaper

I6. Best Podcast

This contest recognizes an outstanding digital presentation. Each paper is allowed one entry consisting of no more than three podcast episode.

Emphasis will be placed on the listener experience and relevance to the community. The podcast may be part of a larger series or stand on its own. Entries may be on the entrant’s website or on a hosted channel, but must be recorded, edited and produced by the newspaper’s staff. Entrants are encouraged to include a description of the podcast’s mission.

Entries should be submitted as a URL.

1 entry per newspaper

MARKETING CONTEST

M1. Best Newspaper Marketing

This contest recognizes the newspaper’s initiatives to promote the newspaper and its various products. Entries may include materials to promote digital, readership, advertising, circulation, etc. Submit up to three entries per newspaper; each promotion or campaign constitutes an entry.

Up to 3 entries per newspaper

ADVERTISING CONTESTS

Entries must have been published in a paid circulation newspaper. This does not include stand-alone shoppers. General advertising run as part of a national schedule will not be judged. General advertising created for a specific market will be accepted for competition (example: Auto Dealer Association ad).

CRITERIA:

Originality	30
Headline and body copy	25
Design, layout, illustrations and photography	25
Adaptability	10
Explanatory material	10

Each newspaper may enter up to three entries in each category.

The entries must conform to the categories that follow. Each entry will require a separate entry fee. A pdf of the ad in color or black/white must be included in addition to the required full-page tearsheet (**except for A6, A8 and A10**). Editing should maintain the integrity of the images' content and context. Do not manipulate images or add or alter sound in any way that can mislead viewers or misrepresent subjects. **The categories are:**

A1. Best ad featuring grocery/food/entertainment

Example: live music events, bake sale, cook off, haunted house

A2. Best ad featuring financial, insurance or other professional service

Example: clinics, banks, retirement communities, chiropractors

A3. Best ad featuring furniture, furnishings, appliances or hardware

Example: carpet stores, antique shops, mattress stores, lumber company

A4. Best ad featuring automotive, boats, aircraft, tires, gasoline, etc.

Example: car sales, tire shops, repair services, airports

A5. Best ad featuring miscellaneous

(not covered in categories 1-4)

A6. Best special section advertising

(judges will consider quality of advertising with no regard to editorial content)

A7. Best advertising series or campaign featuring any service or merchandise category

Example: golf course, retail, coops, dentist (a series constitutes more than one related ad)

A8. Best advertising idea for a community promotion or event

Example: sidewalk sales, visitor guides, homecoming features, elected official candidate features

A9. Best ad featuring agriculture

(ads that feature local agriculture from any business)

FOR CATEGORIES A1 THROUGH A9

3 entries per newspaper

STATEMENT OF INTENT

It is the intent of the INA's Better Newspaper Contests to recognize and reward Iowa newspaper enterprises for content of a local nature, that content which is unique to the communities the newspapers serve. However, the INA Contest Committee and its boards of directors also recognize that the contests must reflect an evolving industry, one which is outsourcing and collaborating on content more than ever before. To better reflect how newspaper enterprises operate today, changes have been made in the eligibility guidelines to allow entries by those not on the staff of the newspaper company, if certain criteria are met (defined under eligibility). It is the INA's hope that each newspaper will critically evaluate those entries not produced by its own staff to ensure all the criteria are met and that the integrity of the Better Newspaper Contests is maintained.

A10. Best Web Advertisement

Recognizes visual appeal and creativity in design and content of a single static or animated ad appearing online at the newspaper's website.

Up to 3 entries per newspaper

A11. Ad Designer

Individual graphic designers may submit a "portfolio" of 6-10 examples of their published ad design work. Entries will be judged on overall design, typography and effectiveness. Explanatory material is welcome but not required. One entry fee per designer required. Designers will be limited to one entry per designer, regardless of the number of newspapers the individual designs for. Portfolio submissions are to be from one newspaper.

Unlimited entries per newspaper

Best of Class Advertising

All newspapers that enter advertising contests A1 through A10 will automatically be considered for these awards. Judges will choose the Best of Class winners from the first place ads in each class. No entry fee is required.

SPECIALITY REPORTING CONTESTS

R1. A-Mark Prize for Investigative Reporting

Investigative stories are defined as those which demand (a) research into documents and public records; (b) multiple interviews, which may include background sources never mentioned in the story; (c) documentation of time and depth of research on story; (d) planning for the articles.

Judges will take into consideration such points as community-wide interest; effect of the story on the community; staff time spent on the story; depth of research; commitment of the newspaper to the project and risks involved in publishing the information.

Entries in print or combination of media is allowed (print, digital, audio, video, multimedia). Entries may include a series. A maximum of five supporting pieces may be submitted per entry. Entrants are asked to submit an additional explanation responding to points (a) through (d) and its impact on the community. The explanation is to be no more than one page, double-spaced.

R2. Genevieve Mauck Stoufer Outstanding Young Iowa Journalists Awards

To qualify for consideration, the nominee must be under 30 years of age as of December 31, 2025, and have worked at least one year for his or her current employer. A statement attesting to the nominee's qualifications is to be submitted by his or her editor or publisher and must be accompanied by six examples of the nominee's work within the past two years and a statement of not less than 150 words written by the nominee telling of his or her journalistic goals. This contest includes the work of all journalists, including but not limited to, reporters, photographers, graphic designers, production and advertising professionals. Judges shall name three winners for the Young Iowa Journalists Award. One winner must be from a daily and one winner must be from a weekly.

R3. Ken Fuson Best Writing Award

This award recognizes the best single piece of writing across all circulation classes and categories that published during the contest year. That includes features, news, sports, opinion, etc. The winning entry should draw readers in with compelling prose and keep them engaged until the end. Judges will look at the writing quality and the effectiveness of the writer in telling the story, regardless of its length. All entrants are limited to one submission. In the case of a series, the entrant must choose one part to submit. Judges shall award one winner.

R4. New Community Journalist

This award celebrates the unsung heroes of community news—journalists who report it all. From city council meetings and school board debates to neighborhood milestones and profiles of everyday heroes, these reporters are the pulse of their towns.

This award honors a journalist whose work captures the true spirit, struggles, and successes of their community through consistent, thoughtful, and impactful reporting.

Judges will consider reporting community impact, breadth of coverage, storytelling, and integrity. Journalists may submit up to six samples of published work and a statement of up to 300 words on his or her journalistic experience. Judges will select a first, second and third place.

Wagner Family Prize for Young Journalists

Wagner Family Prize for Young Journalists was created to honor the memory of Wagner, a lifelong Iowa newspaper reporter and editor whose passions included encouraging young reporters and promoting great community journalism. The contest is open to any reporter, columnist, editorial writer or blogger working on a newspaper in Iowa who is 30 years old or younger as of Dec. 31, 2025. There is no entry fee for this award. *Additional details on this award can be found in the inserted flyer or at INAnews.com.*

Appeals

Any contest appeals of rules violations relating to contest entry procedures must be submitted in writing to the INF board within 30 days after the INA Annual Convention to be reviewed and resolved by the INF executive committee, and resulting communications will be handled by the INF board president or another member of the INF executive committee.