



2025 Advertising and Editorial Contest Packet

The MDDC Contest recognizes excellence in news media in Maryland, Delaware and DC. Contest categories focus on editorial, design and revenue, plus special awards for standout personnel, Freedom of Information coverage, Courage in Journalism, and News Organization of the Year.

All contest details are at
<https://mddcpres.com/contest/contest-details/>

Deadline for Entries:

All entries must be uploaded to ACES by 11:59 p.m. on January 31, 2026.

Eligibility:

The contest is open to staff members and freelancers of active members. Freelancers must enter through or with the permission of the publications they write for. Members of MD, DE & DC chapters of SPJ may enter editorial categories only.

Judging:

The entries will be judged by newspaper professionals from another Press Association. We will be judging their contest in 2026.

ACES Platform:

This year we have migrated to a new platform, ACES. You will be required to register a new account. New to the contest or need help? Contact Kristin Wagonblott at admin@mddcpres.com or 443-768-3281.

Awards:

The 2025 MDDC Contest awards will be presented at the MDDC Annual Conference and Celebration May 8, 2026. Certificates in each division will be presented to first and second place winners. One Best of Show award is presented in each category. The News Organization of the Year award is presented to the news organization in each circulation division that accumulates the most points in the contest across all categories. First place earns three points and second place earns two points. In a tie, the number of first place wins will be the determining factor.

Fees:

The fee is \$20 per entry. Entry fees may be made online in the contest portal, by credit card, or by check, payable to MDDC Press Association and mailed to P.O. Box 26214, Baltimore, MD 21210.

Contest Divisions

MDDC groups publications by total audience, including print and online readers and the number of content generator roles. These divisions are the same ones used to assess member dues.

In addition to Divisions A – F, the contest has an individual Division S for freelance and individuals who otherwise would not be eligible to compete in the contest.

Save the date!

May 8th
Annual Conference &
Awards event
ANNAPOLIS MD

OPENS: December 1, 2025
CLOSES: JANUARY 31, 2026

Just three steps to enter:

1. Confirm your publication's membership is current.
2. Log into [URL](#) and submit your electronic entries. Each publication has a contest manager.
3. Complete your entries before January 31, 2026. Entries must be uploaded by 11:59 p.m.

Questions? Please contact Rebecca Snyder at rsnyder@mddcpres.com or 443-768-3281 or Kristin Wagonblott at admin@mddcpres.com.

Contest Rules:

1. Entries must be original, must not have appeared previously in other publications, and must have been published between January 1 and December 31, 2025. Entries must include publication date. Any material that appeared in member publications during the contest cycle is eligible. By entering the contest, the publisher certifies that all entries submitted were developed or created by staff members or subcontractor engaged by the news organization. Entries are original and were first published during the contest cycle as required.
2. All entries to the online and video categories are to be judged "live" online and must be made available to the judges as such, even if they are no longer available to the public. Judging will take place in February through April 2026. Entries need to be accessible during that time. **If your website has a paywall to view stories, you must provide MDDC with log-in credentials for judging access. Please note the credentials in the "comments" section of the entry.**
3. Entries may list a maximum of three individual names. Entries involving more than three staffers must be listed as a group or department. For example: "News Staff," "Art Department," or "Advertising Staff."
4. Participating news organizations must have paid their association membership dues for the contest year (2025) and be current for 2026 by the time of the Annual Conference and Celebration May 8, 2026. A news organization

must be an active member of the MDDC Press Association to participate in the Editorial Contest.

4. Entries submitted in the incorrect division, if detected prior to judging, will be moved to the correct division. Otherwise, they are subject to disqualification. Contest divisions are the same as the member dues divisions confirmed by the publisher with the MDDC Press Association.
5. The decisions of the judges are final. Judges may declare "no contest" if the category has insufficient entries. Fees will not be returned for categories deemed no contest.
6. Individuals and teams may submit more than one entry in any category.
7. Series that overlap two years in publication dates must be entered in the year the series concluded.
8. Additional copies of certificates may be purchased after the Awards Party for \$5 each.



Revenue & Promotion CATEGORIES

REVENUE GENERATORS

Media organizations are under intense pressure to close new business and come up with innovative revenue strategies. Showcase your best work – and get ideas from other winners!

New Business Concept / Wild Card (R-1)

Wide open to new ideas. This category may include incentives, contests, promotions, design/format ideas and non-traditional revenue sources that have produced business. Materials used in the promotion of the idea should be submitted and online components may be included.

Best Event (R-2)

Submit your best event, including a description of the event, target audience, goals for the event (financial or strategic) and how you promoted the event. Entries judged on basic idea and execution. Materials used in the promotion of the event should be submitted and online components may be included.

Advertising Campaign (R-3)

Single advertiser using two or more ads or news products, including digital ads, for ad campaign. Submit explanatory or promotional materials, examples of pages, scripts, etc. ROP and niche publications can be included. May be any type of ad: retail, institutional, automotive, etc. Must include how the campaign created results for the client.

NEWS MEDIA PROMOTIONS

Getting the audience for advertisers is key. This section focuses attention on audience development.

Community Service Program (R-4)

Any one community service program in whole or in part by

your publication; not expose' or editorial in nature, but an example of the publication participating in the life of the community by giving advertising support to a worthwhile subject, cause or event. Submit a brief statement as to how the program was received or the effectiveness of the program and how it was received.

Self-Promotion Advertising (R-5)

Original ads that demonstrate the way you promote your publication to generate new advertisers and revenue. Submit all media or marketing materials including any digital components. This category will recognize excellence for ads that promote your publication or a specific section or the industry generally, encouraging strength and/or growth of audience or revenue. May include print ads, radio, signs, direct mail, website and digital ads, promoted social media, etc. Entries will be judged on creativity and appearance, including the basic idea, layout, copy, typography, headline, originality and effectiveness.

Design CATEGORIES

Entries in this section do NOT need to be designed in-house. However, the idea for the design must have originated with the news organization.

Restaurant / Entertainment Large Print ad (D-1)

Individual ad featuring restaurants or food (fast food to fine dining to supermarkets), entertainment, festivals, and/or sports. Published in print only, half-page or larger; black & white or color.

Restaurant / Entertainment Small Print ad (D-2)

Individual ad featuring restaurants or food (fast food to fine dining to supermarkets), entertainment, festivals, and/or sports. Published in print only, smaller than half-page; black & white or color.

Retail Large Print ad (D-3)

Individual ad featuring retail merchandise. Published in print only, half-page or larger; black & white or color.

Retail Small Print ad (D-4)

Individual ad featuring retail merchandise. Published in print only, smaller than half-page; black & white or color.

Business (non-retail) Large Print ad (D-5)

Individual ad featuring non-retail business such as hotels, banks, funeral homes, health clubs, gyms, companies or services or political campaigns. Published in print only, half-page or larger; black & white or color.

Business (non-retail) Small Print ad (D-6)

Individual ad featuring non-retail business such as hotels, banks, funeral homes, health clubs, gyms, companies or services or political campaigns. Published in print only, smaller than half-page; black & white or color.

Online only ad (D-7)

Individual ad published only in digital format; any size.

Multi-Media ad (D-8)

Published in print, online and/or digital formats; any size; submit ads in all formats run.

Page 1 Design (D-9)

Front page of the publication only; not section fronts. Judged on editorial presentation, not ad design.

Feature Page Design (D-10)

Includes any lifestyles, entertainment, or feature-style pages. Judged on editorial presentation, not ad design.

News Page Design (D-11)

All news pages eligible, including lifestyles, entertainment and feature-style pages. Double-truck layouts are accepted. Judged on editorial presentation, not ad design.

Sports Page Design (D-12)

Double-truck layouts are accepted. Judged on editorial presentation, not ad design.

News-driven Informational Graphics (D-13)

General or sports-related informational graphics such as graphs, charts, maps, diagrams, etc.

News-driven Art or Illustrations (D-14)

General or sports-related original art or illustration.

Targeted publication CATEGORIES

Advertising-driven Special Section, in-paper product (T-1)

Any special section that is published and distributed in the publication at least once a year. This includes progress reports, school sports, bridal, back-to-school, lawn & garden, holiday greetings, recipe or cooking, school graduation, mall or shopping center, downtown, and fashion merchandising. A section may be any unit of four or more consecutive pages, standard or tabloid. Entries will be judged on basic idea, adaptability to other markets, organization and development of theme in the section and on the publication cover.

Advertising-driven Special Publication, standalone (T-2)

Any special section that is published and distributed as a standalone product at least once a year. This includes custom publishing work, TMC, magazines, etc. A section may be any unit of four or more consecutive pages, standard or tabloid. Entries will be judged on basic idea, adaptability to other markets, organization and development of theme in the section and on the publication cover.

News-driven Special Section (T-3)

A section of predominantly local copy on a single topic or theme, published no more than once each year (not advertorial) that is distributed with the publication. Two entries per publication. Judged for writing, editing, photography, graphics and design.

For files over 15MG, upload to Dropbox and provide a link. For publications with more than 20 pages, select 20 on page count.

Special Niche Website (T-4)

Niche website or microsite developed for or by advertising. Entries will be judged on basic idea, layout, originality and effectiveness.

Custom Publication (T-5)

Any publication created to benefit a client or partnership,

distributed within the paper or as a standalone. This includes publications for community events or non-profits, Chambers of Commerce, Visitors Bureaus, Car dealerships, Anniversary pubs, Real Estate Associations, etc. A section may be any unit of four or more consecutive pages, standard or tabloid. Entries will be judged on basic idea, layout, originality and effectiveness. Must submit statement on how publication has impacted the client or partnership.

Editorial CATEGORIES

Online or Mobile Only

Entries were published on online or mobile platforms only.

General Social Media Reporting (E-1)

Coverage of a planned news event or any non-breaking news story. Submit screenshots of interaction between a publication and its readers regarding a particular story. Entry should show a continuing effort by the new organization to reach its readers in a timely and accurate manner.

Breaking News – Social Media (E-2)

Posts on a single breaking news item published on social media. Not planned or labeled as a series. Submit screenshots.

Best Use of Interactive Media (E-3)

Presentation using digital media and cutting-edge technology in innovative ways to reach and engage the audience. May include features such as Google cardboard, video, interactive maps, podcasting, photo and slide shows, article archives, polls, transcripts, PDFs, blogs and community feedback.

Online Blog Commentary (E-4)

May be staff or citizen created.

News & Beat Reporting

Entries may be published in print, online or mobile platforms.

Breaking News (E-5)

Coverage of single news event that is unplanned and unexpected. Submit one story or a group of stories that were published in the same issue, written under deadline pressure.

General News Story (E-6)

Coverage of a planned news event or any stories that do not fit into one of the specialty categories (such as education, business, etc.) Submit one story or a group of stories in the same issue.

Continuing Coverage (E-7)

Multiple stories on a single issue or news event published in more than one issue. Not planned or labeled as a series.

Investigative Reporting (E-8)

A distinguished example of investigative reporting; emphasizing the originality of the subject, depth of reporting, clarity of writing and impact of reporting. May be one or more stories.

*Supporting documents or a cover letter is encouraged. **All entries in this category will automatically be entered into the A-Mark Foundation Investigative Journalism Prize (category E-54).***

Local Government (E-9)

Single story or designated series that explains the impact of local government.

State Government (E-10)

Single story or designated series that explains the impact of state government.

Public Service (E-11)

Single story or designated series intended to spur action from the community. Supporting documents may be uploaded.

Wild Card: Impact of Trump Administration Policies on Local Communities (E-12)

How did the second Trump administration's policies affect local communities? This Wild Card category changes each year to reflect a topic not easily classified into other categories.

News-driven Multimedia Storytelling (E-13)

Presentation supporting the telling of or enhancing the impact of a single news story. May include, but is not limited to, audio, video, animation, slide shows and sound bites.

Business Reporting (E-14)

Single story or a designated series.

Medical/Science Reporting (E-15)

Single story or a designated series.

Education Reporting (E-16)

Single story or a designated series.

Environmental Reporting (E-17)

Single story or a designated series.

Arts/Entertainment Reporting (E-18)

Single story or a designated series.

Religion Reporting (E-19)

Single story or a designated series.

Growth & Land Use Reporting (E-20)

Single story or a designated series.

Public Notice Reporting (E-21) (no charge for entry)

Single story or a designated series sourced from or using public notices (legal notices). Please include a copy of the public notice as part of your entry.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (E-54)

Single story or a designated series that sheds light on the experiences, challenges, and achievements of underrepresented and marginalized communities.

Commentary

Entries may be published in print, online or mobile platforms.

Editorial (E-22)

A single editorial.

Editorial Cartoon (E-23)

A single cartoon.

Local Column: Critical Thinking (E-24)

Includes commentary, news-related or political columns.

Local Column: Feature or Humor (E-25)

Includes advice, humor or feature-type columns.

Features

Entries may be published in print, online or mobile platforms.

Feature Story: Profile (E-26)

A single story.

Feature Story: Non-Profile (E-27)

A single story.

Features-driven Multimedia Storytelling (E-28)

Presentation supporting the telling of or enhancing the impact of a single feature story. May include, but is not limited to, print, audio, video, animation, slide shows and sound bites.

Series (E-29)

Must be planned and designated as part one, part two, etc., and must have run in a planned sequence.

Headline (E-30)

Submit story with the headline.

Sports

Entries may be published in print, online or mobile platforms.

Please note: Sports Page Design is in Design section

Sports Story (E-31)

Sport news event coverage. May be a single story or a group of stories.

Sports Feature Story (E-32)

Single story.

Multimedia Storytelling (Sports) (E-33)

Presentation that supports the telling of and enhances the impact of a single sports story. May include, but is not

limited to, audio, video, animation, slide shows and sound bites.

Sports Column (E-34)

Includes commentary, features or humor columns.

Photography

General News Photo (E-35)

A photo or group of photos in the same issue of a planned event, or any assigned photo or group of photos other than sports.

Breaking News Photo (E-36)

A photo or group of photos published in the same issue, covering a single news event that is unplanned and unexpected, under deadline pressure.

Feature Photo (E-37)

Single photo.

Photo Series (E-38)

A group of photos published in the same issue on a single subject.

Best Photo Gallery (E-39)

Present a minimum of four photos over a period of issues.

Sports Photo (Sports Action) (E-40)

Single photo.

Sports Photo (Feature) (E-41)

Single photo.

Video

General News Video (E-42)

Coverage of a planned news event or any stories that do not fit into another video category. Submit one video or a group of videos that were published in the same 24-hour period.

Spot News Video (E-43)

Coverage of single news event that is unplanned and unexpected. Submit one video or a group of videos that were published in the same 24-hour period, written under deadline pressure.

Features Video (E-44)

Single video.

Sports Video (E-45)

Single video, action or feature.

Continuing Coverage Video (E-46)

Multiple video stories on a single issue or news event. Not planned or labeled as a series.

Editorial / Blog Video (E-47)

Single video.

Special Event Video (E-48)

Single video of a one-time event.

Personnel CATEGORIES

Editorial Rookie of the Year (E-49)

This award honors a new journalist with less than 18 months' experience in the field. Submissions should include three to five clips of that reporter's work, a letter of recommendation from his or her manager, including date of hire, and a recent headshot. Managers: Please be specific in what has impressed you about the reporter, and what s/he has contributed to your publication(s). The panel of judges will bestow one award across all divisions.

Annual Designer of the Year (D-15)

Submit a body of work (8-10 pieces) from a single designer from the contest cycle, showing creativity and ability to design across platforms. Requires letter of recommendation from manager and recent headshot of nominee. One award will be given across all divisions for the contest year's work.

Annual Salesperson of the Year (R-6)

This award honors a sales executive that runs circles around their peers. Nominations in this category require a short synopsis of how the nominee best matches the criteria during the contest cycle and a recent headshot of nominee. One award will be given across all divisions for the contest year's work. Nominations will be evaluated on the following:

- Set and exceeds goals
- Customer relationship-builder

- *Successful and consistent sales record*
- *Understands client business*
- *Maintains agency/client contact – before, during and after the planning/buying season*
- *Responsive to clients' needs*
- *Regularly bring new ideas to clients*
- *Provides strong alternative recommendations to clients*
- *Understand the competitive landscape*
- *Understand and applies marketing prowess in sales*

Sales Rookie of the Year (R-7)

Award honors a new sales executive with less than 18 months' experience in the field. Nominees should show revenue generation, sales expertise and initiative. Include recent headshot of nominee. Submit letter of recommendation detailing accomplishments and including start date. One award will be given across all divisions.

Organization-wide AWARDS

General Web Site Excellence (E-50)

A panel of judges will visit the website and evaluate it according to the following criteria: (1) social media and engagement (2) local news coverage (3) navigation and design, (4) multi-media/data visualization, (5) mobile responsive design.

James S. Keat

Freedom of Information Award (E-51)

Body of work, which may include news stories, columns, editorials, or documents, that shows a news organization's efforts to (1) gain access to public records; (2) pursue open meetings; or (3) address other FOI issues. Resources available to each entrant shall be considered by the judges. Please include a summary letter describing the arc of the work and the effect the work had on the public. A panel of

judges will bestow one award across all divisions.

Courage in Journalism Award (E-52)

A free press cannot be swept aside or silenced. This award honors acts of courage in journalism and strength in adversity while uncovering truth. The Courage in Journalism Award was established in memory of those killed at the Capital-Gazette in Annapolis in 2018 and in honor of those who survived. Please include a summary letter describing the situation -- the adversity faced and the actions taken by a journalist or news company to push forward -- and the effect the work had.

Best Moves (E-53)

What was the most important thing your organization did this year? Ideas implemented could be from advertising, circulation, or the newsroom. Please include a summary letter describing the initiative and the effect it had on your operation, including any supplementary materials. Selected ideas will be presented in a roundtable format and will be voted on at the awards event.

A-Mark Investigative Journalism Prize (E-54)

(All entries in Investigative category (E-8) will automatically be entered into this category, free of charge.) A distinguished example of investigative reporting; emphasizing the originality of the subject, depth of reporting, clarity of writing, and impact of investigation and reporting. May be one or more stories. Supporting documents or a cover letter are encouraged. Made possible by the generous financial support of the A-Mark Foundation, cash prizes for this award (prizes are awarded in Maryland, Delaware and D.C.) are:

- *First place: \$5,000 for the reporter(s) and \$2,500 for the outlet that published or aired the winning story*
- *Second place: \$3,000 for the reporter(s) and \$1,500 for the outlet*
- *Third place: \$2,000 for the reporter(s) and \$1,000 for the outlet*