



2026 Excellence in Journalism Awards Rules

ELIGIBILITY:

This contest is open to all news outlets who cover New Jersey.

Content producers are not required to live in New Jersey.

Entries must have been published or aired during the 2025 calendar year. They should be focused on New Jersey, its people, issues, and culture. Regional-focused entries with a New Jersey connection are permitted.

GENERAL RULES:

1. All categories are platform neutral, unless specified.
2. Each contestant is limited to two entries per category, unless specified.
3. Judges may shift a story to a category and/or division deemed more appropriate.
4. Entries may not be re-edited and must appear as published and/or aired.
5. Submitting the same entry in different categories is strictly prohibited, except in categories where a compilation of work is required. (e.g. Reporter of the Year)
6. Judging of entries will be performed by an out-of-state SPJ Chapter, unless otherwise noted.
7. All contest entries become property of NJSPJ.
8. Contestants agree to let NJ-SPJ reproduce their work for the purpose of promoting future contests.
9. One first place and one second place award is made in each category.
10. Finalists will be announced prior to the awards ceremony.
11. Winners will be announced at the Excellence in Journalism Awards ceremony.

12. Outlets are allowed to publicize their finalists prior to the awards ceremony.
13. Plaques and certificates will be handed out at the ceremony.
14. If not present at award ceremony, award winners are responsible for cost of shipping their award(s.)

FEES:

Non-members:

Early Bird Fee (July 15 – July 31): \$25 per entry
Regular Fee (Aug. 1 – Aug. 31): \$35 per entry

Members of NJ-SPJ AND SPJ:

Early Bird Fee (July 15 – July 31): \$15 per entry
Regular Fee (Aug. 1 – Aug. 31): \$25 per entry

Fees are non-refundable. Entries without payment will not be considered. Proceeds will be used to fund NJ-SPJ programs.

DEADLINE TO ENTER:

Entries must be received online by 11:59 p.m. on Monday, Aug. 31, 2026.

DIVISIONS:

Metro Division – This division is open to National, New York and Philadelphia outlets

Garden State Division – This competition is open to New Jersey-based outlets.

Broadcast outlets who are licensed to a New Jersey town, but target the Philadelphia and New York markets will automatically be placed in the Metro Division. For Example, WWSI is licensed to Mount Laurel but serves as the Telemundo Affiliate for the Philadelphia Market.

We reserve the right to shift entry to appropriate categories without notice.



2026 Excellence in Journalism Awards

Categories

1. BEST INVESTIGATIVE STORY A single story that exposes wrongdoing or provides a public service by examining a community issue/problem.

2. BEST COVERAGE OF STATE GOVERNMENT Up to three stories demonstrating commitment to covering the governor, Legislature, state agencies and other entities of the government. This is not just daily coverage, but watchdog coverage and connecting the dots between the government and the residents of the Garden State.

3. BEST COVERAGE OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT Up to three stories demonstrating commitment to covering the county executive, county commissioners and other related entities. This is not just daily coverage, but watchdog coverage and connecting the dots between the government and the residents of the Garden State.

4. BEST COVERAGE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT Up to three stories demonstrating a commitment to covering the mayor, municipal council and related entities. This is not just daily coverage, but watchdog coverage and connecting the dots between the government and the residents of the municipality.

5. BEST NEWS SERIES Up to three stories covering a single topic over a number of stories/segments.

6. BEST SPORTS FEATURE A single story on a person or topic. Non-game coverage is eligible for this category.

7. BEST BUSINESS/CONSUMER STORY A single story that focuses on either a business or consumer concern.

8. BEST BREAKING NEWS COVERAGE Up to three stories that demonstrate one day's coverage of an unplanned, unexpected news event.

9. BEST IN-DEPTH REPORTING A single story that focuses on a person, group of people, a community, a significant news event or significant community problem.

10. BEST CONTINUING COVERAGE Up to three stories demonstrating commitment to coverage of a major story that requires more than one day's worth of reporting.

11. BEST ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT COVERAGE Up to three stories covering arts and entertainment in New Jersey that demonstrates thoroughness, diversity and mastery of coverage.

12. BEST PODCAST The best produced program intended for digital-first distribution. Please submit one episode only.

13. BEST DIGITAL NEWS VIDEO For excellence in video for digital-based platforms. Entries should demonstrate the best quality and imagination in telling the story.

14. BEST NEWS PHOTOGRAPHY Up to three photos, published in any format, demonstrating the skills of the photographer in capturing the story. All photos must come from the same photographer.



2026 Excellence in Journalism Awards Categories

15. BEST TELEVISION NEWS

PHOTOGRAPHY A single story demonstrating the best quality and imagination in capturing the event.

16. BEST USE OF SOUND FOR RADIO NEWS

STORY A single story technical skill and creativity to tell a story. Entry is limited to 15 minutes.

17. MICHAEL ARON REPORTER OF THE

YEAR Up to four stories highlighting an individual's work during the year. A cover letter is required to accompany the entry.

18. BEST SHORT DOCUMENTARY A stand-alone film/video that addresses an issue, topic or subject that is 30 minutes or shorter.

19. BEST LONG DOCUMENTARY A stand-alone film/video that addresses an issue, topic or subject that is longer than a half hour.

20. BEST NEW YORK TELEVISION COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

21. BEST PHILADELPHIA TELEVISION COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

22. BEST NEW YORK RADIO COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

23. BEST PHILADELPHIA RADIO COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

Coverage in categories 20-23 should include a combination of stories (daily, in-depth and/or investigative) that -focuses on New Jersey; the state, its counties and municipalities. Each entrant is required to include a cover letter explaining why they believe they provide the best coverage of New Jersey in support of its portfolio. Entries are limited to four stories.

24. BEST PUBLIC AFFAIRS SHOW

(TV/RADIO/STREAMING) This award is for the best regularly scheduled program focusing on New Jersey issues. Time limit: 60 minutes; please remove commercials/breaks

SPANISH LANGUAGE CATEGORIES

25. BEST GENERAL COVERAGE, SPANISH

This category is for print and digital based outlets. Entries should demonstrate best overall coverage of New Jersey with stories of interest to their audience. Entries are limited to seven stories.

Mejor cobertura general en español: Esta categoría es para medios impresos y digitales. Las notas postuladas deben demostrar la mejor cobertura general de Nueva Jersey con historias de interés para su audiencia. Las postulaciones están limitadas a siete historias.

26. BEST INVESTIGATIVE COVERAGE,

SPANISH An individual, series or ongoing story that exposes wrongdoing or provides a public service by examining a community issue/problem affecting the Spanish-speaking community. Entries are limited to seven stories.

Mejor Cobertura de Investigación, En Español: Una historia individual, en serie de notas o una investigación en curso que expone irregularidades o proporciona un servicio público al examinar un tema/problema en la comunidad que afecta a la comunidad de habla hispana. Las postulaciones están limitadas a siete historias.



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SPANISH LANGUAGE CATEGORIES

(continued)

27. BEST PUBLIC AFFAIRS SHOW, SPANISH

This award is for the best regularly scheduled Spanish-language program on radio or television that focuses on New Jersey. Time limit: 60 minutes; please remove commercials/breaks

Mejores Programas de asuntos públicos en español:
Este premio es para el mejor programa transmitido regularmente en español en radio o televisión que se enfoca en Nueva Jersey. Límite de tiempo: 60 minutos; por favor, retire los comerciales/pausas.

28. BEST SPANISH COVERAGE BY AN ENGLISH OUTLET

This category is for English-language outlets that publishes or broadcasts special coverage in Spanish.

Esta categoría es para medios en idioma inglés que publican o transmiten cobertura especial en español.

29. BEST NEW YORK SPANISH TELEVISION COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

30. BEST PHILADELPHIA SPANISH TELEVISION STORY COVERAGE OF NEW JERSEY

Entries for categories 29-30 should be presented as a portfolio. It should include a letter explaining coverage and a combination of stories (daily, indepth and/or investigative) that focuses on New Jersey. Please limit portfolios to four stories.

Las postulaciones para las categorías 29-30 deben presentarse como un portafolio. Deberá incluir una carta explicando la cobertura y una combinación de historias (diarias, profundas e/o investigativas) que se centren en Nueva Jersey. Por favor, limite los portafolios a cuatro historias.

Mejor cobertura de televisión en español de Nueva Jersey en Nueva York.