



2026 OCNA Better Newspapers Awards

Rules of Entry

1. DEFINITION OF AN ENTRANT:

Entrants must be Ontario Community Newspapers Association (OCNA) Active Members or OCNA College/University Associate members in good standing.

Entries must be produced by a member of the newspaper staff or a regular freelancer unless otherwise stated in the category criteria.

Student entries must be produced by full-time students who have achieved passing grades during the evaluation period.

2. SCOPE OF THE COMPETITION:

All entries must be selected from your work published between October 1, 2025 and September 30, 2026.

3. ENTRY DEADLINES:

The final entry deadline is October 31, 2026 at midnight. All entries must be submitted and paid in full by the deadline to qualify.

4. AI CONTENT:

New for 2026 – If AI was used in creating your entry, briefly explain its use in the category description box. This information will support ongoing discussions by the OCNA AI and BNC Committees. Please note that entries may be reviewed with AI-content detection tools during judging.

5. CIRCULATION CLASS FIGURES:

Newspapers shall compete in the circulation class applicable to them. Circulation figures are the latest audited or sworn figures OCNA has on record. Your circulation class has already been determined based on these figures.

6. ENTRY REQUIREMENTS:

All PDF files entered must be the original file as printed. All entries must include all pages of the article and be full pages as published. Newspaper Folio & Date must be present on entry. If entry was published in a member publication (Special Section, Vertical Product) which does not have a folio, a note in the description of the entry must state the date and title of publication. Entrants guarantee that the file has not been altered in any way. Incomplete or incorrect articles will be disqualified.

ONLINE ENTRIES: Online articles may be submitted for many of the categories. Any changes made to the article after original posting should be noted. Please include a username and password if required to view the entry. If the judge cannot access the entry at the time of judging, either due to a broken link or a password protected site, the entry will be disqualified.

7. CATEGORY ENTRY NUMBERS:

If an insufficient number of entries are received in a Premier or General Excellence category, OCNA reserves the right to combine categories or suspend that category for the contest year.

8. FILE FORMATS ACCEPTED:

PDF, JPEG, DOC, GIF, XLS, PPT, FLV, MPG, WMV, MPEG, PNG, MOV, MP4.

A **URL** link to your website can be uploaded for website entries/online in most categories. Please see individual category descriptions for details on which categories will allow online entries.

To minimize server errors, please remove spaces and symbols from file names before uploading them into the entry system (Ex. OCNA July Issue.pdf should be OCNA_July_Issue.pdf). Each file uploaded to a category must have a different file name.

Please do not exceed a maximum file size of 5MB.

9. ENTRY FEES:

OCNA Active Members

Entrants wishing to compete in their General Excellence category must pay the entry fee of \$45.00 + HST (\$50.85 total), for one entry. Entrants wishing to compete in the Premier Awards must pay a fee of \$65.00 + HST (\$73.45 total). For this one-time fee, you may enter as many of the Premier categories (one entry per category) you are eligible to participate in - **enter as many as 43 categories for one price.**

OCNA College & University Papers

Entrants wishing to compete in the General Excellence Class 4 category must pay the entry fee of \$35.00 + HST (\$39.55 total). Entrants wishing to compete in the College/ University Premier Awards must pay a base fee of \$60.00 + HST (\$67.80 total). You may enter up to three (3) different student entries in each category (each student is only permitted to enter a category once) in Student Feature Writing, Student News Writing, Student Editorial Writing and Student Photography, and one (1) entry in the Best College/University Newspaper Website category for this one-time fee.

PAYMENT METHOD:

Payment can be made by Visa or MasterCard through our online entry site. You will be forwarded to a PayPal site for credit card payment, but do not require an account. OCNA will also accept e-transfers (sent to l.shepherd@ocna.org) or cheques. (payable to OCNA and mailed to OCNA Awards, Box #348, 6-1500 Upper Middle Road West, Oakville, ON L6M 0C2). All payments are to be made no later than the entry deadline – October 31, 2026. Please email Karen Shardlow at k.shardlow@ocna.org and indicate your newspaper name, amount owing and when the cheque will arrive.

10. GENERAL EXCELLENCE:

Circulation Classes Available:

Class 1: Circ. 1,500 and under

Class 2: Circ. 1,501 - 8,000

Class 3: Circ. 8,001 and over

OCNA Active Members (Class 1 to 3): Members wishing to enter this category must submit a pdf edition or a digital link to the pdf edition of one (1) issue from each of two (2) months (*November 2025 and April 2026*).

OCNA College/University Members (Class 4): College/University Associate Members wishing to enter this category are required to submit either a pdf copy or url link to entry. Entry should be made through the contest website and should include one (1) issue from each semester. *Fall semester* – October to December 2025 and *Winter semester* – January to April 2026.

11. HARDCOPY ENTRIES FOR GENERAL EXCELLENCE AND PREMIER:

Please note that hardcopy entries will no longer be accepted for ANY categories. All entries must be entered into the contest website as a pdf or link to a pdf copy.

12. WORKS PUBLISHED IN MULTIPLE PUBLICATIONS:

Any work entered into a split over/under 8,000 category that is published in more than one newspaper may only be entered by the OCNA member newspaper with the highest circulation and must be entered in the over 8,000 circulation category for that newspaper.

13. ETHNIC NEWSPAPERS

Ethnic newspapers published in a language other than English are not eligible to enter the General Excellence awards. If entering Premier awards, they must provide an English translation of the submission along with the original entry.

14. PHOTOGRAPHIC ILLUSTRATIONS:

Technically altered or manipulated photos are not eligible in the following categories: Best Photo Layout, Best Spot News Photo and Best Sports Photo. Technically altered images are permitted in the advertising categories, and in the Photo Category - Best Feature Photo (see Premier criteria for complete description).

15. JUDGES:

The decision of the judges shall be final. Judges will be chosen by the Association. Judges are newspaper professionals, instructors or recent retirees of the industry. General Excellence Class 1 to 3 categories are assigned three judges, with final results being agreed by all three. All other categories will be assigned one judge.

16. ENTRY COPIES:

All entries become the property of the Ontario Community Newspapers Association and may be reproduced by OCNA in any of its publications.

17. WINNING PLAQUES

Along with the name of the winning newspaper, OCNA will add the name of the reporter/photographer to the plaques presented for first, second and third place. When filling out your entry information, please include only the name(s) you wish to have placed on the plaque (ie/ Writer, Columnist, Photographer, Artist, Graphic Artist). If you do not wish to have a name included, please enter NO NAME in writer area. General Excellence and group categories will not have names added.

18. WINNER ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Winners of the first, second and third place awards will be posted in alphabetical order on the OCNA website on February 14th, 2027. Final results will be announced at the Awards Presentation to be held in the spring of 2027. More details to follow.

If you have any questions, please contact Karen Shardlow at 416-923-7724 ext. 4432 or email k.shardlow@ocna.org.