



the **41st** ANNUAL CITY & REGIONAL MAGAZINE

AWARDS

• 2026 •



ENTRY DEADLINE: Friday, Nov. 21, 2025

citymag.org

In association with the Missouri School of Journalism

50th Annual Conference

New Orleans | May 30 – June 1

C A T E G O R I E S

WRITING AWARDS

Entries for the following categories may have appeared online, in the primary print publication or in an ancillary publication. A piece of work may be entered in only one category within each division (Writing, Design, Editorial), with the exception of submissions for Writer of the Year and Excellence in Writing.

1. ESSAYS/ COMMENTARY/ CRITICISM: The best single example of point-of-view writing that explores ideas about contemporary issues, urban affairs, politics, arts and culture (visual and performing arts, architecture, literature, media, etc.) or personal experiences. Whether a long- or short-form essay, editorial or editor's letter, an entry must be the work of one writer and should bring insight and perspective based on a convincing argument, the strength of the idea and the quality of the writing.

2. FOOD OR DINING WRITING: Restricted to the subject of food, restaurants, dining out, wine and food or dining-related topics. This category awards the best food writing in any form (critical reviews, columns, features). Entries consist of three samples by the same writer.

3. HERB LIPSON AWARD FOR COLUMN EXCELLENCE: Entries should show the writer's style and originality of ideas and should focus on general-interest subjects rather than criticism. Syndicated columns and entries in categories 1 and 2 are not eligible. An entry consists of three samples by the same writer and can appear in a print publication (primary or ancillary) or on a magazine's website. Judges will consider originality, voice and knowledge of the subject.

4. SHORT WRITING LIFESTYLE (arts, culture, people): Single text story up to 800 words published in print or online. Listicles and round-ups are not eligible.

5. SHORT WRITING NEWS (local issues, politics, business): Single text story up to 800 words published in print or online. Listicles and round-ups are not eligible.

6. REPORTING: A single article or package of articles on the same topic by the same writer or team of writers should give a definitive account of or uncover new information about an event, a situation or a problem of contemporary interest. Emphasis should be placed on enterprising, imaginative news gathering and clear presentation. The entry should answer the questions of who, what, when, why and where, based on current observation, investigation, interviews and original fact finding.

7. PROFILE: The single best example of a written portrait of a person or associated duo or group of people. Entries should introduce a person to readers and offer insight into their background or character.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

8. FEATURE STORY: The single best example of non-fiction magazine writing. No restrictions regarding subject matter. Entries should treat an idea, event or trend with imagination, originality and style.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

9. WRITER OF THE YEAR: Submit four to six articles or packages by the same writer. No restrictions regarding length or subject matter.

10. EXCELLENCE IN WRITING: Entry should demonstrate superb writing throughout a single issue of the primary publication or an ancillary. Entries will reflect high attention to quality writing throughout the magazine and will be judged for reporting, clarity, literary quality and style. *Submit FOUR copies of a single issue and four copies of the entry form. Each magazine may submit a maximum of two entries in this category: one primary print issue and one ancillary issue.*

DESIGN AWARDS

Entries for the following categories must have appeared in either the primary print publication or an ancillary publication. A piece of work may be entered in only one category within each division (Writing, Design, Editorial), with the exception of articles and spreads included in submissions for Illustration and Graphics, Designer of the Year and Excellence in Design.

11. SPREAD DESIGN: A color or black-and-white, two-page spread. The spread may employ photography, illustration or type-only treatments.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

12. FEATURE DESIGN: Multiple-page treatments (more than one two-page spread) using color or black-and-white or any combination. The entire story will be judged.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

13. PHOTOGRAPHY: Entries should consist of a feature layout that deploys photos in a way that elevates the story. Traditional photo essays are eligible in this category, but entries do not need to rely on photos as the primary storytelling element. Judges will consider the content and quality of the photos as well as the selection, arrangement and overall design.

14. ILLUSTRATION AND GRAPHICS: An entry consists of three examples of illustration and or graphics from at least two different issues of a primary or ancillary publication. An entry may include work from covers, features or departments. (For example, an illustrative opening spread, a graphic chart and a spot illustration, or other combinations.) Judges will consider creativity, originality and how well the work captures the intent of the editorial. Any piece of work included as part of an entry in this category may be entered in only one other Design award category.

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15. COVER EXCELLENCE: An entry consists of three covers from the same primary or ancillary publication. All aspects of the submitted covers will be considered, from image and display type to the creativity of cover lines and blurbs. *Each magazine may submit a maximum of two entries in this category: one from the primary print publication and one from an ancillary publication.*

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

16. DESIGNER OF THE YEAR: Submit a minimum of four to a maximum of six designs by the same designer. These can include feature or department designs, single-page or spread layouts and covers.

17. EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN: Entry should demonstrate superb design throughout a single issue of the primary print publication or an ancillary. *Submit FOUR copies of a single issue and four copies of the entry form. Each magazine may submit a maximum of two entries in this category: one primary print issue and one ancillary issue.*

EDITORIAL AWARDS

The following categories are judged on every aspect of editorial excellence, including writing, editing, photography, illustrations, other art, design and use of sidebars, charts, graphs and tables as appropriate. A piece of work may be entered in only one category within each division (Writing, Design, Editorial). Entries must have appeared in either the primary print publication or an ancillary publication.

18. MAGAZINE SECTION: Open to regularly published, front- or back-of-the-book departments or sections, except Food and Dining. All aspects will be considered, including originality, usefulness to readers, consistency and execution of the editing, reporting, writing, photography and illustrations. An entry consists of two consecutive samples of the department or section (for example, January and February or April/May and June/July).

19. FOOD OR DINING SECTION: Open to all regularly published departments with content exclusive to food and dining. All aspects will be considered, including originality, usefulness to readers, consistency and execution of the editing, reporting, writing, photography and illustrations. An entry consists of two consecutive samples of the department or section (for example, January and February or April/May and June/July).

20. READER SERVICE: A single article or package of articles on the same topic by the same writer or team of writers that gives readers practical advice or how-to information. Entries should offer guidance and assistance while answering specific questions a reader might have, whatever the topic. Entries may consist of pioneering new ideas in service journalism or creatively handled standards of city and regional journalism, such as "top" or "best of" stories, regardless of subject matter. Content related to food or dining should be entered in Category 23.

21. LEISURE/LIFESTYLE INTERESTS: A single article or package of articles on the same topic by the same writer or team of writers that enhances the enjoyment of

leisure time or lifestyle interests. Content areas may include fashion, entertainment, culture, arts, homes, decorating, sports, travel. Content related to food or dining should be entered in Category 23.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

22. FEATURE PACKAGE: Thematically linked material appearing under a single main headline that might include text, sidebars and nontraditional story formats, such as Q&As, charts, graphics and more. Judges will consider the ways the topic is covered and the innovative use of story forms as well as visual presentation. Content related to food or dining should be entered in Category 23.

23. FOOD OR DINING FEATURE PACKAGE: A single article or package of articles on the same topic by the same writer or team of writers that enhances readers' enjoyment of food and dining. Unlike category 2, which is restricted to food and dining writing, this category awards editorial and design packaging as well as writing and reporting. Judges will consider traditional stories as well as innovative ideas and or superbly executed "top chefs" or "best restaurant" features. This category is for a single story package; entire food or dining sections should be entered in Category 19.

- A. Open to magazines with circulation less than 33,000.
- B. Open to magazines with circulation more than 33,000.

24. CIVIC JOURNALISM: A single article or package of articles on the same topic by the same writer or team of writers that explores significant issues in the community. The entry should be an outstanding example of analytical, investigative or expository journalism that brings exceptional insight to complex issues facing communities or regions. Judges will consider the potential of the story or package to affect local political, economic or social policy. *Submit an editor's statement, 200 words maximum, that addresses the local impact, and elaborate if the story or package has the potential to affect local/regional/state political, economic or social policy.*

25. SPECIAL ISSUE: Open to any issue of the regular magazine schedule in which more than 50 percent of the editorial feature well is devoted to the clearly labeled single topic or theme. A related cover should underscore the single theme aspect of the issue. Open to any one-time or annual special project, such as anniversary issues, "best of" issues, annual guides or other special issues published. Every entry should have complete distribution to the regular list of subscribers and newsstands. Not open to advertising supplements. *Submit FOUR copies of a single issue and four copies of the entry form.*

26. ANCILLARY PUBLICATION: Open to spinoffs that carry the title or logo of the existing city or regional magazine as part of its identity. Ancillary publications include those with content specific to subjects such as: home and shelter, weddings, business, etc. The publication cannot be an insert within the primary publication. Not open to advertising supplements. Regardless of topic, all entries will be judged on the quality and creativity of editorial and design. To be entered in this category a city guide must not be part of the regular publishing cycle but a true ancillary. *Submit FOUR copies of a single issue and four copies of the entry form.*

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BEST OF SHOW AWARDS

27. ONLINE EXCELLENCE: This award honors a website's content, appearance, service to readers, ease of use and its extension of the magazine's brand. Special attention will be given to multimedia components on the site, such as videos, slideshows, audio and more. Please provide the website's address. Judges may review the website at any time. **Submit an editor's statement, 200 words maximum**, that discusses the website's mission, objectives and how the site extends the magazine's brand. Also include an overview of the content and anything that would help a first-time user navigate the site.

28. NEWSLETTER EXCELLENCE: Submit three examples of the same editorially focused digital newsletter. Judges will consider originality and knowledge of the subject as well as readability and design. **Submit an editor's statement, 200 words maximum**, that defines the newsletter's audience, outlines its frequency and addresses how the newsletter targets its readers' interests in this concise format.

29. GENERAL EXCELLENCE: General Excellence winners are honored for consistently high-caliber work in all aspects of journalism: writing, editing, photography, illustrations, other art and design. Winners should show a sense of community connection and service.

- A.** Open to magazines with circulation less than 18,000.
- B.** Open to magazines with circulation 18,000 to 33,000.
- C.** Open to magazines with circulation more than 30,000.

For this category, magazines may submit only one entry and should provide the following:

- Six copies of three separate issues, two of which must be consecutive
- Six copies of the magazine's mission statement
- Six copies of an **editor's statement, 200 words maximum**, that addresses how your magazine meets its mission and why the magazine deserves recognition
- Six copies of the entry form
- One copy of an audit with circulation verification

//////////////////////////////////// C O N T E S T R U L E S //////////////////////////////////////

Entries must be dated between January 2025 and December 2025. All entries must be submitted by the magazine as an institution rather than by an individual. Awards are presented to the magazine as an institution. Stories or projects undertaken with commercial or corporate sponsors are ineligible for awards. All magazines must submit an audit verifying circulation.

- Magazines may submit an unlimited number of entries in each category except General Excellence (one entry per magazine); and Excellence in Writing, Excellence in Design and Cover Excellence (one regular issue entry and one ancillary publication issue entry per magazine). A magazine cannot be named finalist more than twice in any one category.

- A piece of work may be entered in only one category within each division (Writing, Design, Editorial), with the exception of articles and spreads included in submissions for Writer of the Year, Excellence in Writing, Illustration and Graphics, Designer of the Year and Excellence in Design.

- Food or dining content must be entered in Food or Dining categories and not those such as Short Writing Lifestyle, Magazine Section, Reader Service, Feature Package, Leisure/Lifestyle Interests.

- Fill out an entry form online for each entry. (See separate instructions about using the online system.)

- **Entry fee:** \$65 per entry, except the Best of Show categories, which are \$95 per entry. For payment options, see "Submitting Payment" on final page.

- **Deadline:** Friday, Nov. 21, 2025.

- Digital entries will be submitted as PDFs, uploaded as spreads (if multiple pages), not single pages. For those digital entries that appeared on a magazine's website only, a link should be submitted.

- Hard copy entries must be sent in for judging the following categories: Excellence in Writing, Excellence in Design, Special Issue, Ancillary Publication and General Excellence. See category

descriptions for specifics. They must be postmarked by Friday, Nov. 21, 2025. Issues will not be returned. Send hard copy issues to be judged and additional materials to:

CRMA AWARDS
Missouri School of Journalism
c/o Jennifer Rowe
216 Lee Hills Hall, Columbia, MO 65211

- **Optional critique for General Excellence entries:** For an additional fee of \$100, judges in the General Excellence categories will offer a one-page critique of your magazine. This private document will be sent to you following the annual meeting. The critiques will include observations about the writing, reporting, design, packaging and, in general, how your magazine compares to other entries in your circulation group. Choose this additional service on the payment form when you pay with a credit card.

- **Collaborations:** CRMA recognizes the benefit of working with other organizations on co-publishing articles and packages. If, however, that work did not originate with the CRMA publication and any part was paid for by another institution, it will not be eligible for this contest.

- **Subject of legal action:** Contest participants should notify the contest coordinator if any submission is or becomes the subject of legal action.

- **Finalists** to be announced by March 20, 2026

- **Winners** will be announced at CRMA's Annual Conference in New Orleans May 30 – June 1, 2026.

- **Post-judging PDF submission:** Within one week following the announcement of finalists, magazines chosen in the following categories will be notified about sending PDFs of their final entries to the Missouri School of Journalism for inclusion in the awards video: Excellence in Writing, Excellence in Design, Special Issue, Ancillary Publications and General Excellence.

ENTERING ONLINE

The contest is open only to regular and affiliate members of CRMA. Entries to the National City and Regional Magazine Awards are submitted using a web-based program at **betterbnc.com**. Below are directions for preparing and submitting entries. **Questions:** Please contact Jennifer Rowe at RoweJ@missouri.edu or call 573-882-6839.

Important: The contest platform is optimized for Firefox and Google Chrome for PC and Mac. Please have a recent version downloaded and installed for the best contest experience.

LOGIN:

1. Go to <http://betterbnc.com>
2. Click Contestant Login.
3. Select Contestant Manager.
4. Using the pull-down menu, select 2026 National City and Regional Magazine Awards.
5. Select your magazine. If the name of your magazine is not listed, contact Cate Sanderson at sandersonmgt@gmail.com or call 203-515-9294.
6. Enter your password from last year. If you are new to the contest, enter your temporary password: bnc (lowercase). Click Login. When you first log in, the system will prompt you to create a secure password and enter your contact information. If you set the new password for your organization, please make sure to share it with any others from your organization who may be submitting entries.

SUBMIT ENTRIES:

1. On the Manage Entries page, click Submit Entry (left side).
2. Select the appropriate Division (Writing, Design, Editorial, Best of Show).
3. Select the appropriate Category (Profile, Reporting, etc.).
4. Read the corresponding Category Note (directly below the Category selection box) describing what is expected for the category's entry content.
5. Complete the Headline/Title field.
6. Based on the type of entry, add content:
 - a. To upload digital file attachments (other than audio/video), click Browse, navigate to the desired file, select Open, and click Upload. Upload only PDF files! Upload multiple-page stories (features, for example) in spreads, not single pages. If you would like to include more than one attachment for an entry, repeat these steps. If you reach a point where you cannot add any more attachments to an entry, you might have reached the limit set by the contest rules. Please try to limit file sizes to 5 MB or less to aid judges in accessing content. To reduce the size of your files on a Mac, run the PDF optimizer inside Acrobat, or use Stuffit.

- b. To add web/audio/video content, copy and paste the content's web address into the provided Web URL field. To host your content online, either upload it to a free streaming content website (e.g., YouTube), or talk to your IT person about adding it to your website. Make sure the content will be accessible online throughout the contest and awards process. Here are some examples of free streaming content websites where you can upload audio and video content:

Audio: [Soundcloud.com](https://soundcloud.com)

Video: www.youtube.com, www.vimeo.com

Important: Please ensure that items are not behind a paywall or a password-protected area. If they are, you must provide username/password information in the Comments section of your entry. Judges may disqualify your entry if work samples are inaccessible.

- c. For mail-in, hard copy entry categories (e.g., General Excellence or other categories that require entire issues), do not upload a file or add website URL content. Simply complete all other content fields.

- d. For those digital categories that require editor's statements (Civic Journalism, Online Excellence, Newsletter Excellence), upload those as Word documents or PDF files.

7. Click Next.
8. Add Credits for those responsible for the entry content.
9. Add Comments (if needed), but keep them brief (e.g., 100 words).
10. Click Submit.
11. For mail-in, hard copy entry categories, print and attach the entry label (which automatically appears after each entry is submitted) to each hard-copy item, and follow contest shipping instructions on under Contest Rules (contact Jennifer Rowe at RoweJ@missouri.edu, or call 573-882-6839 for more information).

SUBMITTING PAYMENT:

The software will automatically calculate fees based upon the number of entries. Once you have completed all of your entries, follow the payment link to the secure portal to pay with a credit card (Visa, Mastercard, American Express or Discover Cards are accepted).

Alternatively, magazines may send a check payable to City and Regional Magazine Association to:

CRMA Awards
c/o Cate Sanderson
287 Richards Ave., Norwalk, CT 06850

Please print and include the entry summary page (which opens when contestants click the Calculate Entry Fee button on their Manage Entries page). Magazines with multiple submissions, please submit one payment in whatever form.