Center for Integrity in News Reporting

Benjamin Franklin Prizes for News Reporting

2026 Contest Rules

CONTEST PERIOD:

News items must have been published, aired, reported on cable television or posted digitally within the United States on a date or dates within the 2026 calendar year (Jan. 1, 2026-Dec. 31, 2026). Additional information, instructions, registration and submission links can be found at: https://www.cfinr.org/award-entry

TYPES OF ARTICLES:

Articles which qualify are solely news articles. Editorials, commentary, op-eds, and any forms of opinion writing or comments, while important, will not be considered. Judges will consider the entries which best meet the spirit of Adolph Ochs' quote, “to give the news impartially, without fear or favor.” The award in each of the four categories will go to the best examples of impartial, objective, and fair reporting. Entries can be a breaking news story, a multipart series, investigative reporting, or any other type of news reporting as long as a reasonable, independent reader would likely consider it fair, impartial, and objective.

These awards are for news reporting within the United States. Foreign journalists reporting U.S. news within the United States are eligible.

Policy Statement

1. **Prohibition of AI Assistance**

- Contestants must not use any generative AI tools, software, or services (including but not limited to ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, or similar systems) to write, edit, or otherwise produce their submitted piece.
- AI-generated text, summaries, rewrites, or suggestions are strictly prohibited.

2. **Permitted Tools**

- Standard word processors, grammar checkers, and spell-check functions are allowed, provided they do not generate original content.
- Research using search engines or databases is permitted, but contestants must synthesize findings in their own words.

3. **Attestation Requirement**

- Each submission must include the following signed statement at the top of the document:

“I attest that this submission is entirely the entrant’s own work and that no generative AI tools were used in its creation, editing or refinement.”

4. **Enforcement & Consequences**

- Any violation of this policy will result in immediate disqualification.
- If a violation is discovered after awarding, the prize will be revoked and returned.

5. **Ethics & Integrity**

- This policy is designed to uphold the values of impartiality, originality, and trust in journalism. Contestants are expected to adhere to the highest ethical standards.

MEDIUMS DEFINED:

Broadcast

This refers to shows broadcast by national television networks which are available to be carried on local television stations. It also includes stories that originated and aired on local television stations. It also covers radio broadcasts, both national and local, similar to television above. Podcasts do not qualify for broadcast, but should be included in digital entries.

Cable television

This refers to news stories which originate on cable television national networks, including but not limited to historic brands like CNN, Fox News, MS NOW, but not limited to those. If another cable network is available for viewing on satellite or cable television systems, it would qualify. It would also include news reporting originated on a local cable television system.

College Student News Reporting

This category is for news reporting produced by college students and published or posted through a college or university news organization. Eligible entries may appear in print publications, on news websites, on digital news platforms, or on blogs. Entries must be news reporting and should reflect the same standards of impartial, objective, and fair reporting required throughout the contest. Opinion writing, editorials, commentary, and other opinion-driven content are not eligible.

Digital

This refers to news reporting posted on a website, a blog, or a podcast. News reporting which is available only in a digital format originated by daily or weekly newspapers, broadcast networks or stations, cable television or satellite networks or local cable systems should be entered in the digital category.

Investigative Reporting

This category recognizes in-depth, original investigative journalism that uncovers facts, wrongdoing, systemic failures, or matters of significant public interest that would not otherwise be known without sustained reporting effort. Eligible entries may include single stories or multipart series that demonstrate rigorous research, use of documents and data, multiple sourcing, and persistence over time.

Judges will place particular emphasis on reporting that is impartial, objective, and fair, consistent with the spirit of Adolph Ochs' guiding principle “to give the news impartially, without fear or favor.” While investigative reporting often examines powerful institutions or controversial subjects, entries should reflect a commitment to accuracy, balance, transparency of methods, and clear separation of verified facts from inference or opinion.

Investigative Reporting entries may originate in print, broadcast, cable television, or digital platforms, and may include accountability reporting at the local, regional, or national level. The winning entry will exemplify journalism that serves the public interest by illuminating truth, strengthening civic understanding, and upholding the highest standards of ethical news reporting.

Print

This refers to any publication in a weekly or daily newspaper within the United States. Newspapers that are all digital, or published only in a digital format and not in a print format, should be entered in the digital category, not the print category.

White House Correspondents’ Association Members Reporting

This refers to any impartial and objective news reporting from members of the White House Correspondents’ Association covering the President of the United States, the White House, or the Executive Branch. Eligible entries must be news reporting, originating from accredited access such as briefing room coverage, press pool reporting, official presidential events, enterprise or explanatory journalism, or exclusive interviews, and may be published in print, broadcast, cable television, or digital formats. Editorials, opinion columns, commentary, advocacy journalism, partisan analysis, personal essays, and opinion-driven content are not eligible.

Judges will evaluate submissions based on accuracy, balance, independence, and a clear separation of verified fact from opinion, consistent with Adolph Ochs' guiding principle "to give the news impartially, without fear or favor."

ALLOWABLE NUMBER OF ENTRIES:

For news reporting, a single entry or multiple entries on the same news event or subject are accepted. For a series, there is a limit of 10 entries. For ongoing stories which continue to evolve with new developments and events, there is no limit on the number of entries.

ENTRY DEADLINE:

January 31, 2027, 11:59pm EST

SUBMISSION:

You should submit a PDF of the article for print or digital. You may also include a url of the online version of the article. For Broadcast and Cable Television, you should include a url of the reporting including all videos. Submit all entries at: https://portal.newspapercontest.com/cfinr/newspaper/login.php

All contest information, instructions, registration, contact information and submission links can be found at: https://www.cfinr.org/award-entry

AWARDS:

While recognizing the contribution of editors, researchers, and others, the monetary awards go to the bylined or credited reporters in these four categories. If multiple bylines, the award will be divided equally. Awards will be presented at a recognition ceremony, with a date and location yet to be determined.

JUDGING:

Judging will be done by the Newspaper Association Managers, the national organization of the state press associations in the United States.