

# 2026 Excellence in Journalism ‘CALL FOR ENTRIES’

*Sponsored by the Detroit chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists*

Detroit SPJ is accepting entries and nominations honoring the outstanding achievers and achievements in 2025 by print, broadcast, photo, digital and other practicing journalists and media outlets in Michigan. In addition, we will be naming a Journalist of the Year, a Young Journalist of the Year and the Larry Laurain Scholarship winners.

***Please read these instructions carefully. Many entry divisions have been expanded or changed. Watch for an \* to signify a new or revised entry category.***

Deadline for most entries is Monday, Feb. 16, 2026. This contest is judged by working journalists from other local chapters of the Society of Professional Journalists.

Winners will be honored at the chapter’s annual awards banquet in May at the San Marino Club in Troy, Michigan.

## General Information

1. All entries must be submitted online through the [BetterBNC® :: Open Call Contestants](#) website. Visit our web page for additional information: [spjdetroit.org](http://spjdetroit.org). **Mailed tearsheets or other materials will not be accepted.**
2. Entries must have been published or broadcast in Michigan **between Jan. 1, 2025, and Dec. 31, 2025**. Questions on eligibility may be directed to: [spjdetroit@gmail.com](mailto:spjdetroit@gmail.com).
3. An entry may be submitted in only one contest category.
4. Entrants do not need to be members of the Society of Professional Journalists, though members receive a discount for their entries.
5. All entries must be the product of original writing, reporting or production by the entrant(s). This contest is intended to reward individual achievement. In most cases, the name of the entrant(s) should be that of an individual or individuals and the news organization they represent. News organizations should be listed as the “entrant” for team efforts involving more than four individuals.
6. All entries must be in the correct presentation format. See information provided with each class. Both broadcast and print entries may contain online elements. *Entries can compete in only one class – radio/audio, print, television, digital or the “open” division.*
7. Judges will take into consideration the SPJ Code of Ethics in evaluating all entries.
8. Entries must include the text of any correction or clarifications made in connection with that entry. They also should include a summary of written challenges concerning the accuracy or fairness of the entry (including letters to the

editor, whether published or not), or any notice of legal action. As an aid to the judges, entries should also include an explanation or refutation of any objections.

**9.** Judges may declare “no winner” in any category at their discretion. All decisions by the judges, including interpretation of these rules, are final. Judges reserve the right to disqualify any entry. In the case of disputes, the Detroit chapter’s board of directors will make final determinations.

**10. ENTRY FEES:** The fee is \$40 per entry for SPJ members or \$60 per entry for non-members. Students will be charged \$25 per entry for SPJ student members, or \$30 per entry for non-SPJ members. **At least one person within a media organization must be a member for that organization to qualify for the SPJ member rate.**

**11. SMALL NEWSROOMS:** Entries from small newsrooms, defined as newsrooms with 10 or fewer employees, may take advantage of a lower entry fee of \$30 per entry.

**12. PAYMENT:** Payments are accepted via credit card or PayPal, are non-refundable and must be received by the entry deadline.

**13. ENTRY DEADLINE:** Most entries must be received by midnight, Monday, Feb. 17, 2026. See below. Specific requirements for attachments are listed within each class of competition.

**14. JOIN SPJ:** Reduce your entry fees, follow the link: [Become a Member - Society of Professional Journalists \(spj.org\)](#). You will also qualify for reduced banquet tickets. Membership includes discounts at Office Max and other organizations.

## Deadlines (at midnight)

**Feb. 16, 2026** – Entries in the radio, television, print, digital and specialty media categories.

**Feb. 28, 2026** – Nominations for Journalist of the Year and Young Journalist of the Year.

**Feb. 28, 2026** – Larry Laurain Scholarship applications.

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## The Sojourner Truth Award for Reporting on Racial Justice

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 16, 2026**

The Sojourner Truth Award for Reporting on Racial Justice honors excellence in journalism in covering issues relating to matters of race. It seeks to recognize reporting that is revelatory and impactful on any aspect of racial justice. The competition is open to journalism from any platform – digital, print, television or radio. An entry is limited to five related stories.

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## RADIO/AUDIO

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 16, 2026**

**Radio and Podcasts:** Upload audio files.

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### Categories:

**\*Arts reporting/criticism:** A series of reports or reviews on arts and cultural topics. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Autos reporting/reviews:** A series of reports on any aspect of the auto industry, including car reviews. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Breaking/spot news reporting:** Single-day coverage of breaking or developing news produced under deadline pressure.

**Community/local news reporting:** A single or series of reports covering issues affecting specific communities or neighborhoods. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Consumer/watchdog/investigative reporting:** Coverage that looks out for the interests of community members, such as saving a family from losing a home or helping correct an injustice. An entry can include up to 5 reports on a particular issue.

**\*Editorial writing:** Editorials or opinion pieces, clearly marked as such, contributed by an individual. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Education reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics of importance in education. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Environment reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics related to the environment. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Explanatory reporting:** A single or series of reports that help viewers make sense of a complex topic. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Feature photography:** A single, compelling photo, not of a breaking-news variety.

**Feature reporting:** A report or series of reports on feature subjects, such as profile or human-interest stories. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Food reporting/reviews:** A series of stories or reviews of restaurants or other facets of the food industry. Submit up to 3 examples,

**\*General column:** Regularly appearing viewpoint, business, features or news columns by a single contributor. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**General news/enterprise reporting:** A report or series of reports resulting from a journalist's initiative but excluding coverage of breaking or developing news. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Health reporting:** A report or series of reports on topics related to health or well-being. Submit up to 5 examples.

**News editing:** Best editing techniques used to tell a story. This can be a single story or series including audio elements and graphics.

**\*News Photography:** A single, compelling photo of a breaking-news event.

**News/Public affairs regularly scheduled program:** One single, complete program from a weekly or other regularly scheduled program.

**News/special/documentary:** A program 15 minutes or longer broadcast outside of a regular newscast and prompted by breaking news or a major issue of community concern. This may be a live or taped original broadcast.

**Newscast:** One single complete, regularly scheduled daily or weekly news program.

**\*Open-government reporting:** Significant, effective coverage promoting open government in Michigan. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**\*Podcasts:** A single or series of audio podcasts on any subject. Submit up to 3 examples, not to exceed 1 hour in total length.

**\*Sports commentary:** Sports commentary broadcast on a regular basis by a single contributor. Submit 3 samples. No blogs.

**Sports reporting:** A report or series of reports within a newscast or coverage of a sporting event. Submit up to 3 examples.

# TELEVISION

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 17, 2026**

**Television:** Entries should include studio lead-in, where appropriate

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## Categories:

**\*Arts reporting/criticism:** A series of reports or reviews on arts and cultural topics. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Autos reporting/reviews:** A series of reports on any aspect of the auto industry, including car reviews. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Breaking/spot news reporting:** Single-day coverage of breaking or developing news produced under deadline pressure.

**Community/local news reporting:** A single or series of reports covering issues affecting specific communities or neighborhoods. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Consumer/watchdog/investigative reporting:** Provides an example of looking out for citizens' interests such as saving a family from losing a home or helping correct an injustice. An entry can include up to 5 reports on a particular issue.

**\*Editorial writing:** Editorials or opinion pieces, clearly marked as such, contributed by an individual. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Education reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics of importance in education. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Environment reporting:** A single or series of reports on topics related to the environment. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Explanatory reporting:** A single or series of report that help viewers make sense of a complex topic. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Feature photography:** A single, compelling photo, not of a breaking-news variety.

**Feature reporting:** A single or series of reports on feature subjects, such as profiles or human-interest stories. Submit up to 5 reports.

**\*Food reporting/reviews:** A series of stories or reviews on restaurants or other facets of the food industry. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*General column writing:** Regularly appearing viewpoint, business, features or news columns by a single contributor. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**General news/enterprise reporting:** A report or series of reports resulting from a journalist's initiative but excluding coverage of breaking or developing news. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Health reporting:** A single or series of reports on topics related to health or well-being. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*News photography:** A single, compelling photo of a breaking-news event.

**News/public affairs regularly scheduled program:** One single, complete program from a weekly or other regularly scheduled program.

**\*News special/documentary:** A program 15 minutes or longer broadcast outside of a regular newscast and prompted by breaking news or a major issue of community concern. This may be a live or taped original broadcast.

**News videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound.

**Newscast:** One single, complete, regularly scheduled daily or weekly news program.

**\*Open-government reporting:** Significant, effective coverage promoting open government in Michigan. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**\*Sports commentary:** Sports commentary broadcast on a regular basis by a single contributor. Submit 3 samples. No blogs.

**Sports reporting:** A report or series of reports within a newscast or coverage of a sporting event. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Sports videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound.

# PRINT

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 16, 2026**

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**Class A:** Stories/photos published in any newspaper of greater than 100,000 circulation; by wire services; or in magazines, trade publications and non-daily entertainment/alternative newspapers of greater than 50,000 circulation.

**Class B:** Stories/photos published in daily newspapers of less than 100,000 circulation. Publications in Class B may choose to compete in Class A.

**Class C:** Stories/photos published in any non-daily newspaper, magazine or trade publication of less than 50,000 circulation. Publications in Class C may choose to compete in Class A or Class B.

**Class D:** This class is for in-house and custom publications such as those produced by universities, membership organizations or other nonprofits and businesses.

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**NOTE:** Entry classifications are determined by the publication's circulation. For chains and group publications sharing editorial or photographic copy across several publications or nameplates, the largest circulation of any single publication within the group should be used. If the entry was used only in one publication, use that publication's circulation.

## Categories:

**\*Arts reporting/criticism:** A series of reports or reviews on arts and cultural topics. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Autos reporting/reviews:** A series of reports on any aspect of the auto industry, including car reviews. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Breaking/spot news reporting:** Single-day coverage of breaking or developing news produced under deadline pressure.

**Community/local news reporting:** A single or series of reports covering issues affecting specific communities or neighborhoods. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Consumer/watchdog/investigative reporting:** Coverage that looks out for the interests of community members, such as saving a family from losing a home or helping correct an injustice. Can include up to 5 reports on a single topic.

**Cover design:** Open to magazines and tabloid newspapers. (Depending on the format, tabloid newspapers have the option of entering in the Page One design or Magazine spread categories, but not both.) Submit a 1-page layout.

**Editorial writing:** Editorials or opinion pieces written by an individual and appearing on the editorial or op-ed page. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Education reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics in education. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Environment reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics related to the environment. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Explanatory reporting:** A single or series of reports that help readers make sense of a complex topic. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Feature page design:** A single or series of reports on various topics related to the environment. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Feature photography:** A single, compelling photo, not of a breaking-news variety.

**Feature reporting:** A report or series of feature subjects, such as profiles or human-interest stories. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Food reporting/reviews:** A series of stories or reviews on restaurants and other facets of the food industry. Submit up to 3 examples,

**General column writing:** Regularly appearing viewpoint, business, features or news columns by a single writer. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**General news/enterprise reporting:** A report or series of reports resulting from a journalist's initiative but excluding coverage of breaking or developing news. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**Headline writing:** An individual (not a team) award. Submit 5 headlines by one headline writer. Include stories.

**Health reporting:** A report or series of reports on topics related to health or well-being. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Informational graphics:** A storytelling graphic that illustrates an aspect of a news or feature story.

**Inside page design:** Submit a 1- or 2-page layout.

**Magazine spread design:** Open to magazines and some tabloid newspapers. (Depending on the format, tabloid newspapers have the option of entering in the Feature page design or Magazine Spread categories, but not both.) Submit a 1- or 2-page layout.

**News photography:** A single, compelling photo of a breaking-news event.

**\*News videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound.

**Open-government reporting:** Significant, effective coverage promoting open government in Michigan. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**Page One design:** Submit a 1-page layout.

**Portrait photography:** A single, compelling portrait photo.

**Sports commentary:** Commentary appearing on a regular basis by a single contributor. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**Sports page design:** Submit a 1- or 2-page layout.

**Sports photography:** A single, compelling sports photo.

**Sports reporting:** A report or series of reports on a topic related to sports or a sporting event. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Sports videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound

# DIGITAL

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 16, 2025**

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All digital and news websites, whether independent or affiliated with print or broadcast news organizations, may enter. Substack contributors are encouraged to enter this division. **NOTE:** All entries are eligible to compete in only one class: print, radio, television or digital.

**How to submit:** The website address and directions on how to access the site, including passwords, must be included with the entry form. Include the URL and passwords needed to access the site. Entries that do not include this information will be disqualified.

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## Categories:

**\*Arts reporting/criticism:** A series of reports or reviews on arts and cultural topics. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Autos reporting/reviews:** A series of reports on any aspect of the auto industry, including car reviews. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Breaking/spot news reporting:** Single-day coverage of breaking or developing news written under deadline pressure.

**Community/local news reporting:** A single or series of reports covering issues affecting specific communities or neighborhoods. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Consumer/watchdog/investigative reporting:** Coverage that looks out for the interests of community members, such as saving a family from losing a home or helping correct an injustice. Submit up to 5 examples on a single topic.

**Digital media presentation:** A single entry demonstrating excellence in blending multiple media into a digital presentation.

**\*Editorial writing:** Editorials or opinion pieces, clearly marked as such, written by an individual. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Education reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics in education. Submit up to 5 examples.

**Environment reporting:** A single or series of reports on various topics related to the environment. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Explanatory reporting:** A single or series of reports helping readers make sense of a complex topic. Submit up to 3 examples.

**Feature reporting:** A report or series of feature subjects, such as profiles and human-interest stories. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Food reporting/reviews:** A series of reports or reviews on restaurants or other facets of the food industry. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*General column writing:** Regularly appearing viewpoint, business, features or news columns by a single writer. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**\*General news/enterprise reporting:** A report or series of reports resulting from a journalist's initiative but excluding coverage of breaking or developing news. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**\*Headline writing:** An individual (not a team) award. Submit 5 headlines by one headline writer. Include stories.

**Health reporting:** A report or series of reports on topics related to health or well-being. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Informational graphics:** A storytelling graphic that illustrates an aspect of a news or feature story.

**\*News photography:** A single, compelling photo of a breaking-news event.

**\*News videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound.

**\*Open-government reporting:** Significant, effective coverage promoting open government in Michigan. Submit up to 3 examples on a single topic.

**\*Sports commentary:** Sports commentary appearing on a regular basis by a single writer. Submit 3 columns. No blogs.

**\*Sports photography:** A single, compelling sports photo.

**\*Sports reporting:** A report or series of reports on a topic related to sports or a sporting event. Submit up to 3 examples.

**\*Sports videography:** Best visual storytelling. The winning entry will demonstrate excellence in the use of videography and sound.

**\*Web design:** Visual excellence that supports and enhances digital journalism. Provide 3 examples.

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Questions? Call (734) 277-5922 or e-mail [spjdetroit@gmail.com](mailto:spjdetroit@gmail.com).

# OPEN

**Deadline: Monday, Feb. 16, 2026**

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Any format – broadcast, print or digital -- is eligible.

**\*Breaking news via social media:** Use of social media channels to report breaking news with immediate postings that precede or accompany full coverage. Entries should include links to a series of social posts that first reported a breaking news event.

**\*Collaborative coverage:** News coverage executed by multiple outlets exhibiting collaborative efforts to share resources and information. Entries must involve joint, one-time or sustained coverage by newsrooms under separate ownership. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Engagement-driven coverage:** News coverage that draws on content contributed or topics generated by readers. Entries can include a single story or a series clearly driven by audience interaction. Submit up to 5 examples.

**\*Newsletter strategy:** Regular news curation that generates an audience or heightens awareness of the events of a day, week or month for an outlet. Entries may include up to 3 examples of newsletters that creatively or efficiently collect and convey news or feature coverage or opinion pieces.

**\*Social media strategy:** Consistently effective use of social media channels to highlight, discuss or explain news events and journalistic works. Entries may include up to 5 posts that demonstrate excellence in strategically expanding or engaging audiences.

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## ‘Journalist of the Year’ and ‘Young Journalist of the Year’

**Deadline: Friday, Feb. 28, 2026**

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The Journalist and Young Journalist of the Year competition is open to all journalists (reporters, editors, producers, anchors, photojournalists, etc.) in Michigan.

Judges consider the nominee’s impact through examples of outstanding work, exemplary service to the profession or extraordinary leadership during 2025. Entry must be the nominee’s original work.

**Journalist of the Year:** Nominees should have produced outstanding original work, performed exemplary service and/or exhibited extraordinary leadership over the year in the practice of journalism in Michigan.

**Young Journalist of the Year:** Nominees must be age 30 or younger or have turned 31 in 2025. Nominees must have at least one year of paid, full-time work experience. Equivalent experience as a freelancer qualifies. Internships do not qualify.

*Each nomination must include:*

1. **Nomination letter.** A statement from a supervisor/employer stating why the individual should be considered. Freelance nominees must include 2 supporting/nominating letters.
2. **Resume.** A work history of the nominee.
3. **Work samples.** “Journalist of the Year” entries must include a minimum of 5 and maximum of 10 work samples. Young Journalist” entries must include a minimum of 3 and maximum of 5 work samples. Each entry must include a brief explanation with each work sample providing context for the judges. Freelance nominees must include at least 10 work samples.

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## SCHOLARSHIPS

**Deadline: Friday, Feb. 28, 2026**

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SPJ Detroit annually awards grants up to \$2,500 to Michigan residents who are or will be a sophomore, junior or senior at a college or university with a demonstrated interest in journalism. The chapter’s board of directors maintains the right to determine the number and size of scholarships depending on the availability of funds.

The scholarships may be used at any institution of higher education.

The awards honor the late Lawrence (Larry) A. Laurain, who was serving as president of the Detroit chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists at the time of his death in August 1985 of esophageal cancer. His journalism career spanned 17 years, including stints at the Royal Oak Daily Tribune, Macomb Daily and United Press International before becoming city editor of the Oakland Press.

**Call for Entries** - Applicants must intend to practice journalism, as evidenced by enrollment in journalism classes and by work from those classes or by clips published in student or professional publications. Financial need is considered.

**No entry fee is required** - Scholarship winners will be honored at the chapter’s annual awards banquet.

**Applications must include:**

1. **A resume.**
2. **Portfolio.** At least three clips of any published or classroom-produced samples of the applicant’s writing or other news-related reporting.
3. **Supporting documents.** At least one document, such as a letter of recommendation or other statement from a teacher, dean or adviser who is familiar with the applicant’s work. The document must affirm the applicant’s enrollment in a journalism class, academic status or purported interest in journalism.
4. **Personal narrative/essay.** A double-spaced, titled document that addresses any of the issues cited here:

**An applicant’s personal narrative should address any of the following points:**

- Why do you want to be a journalist?
- What are your career goals after graduation?
- Describe your journalism-related activities and how they have advanced your journalist training.
- List your educational, campus and social activities with brief details of their influence on you.
- Describe the most important challenge facing journalists today.
- Identify the person in journalism you would most like to emulate and why?
- What would winning this award mean to you?