

INSTRUCTIONS

- ⇒ **Who can enter?** All entries must be submitted by a broadcast station, an educational institution, or an individual student. The categories of Team Multimedia Storytelling – News and Individual Multimedia Storytelling – News may also be entered by organizations that are traditionally print in nature and by online-only organizations. Otherwise, no independent professional productions will be accepted.
- ⇒ **Air dates:** All entries must have aired during the calendar year 2025.
- ⇒ **Number of entries:** There is no limit to the number of entries that an entrant may submit.
- ⇒ **Multiple entries:** If applicable, a story may be entered in more than one category (i.e. Feature & Best Audio). However, two entry fees must be submitted.
- ⇒ **Online Entries:** All entries will be submitted through our online contest website, www.betterbnc.com.
NOTE: Entries must be submitted in the form of URL's—the entry is not uploaded to the contest site. If the entries are not already archived on your station's website, they can be uploaded to an online hosting site such as You Tube or Kiwi6 or Sound Cloud (audio only). Please be certain that each entry remains online and is not behind a paywall or password protection through the 2026 Midwest Journalism Conference.

In addition to the entry itself, we also request that each entry also be accompanied by a 30-second clip that will be used to complete our awards presentation.
- ⇒ **Supplementary material:** Supplementary material can be uploaded to the contest site, but judging will be based solely on the broadcast entry.
- ⇒ **EXTENDED Deadline:** All online entries must be **submitted by 11:59 p.m. EST Friday, January 30, 2026**
- ⇒ **Entry fees:** Fees, payable to **MBJA** are as follows:
\$50 per professional entry. \$40 per student entry.
NOTE: MBJA accepts payment by check, VISA or Mastercard.
- ⇒ **Questions:** Call MBJA Executive Secretary Christine Paige Diers at (605) 490-3033, or email cpaigediers@gmail.com.
- ⇒ Unless otherwise noted, entries can be edited to fit the maximum allowed length.

MARKET SIZE

TELEVISION (AND PRINT AND ONLINE ORGANIZATIONS WHERE APPLICABLE)

LARGE: Milwaukee, Minneapolis/St. Paul.

MEDIUM: Cedar Rapids/Waterloo, Des Moines, Fargo, Green Bay, Lincoln/Hastings/Kearney, Madison, Omaha, Quad Cities, Sioux Falls.

SMALL: Alexandria, Bemidji/Brainerd, Bismarck/Minot/Dickinson, Duluth, La Crosse/Eau Claire, Mankato, North Platte, Ottumwa, Rapid City, Rochester/Mason City/Austin, Rhinelander, Wausau, Sioux City.

STUDENTS: May submit their own entries or college/university can enter on behalf of student(s). Entries must be produced as part of a student's coursework and/or for a college media entity.

RADIO

LARGE: Four or more full-time newsroom employees.

MEDIUM: Two or three full-time newsroom employees.

SMALL: One or no full-time newsroom employees.

STUDENTS: May submit their own entries or college/university can enter on behalf of student(s). Entries must be produced as part of a student's coursework and/or for a college media entity.

News staff that operate only within the framework of a network must compete at the large market category regardless of the size of their individual shop. News operations that are part of a network, but operate independently from that network— and at least 75 percent of the news produced is for a local audience— should compete based on the size of their staff. Stations may enter multiple categories, but must select only one market size.

SPECIAL NOTES ON ENTERING & JUDGING

MARKETS

Program producers or syndicated non-broadcast services must enter in the largest market in which their programs aired regionally.

SELECTING WINNERS

The judges will select one First Place and up to two Award of Merit winners in each category and market size (where applicable).

Judges are instructed to select as many winning entries as allowed by contest rules and **have the discretion to select no winners in a category if none are merited**. In that event, judges will submit a written explanation of their reason.

Judges also have the right to move an entry from one category to another, if deemed a better fit. In this case, judges should call or email the contest manager, MBJA Executive Secretary Christine Paige Diers at (605) 490-3033, or email cpaigediers@gmail.com.

All decisions made by judges are final.

CATEGORIES

GENERAL REPORTING

Best reporting on a single topic. May be in-depth, enterprise, or coverage of a planned event used in a regularly scheduled newscast. Single stories or composites are allowed. Cannot be investigative.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance of the report; depth; originality; public interest; results; contains information discovered by a deliberate journalistic effort.

BREAKING NEWS

Coverage of an unscheduled event for which there was no advance planning or notice, broadcast or telecast within 24 hours of the event. A single story or composite of all coverage of an event aired within 24 hours may be entered.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Depth of coverage; Information developed in limited time period (under deadline pressure); use of station resources such as graphics, live interviews, audio/video to help the story.

INVESTIGATIVE

A single story or series of stories showing enterprising investigative reporting by a reporter or team. This category is for short reports; not documentaries.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance and impact of the report; use of investigative techniques, depth, extent of research and supporting records used; presentation of facts; originality; timeliness; public interest; exposure of corruption/wrongdoing; results and/or change produced.

NEWS SERIES

Multi-part reports on a single subject or continuing coverage of a single news event, broadcast in a regularly scheduled newscast. Cannot be investigative.

Maximum Length: 30 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance of the series; depth; originality; public interest.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

A single story or series of stories that showcases diverse and under-represented voices and/or brings attention to social, economic, or political challenges facing marginalized communities. Topics can include, but are not limited to, biases against race, religion, or gender identity.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance and impact of report; engagement; creation of meaningful dialogue or potential solution to issue presented; quality.

BROADCAST WRITING

Stations are asked to submit entries **and accompanying scripts** that demonstrate excellence in writing. The writing must convey the feeling and significance of events to the listener or viewer. It may represent individual or collaborative efforts. Stations may include up to three examples, exactly as broadcast.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Clear, concise writing that conveys the feeling and significance of events.

HARD FEATURE

A planned story on a news-related topic that is timely, important and consequential in which the reporter, producer or photographer put considerable time and effort into the production of the story; not breaking news or weather-related.

Maximum Length: 10 min.

Judging Criteria: Quality of writing; use and quality of audio/video; originality.

SOFT FEATURE

A story providing an imaginative and colorful look at an event or individual(s). Entry may be human interest stories, personality profiles, entertainment or trend stories, or any other feature, not weather-related.

Maximum Length: 10 min.

Judging Criteria: Quality of writing; use and quality of audio/video; originality.

MULTI-MEDIA JOURNALIST/SOLO STORYTELLER

For the journalist who does it all and does it well. Entry may include up to three different stories from three different days. Entry cannot include a natural sound package. Can include individual reporting of news that engages online audiences through multiple platforms.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance and impact of the reports; creative use of writing, sound and video.

VIDEOJOURNALISM

Best use of visuals and sound in a published or broadcast video story.

Maximum Length: 10 min.

AUDIO (Radio Only)

Best use of audio in a story which places the listener at the scene of an event. Accuracy in conveying story,

meaning and impact will be factors in judging.

Maximum Length: 10 min.

SPORTS PLAY-BY-PLAY

An unedited aircheck of play-by-play coverage of any sporting event. Commercial breaks should be removed.

Maximum length: 15 minutes

SPORTS REPORTING

Best sports reporting on a single topic.

Maximum Length: 15 min.

Judging Criteria: Significance of the issue; impact on the community; quality.

SPORTSCAST/PROGRAM

A regularly scheduled sportscast or program airing on any day in the contest year.

Maximum Length: 60 min.

Judging Criteria: Overall content, presentation, writing, editing and use of audio and/or video.

WEATHER – FEATURE

A planned story on a weather-related topic in which considerable time and effort is put into the production of the story; not breaking news. Entries may be a single report or multiple reports.

Length: 10 min.

Judging Criteria: Quality of writing; use and quality of audio/video; originality.

WEATHER – BREAKING COVERAGE

Coverage of a major or severe weather event. Entry should be a composite of all coverage airing within a 24-hour period. Can include breaking weather forecasts, on-the-scene reporting or a combination of the two.

Maximum Length: 30 min.

Judging Criteria: Quality of reporting and community impact.

WEATHERCAST

Best weather coverage by a single meteorologist. Entrants must submit any two regularly scheduled weathercasts that aired 24 hours apart.

Maximum Length: 10 min.

Judging Criteria: Content; clarity, accuracy, and overall presentation.

MORNING NEWSCAST

A regularly scheduled newscast airing on any day in the contest year from 4 a.m. to 12:59 p.m. One entry allowed per news organization. Entry will represent the station's best effort at producing a newscast.

Maximum Length: 30 min. (remove commercials)

Judging Criteria: Overall content, sophistication of presentation, story selection, pacing, writing, editing and use of audio and/or video.

EVENING NEWSCAST

A regularly scheduled newscast airing on any day in the contest year from 1 p.m. to 11:59 p.m. One entry allowed per news organization. Entry will represent the station's best effort at producing a newscast.

Maximum Length: 30 min. (remove commercials)

Judging Criteria: Overall content, sophistication of presentation, story selection, pacing, writing, editing and use of audio and/or video.

CABLE NEWSCAST

Each Cable system can submit one newscast originally produced for cable.

Maximum Length: 30 min. (remove commercials)

Judging Criteria: Overall content, sophistication of presentation, story selection, pacing, writing, editing and use of audio and/or video.

Cable operators are still eligible to enter under single categories, but will compete against those stations listed for their market size. In this category only will they compete solely with each other.

LIFESTYLE OR SPECIALTY PROGRAMMING

Single or regularly scheduled program outside of a newscast that consists of stories or interviews designed to entertain or inform the local community. Can be a compilation of clips from the program.

Maximum Length: 30 min. (remove commercials)

Judging Criteria: Overall content, originality, and creativity.

TALK/PUBLIC AFFAIRS

The category provides for a variety of locally-produced entries in substance and form, serious or humorous. The subject and format can be anything newsworthy, including talk show, caller interaction, interview, debate, or other broadcasts, live or taped, outside of a regular newscast.

Maximum Length: Unedited 15 min.

DOCUMENTARY/SPECIAL

Single program scheduled outside of a newscast, showing station's commitment to a contemporary or historic issue. Supporting results of the effort may be included with the entry.

Maximum Length: 60 min.

Judging Criteria: Depth of reporting and research; significance; originality; impact; depth of the station's commitment to the project; service to the community.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Stations are asked to submit up to five examples of functioning, cached or active URLs that demonstrate the exceptional use of social media to further the audience's understanding of the single news story, news event or news project. Entry may include apps or any other platform that demonstrates the best use of social media in journalism. A written description of how social media was used in coverage of the story, event or project is required.

Judging Criteria: Excellence in design, creativity and execution as evidenced by the quality of journalism and the quantity and quality of user engagement.

TEAM MULTIMEDIA STORYTELLING – NEWS

NOTE: FOR THIS CATEGORY, PRINT AND ONLINE ORGANIZATIONS ARE ELIGIBLE TO COMPETE. All organizations in each market size will compete against one another (Large Market TV, Large Market Radio and Large Market Other will be a single competition, etc.)

Entries consist of team reporting news coverage that engages online audiences through multiple platforms. The emphasis should be on multimedia storytelling, the quality of journalism and creative use of the medium.

- A team is defined as two people to no more than 15 people.
- Entries must be news; they can be based on but are not limited to public affairs, business, science, feature or sports news.
- Entries must be journalism and may not include dramatization.
- The entry must have been posted on the Web and the entrants must have completed at least three substantial components from the following list: writing, photo, audio slideshow, video, animation, interactivity, graphics or any other data-driven tools. Entrants may include social media and/or blogging.
- Entrants must describe each entry's publishing timeline.

PODCAST

A digital audio production you can stream or download from the internet to a computer or mobile device. Entry may be a single episode or montage of a series.

Maximum Length: 30 min. (include active link to full series)

Judging Criteria: Creativity. Production Value. Entertaining. Informative. Public interest. Timeliness.