



2026 SPJ San Diego Area Journalism Competition

CONTEST GUIDELINES

The 2026 SPJ San Diego Area Journalism Competition recognizes outstanding work by San Diego and Tijuana area students and professional journalists who published or broadcast during the 2025 calendar year.

The contest opens on Monday, Feb. 9, 2026.

The Early Bird entry deadline is Monday, March 2, 2026, at 9 p.m. PST. Starting Tuesday, March 3 entry fees will increase. The final deadline is Monday, March 9, 2026, at 9 p.m. PST.

To qualify for the early bird rate payment must be made online via PayPal no later than 11:59 p.m. Monday, March 2, 2026. Otherwise, the regular rate applies. If paying the early bird rate by check, payments must be postmarked by Tuesday, March 3, 2026. Final deadline payments must be made online by 11:59 p.m. Monday, March 9 or if paying by check, postmarked by Tuesday, March 10, 2026.

Entry fees are nonrefundable.

Identify each person who contributed to the work on the entry form. The way the name appears on the entry form is the way it will appear on the award.

The submitting entrant must create an online contest account. If an outlet has a contest coordinator, that person can create an online "Open Call" account and submit entries on behalf of others. For detailed instructions on submitting entries, see the How to Enter link at spjsandiego.org on the Journalism Contest page. If you have questions, send an email to sdspjcontest@gmail.com.

To enter, select the division and category that best fits each entry. A story or work of journalism may be submitted to only one category. Do not enter the same piece in multiple divisions unless there was a substantial difference in producing each variation of the same story or work (i.e. print version vs. audio version). A work submitted in multiple categories within the same

division will be rejected at SPJ San Diego's discretion. We will reassign entries submitted to an incorrect division or category. For example, a weekly or monthly column in a daily publication must be entered in the daily division, not the non-daily division.

This limitation does not apply to the Top and Special Awards divisions; any given work may be submitted for as many Top and Special Awards as the submitter thinks appropriate.

All entries — with the exception of College Media Best Newspaper entries — must be submitted online as either a URL address, PDF or JPG file, or video or audio link.

Checks and College Media Best Newspaper division entries should be mailed to: San Diego SPJ Journalism Competition, P.O. Box 880482, San Diego, CA 92168.

ENTRY FEES

Fees are per entry, regardless of the number of journalists on the entry. SPJ San Diego Pro Chapter members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry and students pay \$5 regardless of membership until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry, professional non-members pay \$50 per entry and students pay \$10 per entry. (NOTE: Top awards have a different entry fee amount.)

Spanish division fees are \$10 per entry, regardless of SPJ membership status, until March 2. Starting March 3, the fee will be \$20 per entry.

At least one journalist per entry must be an active SPJ San Diego Pro Chapter member to qualify for the member rate. If you are not currently a member, you can join at spj.org/join.asp. We will cross-check all entries submitted at the membership price against a list of current San Diego Pro Chapter members.

NOTE: Public relations and marketing content (e.g., content sponsored, or paid for, by another person or business to benefit that person or business) is not eligible for this contest. San Diego SPJ reserves the right to disqualify such entries and refund entry fees.

JUDGING

Professional journalists judge all submissions. Judges fluent in Spanish will review those entries. Judges will select winners in each category in which exemplary work is submitted. Winners will be announced online on Monday, May 18, but placings will not be announced until San Diego SPJ's annual awards banquet on Thursday, June 25.

Each first-place winning entry receives one plaque, regardless of the number of names listed. Additional plaques can be ordered at the winner's expense by contacting Dell Awards after the banquet. Second- and third-place receive certificates and one certificate per name listed on the entry will be awarded.

DIVISIONS AND CATEGORIES

TOP AWARDS San Diego SPJ presents an annual Excellence in Journalism Award and a Distinguished Coverage award.

SPECIAL AWARDS San Diego SPJ presents special awards named in memory of journalism professionals and individuals who contributed significantly to the journalism profession or community. Other awards are for outstanding work addressing diversity and First Amendment issues. Special award entries can come from individuals at any outlet and can be submitted in other appropriate divisions.

DAILY REPORTING AND WRITING This division includes print and online reporting and writing. "Daily" refers to outlets that publish new content five or more times a week.

NON-DAILY REPORTING AND WRITING This division includes print and online reporting and writing. "Non-daily" refers to outlets that publish new content four or fewer times a week.

DIGITAL This division is open to work published online, whether for a print publication, TV or radio station, podcast, social media site or online-only publication.

DESIGN ELEMENTS This division is open to work published in daily and non-daily print publications.

AUDIO This division is open to audio work from any professional media outlet.

VIDEO This division is open to video work from any professional media outlet.

COLLEGE MEDIA This division is open to college outlets. Please note: College students whose work appeared in professional publications and/or broadcasts must submit that work in professional divisions.

SPANISH MEDIA Spanish entries in select print (daily, non-daily and online combined) and video categories will be judged only against other Spanish language entries. These are not to be entered in any other divisions. This division is meant to be for work created in Spanish, not Spanish translations of work created in English.

TOP AWARDS

SPJ Excellence in Journalism Award: This top award honors the best story, series or segment. Submit your best work along with an essay of no more than 500 words explaining why it stands out in San Diego journalism. Open to all. Entry fee is \$55.

Distinguished Coverage Award: San Diego SPJ selects a new topic each year that dominated local headlines. This year's topic is "ICE, immigration enforcement and deportations." This topic may have been completed by a single reporter or a reporting team at the outlet.

The topic includes — but is not limited to — coverage of ICE and deportations, particularly those affecting individuals who show up to their appointments. It can also include how enforcement actions rippled through border communities and major immigration incidents (i.e. protests, courtroom clashes and high-profile ICE raids), etc.

Each outlet should submit its best stories, series or show(s). Entries are limited to no more than five components (i.e. stories, segments). Entries must also include an essay of no more than 500 words on why the coverage merits recognition. Open to all outlets. Entry fee is \$55. Outlets may make multiple entries if they are by different teams/reporters.

SPECIAL AWARDS

Gloria Penner Award for Political Affairs Reporting: The award, named for longtime KPBS broadcast journalist Gloria Penner, recognizes the journalist whose story or series represented the best in local political journalism. Like Penner, this journalist will demonstrate a deep understanding of civic issues. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15

per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

Neil Morgan Community Impact Award: This award, named for San Diego journalism icon Neil Morgan who helped shape outlets including The San Diego Union-Tribune and Voice of San Diego, recognizes the local journalist whose story or series achieved the greatest community impact. Entries should include an essay of no more than 500 words explaining what the work

accomplished and what impact it had on the community. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

Sol Price Prize for Responsible Journalism: This award, named for entrepreneur and philanthropist Sol Price, will honor a journalist whose work meets ethical standards while showing uncommon sensitivity. The journalist pursued the truth despite unpopularity, economic retribution, or physical harm. Entries should include a 500-word essay about how the journalist overcame challenges to pursue the story. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

First Amendment Award: This award honors the story, series, or commentary for which the author or authors had difficulty accessing information. Stories might demonstrate skillful use of the California Public Records Act or the federal Freedom of Information Act or a successful challenge to a violation of California's public meeting laws. Entries must include an essay of no more than 500 words explaining how the author(s) made use of open records or open meeting laws. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

Herbert Lockwood "Woody" Award: This award, named for journalist, historian, and humorist Herbert Lockwood, honors the best local humor writing. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

Diversity Award: This award honors a story or series that provides outstanding coverage of communities not typically represented in local stories, or an outlet that deserves recognition for outstanding inclusion of diverse voices in everyday news coverage. Entries should include examples of the work, along with an essay of no more than 500 words about how efforts were made to better serve underrepresented communities. Open to all journalists. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

James Julian Memorial Award: This award, named for San Diego State University journalism professor emeritus James L. Julian, honors the best community service story or series. Open to those who work for newspapers with circulation below 65,000 subscribers. SPJ members pay \$15 per entry, non-members pay \$35 per entry until March 2. Starting March 3, SPJ members pay \$30 per entry and professional non-members pay \$50 per entry.

DAILY REPORTING AND WRITING

Arts/entertainment story – performing arts

Arts/entertainment story – visual arts

Breaking news story

Business story

Column (must submit three examples in the form of a single entry)

Criminal justice story

Education story

Environment story

Feature story – light subject

Feature story – serious subject

Food story (not a review)

Government story

Health story

Housing development story

Housing insecurity story

Investigative/enterprise story — single subject

Investigative/enterprise story — series (no more than five examples)

Multicultural story

News story (not breaking news)

Opinion/editorial

Politics

Profile

Review/criticism

Science/technology story

Series — any subject (no more than five examples)

Sports story

Travel

NON-DAILY REPORTING AND WRITING

Arts/entertainment story – performing arts

Arts/entertainment story – visual arts

Breaking news story

Business story

Column (must submit three examples in the form of a single entry)

Criminal justice story

Education story

Environment story

Feature story – light subject

Feature story – serious subject

Food story (not a review)

Government story

Health story

Housing development story

Housing insecurity story

Investigative/enterprise story — single subject

Investigative/enterprise story — series (no more than five examples)

Multicultural story

News story (not breaking news)

Opinion/editorial

Politics

Profile

Review/criticism

Science/technology story

Series — any subject (no more than five examples)

Sports story

Travel

DIGITAL

Blog

Data visualization

Entertainment website

Multimedia presentation

News website

Social media account

Social media storytelling

DESIGN ELEMENTS (open to all media types)

Feature photograph

Breaking news photograph

Headline writing (must submit three examples in the form of a single entry)

Layout and page design (single story or series - no more than five examples)

Photo essay

Sports photo

VIDEO

Breaking news story

Business/consumer report — single story or series (no more than five examples)

Community service program or series (no more than five examples)

Government story — single story or series (no more than five examples)

Investigative/enterprise — series (no more than five examples)

Investigative/enterprise — single story

News feature – light news reporting

News feature – serious news reporting

Newscast – morning

Newscast – evening

Photography

Politics – single story or series (no more than five examples)

Sports story

Video editing

AUDIO

Breaking news story

Business/consumer report — single story or series (no more than five examples)

Community service program or series (no more than five examples)

Feature series (no more than five examples)

Feature story

Government story — single story or series (no more than five examples)

Investigative/enterprise — series (no more than five examples)

Investigative/enterprise — single story

News

Newscast

Podcast

Politics

Sports story

COLLEGE MEDIA

Arts/entertainment story

Best newspaper

Best news media website

Column (must submit three examples in the form of a single entry)

Feature photo

Feature series (no more than five examples)

Feature story

Headline writing (must submit three examples in the form of a single entry)

In-depth reported story

Layout and design — single story or series (no more than five examples)

Multicultural story

Newscast

News photo

News series (no more than five examples)

News story

Opinion/editorial

Original illustration or cartoon

Photo essay

Review/criticism

Social media account

Sports photo

Sports story

SPANISH MEDIA - PRINT (daily, non-daily and online combined)

Breaking news

Feature story

General news

Immigration/border

Investigative

SPANISH MEDIA - VIDEO

Breaking news

Feature story

General news

Immigration/border

Investigative

Thank you for participating in the 2026 SPJ San Diego Area Journalism Competition. We look forward to celebrating your work!

Questions? Check the San Diego SPJ website (spjsandiego.org) for commonly asked questions, or contact contest coordinator, Jennifer Kastner, at sdspjcontest@gmail.com.