

2024 MPA Better Newspaper Contest | Special Categories

Freedom of Information | Weekly 1

No winners

Freedom of Information | Weekly 2

1. **J. Craig Anderson, Harpswell Anchor** | A strong "press as watchdog" story about public records made unavailable online due to a software glitch. The story explains the problem well and what is being done to address it and public needs.

Freedom of Information | Daily/Weekend

1. **Rose Lundy, Samantha Hogan, The Maine Monitor** | Maine should be proud of how strong all the entries were in this contest. The Monitor's reporting shows the value of public records through compiling narratives that point to larger issues and making that accessible to the public.
2. **Staff, Portland Press Herald** | Reporter Randy Billings dug deep into a complex issue to establish a baseline of facts that created the impetus for legislative change. The other investigations highlighted similarly had real consequences in boosting transparency in the state.
3. **Emily Duggan, Ben Bragdon, Kennebec Journal** | Sometimes stories come together because records paint a clear picture. But sometimes you don't get access to the records. Finding a way to tell the story requires clear explanation of not only what is sought by why, and this story — and matching editorial — make a strong case for disclosure while also pointing out that failing to make information public erodes trust.

General Excellence Digital | Weekly 1

No entries

General Excellence Digital | Weekly 2

1. **Staff, Boothbay Register/Wiscasset Newspaper** | Really appreciate the ease of navigation on the site. It allows a reader unfamiliar with news in the Maine to get the top information quickly. Having "Police, Fire and Courts" on the left gives those who are interested in the siren they heard a quick reference point. Ads are incorporated in a way that isn't too overbearing and cluttered with the news hole. The newsletter popup does take away from the overall design as it runs across the page leaving the viewer with a block of gray.
2. **Sam Allen, Harpswell Anchor** | Page is put together well — really appreciate the ability to switch to dark mode to allow for readability. This is a big step in what all publications need to be thinking about as we look to retain readers who might use screen readers or assistive tech to consume news of their areas. Ad space was not overwhelming and at the time of judging was just a placeholder house ad soliciting sponsored ads.
3. **Staff, The Ellsworth American** | Clean top landing for most current/featured news. Appreciate as a reader the ad below the most important content allowing for eyes to get connected to news. Flow of news, special section, sports, lifestyles works well on the scroll. At the time of judging there were a couple of featured articles which did not have art and looked out of place on the page as there was nothing to connect readers.

General Excellence Digital | Daily/Weekend

1. **The Maine Monitor** | The Monitor was the entry in this judge's opinion that most met the criteria listed in contest rules for "winning" entry. The website had a mix of written stories with usual photos, but the supplemental web-only perks such as podcasts, newsletters, video and even a radio-collaboration were above and beyond what other publication's websites offered/had. The drop-down menu was easy to use and clear. I also REALLY appreciated the almost complete focus on Maine, with no canned wire stories weaved prominently atop page like other publication's sites. Thank you!
2. **Bangor Daily News** | The BDN had an easy to use website which allows a user to have a good experience and ease of finding the news they're seeking. The site also was reader-interactive, with many polls, a democracy survey and outreach efforts. There was also a nice segment of videos, which were mixed with longer former stories like the profiles of 5 elected officials. The drop down menu has a ton of specific subsites to find the news one is seeking; and y'all even had a store to purchase BDN products. Good job with the design. Thank you.

- 3. Portland Press Herald** | The Press Herald is the flagship of a group of papers - including two others entered into this category. The problem that this creates is simple: the parent company uses a web template for all their papers with essentially little to no differentiation between each site. In a contest, that's a problem. The PH site had almost identical news content and story placement as the Sun Journal website entered. The Central Maine was slightly different. I rated the PH higher than the other two sibling papers because in a search for videos, the PH had more than the other papers did. No podcasts I could find, no reader interactive polls or surveys to place into top two. Thank you.

General Excellence Advertising | Weekly 1

- 1. The Calais Advertiser** | Well designed ads, which fit in nicely on the pages and catch the eye. Classified pages are especially easy to read and navigate. Nicely done!
- 2. Machias Valley News Observer** | Well laid out ads, nicely designed.
- 3. x**

General Excellence Advertising | Weekly 2

- 1. The Lincoln County News** | Although the paper size is somewhat cumbersome, the pages are filled with local information including numerous local business ads. Excellent color registration and use of color on ads. Classifieds are robust, with wider & easier to read columns on easily identified pages. Obits look clean and distinct from other sections with a nice legible font and spacing, as well as good sized photos. The Public Notices pages are clean and easy to navigate. The Arts & Eats section is fun and the ads correlate very well with the content. Monthly calendar is helpful. Overall, very nice work on behalf of your advertisers. This is a strong, solid entry of which to be proud.
- 2. The Ellsworth American** | Lots of good local ads in this newspaper. Pages are laid out and readily identified by category for Classifieds, Obits and Public Notices. The Obit page layout is clean and easy to locate. Classified Ad header artwork makes them stand out from other pages and helps the reader find what they are looking for in the section. Public Notices have a good description as to why the content is important, and they are clearly marked with good headers. We also appreciated the large number of house ads for self-promotion, something many newspapers forget to do. The variety of house ads help prompt the reader to interact with their local newspaper.
- 3. Harpswell Anchor** | Beautiful COLOR everywhere! Printing this newspaper on a heavier stock of newsprint, helps extend the month-long shelf life as well as adding to the crisp color reproduction on content – especially the advertisements. All ads are very clean, easy to read, and art focused to grab attention. Excellent use of artwork, photography, and typography in the ads gives a magazine-quality design feel to the overall product. There's a continuity to the overall design that makes it easy to find sections. The Business Directory ads have good spacing in between and plenty of room for text. The only reason this newspaper didn't score higher is because there's a lack of content for Obits, Classifieds and Public Notices which were all three defined as areas we needed to judge.

General Excellence Advertising | Daily/Weekend

- 1. Morning Sentinel** Nice, large inviting ads. Good placement. Kept my eye on the paper.
- 2. Maine Sunday Telegram** | Inviting with different sizes and color to attract the eye.
- 3. Central Maine Sunday**

General Excellence Print | Weekly 1

- 1. Star-Herald** | Overall layout is clean, easy to navigate throughout the publication. Excellent emphasis on utilizing news that has the biggest impact on the community in prominent positions in the layout. Paper takes reader on a logical journey each issue with combination of news and opinion. Well crafted all around. Downside: the masthead font is a bit antiquated and looks a bit cartoonish with serious news below it.
- 2. Houlton Pioneer Times** | Great use of dominant photo in layout on pages, building rest of news emphasis around that concept. Strong use of hard news and features to give something for everyone. Downside: Color is off and photos could 'pop' more.
- 3. Machias Valley News Observer** | Solid reporting throughout. A bit jumbled/cluttered at times in layout. Masthead very antiquated, hard to read with fade behind it.

General Excellence Print | Weekly 2

1. The Ellsworth American | The front page is visually appealing, with engaging photos that immediately draw the reader in. The spacing and sectioning of the stories are well thought out, making navigation intuitive and enjoyable. The writers demonstrate a flair for storytelling, with headlines that are both captivating and well-formatted. The Arts and Leisure section is particularly inviting, encouraging further exploration. Formatting throughout the paper is consistent and professional, enhancing the overall readability. The ads are well-designed, utilizing space effectively while delivering information clearly. Photographs are strong and constructively pull the reader into the stories, though some images tend to blur slightly in print. Overall, this is an exceptional publication. Our team unanimously agrees that it deserves honors for its high-quality presentation and content.

2. Mount Desert Islander | The front page is thoughtfully designed, with consistent headlines and a sidebar that effectively guides readers to key highlights. The addition of clipart adds a charming touch, and the almanac on the front page is a delightful feature. While the advertisement is noticeable, it might benefit from a slightly more integrated placement. The photos are well-cropped, and the consistent formatting throughout the paper is appreciated. The front page sets a strong tone, and while a dominant lead story could further enhance the layout, the current arrangement works well. Inside the paper, the photos maintain a good quality, though they might appear a bit saturated or blurry at times. The overall layout is cohesive and easy to follow, with a good balance between content and advertisements. The ads are effectively placed and contribute positively to the design. The crossword/sudoku section is a charming addition. While there's room to experiment with photo placement for clearer visual hierarchy, the images are appealing and add value to the stories. Our team unanimously selected this entry for honors, recognizing its strong presentation and engaging design.

3. Boothbay Register/Wiscasset Newspaper | This entry effectively guides the reader to interior stories with engaging photos and concise descriptions. The front page does a good job of showcasing a dominant story, which grabs attention right away. While the layout works well, introducing more variation in the front page formatting could enhance visual interest. The photos, though slightly saturated, remain engaging and add to the overall appeal. We particularly enjoyed the activity page, which provides an interactive element for readers. Improving the alignment between stories and their accompanying photos could further strengthen the presentation. Inside the paper, while there are some striking photos, the high contrast and occasional color issues could be refined. We appreciate the strong focus on community concerns, which is a key strength of this publication. The layout might benefit from a bit more breathing room to avoid feeling overwhelming. Enhancing the dominance of key stories and advertisements would help draw the reader's attention more effectively. Overall, our team unanimously decided that this paper should place, as it is engaging and successfully encourages further exploration.

Honorable Mention: Harpswell Anchor | Our entire team was highly impressed by this publication. The free distribution is presented with a clean and consistent style, featuring engaging photos well-formatted headlines and with non-intrusive advertising. The overall page design is both clean and cohesive, making it easy to navigate and enjoyable to read. Advertisements are thoughtfully placed, adding value without detracting from the content. The photos are a strong addition to the pages, enhancing the visual appeal and supporting the stories effectively. While this publication stands out as a class of its own in its category, we believe it's important to highlight its excellence. We suggest creating a bit more dominance in key areas to further elevate the delivery of its important information. We appreciate the clear intent and effort of the publishers, which shines through in every aspect of this work.

General Excellence Print | Daily

1. Bangor Daily News | Maine readers are lucky to have such high-quality journalism at their disposal. The Daily News uses catchy headlines, compelling ledes, well-designed and well-written stories that tell the story from the perspective of those most affected, excellent photos that help tell the story, helpful graphics and a simple yet effective layout. First-rate coverage of the mass shooting with compelling follows. Two full pages of Opinion with lots of local copy and in-depth editorials complete this highly effective and informative newspaper.

2. Portland Press Herald | Well-written, in-depth articles complemented by riveting photos and helpful graphics. Layout acts as a roadmap that makes the paper easy to consume. Headlines are simple yet effective in telling the story. Coverage of the mass shooting was amazing. Solid editorials and locally generated columns give a reader plenty to contemplate in addition to the solid overall news and sports coverage. An excellent newspaper all the way through.

3. Kennebec Journal | Straightforward articles with clear, concise headlines and a clean, crisp layout that complements the content. The Journal even makes meeting stories compelling, with very effective art that shows the emotion of the participants. A reader's delight.

General Excellence Print | Weekend

1. **Sun Journal** | What a great newspaper! In a category with multiple top-notch entries, the Sun-Journal stood out for its clean design, focus on local news, and the unique topics it covered. The “B” section tipped the scales: Colorful stories that even caught an outsider’s attention.
2. **Central Maine Sunday** | This newspaper clearly took a deep dive into a local tragedy, and it did a good job of covering the event from every angle, with the faith-centered take being unique. A dedicated Classifieds section is a rarity in newspapers nowadays and this publication had it. Also, while it wasn’t all local, the pep coverage seemed to be all-encompassing.
3. **Maine Sunday Telegram** | Clearly the largest newspaper in the category, the Telegram offered a variety of sections dedicated to topics that clearly showcased the newspaper’s work in covering its community. The “Outdoors” page was also fun and interesting. Sometimes, the design got in the way of telling the story, which was unfortunate, as the writing was of a high caliber.

Best in Show Photos



Weekly 1: Jayna Smith, The Calais Advertiser

Happy Faces & Festive Cheer

This shot definitely captures the moment. Great timing, excellent composition. Loved the expressions, which is what winning photos capture.



Weekly 2: Freyja Grey, Free Press

Housing Crisis Portland

It’s tough judging news photos against feature photos, sports photos, etc., but photos need to tell a story, and this one definitely does. There’s a lot provided to the reader in this one. Excellent work.



Daily/Weekend: Daryn Slover, Sun Journal

Spring Break

So many excellent photos in this class, but this one kept jumping out at me each time I went thru the entries. There is a lot going on without being “busy.” The shovel, his face, and the sign bring it all together. Just a great feature shot that on this day is the winner. (I told myself it wasn’t staged, and hope that’s the case!)

Individual Awards

Journalist of the Year | Sawyer Loftus, Bangor Daily News

Advertising Person of the Year | Janis Bunting, Penobscot Bay Pilot

Bob Drake Young Writer | Will Robinson, Penobscot Bay Press

Unsung Hero | Mary Delamater, Sun Journal