

2025 MPA Better Newspaper Contest | Special Categories & Judges Comments

Freedom of Information | Weekly

1. **Ben Meiklejohn, Lincoln News** | Great use of public records requests to break down a tragic failure by EMS agencies, and to explain the complex and frustrating situation that led to it.
2. **Kathleen Phalen Tomaselli, The County** | These stories effectively demonstrate the importance of local FOI laws and how they can empower residents.

Freedom of Information | Daily/Weekend

1. **Rose Lundy and Alexa Foust, The Maine Monitor** | Strength of the stories, data gathered and presented to the public, edged The Maine Monitor into first place over strong competition.
2. **Sawyer Loftus, Bill Trotter, Marie Weidmayer, Bangor Daily News** | Tough decision in this category, as all entries were worthy. Good use of records and analysis to provide readers with important info.
3. **Eric Russell, Emily Allen, Penelope Overton, Portland Press Herald** | Lots of strong competition in this category made this hard to choose. Good work on all the stories, with the one about the students especially tough to report.

General Excellence Digital | Weekly 1

1. **Island Ad-Vantages** | Very clean.
2. **Castine Patriot** | Nice work.
3. **Weekly Packet** | Nice.

General Excellence Digital | Weekly 2

1. **Sam Allen, Harpswell Anchor** | Wow! What a great website. Love the simplicity and user friendliness. I also loved that you include the weather on the main page. I appreciate that. Made it feel like a physical paper in digital form. Also adding the pdf of the paper is just an extra touch that is appreciated.
2. **Staff, The Ellsworth American** | Your layout is fantastic. I love that you highlight a photo at the top of the page. Well done.
3. **Linda Speight, Mount Desert Islander** | Amazing layout. Well done. user friendly. See if you can make it a little different than second place top help you stand out.

General Excellence Digital | Daily/Weekend

1. **The Maine Monitor** | The Maine Monitor offers a focused, accessible website that reflects a strong digital-first strategy. The homepage clearly highlights top stories and investigative projects. Navigation is intuitive and the overall design supports serious journalism without distractions. Multimedia is used purposefully, especially in video and audio formats that enhance the storytelling. While the site does not include traditional comment sections, it encourages reader involvement through newsletters, events, and donation options. Advertising is minimal and unobtrusive. This is a smart, clean platform that prioritizes public service reporting and delivers it in a digital-native format.
2. **Bangor Daily News** | Bangor Daily News is a strong example of daily journalism adapted for the web. The homepage is well-organized and makes it easy to identify breaking news and key stories. Updates are frequent and multimedia elements are well executed, including video, graphics, and photo galleries. Reader interaction features such as comment threads and tip submissions are active and visible. Advertising is present but well balanced with editorial content. The site has a lively, engaged feel and serves its statewide audience with authority.
3. **Portland Press Herald** | Portland Press Herald delivers a polished user experience with strong local coverage and consistent updates. Navigation is clean and logical, and the site offers digital-only features such as newsletters and news quizzes that add to reader value. Commenting is available on selected stories, though community interaction is less emphasized than on other sites. Multimedia is solid but not central to the storytelling. The site is a dependable and professional product that serves its audience well but would benefit from more web-exclusive content and bolder visual presentation.

General Excellence Advertising | Weekly

1. **Harpswell Anchor** | Nice use of color and design in advertisements. Business Directory is a great option for smaller local businesses, which is clearly designed and easy to navigate. Nice advertisement placement throughout the newspaper.
2. **The Lincoln County News** | Nice use of color and design in the advertisements. Obituary layouts are very clean. Classified section is well organized and easy to follow. Holiday Shopping Guide is a great way to promote small business shopping.
3. **Mount Desert Islander** | Classified & Public Notices sections are clean and neatly designed. The Business Directory enables the reader to easily find the business category they are searching for. Clever promotional advertising. Nice downtown feature in the Out & About insert section.

General Excellence Advertising | Daily/Weekend

General Comments: Overall, these entries provide readers creative, informative advertisements. Over recent years we've seen ads focused on creativity. However, personal connection to and for readers has become more obscure. Examples within these entries: phone numbers seven-digit (absent area code) when ten are required; no physical addresses in display ads, only web addresses; institutional focus absent personification—why readers should respond; color that appears clear on a digital screen becomes blurred, even obscuring type when printed on paper—creativity process needs attention to outcome in print! Keeping public notices in print is a growing challenge due to ease of digital information delivery. Creating a directory for those notices provides a 'headline' to attract readers providing something the digitized process can't collectively do. Post a "sponsor" or "paid" note with obituaries as appropriate.

1. **Maine Sunday Telegram** | The largest and best in Maine! Excellent creativity, variety, presentation. Press work needs vigilance! Special sections provide excellent vehicles to expand advertiser opportunities especially as in-paper advertising declines. Limited classified section.
2. **The Times Record** | The Brunswick Times Record provides a limited number of in-paper advertisements, and expands its advertising reach with its superb special sections. Many institutional ads struggle to attract readers. Generally, The Times Record puts in place the basic Journalistic principles: Who, What, When. Where, Why and How. Too many ads fail to provide complete contact details, even locations for outlets and events. Mostly those elements are covered in The Times Record print product.
3. **Morning Sentinel** | Fewer ads than other entries, but congregating ads for special projects, events in living black-and-white provides readers an opportunity to see and respond to its community businesses.

General Excellence Print | Weekly 1

1. **Houlton Pioneer Times** | 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. **The Star-Herald** | The Star-Herald stands out in its polished writing and in-depth coverage on local news that greatly impact the community. Its stories balance clear, factual reporting using compelling quotes and research to back their claims. The attention is noticeable, and I commend the staff of The Star-Herald for putting in the time and effort to produce a successful paper. Strong photography and a visually appealing design round out a package that reflects a well-organized newsroom. With a greater push into investigative work, reader-engagement, and the implementation of more photography, The Star-Herald is on the path to greatness.
3. **St. John Valley Times** | The St. John Valley Times shines in concise, effective, storytelling that is easy to understand. Reporters excel at weaving context, history, and emotion into stories while maintaining clarity and engagement. The overall design, strategic advertisement placement, and compelling headlines invite its audience to read the paper's content. The addition of more investigative pieces and use of photography will take this newsroom to the next level.

General Excellence Print | Weekly 2

- 1. Midcoast Villager** | This paper sets the standard in its first months of existence. The look is clean and iconic, paying tribute to great newspapering traditions. Compelling reads are abundant and straight news gets to the point and gets out – something readers should appreciate. Headlines let me know what I need to and photos make sense. The ads should be producing results for the advertisers. The formula is terrific and the only challenge is do the type of journalism and public service the community will come to embrace.
- 2. Harpswell Anchor** | So many things are right about the Anchor. Stories are well written; headlines tell the story without overselling; and photos are good journalism in their own right. The inside pages are well constructed around the ads. The front page is built like a miniature broadsheet, but would probably do a better job if it embraced its tabloid size and focused on one big story or photo with well designed teasers to the great content inside.
- 3. The Lincoln County News** | The News is a throwback that makes the most of its wide, wide (90+ picas!) page. Seven, eight or nine stories on a front page ought to offer something for everyone – sort of a daily paper from 1954 published weekly in 2024. The news is apparent; the features, not as much. Writing is workmanlike; photos are abundant. All three issues demonstrate the paper has its formula down pat. Readers, however, might appreciate some surprises and variation sometime.

General Excellence Print | Daily

- 1. Bangor Daily News** | Each issue of this newspaper had so much to read and offer. The stories are well written. The graphics are spot on. The photos are great. This newspaper was the total package. The ads were superb. The layouts were clean. This is a textbook example on what a newspaper of the daily variety should be. Even the special extra edition insert was top notch. Top to bottom and front to back - a great end product.
- 2. Sun Journal** | Layouts were solid with similar placements and fond families. Many of the photos were good. The features were relevant and well-planned. The ads are well placed and speak volumes and are created well. The only drawback were the large spaces of expansive text. We loved the longer stories but perhaps some design elements -- even pull quotes could break that text up to make it more engaging.
- 3. Portland Press Herald** | The front page of each issue was compelling and engaging but also very busy. Having more consistent text styles in headlines would help bring the paper to the next level. Ads were classic. Photos were good. Features were consistent and relevant. Nice mix of local, state, and National content.

General Excellence Print | Weekend

- 1. Sun Journal** | Sun Journal would be my pick for the winner because of its spacious, balanced, and easy-to-interpret design, and overall cohesiveness. It uses the best fonts, in my opinion. This publication, though packed with a ton of different forms of content, utilizes a lot of negative space between photos, pull quotes, etc. to not make it feel so cluttered. There's even a story on page D4 of the November 24, 2024 publication that has more dramatic margins on the left and right sides, creating lots of negative space. I also really like their font choices. Their serif fonts appear high contrast and sophisticated (like the headline at the bottom right corner of the front page on the Nov 24 publication), and they use very nice neutral sans-serifs for datelines, teasers, bylines, etc. I also noted a great deal of contrast in their font weights. Many of their sans serifs are very, very thin, contrasting nicely with adjacent text elements. They also have these bold red sans-serif font pieces of type representing a portion of the headline for some stories. The drop-cap at the beginning of the top story is a nice touch too. It uses a matching red. Also notable is their use of lines to separate content. These lines are very thin, ranging from 0.25 - 0.5 pt. This also makes the paper feel very sophisticated and neutral, making the design feel more timeless. I also appreciate the simplicity of the flag at the top of the front page. It only has the most basic information and reads nicely. Favorite article from the submitted papers: Nov 24th paper, Page C8. "TECH 'DISRUPTION' V. THE U.S. GOVERNMENT" and March 16th paper, Page C8. "FIVE YEARS OF COVID-19."
- 2. Maine Sunday Telegram** | I really, really enjoy all the bold design decisions they make. On their Nov 3rd publication, they allow a cutout picture of that basketball player to take up a significant portion of the paper. They have some really large and bold headlines too that help create a strong hierarchy of the page content. You can very easily tell which stories they want you to see first, and then less important content is tucked away nicely while also having nice contrasts on their own in terms of font weight and size. One story that stood out to me was in their F section. It's called "It's Not You It's We". The story still maintains qualities of their standard layout, but the composition breathes so much because of the large margins and the dramatic choices, such as keeping the story a single column, utilizing a very large drop cap, placing a large pull quote at the bottom, and not being too stiff about separating everything by exact gutter widths. They err on the side of spaciousness. But I can tell they're still being intentional and not just arbitrarily placing page content far apart from each other.

It all still feels mostly balanced. I like their lines too. They're all very thin. Their cutlines are an equivalent thin-ness too, which is nice. I'm always in favor of understated cutlines. I really like their willingness to allow stories to stretch across the entire page and take up lots of space. I saw another food story on page F4 of the Feb 9th paper with this very large photo at the top. Overall, the more contrast between page elements (large to small, thick to thin, etc), the more interesting the design. Favorite article from the submitted papers: Feb 9th paper, Page D1. "HOW CAN WE ADDRESS MAINE'S LONELINESS EPIDEMIC?" and Nov 3rd paper, Page 1. "SHOWTIME."

3. **Central Maine Sunday** | I'm really not a fan of the flag being two separate typefaces like it is. All the other content adjacent to it at the top of the page also isn't very attractive to me. Looking through their papers, I really just feel like everything is way too close together and there's so much content that I have no idea where to begin. There are some nice moments, like the large "Gray market weed" headline on page 1 of their Nov 3rd paper. I sort of like that font and I like the contrast it creates on the page. They also utilize very thin lines, which look nice, and their body type appears smaller (probably 9 pt). They definitely seem cohesive, but I do have trouble organizing the content in my head because it doesn't always *feel* consistent or cohesive. This could just be a matter of taste. Favorite article from the submitted papers: Dec 8th paper, Page C6. "Christmas Bird Count helps identify trends in population" and Nov 3rd paper, Page 1. "Gray market weed."

Best in Show Photos



Weekly 1: Paula Brewer, The Star Herald
Anna Roberts | Nice moment. These birthday photos can be deadly but this one works.



Weekly 2: Isabelle Curtis, Boothbay Register/Wiscasset Newspaper
Letters for Santa on the Train



Daily/Weekend: Derek Davis, Portland Press Herald

Joseph Brennan | A well thought out photo of an important event in the state's history! Love the "walk" out of the light into the shadows! It adds much larger emotion to the event for the former governor!

2025 INDIVIDUAL AWARDS

JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR | Rose Lundy, The Maine Monitor
ADVERTISING PERSON OF THE YEAR | Fred Berry, The Ellsworth American
BOB DRAKE YOUNG WRITER | Kristian Moravec, The Maine Monitor
UNSUNG HERO | Brian Robitaille, Maine Trust for Local News
UNSUNG HERO | Paula Sawyer, Bangor Daily News
MENTOR OF THE YEAR | Kate Cough, The Maine Monitor