



2026 SEAComm Awards

As a member of the State Education Association Communicators (SEAComm), you already know how important the work you and your colleagues do in informing, educating and advocating on behalf of our state affiliates' members. Your team's exceptional work speaks volumes, and it's time to elevate it to new heights by vying for the esteemed SEAComm communications awards. Join us in Santa Fe this June for the Awards Banquet, where you can showcase your accomplishments and celebrate excellence in education communication.

If you have any questions, please contact Rishanda Richardson, SEAComm President-Elect, at 573-508-8543 or rishanda.richardson@mnea.org.

Quick Facts

Choose from two divisions: Communications Management and Communications Skills. Communications professionals will review entries and provide feedback.

Communications Management awards are limited to one submission per state affiliate. This category, which is copied from the PR Council awards program and rules, is intended more for larger programs, involving one or more team members, and you will need to include information on strategies, tactics, audiences and rationale. Additionally, you can attach multiple files and/or links for parts of the larger program. Please assign responsibility for entering in these categories to one designated SEAComm member per state. After the first entry from a state affiliate is received, any other entries received will be disqualified from consideration.

Judging for Communication Management entries is based on the rubric provided to the judges, with the work plan/narrative and the work sample carrying equal weight.

Communications Skills awards are limited to one submission per SEAComm member (e.g., Only one Best External Video entry, not three different videos within the same category). This category, which is copied from the State Education Editors awards

program and rules, is intended for individual members of state affiliates. Most categories allow for one link or file attachment, except for Publications and Digital-Podcast, which have three attachments. Entries in the Skills category should be submitted by the SEAComm member primarily responsible for the work, but please also note any individuals who helped in creation and production.

Judging for Communication Skills entries is based on the rubric provided to the judges, including, but not limited to, the work sample's creativity and professional execution.

SEAComm Awards Program

The State Education Association Communicators (SEAComm) Awards Program is a national competition for communications professionals involved in the conception, writing, design, production and implementation of print, visual, audio, digital programs and campaigns for state affiliates of the National Education Association. Recognizing the diversity among NEA state affiliates, especially in size and resources, the SEAComm Awards honor the professionalism of members in communications management and skills.

Eligibility

All members of the State Education Association Communicators who have paid dues (except NEA staff and retired staff, per SEAComm bylaws) may enter their work in the 2026 Awards Program. NEA staff can submit an entry in conjunction with a state affiliate for the NEA-State Collaboration Award in the Communications Management division. A current or former SEAComm member must have had significant responsibility for the entry submitted. The assistance of other organizations, agencies, individuals, or departments in the project must be noted.

Judging

Submissions are judged by professionals in editing, photography, social media, graphic design, news media and public relations. Judges base their decisions on learned perceptions of professional and creative excellence. As of 2025, judges use a scoring rubric, and all submissions must score above the standard to be considered for an award.

An **Award of Excellence** will *only* be achieved by an entry that scores at or above the Excellence threshold on the scoring rubric AND receives the highest score total within that group. These awardees will be considered for Best of Show.

An **Award of Distinction** may be awarded in a category where no entries meet the criteria to be considered for an Award of Excellence OR as a runner-up in categories where an Award of Excellence has been given. No award may be given if the judges feel the entries have not held a high enough standard.

A **Best in Show Honor** will be awarded to no more than one awardee in each section of work—Visual, Writing, Graphic Design, Publications, Digital and Campaign. To be considered for this honor, awardees must achieve an Award of Excellence in two or more categories within that section of work AND their overall score of combined work meets or exceeds the BEST threshold on the scoring rubric. Work that receives an Award of Distinction may be used in the overall scoring of the Best in Show and may help determine winners in the case of a tie. Best in Show honors may not be given every year.

Submitting Your Entries

Entries must be submitted online by 11:59 p.m. CST, April 1. SEAComm's online submission site will allow you to attach all necessary files for the category you are entering.

Each SEAComm member can submit one entry per category, except in the State Affiliate Newsletter/ Newspaper and Magazine categories, for which only one entry per state may be submitted.

The award program has three groupings:

- Group 1 includes states with memberships of 20,000 or fewer
- Group 2 contains states with 20,001 to 55,000 members
- Group 3 represents states with membership of 55,001 or more

For the Skills Division: All entries must be original work created primarily by the SEAComm member entering it. Original means that the piece has been written, ghostwritten or created by a SEAComm member — not purchased, hired or earned media coverage. Judges may recategorize or disqualify any entry if they feel it does not meet the criteria for the category in which the member submitted it. Please submit three different issues of the entire publication for the publications categories and for podcasts.

For the Management Division: A current or former SEAComm member must have had major responsibility for the project. You must note other organizations, agencies, individuals or departments that assisted in the project.

Division 1: Communication Management

The Communication Management division covers projects, programs and campaigns that are guided by a communication strategy. Entries may include a wide range of communication materials. A single element in this program may also be entered into the Communication Skills division.

Category: Paid Media Campaign

Paid advertisement campaign materials created for various media, including radio, television, outdoor ads, print publications, or electronic media. Include messaging in the objective description.

Category: Earned Media Campaign

Campaigns around an issue, promoting the education profession, or enhancing the association brand through various mediums, including print materials, video, audio, electronic communications, mobile communications/texting, PSAs, and activities. Include messaging in the objective description.

Category: Social Media Campaign

Utilization of social media tools for targeted campaigns regarding a crisis, event, or issue, including special-purpose or short-term project websites, electronic publications, mobile communications, texting, blogs, podcasts, or other electronic media. Include messaging in the objective description.

Category: Government and Political Affairs Campaign

Advocacy campaigns targeting government bodies and agencies, encompassing print materials, video, audio, mobile communications/texting, and activities developed for bargaining, legislative issues, and political campaigns. Include messaging in the objective description.

Category: Digital Organizing Campaign

A campaign to prompt action by members and/or the public using online platforms such as Hustle, Every Action, Mobilize, and more.

Category: Special Events

Promotion of events or significant occasions supporting association goals, involving print materials, specialty items, video, audio, electronic communications, and other activities to increase visibility or promote an observance, event, or convention. Include messaging in the objective description.

Category: Steve Lemken NEA-State Affiliate Collaboration Award

Recognition of outstanding collaboration between the National Education Association and a State Affiliate in a communications campaign. State Affiliate Communicators and/or NEA Communications Staff can enter a project, product or campaign on which they collaborated.

Division 2: Communication Skills

The Communication Skills division showcases technical skills, such as editing, writing, design and multimedia production. Entries in this division are generally tactical in nature.

Category: Interdisciplinary Excellence (JACK-OF-ALL-TRADES)

Recognizing individuals who independently and seamlessly integrate multiple creative disciplines into association communications. Entries must be submitted by a single individual and reflect work completed by that individual alone, combining disciplines such as writing, photography, video, graphics, web design, and audio to tell a deeper, richer story about a topic, person or campaign.

Category: Commemoration/Tribute

A publication, web story or other piece of media honoring a specific person, event or celebration at your union. Examples include the organization's anniversary, an educator of the year, a retiring executive or state president, etc.

Category: Writing – News Story

The original news story is timely, informative and well-organized. The story contains a strong news lead and conveys context through writing that is clear, concise and distinctive.

Category: Writing – Feature Story

The original feature story conveys themes of human interest through descriptive storytelling. The story can focus on a current trend or an individual's story to inform, advocate or entertain through lively and detailed writing.

Category: Writing – Editorial and Opinion

Well-constructed arguments based on topics of particular interest to state affiliate work, constructed to educate and engage the reader.

Category: Writing – Investigative/Analytical Reporting

The investigative/analytical reporting entry presents a thoroughly researched, well-constructed story to the reader on a topic of particular importance to their state affiliate. Strong evidence of research and analysis helps to convey a clear, concise and well-conceived story.

Category: Design – Visual Storytelling

Recognizing designers or teams who excel in telling compelling stories through visuals, encompassing both print and digital media. Non-video.

Category: Design – Editorial Layout and Typography

Layout design incorporating photographs, artwork, infographics and typography that enhances an article or publication, and complements the editorial message.

Category: Design – Branding Excellence

Recognizing strong and impactful brand identities that span across print and digital platforms.

Category: Design – Graphic Element

Recognizing outstanding design or illustration of elements; logos, graphics, motion graphics, infographics or symbols for the state affiliate or special programs. Submit one element.

Category: Photography – Editorial Storytelling

Recognizing achievement in telling compelling stories through photography. Should be a series of photos, which work together to deliver a visual narrative about an individual, group, topic or project.

Category: Photography – News

Recognizing photographers for their ability to document news events effectively. Should be timely and not posed or staged.

Category: Photography – Portrait

Recognizing outstanding studio or environmental portrait photograph for state affiliate digital or print publication.

Category: Internal Video – Short Form

Original videos designed for an advertisement or short-form video platforms (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube Shorts or similar), two minutes or shorter.

Category: Internal Video – Long Form

Original videos produced by the state affiliate communications staff that are longer than two minutes for YouTube, special messages, video storytelling, etc.

Category: External Video

Videos designed for broadcast, website, or social media to promote the association, an event, or an issue. Limit each entry to a single program, presentation or episode.

Entries in the “External Video” category must have been conceived of/designed by state affiliate staff but can be filmed/produced by an outside vendor.

Category: Video – News Story

The original news story, told primarily in video form, is timely, informative and well-organized. The story contains a strong news lead and conveys context through images/videos that are clear, concise and distinctive.

Category: Video – Feature Story

The original feature story, told primarily in video form, conveys themes of human interest through visual storytelling. The story can focus on a current trend or an individual’s story to inform, advocate or entertain through lively and detailed video.

Category: Publications – Magazine

Represents the state affiliate's primary all-member publication, a magazine is generally longer than 16 pages and can have any dimensions, from 6x9 inches and larger. Three (3) samples of different issues of the publication must accompany the entry form.

Category: Publications – Newsletter/Newspaper

Newsletters and newspapers that either represent the state affiliate's primary all-member publication or is targeted toward specific member constituencies. Three (3) samples of different issues of the publication must accompany the entry form.

Category: Special Publication

Special one-time publications, digital or print, published for specific issues or events, excluding delegate handbooks and basic membership materials.

Category: Publications – Member Materials

Print materials, video, audio, mobile communications, and specialty items used for recruitment, member retention, professional development, training activities, services or merchandise.

Category: Digital – Website

State affiliate official websites, sub-pages or micro-sites entries are judged on content, usability, design, ease of navigation, and effective use of current trends and technology.

Category: Digital – Electronic Newsletter

Regular digital digests of member news that go out on a regular basis to targeted membership categories, distributed electronically.

Category: Digital – Social Media Strategy and Use

Celebrating state affiliate individuals or teams for their effective use of social media in association communication, social media use to build the association's brand, and an online community, excluding text messaging.

Category: Digital – Podcasts

An informational podcast to promote your union or an issue of importance. The podcast can be created and produced by your association staff, by an outside vendor at your staff's direction, or by a combination of your association staff and outside vendors or other organizations.

Best in Show Awards

In recognition of SEAComm members' extraordinary talents and expertise, judges are authorized to award a Best in Show for certain category groupings. Potential recipients of these awards are first identified during the normal course of judging for a category. If an entry receives a score above the established threshold, judges have the discretion to award it a Best in Show.

There can be only one Best in Show winner per category grouping. For example, if Delaware, Virginia and Pennsylvania receive the Award of Excellence for Writing – Feature Story in their respective state group and all exceed the score threshold for Best in Show consideration, only one of them will receive the honor for Best in Show–Writing.

Best in Show - Visual

Category submissions eligible for Best in Show – Visual recognition: Internal Video – Short Form; Internal Video – Long Form; External Video; Video – News Story; Video – Feature Story; Photography – Editorial Storytelling; Photography – Photojournalism; Photography – Portrait

Lisa Galley Best in Show - Writing

The required scoring threshold is 18 pts (out of 20). Category submissions eligible for Best in Show - Writing recognition: News Story; Feature Story; Opinion/Editorial; Investigative/Analytical Reporting

Best in Show - Graphic Design and Layout

Category submissions eligible for Best in Show – Graphic Design and Layout recognition: Visual Storytelling; Editorial Layout & Typography; Branding Excellence; Graphic Elements

Best in Show – Publications

Category submissions eligible for Best in Show – Publications recognition: Newspaper/Newsletter; Magazine; Special Publication; Membership Materials

Best in Show – Digital

Category submissions eligible for Best in Show – Digital recognition: Website; Electronic Newsletters; Social Media Strategy and Use; Podcast

Joe Bland Best in Show - Campaigns

Category submissions eligible for Best in Show – Campaigns: Paid Media Campaign; Earned Media Campaign; Social Media Campaign; Government and Political Affairs Campaign; Digital Organizing Campaign; Special Event Campaign; NEA-State Affiliate Collaboration

Specialty Awards and Honors

Nominees for the special awards of Karen Reed Award for Excellence in Design, George Badner Award for Excellence in Editing and Bill Guy Award for Excellence in Public Relations will be solicited from all SEAComm members during the conference registration and awards submission process. This represents a change from the manner in which these award recipients were determined in past years. There is no requirement to nominate someone. SEAComm members can also apply for this award, themselves. The nomination form will specify the expected criteria for a potential recipient. Once the awards submission window has closed, a judging panel will be convened to evaluate the nominations and determine which, if any, nominees will be honored.

The judging panel for each respective special category will consist of the three previous winners from that particular category (e.g., nominations for the 2026 Bill Guy award will be adjudicated by the recipients from 2023, 2024 and 2025).

Description/Criteria for each award:

- **Bill Guy Award for Excellence in Public Relations:** The award for the Public Relations Person of the Year is meant to recognize outstanding achievement by a SEAComm member for public relations work that advances and supports the work of their state association, its local associations, and public education as a whole. This work may include, but is not limited to, communications work on earned or social media campaigns, government/political affairs advocacy, or publication and production of member communications. Recipients must be members of the State Education Association Communicators organization and have not previously received the award.
- **Karen Reed Award for Excellence in Design:** The award for Designer of the Year is meant to recognize outstanding achievement in graphic and publication design by a SEAComm member. This work may include, but is not limited to, the creation and use of graphic elements that enhance or complement the work of their state association, as well as the use of photography, artwork, or infographics to enhance the print and/or online publications of their state association. Recipients must be members of the State Education Association Communicators organization and have not previously received the award.
- **George Badner Award for Excellence in Editing:** The award for Editor of the Year is meant to recognize outstanding achievement in the production and editing of a state affiliate publication. This work may include, but is not limited to, the writing and editing for print and electronic publications, supervision on the planning and creation of the state affiliate's official publication and/or any other print and online publications of their state association. Recipients must be members of the State Education Association Communicators organization and have not previously received the award.