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# “The Society of Publishers in Asia 2020 Awards for Editorial Excellence”

亞洲出版業協會  
「2020 年度卓越新聞獎」

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## SOPA 2020 AWARDS FAQ

### GENERAL ISSUES

**Q1 Are online publications eligible to submit their work under all categories?**

Yes. SOPA regards journalistic work published online – including breaking news, feature writing, opinion writing, and photography – as eligible for entry into categories open to print. The exception is Excellence in Magazine Design, which is open ONLY to magazines.

**Q2 We have never entered the SOPA Awards before as we don't have the budget. Is there any financial assistance for first-time entrants?**

Yes. In line with its mission to support editorial excellence, the Google News Initiative (<https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com>) will subsidize first-time entrants to the SOPA Awards 2020, or any news organization that hasn't entered in the past five years. Each first timer can submit a maximum of 5 entries, paying only HKD\$250 for each. There's a cap on the subsidy, so entrants are encouraged to apply early. Go to [www.sopawards.com](http://www.sopawards.com) for all Award entry submission requirements. Once your nomination letters and entries are ready, email us at [mail@sopasia.com](mailto:mail@sopasia.com) and [sopa@hku.hk](mailto:sopa@hku.hk) with the Entries' unique reference code and we will be in touch

**Q3 What advice do you have for entrants?**

Be extremely selective. While some awards have gone to entries with multiple articles or photographs, just as many awards have gone to entries with a single article or photograph. Simply submitting the maximum number of articles doesn't necessarily help an entry's chances. This is especially important for entries with multiple articles to show a clear theme of coverage; in fact, the submission of a weak article may pull the overall score down of a multi-article entry.

Write a strong, persuasive description of the circumstances behind the reporting for the entry, the topic's importance, the impact of the article(s), and so on using the online nomination letter. Judges come from all over the world and will be reviewing work done months ago. While they are all senior, seasoned journalists and ex-journalists, they may not be as familiar with the circumstances surrounding the work submitted. If you don't explain clearly why the work matters, what impact it had, or how difficult it was to obtain, they won't be able to get a full sense of the quality of the entry.

Presentation matters. If you are submitting online work, list up to three URLs or, for the Excellence in Photography category, upload a compressed package of up to 5 photographs in the description and supply an ID and password if necessary. If you are submitting print entries, include all the parts of each entry as a single PDF file. Make it easy for judges to evaluate your entry by showing the editorial context or how it appeared when it was published.

**Q4 Can non-SOPA members enter the awards?**

Yes. The SOPA Awards aim to raise journalistic standards across the Asia-Pacific region. Entries from all publications in the region, be they SOPA members or otherwise, are welcome. Assessment is based on the quality of journalistic work.

**Q5 When will you announce finalists for the awards?**

Finalists will be announced in May, and the awards will be presented at a gala dinner on May 21st, 2020. A complete listing of the Award winners will be posted on the SOPA Awards website [www.sopawards.com](http://www.sopawards.com)

## **THE ENTRY PROCESS**

### **Q1 What are the options for submitting entries?**

All submissions will be submitted electronically - <https://sopawards.awardsplatform.com/>. No hard copy submissions will be accepted.

### **Q2 Can we submit files in any other soft-copy format besides PDF?**

Yes. Up to THREE URLs may be submitted.

Exceptions are:

Excellence in Feature Writing, which is limited to ONE article per entry;  
Excellence in Video Reporting, which is limited to ONE video per entry; and,  
Excellence in Magazine Design, which is limited to ONE edition of a magazine only.

Excellence in Photography, which allows up to FIVE photographs.

### **Q3 How should the work(s) for each entry be submitted?**

Submit only PDF or web versions for entries. Do not submit both PDF and web versions.

For copies of work(s) as a PDF file, submit in the form they were originally published, rather than as text files reprinted from databases. This will allow judges to see the entry as it originally appeared. If the submission is in a photo category, submit photos as they were published. For entries displaying more than the maximum number of photos allowed, indicate which photos should be considered.

For the Excellence in Magazine Design entries, the whole book should be submitted and is limited to ONE edition of that magazine.

Exceptions are:

Excellence in Feature Writing, which is limited to ONE article per entry;  
Excellence in Video Reporting, which is limited to ONE video per entry; and,  
Excellence in Photography, which allows up to FIVE photographs.

PDFs should be configured to output for the web to reduce file size.

Advertising may be omitted.

Do not place the URLs in the nomination portion of the entry form.

If the entry is behind a paywall, the entrant should provide an ID and password. The URL should remain active during the judging period, from February to the end of May.

All submitted URLs should be hosted on the website where the work was initially published, including the Video Reporting category.

In addition, you **MUST** include any challenge to the fairness or accuracy of an entry as well as the publication's response to the challenge, including published corrections and clarifications.

#### **Q4 What should the nomination letter include?**

You should explain why the entry deserves consideration, the publication's editorial objectives and how the entry helped fulfill those objectives. You may also provide additional information about the entry to assist the judges to contextualise the article.

In the case of entries with multiple articles or photographs, you must explain the unifying theme of coverage they collectively address. Entries will be judged by how well they fulfill the objectives described in the nomination letter.

The nomination letter is of fixed length for all entries.

#### **Q5 What are the criteria for submissions in the various groups?**

Awards are divided into three groups: Global (English-language), Regional/Local (English-language) and Chinese-language.

- Global (English-language): Publications with original news coverage of an international nature and marketed to a worldwide audience. Some examples include: *The New York Times*, *CNN International*, *The Guardian*, *Financial Times*, *Bloomberg*.
- Regional/Local (English-language): Publications that are regional or local in both audience and news coverage. Some examples include: *The Australian*, *Rappler*, *Nikkei Asian Review*, *Hong Kong Free Press*.
- Chinese-language: Publications in Chinese that are local, regional or global in focus.

Note: online publications that are affiliated with, or part of, a print publication should enter in the same category as their affiliated print publication.

**Q6 Can the entry forms and nomination letters be filled out in Chinese?**

Entry forms in for the Chinese-language Group must be in both English and Chinese. Only the Nomination Letter part for entries in this group must be completed in Chinese. The English information provided in the other parts of the entry form will be used for the presentation during the award ceremony.

**Q7 Can publications in languages other than Chinese and English participate in the awards?**

Regrettably, we are unable to accept entries in other languages due to resource limitations. We hope in the future to be able to expand the awards.

**Q8 How many entries can we submit?**

Each publication may submit a maximum of TWO entries per category except in the following categories: SOPA Award for Public Service Journalism and Excellence in Magazine Design. In those categories, each publication may submit only ONE entry.

For example, a publication can submit two entries in the Excellence in Reporting Breaking News category, two entries in the Excellence in Feature Writing, two entries in the Excellence in Business Reporting categories and so forth.

**Q9 How many articles or photos can be submitted as part of each entry?**

It depends on the category.

- In Excellence in Investigative Reporting, Journalistic Innovation, Reporting Breaking News, Business Reporting, Human Rights Reporting, Reporting on Women’s Issues, Information Graphics, Reporting on the Environment, Opinion Writing, Arts and Culture Reporting, Explanatory Reporting and The Scoop Award each entry may include a maximum of THREE pieces of work, of which more than half must be written articles. That means, for example, an entry that has three pieces of work can comprise two written articles and some other non-written article element, such as a photo, video or graphic. So entries in these categories that comprise a single piece of work must be a written article; if they have two pieces of work, both must be written articles; if they comprise three pieces of work, at least two must be written articles. This is in recognition of the increasing multimedia nature of journalism, while preserving an emphasis on written work.
- In the Excellence in Photography category, each entry may include a maximum of FIVE pieces of work.

- Multimedia entries that incorporate interactive graphics should be submitted in the Excellence in Journalistic Innovation category.
- In the Excellence in Magazine Design category, entries are limited to ONE issue per entry.
- In the Excellence in Feature Writing category, entries are limited to ONE article per entry.
- In the Excellence in Video Reporting, entries are limited to ONE video per entry.
- In the SOPA Award for Public Service Journalism, entries can consist of a single piece or up to a maximum of five works of journalism. Examples can comprise a single package of written work/photos/video or a series of written works/photos/videos.

**Q10 Do sidebars count against the three-article limit in entries?**

Yes, sidebars do count. Videos embedded in an article do not count as a separate submission.

**Q11 We're very busy. Can we get an extension on the entry deadline?**

No. This is a strict deadline.

**Q12 Are there any special rules governing the submission of entries from online publications or independent online media?**

An online publication may be an independent website or part of a print or broadcast organization.

URLs and web versions are acceptable for all categories except Excellence in Magazine Design. The work(s) should have been first published in 2019. Entries may be a single item or a continuing project.

Websites requiring passwords must provide a single username and password to be used by the judges. It is up to the entrant to ensure that judges are able to access URLs during the judging period (February to May).

**Q13 We're a newly launched magazine with less than four published issues. Can we enter the awards?**

The clause in the rules “Magazines must be issued at least four times a year” refers to the frequency of publication. Only entries that have been published or distributed at least four times in the calendar year 2019 are accepted.

**Q14 Can we submit photographs produced by other publications?**

No. Entries must have been taken by, or exclusively for, the entering publication.

**Q15 For Excellence in Photography, if I am submitting five photos from a series of 10, how should I submit it?**

If you are submitting the photos as a packet, upload the photos as a compressed zip file.

For PDFs depicting photographs that are part of an article, clearly indicate which five photos you are submitting. In the past, entrants have drawn a red highlight or red rectangle around the images for consideration for the award.

## **THE JUDGING PROCESS**

**Q1 How does the judging process work?**

SOPA judges are experienced journalists, academics, and former journalists from around the world. Because of the large number of entries, the SOPA judging process has two stages. In stage one, panels of judges consisting primarily of academics with several years of SOPA judging experience will choose up to 15 entries from each category for consideration in the second round. In that second and final round, three-person specialist panels of judges will determine a shortlist of three entries in each category, including a winner and a runner-up. Each of the specialist panels will have a lead judge, who is responsible for breaking ties and resolving any disputes. In the case of a deadlock or disputes, the lead judge seeks the assistance from the Head of Judges.

The Head of Judges is a journalist or a former journalist with minimal ties to award entrants and potential entrants. Judges are chosen so as to ensure there are no conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest with the publications entering the category they are judging.

**Q2 Will awards be given in all categories?**

If there are insufficient entries in a given category, no award will be given. Also, if in the opinion of the judging panel, the quality of entries does not merit an award, no award will be given. For those categories, SOPA will not refund the entry fee but will apply a credit towards entries for next year.

**ENTRY CRITERIA**

**Q1 Can work done principally from outside the Asia-Pacific region be entered? What about joint-venture articles in which one reporter is in the Asia-Pacific region and one reporter is outside the region?**

Entries must show a substantial emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region, and substantial journalistic work must have been done in the Asia-Pacific region. So work done principally from outside the Asia-Pacific region, even if it has a substantial emphasis on the region, is ineligible. However, articles that are reported partly in the region and partly outside the region are eligible if substantial journalistic work was done in Asia-Pacific.

**Q2 Can translated articles be entered in the awards?**

No. Articles must be entered in the language in which they were originally published.

**Q3 Is work from Afghanistan/Iraq eligible for entry?**

For the purposes of the awards, the Asia-Pacific region is defined to include the region of Afghanistan and the Central Asia republics, in addition to the Indian subcontinent, North and East Asia, Southeast Asia, Australia, New Zealand and Pacific Islands.

Iraq, Iran and the Middle East are not included in this definition and hence work from those places is not eligible for entry.

**Q4 Must entries in the Excellence in Opinion Writing category be written by the publication's staff, or can they be from outside contributors?**

They should be from regular contributors, although the authors need not be on staff.

**Q5 Can opinion pieces be submitted in categories other than for Excellence in Opinion Writing?**

Articles that have appeared on op-ed pages rather than on news pages can be submitted in reporting categories, but will be judged on their standard of reporting and writing.

**Q6 Can entries comprise both online and print articles and photographs?**

Entries can contain a mix of online and print articles and photographs. For Excellence in Journalistic Innovation and Excellence in Video Reporting, only online entries are accepted [whereas for Excellence in Magazine Design, only print entries are accepted.] Please do not exceed the limit on the number of articles and photographs per entry. Entries comprising more than a single article or photograph must demonstrate a clear theme of coverage articulated in the nomination letter.

**Q7 Why the need for the editor's contact details?**

The rules for the Awards stipulate that entries must be on behalf of a publication, not an individual entry. As such, all entrants will be required to provide the editor's name, email address and telephone contact number acknowledging that the editor is aware of the submission.

**Q8 What kind of stories are suitable for the SOPA Award for Public Service Journalism?**

Any journalistic work that has a significant impact on public affairs in the Asia-Pacific region. Some examples of past SOPA Award winners that would be suitable for submission in this new category are:

- *The International New York Times*, [\*The Plight of the Rohingya of Myanmar\*](#) (2015 Award of Excellence in Human Rights Reporting, Group A)
- *The Cambodia Daily*, [\*Still Taking a Cut\*](#) (2017 Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting, Group B)
- *Ming Pao/明報*, [\*權貴BVI離岸公司與利益衝突調查系列\*](#) (2015 Award for Excellence in Investigative Reporting, Group C)

**Q9 What should the Finalists be aware of when the list is released?**

1. A representative of every finalist's entry is expected to attend the Gala Dinner. Otherwise, the winning certificate can be sent out after the Gala Dinner.
2. SOPA will not reveal the winners until the Gala Dinner on May 21st, 2020.
3. SOPA is a not-for-profit industry association, thus we are unable to provide financial assistance with flight, hotel or travel to finalists.

**Q10 Can I get a refund?**

No refunds will be made.

**Q11 Where can I see the Winners lists and articles from past years?**

<https://2019.sopawards.com/awards/awards-finalists/index.html>

<https://2018.sopawards.com/awards/award-winners/>

<https://2017.sopawards.com/awards/awards-winners-article/>

In the case of discrepancies between the English and Chinese versions of the FAQ, the English version will prevail.