

Investigative Reporters and Editors (IRE)
2024 Contest Committee Recommendation Report
April 2025
Submitted by: Walter Smith Randolph, committee chair

As always, it's an honor and pleasure to serve as a judge on the IRE Contest Committee. Watching, reading, and listening to the entries always blows me away as it shows just how hard our members work and how talented our members are. The contest also helps IRE further its mission of promoting the highest professional standards. This year, we saw entries from around the globe from dozens of outlets. The judging of the contest also took a different meaning for me this year. We are currently witnessing a crackdown on press freedom but the contest entries show that investigative journalism is alive and well, and our members will continue to hold the powerful accountable while fostering excellence in investigative journalism.

Suggested Action Item

To establish a Special Awards Committee or Task Force that will work on improving the contest categories. The committee could work through the summer so changes can be implemented by the next contest cycle.

Student categories

There is no winner this year in the *student, small* category because three of the four entries were published in professional outlets, and the committee thought it would be unfair to judge those entries against the sole student-published entry in this category. Additionally, in the past two years, no student winners were from work published in professional outlets. Because cross-publication of student work happens quite often, there should be categories making that distinction.

We recommend the student categories be divided between stories published in student-published outlets (eg: *The Cornell Daily Sun*) and those published in professional outlets (a Cornell student has work published in *The Ithaca Journal*). The committee may want to further divide the category between undergraduate students and graduate students.

Furthermore, because of the potential number of categories, the board may want to consider establishing a separate student contest as a way to engage and uplift our student members. The judges in this contest could also specifically include our members who are educators.

Video 1

In this category, we recommend dividing entries according to those published by international-based outlets and those published by US-based outlets. In summary, we recommend that International should be in its own category.

Screeners

We recommend that all categories have at least three screeners, with one screener having screened before. We recommend that screeners should also include their fourth and fifth picks just in case we need to disqualify some of the entries the screeners have pushed forward.

Judging portal

For the first time, the contest committee used a judging platform that allowed us to rank the entries and save comments. We recommend we continue using this system. Previously, judging dragged on because there was no portal or ranking system. This sped the process up and allowed for more dynamic discussions.

Maximizing Publicity

Contest committee member Mark Lagerkvist has suggested creating “IRE Awards Week.” This would be similar to how RTDNA and the Nobel Prizes are announced—a new category each day of the week. This will create anticipation of the announcements and maximize publicity.

Conference panels featuring award winners

Also suggested by Mark Lagerkvist—bringing back a convention track dedicated to showcasing contest award winners. Previously, all winners were invited to participate in the track to tell the stories behind the story. That has since fallen by the wayside. Bringing this back will allow IRE to highlight award winners while also urging others to submit entries for the contest.

Overall recommendation: Update, streamline, and simplify the IRE Awards contest to make it more straightforward.

Committee member Mark Lagerkvist has suggested the following revamp. I’ve included some tweaks based on committee discussions.

IRE WORDS: Outstanding Investigative Reports *(formerly Print/Online)*

- World
- National
- Regional
- Local

IRE EYES: Outstanding Video Investigation

- World
- National
- Regional
- Local (you may want to further break this up for small markets, medium markets and large markets based off of Nielsen DMA rankings).

IRE EARS: Outstanding Audio Investigation

- International
- National
- Local (further divided by Local, large and local, small)

IRE PAGES: Outstanding Investigative Book**IRE STUDENTS:**

- Student-published, undergraduate
- Student-published, graduate students
- Professionally-published, undergraduate
- Professionally-published, graduate

IRE LONGFORM:

- Video
- Audio

Yours in great journalism,

Walter Smith Randolph

Chair, 2024 IRE Contest Committee

Executive Producer of Investigations, CBS News New York

Committee members: Paroma Soni (Politico, IRE); Daniel Connolly-elected (Law 360); Mark Lagerkvist-elected (independent journalist); Krissy Clark (independent journalist); Jatara McGee (WPXI, Pittsburgh); Scott Zamost (CNBC)