

Task Force report on audit of NPPA's Awards and Honors

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I. Background

For more than 70 years, the National Press Photographers Association (NPPA) has operated an annual awards program in order to recognize the many ways people contribute to the vibrancy of our profession, build community, exemplify our highest standards and ethics, and expand the reach of the NPPA and its mission. It is indisputable that NPPA's Annual Awards are a tradition with a long history and much excellence.

Over the years the majority of these awards were created bearing the names of people with relationships to NPPA at that time. In 2019, photojournalist Yunghi Kim wrote to NPPA's leadership to raise the concern that nearly all of NPPA's annual awards and honors are named for men. Around that same time, it was also noted by NPPA leadership that (a) no awards were named for people of color, (b) no awards were named for people who practiced in the video or broadcast disciplines of photojournalism, and that (c) member engagement with these awards had waned.

The current awards ([list also available here](#)) are as follows:

- Joseph A. Sprague Memorial Award
- Joseph Costa Award
- Alicia Calzada First Amendment Award
- John Long Ethics Award
- Clifton Edom Award
- Morris Berman Citation
- Kenneth P. McLaughlin Award of Merit
- J. Winton Lemen Award
- Burt Williams Award
- John Durniak Mentor Citation
- President's Award
- NPPA Special Citation
- Robin F. Garland Educator Award
- Humanitarian Award
- Jim Gordon Editor of the Year Award
- Outstanding Student Chapter

(Notes: The Samuel Mellor Award is still listed on this page, but with the note that it was retired in 2016. The Legion of Honor Award is listed in the Policies and Procedures but is not listed on the website. The President's Award is in some places referred to as the President's Medal.)

In 2020, while serving as Immediate Past President, I was put in charge of a new task force charged with

auditing the annual awards program, and exploring options for making changes which could include renaming some or all of these awards. Like all NPPA past presidents, I am intimately familiar with NPPA's awards program. It is among the Past President's duties to administer the awards program, and I have also made numerous nominations during my decade-plus of volunteer NPPA service. I have twice co-emceed the awards ceremony.

I assembled this task force to include:

- Brett Akagi
- David Barreda
- Gina Gayle
- Elizabeth Krist
- Jose Lopez

I wish to acknowledge each of them for their volunteer work on this panel. It was their perspectives and contributions that facilitated the success and completion of this work. Lopez served on the task force until Fall 2021 when other commitments called. The rest of the task force served until mid-December 2021, dissolving upon submission of this report.

II. Mechanisms required for change

This task force cannot act unilaterally. NPPA's annual awards are codified in [NPPA's Policies and Procedures](#). Therefore, any changes to the awards must be done by amendment with a majority vote of the Board of Directors. NPPA's Awards and Honors Committee is established in [NPPA's Bylaws](#). Any changes to the committee or its structure must be done by amendment with a two-thirds majority vote of the Board of Directors. Our recommendations can be rejected, modified or accepted — in part or in whole.

It must be noted that change over time is inevitable. This task force believes that any changes being considered should be explained and amply communicated to all stakeholders prior to the Board taking action. We strongly encourage NPPA leadership to — at minimum — communicate this report's findings to NPPA's membership and the broader photojournalism community, and we strongly encourage the Board to be open to stakeholder feedback to advise their final decision.

III. Scope and purpose

It was within this task force's scope to:

- Evaluate the current state of NPPA's awards program

- Solicit, receive and evaluate member and public input regarding changes to these awards ●
Probe aspects of the awards that inhibit engagement, participation and affinity to the awards as well as NPPA, in general
- Explore alternatives to the current naming and administration of the awards that could increase affinity and engagement

It was neither within nor outside of our scope to evaluate the current composition and structure of the Awards and Honors Committee, or the manner in which the awards are given to honorees (currently, during an awards ceremony/dinner associated with the Northern Short Course). We did not investigate these aspects and therefore have no recommendations on these matters.

It was **not** within our scope to investigate the careers, conduct, or acts of the individuals whose names are currently attached to NPPA's awards. With only a few exceptions, we have generally *not* made [positive or negative] judgments on their legacies.

It must also be noted that awards under the Best of Photojournalism contest (some of which are named for individuals, e.g. Ernie Crisp Photographer of the Year and Cliff Edom's "New America" Award) were **not** within our scope and fall under the purview of the BOP committee and NPPA leadership. Therefore, no changes to these are recommended by this task force.

IV. Methods

By the autumn of 2020, the task force was fully-formed and began its review of the current slate of NPPA awards and discussed the structure of some other organizations' awards programs.

In the winter of 2020-2021, our task force solicited member/public input via NPPA.org, NPPA social media accounts, and NPPA's email newsletter. This period was ultimately extended to a total of two months in the interest of maximizing participation. Even so, we received input from about 10 individuals.

The task force reviewed all of the submitted suggestions. It then met and corresponded periodically to engage in free debate on the pros, cons, and nuances required of named awards, as well as aspects of awards' administration that could be improved. This debate led to the exploration and careful consideration of an awards naming framework that prioritized descriptive names (relating to NPPA's values) over the names of individuals.

In March 2021, I presented this rough framework as a "work-in-progress" to NPPA's recently formed DEI Committee in order to provide an update, both for their information and to solicit feedback.

In November and early December 2021, the task force finalized its recommendations by agreeing on a set of "findings," and mapping current awards to the new framework. I gave an update to NPPA's Executive Committee and alerted them to expect this report in advance of the 2022 Annual Meeting.

V. Findings

A. NPPA's history and legacy

NPPA has a rich history and legacy that deserves far more robust and purposeful curation on NPPA.org, and in the association's other publications. Awards named for people are just one way — and *far* from the best way — to accomplish the association's goal of celebrating and memorializing significant individuals in its past.

Our recommendations below aim to make our slate of awards more welcoming, understandable, and accessible. *NPPA's history does not have to be sacrificed to achieve this.* (Quite the contrary, in fact.) NPPA can and should have both a vibrant historical record **and** a vibrant annual awards program. Having both enriches the experience and value of one's membership in, and association with NPPA.

If awards are renamed, their landing pages should clearly reference their previous name(s). Retired awards and their honorees should continue to be listed.

Nota bene: This is an opportunity to make NPPA's historical resources more extensive, more inclusive of those who have been forgotten or excluded, and contextualized when necessary. NPPA can and should become the definitive source for history regarding the visual journalism profession.

B. Current names and administration of the awards are clear, significant barriers

This task force agrees with others' assessments that there is a lack of representation of individuals of color, of varying sex and gender identities, and of varying photojournalism disciplines. This is a severe detriment to NPPA's awards program. Furthermore, few of these awards are named in a way that makes the virtue or value being celebrated readily apparent for nominators.

We challenge our colleagues to place themselves in the shoes of someone whose identity or medium is not well-represented in the current list — or in the shoes of someone who doesn't know the history of NPPA or photojournalism. From that perspective, one may wonder (a) what NPPA is celebrating, (b) if the awards are open to, or for, someone like them, or (c) if the honoree or the namesake are more important.

These are significant barriers to engagement with our awards and our process, and they must be addressed. It is imperative that people who look at this list will — at a glance — instantly understand each award's purpose, and understand and appreciate that NPPA and our awards are for everyone.

This task force believes it is of utmost importance to center the *honorees*. They are selected each year for a reason: they exemplify something great. A namesake in the same breath distracts from the honoree, especially (as is often the case) when the honoree has no relationship or tie to the namesake. The honoree will always (necessarily) have a tie to the *value* the award celebrates.

Furthermore, the longstanding practice of holding a “call for nominations” for only a month or two is

quite problematic. NPPA's awards are "out of sight, out of mind" for the majority of the year. Marketing of the awards and solicitation for nominations is inadequate and inconsistent. The call for nominations typically comes during the winter holiday season when people are distracted, stressed, and busy. It is optimistically billed as an opportunity to reflect on the past year with gratitude and appreciation for others, but it would be far more effective if potential nominators were both encouraged *and able* to nominate people for awards immediately, when someone's deservedness is fresh in their minds.

C. NPPA's values are universal

There is disagreement over the *current* individuals' names attached to the awards, and this task force believes a *new* slate of individuals' names would likely result in similar levels of disagreement.

What are universal, however, are NPPA's values — those that are core to its *raison d'être*:

- Ethics
- First Amendment
- Excellence and quality
- Innovation
- Humanitarianism
- Teaching and education
- Service and volunteerism
- Building community

These are virtues universally revered, regardless of a member's color, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, cultural background, or whether they work in video, stills, or are an editor. Our awards should celebrate these values that we share, and NPPA's awards program has untapped potential to foster community and unity in our profession.

Crafting new awards names around these values breaks down the significant barriers we identified above (Section B). It welcomes nominators and nominees with readily understandable awards concepts, and with an inclusive front.

In summary, our approach centers the values and virtues that NPPA espouses, and prioritizes the names of the honorees receiving the award. It is these recipients who — by their good works — lend credibility and prestige to the awards. Non-recipient names attached to these awards generally distract attention from the honorees, and obfuscate the virtue, value, purpose or reason behind the award.

D. Selection of honorees

The task force takes no specific position on how many honorees should be chosen each year for each award. We believe this should ultimately be decided by the Awards and Honors selection committee in consultation with NPPA leadership when necessary (especially considering financial implications of bestowing additional awards).

In some cases, limiting to one or two individuals (as has been customary) will be quite warranted to preserve the prestige of an award. However, in some other cases there is no harm in awarding the same award to multiple individuals if they are deserving. It should also go without saying that it is far more preferable to honor the living as opposed to bestowing posthumous honors. We generally recommend “best judgment” flexibility in this regard.

E. Living namesakes

Two awards are currently named for living people. NPPA is blessed to have John Long and Alicia Wagner Calzada playing an active role in nominating people for the awards that currently bear their names. They have both played instrumental roles in nominating very deserving people for the awards and, in many cases, have been on-hand to physically present the award to the honoree at the awards dinner. Because of their deep involvement, we find it appropriate to keep their names associated with the awards for the foreseeable future, while making minor modifications to fit the proposed framework.

VI. Recommendations

Awards cycle and nominations

Whether or not the Board adopts the renaming recommendations below, the task force strongly recommends overhauling the nominations process to include:

- 1) Moving to a nominations form that is open year-round
- 2) Establishing a clear cutoff-date for nominations to be considered for the current awards cycle
- 3) Issuing frequent, regular, and routine reminders year-round via social media, the weekly email newsletter, website, etc., to nominate deserving individuals

Joseph A. Sprague Memorial Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Lifetime Achievement Award

New Description: The highest honor bestowed by NPPA, this award celebrates and recognizes the careers, achievements and contributions of the most deserving individuals in our field. Those to be considered for this award include working visual journalists and editors who rise to the top of the profession by their conduct, initiative, leadership, skill, and devotion to duty. Also worthy of consideration are individuals who are not working visual journalists but have made contributions through service or achievement beneficial to visual journalism, or for advancing the technology or techniques utilized by visual journalists.

Comments: There are a number of ways organizations name their highest honors that could be adopted by NPPA (e.g. simply “Honors”), and this is a starting point.

Joseph Costa Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Distinguished Service Award

New Description: In the tradition of Joseph Costa — NPPA's founder, first president, and longtime volunteer and supporter — this award recognizes an NPPA volunteer, contractor or employee for their instrumental and invaluable service to the operational, programmatic and strategic needs of the association.

Alicia Calzada First Amendment Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA First Amendment Award *presented by Alicia Calzada*

New Description: This award recognizes individuals who have embraced and lived NPPA's mission of vigorously promoting freedom of the press in all its forms, to promote and advance the First Amendment especially as it relates to news photographers. The award is presented by Alicia Wagner Calzada, a past president of NPPA, the founder and longtime chair of NPPA's Advocacy committee, and currently an attorney specializing in media law.

John Long Ethics Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Ethics Award *presented by John Long*

New Description: This award recognizes individuals who have embraced and lived NPPA's mission of upholding and promoting the ethical responsibilities and practices relating to visual journalism. The award is presented by John Long, a past president of NPPA and longtime chair of NPPA's Ethics committee.

Clifton Edom Award

Recommended Action: Retire and archive

Morris Berman Citation

Recommended Action: Retire and archive

Kenneth P. McLaughlin Award of Merit

Recommended Action: Retire and archive

J. Winton Lemen Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Innovation Award

New Description: This award recognizes individuals who discover, develop or pioneer new and emerging technologies, techniques or strategies to help visual journalism reach new heights.

Burt Williams Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Longevity Award

New Description: This award recognizes a visual journalist who has completed at least 40 years of service in the visual journalism profession, whether or not they are members of NPPA.

John Durniak Mentor Citation

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Mentorship Award

New Description: This award recognizes an individual who has served as an outstanding mentor, either to a specific individual or to the visual journalism community in general.

President's Award

Recommended Action: Brand

New title: NPPA President's Award

New Description: This award is given at the discretion of the NPPA president for special services and support rendered to NPPA.

Note: This award is bestowed at the same time as other NPPA awards, however the Awards and Honors committee plays no role in selecting, approving or confirming the honorees. Nominations are not solicited.

NPPA Special Citation

Recommended Action: No change

Title: NPPA Special Citation

New Description: This award recognizes individuals or organizations for their significant contributions that advance the interests of photojournalism and the NPPA.

Note: This is intended to be a "generalist" award for those whose good works do not quite fit anywhere else.

Robin F. Garland Educator Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Educator of the Year Award

New Description: This award recognizes an individual for their outstanding work as a visual journalism educator, helping their students reach their full potential.

Humanitarian Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Humanitarian Award

New Description: This award recognizes an individual for playing a key role in lifesaving, rescue or protective situations, or other circumstances in which extraordinary compassion or mercy was shown to others in need.

Jim Gordon Editor of the Year Award

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Editor of the Year Award

New Description: This award recognizes the leadership and advocacy roles that visual journalism editors and managers play in their newsrooms and communities. While similarly-named awards in the Best of Photojournalism competitions recognize the work product of visual editors, this award recognizes editors who facilitate and inspire the best work from their staff and advocate for its publication and best use in a multitude of different ways.

Outstanding Student Chapter

Recommended Action: Rename and brand

New title: NPPA Outstanding Student Chapter

New Description: This award recognizes one NPPA student chapter for excellence in serving students of visual journalism with highly engaging and beneficial programming and activities.

New award

Recommended Action: Add

New title: NPPA Community Award

New Description: This award recognizes an individual's efforts to build community and foster a united and inclusive atmosphere within NPPA and across our broader visual journalism industry.

Note: One early working title for this award overtly emphasized “unity” being essential to “community” by using capitalization. We have since come to believe that such text treatment could seem “too much,” and so the title was normalized. However, other types of design and type treatments could be executed in better taste to emphasize this concept.

VII. Conclusion

This task force was formed by the Board with the well-intentioned goal of making our awards more inclusive and engaging. At the time, it was believed that NPPA could achieve this by simply choosing new namesakes with inclusion in mind. The task force found that such an approach would not necessarily be any more simple or effective.

Our deliberations led us down a different path that we believe will be simpler, more welcoming, more effectively administered, and more meaningful to the honorees. This new approach unabashedly leans into our shared values, and invites our members and the broader photojournalism community to come together and celebrate with us.

We hope you find our work helpful to the decisions you need to make about the future of NPPA’s Annual Awards. Thank you for the opportunity to serve the NPPA and its mission.