CCWF Paper Trail NEWSROOM
YEAR 2026 VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3

America Penal Press Awards Ceremony

By Melissa Martin

Central California Women's Facility (CCWF) Paper Trail won big at the second annual American Penal Press Contest (APPC). The APPC held a hybrid awards ceremony at the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center on September 18, which streamed live to numerous prison publication newsrooms across the country.

CCWF Paper Trail staff and contributing writers were in attendance via livestream in the chapel, listening with eager ears to the announcement of the winners; 26 prison newsrooms across 14 states sent in 250 submissions to this year's contest.

CCWF Paper Trail won a total of seven awards being amongst the top three award winners in the country. Nora Igova, who was awarded her second consecutive Woman Prison Journalist of the Year, beamed with pride saying,

"This award doesn't mean I have arrived or that I have nothing left to learn, it motivates me to work harder." Amber Bray was her runner-up in second place.

Igova won again, this time first place in Best Long-Form Feature for her article "Homelessness in Prison." The American Penal Press Association said, "Igova's work exemplifies one of the defining strengths of the penal press: journalists documenting realities that are often nearly invisible to people outside correctional institutions."

Bray won second place in the Best Opinion Category for "How California Can Train More Firefighters." Another win for Bray's article, "Rodriguez Sentenced" placed second in Best Long-Form Reporting. Bray was inspired and said, "Being acknowledged by such a prestigious contest is an incredible honor for our paper. I am thrilled that all of our hard work is being recognized."

Paper Trail's Editorial Advisor Kate McQueen earned second place in Advisor of the Year. According to the event's press release, "The award recognized the people responsible for developing sustainable prison newsrooms and supporting the journalists working within them." McQueen stood out for her educational knowledge in journalism and editing workshops that have helped cultivate CCWF's Paper Trail.

Jamie Monroe, a new contributing writer, explained, "These awards are proof that this work matters, our voices matter, we are changing the world one article at a time!"

Congratulations Paper Trail

First Place Best Long-Form Feature
Nora Igova
Second Place Best Long-Form Reporting
Amber Bray
Second Place Best Opinion Story
Amber Bray
Third Place Best Debut Publication
CCWF Paper Trail
Woman Prison Journalist of the Year
Nora Igova
Second Place Woman Prison Journalist of the Year
Amber Bray
Second Place Newsroom Advisor of the Year
Kate McQueen

WELCOMING THE THIRD COHORT

A Trailblazing Success For CCWF Paper Trail

By C. Gosztyla

On June 29, 2026, CCWF Paper Trail hosted Pollen Initiative's third journalism guild graduation in visiting.

Each graduate was able to invite two guests, either incarcerated or approved visitors, to enjoy the festivities amidst a sea of teal and white decorations. A livestream was also offered for guests who could not attend in person.

To kick off the event, CCWF Paper Trail staff writer Mallissa James emceed in front of a balloon arch crafted by the CCWF Paper Trail team. After a brief appreciation to the facility's administration for supporting the program, James called for an on-the-spot speech by Captain Castelle, who explained how he has watched the CCWF Paper Trail grow, and coined them "trailblazers" for being the first women's institution to do this work.

Editorial Advisor Kate McQueen followed by joking how the CCWF Paper Trail certainly could have been named Trailblazers. "This year we won second best overall prison newspaper," said McQueen. "We are setting the bar for all prison newspapers across the country."

The floor opened up for the graduates to speak. Dana Rivers captured the attention of her audience as she explained the "pickleball like process" of journalism, from concept to print, and all the team players it involves.

"This newspaper is not just another program that gets held up to show off when outsiders come to visit," said Rivers. "Journalism teaches, then puts into practice, the expertise we will use on the outside."

Claudia Granados said, "It is an honor and privilege to represent Hispanics in CCWF." And finally, Jamie Monroe expressed her gratitude for this program, pointing to the fact that her mom is online watching and "witnessing proof that people truly can change."

SIX ESSENTIAL STEPS TO

STORY TYPE

The three sections in CCWF Paper Trail include:

News: Event Coverage; important things that happen within our local community

Commentary: Editorials and Opinion Pieces

Features: Profiles, Q&A's, Trends, How to Stories, and Tips

NEWS VALUES

What makes a story impactful?

Immediacy: When?

Proximity: How Close?

Prominence: Famous!

Novelty/Oddity: Surprising

Conflict: Confrontation

Emotions: Tugs at the heart

COMMUNITY VOICE

CCWF Paper Trail staff focus on quoting as many new voices from our community as possible.

To do this, our team created a quote and photo tracker.

This spreadsheet allows us to monitor who was photographed and quoted so we can be inclusive!

ETHICS IN THE NEWSROOM

By Amber Bray and Mallissa James

Someone recently asked, "How do you stay unbiased being an inmate in a carceral system where there are so many negative points of view?" This question is completely valid but one many incarcerated individuals would not be able to answer. However, after learning about the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics and taking journalism classes, writers for CCWF Paper Trail are in a better position to answer that question.

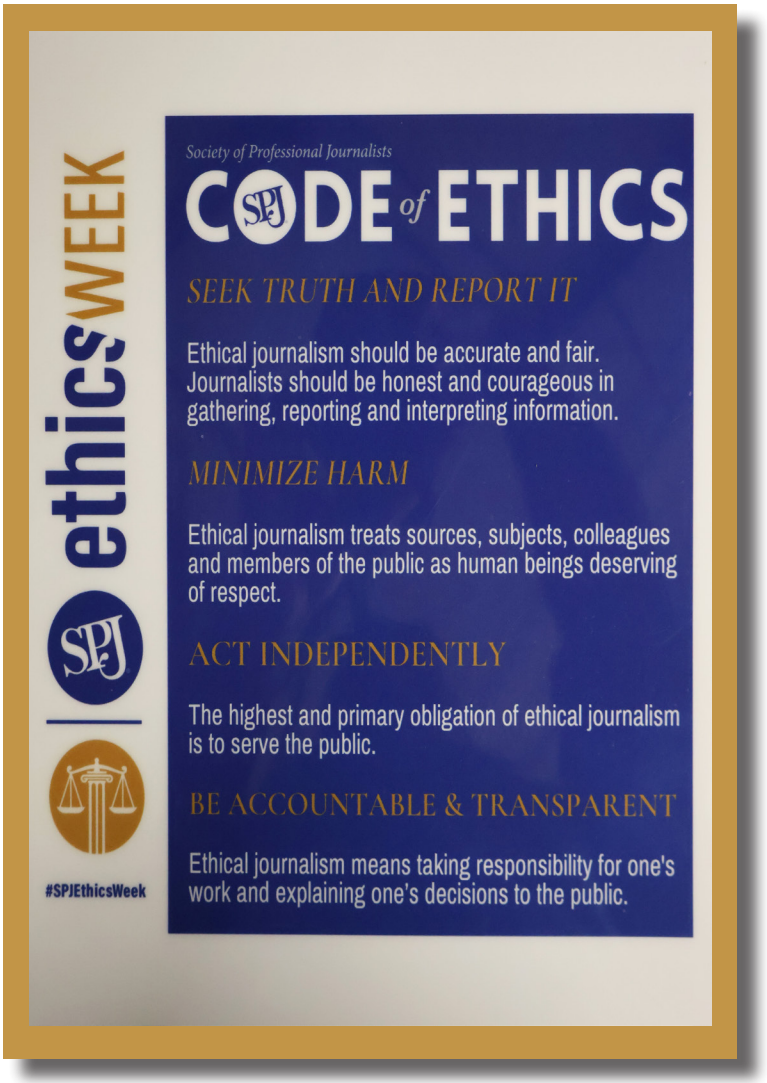
But what is a code of ethics? Why does it matter for journalists?

A code of ethics is important because it is a set of principles journalists live by. They are agreements that encourage integrity, honor, truth, accountability, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge belief systems.

So, how does an incarcerated journalist stay unbiased? By observing their surroundings with an open mind and taking all information with many grains of salt.

Being a journalist is not about being right; it's about getting to the truth and amplifying it, whether to celebrate, commemorate, expose what is hidden, or inspire change.

After all, there is never just one side to a story. There could be two... or two thousand.



KEEP A CREDIBLE NEWSPAPER

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Associated Press: A writing style we use as a guideline to keep our newspaper consistent.

It is an accepted style across many inside and outside newsrooms.

We still add our special in-house style!

SOURCES

Attributing research, also known as sourcing, ensures that credit is given were credit is due.

Attributions also give the reader an avenue to look up the information provided for themselves.

FACT-CHECKING

Fact checking is the process of making sure all information provided in a story is accurate.

Thoroughly fact-checked stories help publications build credibility as a reliable source of information. It also safeguards against spreading misinformation.

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POLLEN INITIATIVE

Pollen Initiative, EIN 92-2619177, is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization within the guidelines of U.S. law and your donation is tax deductible. PO. Box 1493 Alameda CA 94501

What To Look Forward To In Our Next Quarterly Newsletter!

Interview with CCWF Paper Trail's Managing Editor Guadalupe Barragan

Meet our new Senior Editor

Transferable Skills