Guidelines for the NGS Newsletter Competition

Purpose

Most newsletters require a dedicated volunteer editor managing the process and people to publish an organization's newsletter: gather copy, write articles, edit submissions, create attractive designs, and arrange for timely publication and dissemination of information. Recognizing this tremendous effort, the National Genealogical Society (NGS) sponsors a newsletter competition each year to acknowledge these individuals. The competition also provides participating organizations with suggestions for further improvement of their publications.

Requirements for Submission

This competition is for newsletters only. Newsletters are periodical publications that convey information in a timely manner to a specific audience with common interests. They are more than simply an announcement of the next meeting, a call for volunteers, and a reminder to pay dues. They are typically published four to twelve times per year and include genealogical or historical information, notices of events, stories of personal interest, more current information, and are generally less formal.

Newsletters that have received awards in previous competitions have included articles about local history—dealing with specific families, buildings, and/or incidents; articles about genealogical methods and resources; stories about members, their family history research, or copies of members' pedigree charts; information about or transcriptions of local data sets or unpublished reference material; lists of the names being researched by members; queries and the responses to them; reviews of books and/or software; and items such as announcements of events.

Most of the prize-winning newsletters have contained at least one or two original articles in each issue.

Journals are not eligible for this competition. County and local societies whose publications consist of mainly of lists of genealogical information and indexes are not considered newsletters and are also not eligible for this competition.

- Each applicant must be an NGS society or organization member.
- Each editor must be a volunteer.
- Newsletter must be submitted by the society or organization—not by an individual.
- One copy of two consecutive electronic newsletters from the current year must be submitted using the online nomination form.

Other Considerations

Newsletters will be evaluated on content and on design by a panel of judges. Eighty-five percent of the final score will be based on content and 15 percent on design. The accuracy of genealogical content in articles will not be evaluated. We expect that "The Guidelines for Sound Genealogical Research" posted on the NGS website will be followed. The key to a good newsletter is consistency and readability.

Content (85%)

1. Purpose: The purpose of the organization should be clearly stated and accomplished through the content and design of its newsletter. (5%)

2. Genealogical, Historical, and Family Content: Strong genealogical and/or historical content balanced with family material for family publications is a requirement for every newsletter.

Newsletters should include at least one or two original articles in each issue. They should be well researched, detailed, and attention grabbing. Possibly continuing from issue to issue, these could be articles on particular sources or genealogical or historical information; human interest articles about how individuals solved various research problems; genealogical methods applied in different situations; and articles on how to use research repositories such as libraries, archives, and museums and technology tools such as software and apps. These should be balanced with more topical material throughout the newsletter. It is important that every article provides clarity on authorship and original source information. (40%)

3. Strong Audience Identification: Newsletter content should be suitable for the audience it is trying to reach, i.e., state or county publications should concentrate on that state or county, national publications should be more general and varied, and family publications should relate to that particular surname. Members should be able to find information that applies to their own areas of interest. Reprints from other publications generally do not meet this criterion but can provide useful information if

carefully selected.

The tone of the publication should be appropriate for the organization's membership. For example, a jokesy, personal tone would not be appropriate for a newsletter with a large national membership, whereas a stiff, excessively formal or impersonal style would not be inappropriate for a small family newsletter. (10%)

4. Necessary Information: The masthead should include clear and easily found identification of editor, organization, address, telephone number, and subscription information. This must be in every issue and in the same place in every issue along with a list of officers. It should be easily visible and readable. Each page should be numbered and show the date of publication, name of publication, and name of organization. (5%)

5. Well-Written, Edited, and Proofed: The standards for a newsletter should be no different than any other publication. All good writing employs proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Material that is poorly written, contains errors in grammar and spelling, fails to follow a consistent editorial style, and contains typographical errors is unprofessional and injurious to the reputation of the society that publishes the newsletter. Good newsletter writing is usually characterized by understandable words in short sentences, arranged in short paragraphs.

A newsletter should have a consistent editorial style, i.e., a consistent way of using capital letters, punctuation, abbreviations, and numbers. *The Chicago Manual of Style, The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage*, or even the old standby, Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* are guidebooks which can be used to develop an editorial style. The key to editorial style is consistency within and between issues. Changes to a style ideally should come at the beginning of a new volume/year.

Clear, logical expression; good grammar and spelling; and consistency of style and tone are all equally important. (25%)

Design (15%)

Organization's Purpose Reflected in Overall Appearance: The appearance of the newsletter should be creative, pleasing, and inviting with clues to the focus of the organization.

Harmony and Balance: Continuity and consistency through each issue and between issues provides a sense of harmony and balance. Making the newsletter easy to read by putting regular articles in the same place every issue and identifying them by page design, font, graphics, or spacing will encourage readers to pick up every issue. For example, the newsletter should be limited to one or two headline styles, and the feature article should be easy to find in every issue. People get busier every day: make them want to read your publication.

Typography: Typography should be appropriate to the page by providing sufficient

space between the lines and limiting the use of too many different fonts. Use larger size text for wide columns, smaller for narrow columns. Newsletters generally use eleven-point type. A newsletter will generally use one typeface for text (serif for text readability) and one or two for headlines. The type should be the right size for the page, and the font appropriate for the tone and content. Text is easiest to read in black.

Graphics, White Space, Color, Paper: Graphics should be appropriate for the article they accompany and of high quality. Pictures should be an appropriate size for the page and easily identifiable. Older photos may not reproduce clearly but are often valuable and can be enhanced by layout, captions, and clear identification. If using older letters and documents, which do not reproduce well, a transcription and a source citation should be provided. The decision to use less than the highest quality graphics or photos should rest on whether they add value to the story. White space will provide clarity to the printed page and opens the page. Too many lines or columns on a page distract from its readability. readability.

The use of color should enhance the newsletter rather than be a distraction. The use of colored ink is often expensive and not cost effective, and colored paper can make poor copies. Care should be taken to ensure that if color is used, it is aesthetically pleasing in keeping with the overall style and tone of the publication. (15%)

Contributors to Newsletter Guidelines:

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