



American Culinary Federation Chef of the Year 2027 Regional Qualifier Guidelines

Updated August 11, 2026

Preparing for the Competition

All Chefs selected to compete at the 2027 Regional Qualifier will follow the following guidelines:

COY

Individual W Category: Practical and Contemporary Hot Food Cooking

- Six (6) identical portions per course (18 total plates)
- Maximum plate size: 7 inches (178 mm)
- Each portion must consist of 3–4 bites
- All plates must be presented in menu sequence for judging, with *the first course served at open of plating window*

Practical and Contemporary Hot Food Cooking, Individual W Category

General Guidelines

- Competitors will produce a three-course tasting menu reflecting a cohesive culinary progression rooted in seasonality and regional identity. The menu should read as a cross-section of a larger menu composition with multiple courses; a sample, if you will, of the chef's culinary identity and culinary sensibility.
 - Courses include:
 - Plant-Based Course
 - Seafood Course
 - Meat/Game Course (Hot Required)
- Competitors are required to prepare six (6) identical portions of each course, for a total of eighteen (18) plates.
- The plant-based course must be ovo-lacto vegetarian, vegan optional. There may be a **maximum of three (3) components**, including a sauce/condiment. The course must include cooked, fresh/pickled, and textural elements.
- The seafood course may have a **maximum of four (4) components**, must be seafood-dominant, and must include a sauce or emulsion and a structured composition.
- The meat/game course must be served hot, **have a maximum of five (5) components**, and include protein, sauce, and composed garnish.
- Competitors have ten (10) minutes for set-up, seventy-five (75) minutes to cook, fifteen (15) minutes for plating and ten (10) minutes for clean-up.
- Competitors are required to submit a HACCP report for all food items brought into the competition kitchen (consisting of temperature logs while food is in production and transport); this will be provided to the judges upon entering the kitchen at the stated competition start time.



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Packets for the Judges

- Competitors must provide five (5) judges packets. The packets must be presented in packet form upon entering the kitchen at the designated competition start time. The packets should be prepared using 12pt, Times New Roman font and be stapled in the upper left-hand corner of the packet. Please do not use binders or report covers that may inhibit easy access and reference for the judges. At a minimum, each packet will include the following (in this order):
 - **A written menu**, as it would be presented to a guest or customer.
 - **A color photograph** of the dish (should be current and representative of what the judges will receive)
 - **All recipes, including ingredients, quantities and procedures.**

Ingredient Guidelines

- Recipe ingredients are allowed to be pre-scaled and measured; however, no pre-mixing is allowed.
- Competitors should bring enough of each ingredient to satisfy the recipes; excess product and waste should be limited.
- No advance preparation or cooking is allowed.
- Cleaned and peeled mirepoix ingredients are acceptable. Chopped herbs, shallots and garlic are also acceptable.
- Vegetables and fruits can be peeled, and salads may be cleaned and washed, but not cut or shaped in any way; beans may be pre-soaked.
- No finished soups or sauces are allowed. However, basic stocks may be brought in. No clarified consommés are allowed. Stocks should be unaltered; reduced or fortified stocks are not allowed.
- The following ready-made dough may be brought in: bric (brick), puff pastry and filo (phyllo) dough.
- All combinations of ingredients must be completed during the allotted production/plating window.
- All meat proteins can be brought in fabricated, cleaned, trimmed, and ready to cook.
- Proteins can be brought in marinated / brined, and the competitor does not have to show the process of butchery or marinating / brining of the product.
- The competitor may bring in the elements of the forcemeat pre-ground i.e. the lean, the fat, etc. but must combine the forcemeat in their production window.”
- Proteins intended for stuffing can be brought in fabricated to the point where they can be stuffed.
- Competitors must bring their own food items and ingredients.



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Competition Kitchen

- A kitchen diagram and a list of equipment provided will be sent to each competitor by the ACF national office once the kitchen design has been established. This will include the refrigeration and freezer space available and the number of electrical outlets.
- Competitors must bring their own tools, cookware, small specialty equipment, and chinaware.
- Please keep in mind that you will be limited to the number of outlets provided, and the use of power strips will not be allowed.
- Competitors should choose equipment that can be supported by the number of outlets and wattage provided. Time will not be adjusted for equipment malfunctions that result from the provided wattage being overrun.
- The amount of space available is limited so only bring in the appropriate amount of equipment.

Timeline and Guidance

Window	Timing	Guidance
Set Up Window	10 Minutes	Chefs can move into their stations and set up for effective execution; no cooking may occur in this window. However, water may be set to heat, immersion circulators can be turned on, and products may be unwrapped for initial preparations
Production Window	75 Minutes	All production leading to service of the menu must be executed within this window, including all technical skills, knife cuts, cooking and fabrication
Service Window	15 Minutes	Chefs can begin service immediately as this window opens and service must be completed within the allotted time. A competitor's food delivered outside the service window is subject to a point deduction. If the competitor's food delivery impedes the next competitor's service window, judging priority will go to the on-time competitor
Clean Up Window	10 Minutes	Chefs are to leave at the conclusion of this window with the kitchen in the same condition as it was when they entered their set-up window. All remaining food items should be displayed and labeled for judging

Uniform

Competitors must wear the following:

- Chef coat
- Black pants
- Kitchen-appropriate black shoes or clogs
- Competition toque
- Full apron



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Judging Process

- Competitors will be evaluated by a panel of distinguished chefs who will serve as kitchen and tasting judges.
- After the “set-up window” time is complete, competitors will not be allowed to leave the competition kitchen. All dishes and equipment will need to remain in the kitchen until after the cooking window is closed. Any infractions of this rule will result in loss of points or disqualification at the discretion of the judges. In the event a competitor requires additional product or equipment they will need to make a request to the floor judge.
- The lead judge will have the discretionary right to clear a viewing area with the intention of maintaining the integrity of the overall competition
- All the judges’ decisions are final.

Presidential Wildcard (Effective June 2026)

In order for a competitor to move forward to the ACF National Championship from any of the ACF Region Qualifiers, they must score a minimum of a 70 Bronze Medal. In the event that there is no competitor who scores a 70 Bronze Medal in any given category, the highest scoring non-winning competitor from the other regions will move forward. This applies to all Region Qualifier Competitions.