

American Culinary Federation Senior Living Challenge 2027 Regional Qualifier Guidelines

Updated August 14, 2026

Practical Culinary Medicine Category

The purpose of the Senior Living category is to demonstrate the Chef's ability to create a flavorful and healthy dish with sound cooking techniques, using whole and fresh ingredients, that is scalable and executable in an actual senior living environment.

Competitors are required to prepare four portions of a finished entrée plate based on the category choice.

- The proteins must be fabricated in the kitchen and portioned for four servings.
- The entrée plate should have the appropriate accompaniments, garnishes, and sauces.
- The competitors have ten (10) minutes for set-up, seventy-five (75) minutes to fabricate and cook, fifteen (15) minutes for plate-up, and ten (10) minutes for clean-up.
- Of the four portions, three are for the judges, and one is for display and critique.

Protein Choices for Wildcard Category

- 2 whole bone-in Cornish Game Hens—1-1½ pounds, both fabricated in the production window
- 1 whole bone-in Chicken—2½-3 pounds
- Whole Flat or Round Fish (2 ½ to 4 pounds). Fish can be eviscerated and scaled, but the head must remain on when brought in.
- A vegetarian/vegan-based dish is also acceptable. When making a vegan/vegetarian dish, utilize whole forms of soy, legumes, and/or vegetables and no ultra-processed vegan foods such as alternative meats and cheeses (Tofu, Tempeh, and Seitan are acceptable).

General Guidelines

- Dish must harmonize with flavors highlighting nutritional balance and overall health and wellness.
- Dish must be repeatable by a team of cooks certified at no higher than a Certified Culinarian level.
- Dish must be scalable and executable in an actual senior living environment.

Packets for the Judges

- Competitors must provide four (4) 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):
 - Recipes scaled up to 100 portions
 - A complete diagram or a clear, close-up, color photograph of the signature dish.
 - Printed nutritional analysis data within these guidelines:
 - Less than 700 calories, less than 600 mgs of sodium, less than 5 grams of saturated fats, less than 6 grams of added sugars.
 - At least 10g dietary fiber, and 150 mg omega-3 or omega-6 fatty acids

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- A written narrative on how the dish incorporates BOTH of the following “culinary medicine” principles:
 - Incorporate healthy, whole foods (i.e. monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, including omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids, whole grains and/or legumes, lean protein sources including vegetable protein sources, mushrooms/fungi, etc.)
 - Healthful cooking styles/techniques (i.e. veg-centric/vegetarian/vegan cooking, Steaming, poaching, non-sodium dependent seasoning, methods to reduce added sugars, methods to reduce added fats/oils, etc.)

Ingredient Guidelines

- Ingredients for the recipe are allowed to be pre-scaled and measured; however, no pre-mixing is allowed.
- No advance preparation or cooking is allowed.
- Cleaned and peeled mirepoix ingredients are acceptable. Chopped herbs, shallots, and garlic are also acceptable.
- Vegetables can be peeled and sectioned but not shaped in any form. Leeks may be split for cleaning purposes. Salads may be cleaned and washed; beans may be pre-soaked.
- No finished soups or sauces or clarified consommés are allowed. Basic stocks may be brought in and should be unaltered without further reduction from what is obtained after the initial straining of the liquid. Samples of all stocks should be presented to the kitchen judge for assessment.
- The following ready-made dough may be brought in: bric, puff pastry, pizza dough and filo dough.
- All combinations of ingredients must be completed during the competitors allotted competition time.
- Competitors may also bring pre-marinated proteins but will be required to demonstrate fabrication of protein and making of marinade during allotted time frame.
- Competitors are allowed to bring in only the whole and raw materials in the amounts stated in their recipes. However, judges may allow variances in amounts for products that require further preparation (whole fish, meats, etc.).

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.

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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

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.