

AHF National Culinary Competition

Recipe Submission Guide

To help applicants craft a strong recipe submission, this guide provides insight into the key criteria the selection committee uses when scoring entries. Following these guidelines will enhance transparency and ensure that your submission aligns with competition expectations.

Market Basket Goals

Ensuring key ingredients are used helps maintain fairness and creativity while utilizing required components. Recipes that successfully incorporate the minimum required ingredients from Category A and Category B will meet baseline eligibility, but higher scores will be given to those that use these ingredients in a meaningful, well-integrated way that enhances flavor and creativity. Simply including the ingredients without thought to how they contribute to the overall dish may result in lower scores.

- Your recipe must include at least one ingredient from **Market Basket A**.
- Your recipe must include at least two ingredients from **Market Basket B**.
- Be sure to highlight these ingredients in your submission to clearly demonstrate compliance.

Recipe Format

Using the approved recipe format allows for consistency and comparability between applicants. Recipes that adhere strictly to the format ensure that all necessary information is provided in a clear, structured manner. Incomplete or improperly formatted submissions may lose points, as they can make it difficult for judges to fairly evaluate cost, technique, and nutritional compliance.

- Use the official competition recipe template for your submission.
- Ensure that ingredient lists, preparation steps, and yields are formatted correctly.
- Incomplete or incorrect formatting may impact your score.

Food Cost Target

Keeping food costs within the target ensures recipes are financially viable for healthcare foodservice operations. Recipes that come in under budget while still maintaining high-quality ingredients and an innovative approach will score higher. Those that exceed the budget or rely on unrealistic pricing will be disqualified. Clear cost analysis with justification of ingredient choices will contribute to a strong submission.

- The total food cost must not exceed **\$8 per portion**.

- Be sure to calculate and submit a detailed cost breakdown.
- Use pricing based on your site and account for realistic portioning.

Nutritional Guidelines

Recipes must meet the specified nutritional guidelines to be considered for the competition. Submissions exceeding the calorie, fat, or sodium limits will be disqualified. High-scoring recipes will not only comply with these requirements but also deliver exceptional flavor, texture, and appeal. Recipes that rely on artificial modifications or barely meet the guidelines may receive lower scores compared to those that naturally align with nutrition standards.

Your recipe must meet the following nutritional criteria per serving:

- **Calories:** 700 kcal or less
- **Fat:** Less than 23g (maximum of 30% of total calories from fat)
- **Sodium:** Less than 750mg
- Provide a nutritional analysis to support compliance.

Culinary Skills Requirements

Demonstrating a range of culinary skills highlights technical proficiency and professional execution. A winning recipe will go beyond basic techniques and display mastery of the knife skills and cooking techniques included in the application in a way that enhances the dish. Merely including these skills without purpose or finesse may result in a lower score.

- Your recipe must demonstrate a minimum of:
 - **Two knife skills** (e.g., julienne, brunoise, chiffonade, etc.)
 - **Two cooking techniques** (e.g., roasting, braising, sous vide, etc.)
- Clearly describe these techniques in your methodology.

Originality & Innovation

Encouraging originality fosters creativity and innovation in ingredient selection and technique. The highest-scoring recipes will present a fresh perspective, whether through unexpected flavor pairings, unique ingredient uses, or advanced techniques. Submissions that feel derivative or lack innovation may still score well if executed perfectly but will not stand out as winning entries.

- Your recipe should showcase creativity in ingredient selection, cooking techniques, and presentation.
- Consider innovative approaches that enhance flavor, texture, and visual appeal.

Applicability in Healthcare Foodservice & Senior Dining

Ensuring recipes are practical and scalable supports their real-world use in healthcare foodservice operations. High-scoring recipes will balance creativity with feasibility, demonstrating

an understanding of batch preparation, cost constraints, and dietary considerations. Recipes that are too complex, labor-intensive, or difficult to scale may not score as highly.

- The recipe should be practical and scalable for healthcare foodservice, senior dining and hospitality operations.
- Consider ease of preparation, ingredient accessibility, and dietary considerations.
- Recipes that can be efficiently executed in a healthcare or senior dining setting will score higher.

Appealing Use of Color & Texture

Utilizing color and texture enhances visual appeal and sensory experience for diners. Winning submissions will thoughtfully incorporate vibrant colors and varied textures to create a dish that is visually enticing and enjoyable to eat. Dishes that appear monochromatic or texturally unbalanced may receive lower scores.

- The dish should present a visually appealing balance of colors.
- Consider contrasting textures to enhance the overall eating experience.

Overall Plate Presentation

Professional plating demonstrates attention to detail and elevates the dining experience. Judges will score higher for plates that look intentional, elegant, and balanced, with careful portioning and garnish choices. Sloppy, unbalanced, or overly simplistic plating may lead to point deductions.

- Final plating should be aesthetically pleasing and demonstrate professional execution.
- Pay attention to portion balance, clean presentation, and garnishing.

By following these guidelines, applicants can strengthen their submissions and improve their chances of being selected for the competition. We encourage creativity while ensuring compliance with the outlined standards. Good luck!

Need Help? Contact Us!

AHF staff and dedicated members of the AHF Culinary Competition Committee are here to help! Our Culinary Competition Committee Chair and Vice-Chair are available to answer questions, offer advice, and provide guidance throughout the application process. AHF is a community of self-operated professionals committed to improving healthcare foodservice, senior dining, and hospitality. Together, we are leading the way..

For additional questions, contact us at culinary@healthcarefoodservice.org.