



American Culinary Federation Pastry Chef of the Year 2026 Regional Qualifier Guidelines

Updated July 19, 2025

American Culinary Federation, Inc. • Attention: Administration • 6816 Southpoint Pkwy, Ste 400 • Jacksonville, FL 32216 • (800) 624-9458 • www.acfchefs.org

Preparing for the Competition:

Chefs selected to compete at the 2026 Regional Qualifier will follow the following guidelines:

PCOY	Individual KWP Category: Contemporary Cold Buffet Pastry Composition of Chocolate	Nine (9) portions; presented buffet style, one (1) plated portion for critique; judges will serve themselves from the buffet platter
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Contemporary Patisserie, Individual KWP Category

General Guidelines:

Competitors will produce one (1) Contemporary Cold Buffet Pastry Composition of Chocolate Presentation to consist of:

- A total of Nine (9) portions individual pastry, chocolate based (66%) are required, portions not to exceed 150g each.
- Eight (8) of these portions are to be presented buffet style, on a platter of choice. (This could be traditional silver, enameled cast iron, China, etc.)
- One (1) portion is to be presented in a plated format for tasting.
- Construction of pastry must be predominately (66% or more) chocolate and contain two (2) flavors/types of chocolate. (dark, milk, white, gianduja, etc.)
- Construction of pastry must include a minimum of five (5) elements/components such as:
 - Sponge & Biscuit
 - Pâte Sucrée, Sablé, Pastry Shell
 - Dacquoise and Meringues
 - Crispy Inclusions: Feuilletine
 - Soft Inclusions: Crèmeux, Ganache, Caramel, Marmalade
 - Cooked or Macerated Fruit
 - Aerated Creams: Mousse, Bavarian, Chiboust, Crème Parisienne
 - Finishing: Glacage, Spray Chocolate, Pectin Nappage
 - Garnishes: Fruit, Chocolate, Nuts, Cooked Sugar
- Each portion must have an artistic, handmade garnish or ornament which can be considered one (1) component.
- Competitors have ten (10) minutes for set-up, ninety (90) minutes for production, ten (10) additional minutes for plating and service and fifteen (15) minutes for clean-up.
- Competitors must bring their own food, tools, cookware, and chinaware.
- Competitors must provide three (3) packets for the judges. These must be presented to the judges in booklet form (simple stacked pages with one (1) staple) upon entering the kitchen at the stated competition start time.

The packets for the judges should be easy to follow and include:

- A menu written as it would be presented to the guest.
- A color, close-up photo of the dish (should be current and representative of what the judges will receive)



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- A detailed sketch or drawing of each pastry identifying the materials used inside and outside each pastry. Computer assisted drawings are acceptable.
- Followed by the recipe including ingredients, quantities, and procedures.
- The packet should be produced with standard formatting of Times New Roman 12pt font and include only a staple at the upper left-hand corner of the packet—no binders, covers or anything to inhibit easy access and reference for the judge.
- Packets are to be provided to judges on-site on the day of the competition.

Ingredient Guidelines:

- Mold use is allowed for construction.
- The candidates who showcase a variety of hand skills, such as hand cut, piping, craftsmanship, correct temperatures and textures, and unique finishes will receive the higher scores.
- Construction and finishing should represent a variety of contemporary styles, techniques, and presentation skills.
- Sponges and cakes may be brought in baked off and shaped as necessary for the presentation.
- Cookie doughs, crispy cookie pastes, and crispy elements, may be brought in baked off in the shape required for construction of pastry. (For whole pastry then portioned, or individually cut for individual constructions).
- Soft inclusions such as Crèmeux, Ganache, Caramel, Marmalades, cooked or macerated fruits may be brought in prepared and ready for construction. **This does not include aerated fillings, such as mousses, Chiboust Creams, Bavarians, diplomat creams, etc., which must be manufactured on site**
- Glazes may be brought in prepared, but from refrigerated state, not warmed and ready to apply.
- Dessert syrups and dessert sauces may be brought in completed. If a dessert sauce is intended to accompany the dessert, it may be presented in a vessel at the time of the judge's tasting.
- The following ready-made dough may be brought in and baked off and shaped as needed for construction and presentation: bric, puff pastry, and filo dough, and shaped as needed for presentation.
- The required handmade garnishes or ornaments must be made during the competition. Each portion must be adorned with at least one (1) garnish / ornament.
- Ingredients for the recipe are allowed to be pre-scaled and measured; however, no pre-mixing is allowed other than components specified above.
- All ingredients and materials should be labeled and identified and presented to judges during set up.
- Note: The following food colorings are not allowed for use:
 - Red Dye #3 (Erythrosine)
 - Red Dye #40 (Allura Red AC)
 - Yellow #5 (Tartrazine)
 - Blue #1 (Brilliant Blue FCF)
 - Blue #2 (Indigo Carmine)
 - Titanium Dioxide (White E171)

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.



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The Standard of Excellence for Chefs

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- 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 be at the discretion of the lead judge.
- Time will not be adjusted for equipment malfunctions that result from the provided wattage being overrun. Competitors should choose equipment that can be supported by the number of outlets and wattage provided.
- 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 should move into their stations and set up for effective execution; no cooking to occur in this window however, water may be set to heat, ovens can be preheated, products may be unwrapped for initial preparations
Production Window	90 Minutes	All production leading to service of the course must be done within this window.
Service Window	10 Minutes	Chefs can begin service of their course immediately as this window opens and the menu must be completed in the allotted time
Cleanup Window	15 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 judges 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 judge's decisions are final.