



## The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation

### 2026 Restaurant Academy

#### Terms and Conditions for Application

The National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (“NRAEF”) is administering the Restaurant Academy (“Program”), a leadership development pilot program designed to support small restaurant owner operators and senior managers with practical tools to build stronger teams, enhance the guest experience, strengthen business resilience, and connect with peers.

Your application for participation in the Program (and potential receipt of a participation stipend), selection and acceptance for Program are governed by the following terms and conditions.

#### 1. Program Overview

The 2026 Program is a cohort-based, six (6) month leadership development pilot program experience that includes:

- A required in-person training event on September 23–24, 2026 in Washington, DC
- Virtual coursework and cohort sessions
- Assessments and evaluation activities

#### Expected Timeline

- **July 1 – July 29, 2026:** Application period
- **August 13, 2026:** Cohort selection and notification
- **Early September 2026:** Virtual orientation
- **September 23–24, 2026:** In-person convening in Washington, D.C.

- **Later Fall 2026:** Virtual learning sessions and peer engagement
- **March 2027:** Program completion and outcomes review

*Exact dates and program details will be shared with selected participants.*

Eligible applicants will be selected by an impartial panel of judges for participation in the Program through the application process administered by NRAEF. All decisions are final and binding.

Each applicant may only submit one (1) application. By applying for the Program, the applicant certifies that the application is true and correct at the time of submission. Submission of an application does not guarantee acceptance into the Program, any stipend, or any other award.

It is anticipated that approximately thirty (30) individuals will be selected to participate in Program.

## 2. Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for participation in the Program, applicants must:

- Be 18 years of age or older at the time of application
- Be a current restaurant owner, co-owner, or senior manager
- Be able to represent the restaurant externally, and make decisions on staffing and the running of the restaurant
- Be actively employed in and/or operating a restaurant at the time of application and throughout the Program
- Have a minimum of one (1) year tenure in their current role
- Currently own, or work for, an actively operating restaurant with no more than 500 employees and 1 – 5 locations
- Be committed to attending and participating in all Program activities.
- Not be an owner of or employed by a franchisee of a larger restaurant group

Other criteria for Program participation: motivation and interest, existing leadership challenges/needs, commitment for participation, anticipated outcomes from participation.

Employees and the immediate family members of employees of NRAEF, National Restaurant Association, their affiliates, any state restaurant association (and/or their associated foundation) and employees and immediate family members of American Express, Resy, and their affiliates are ineligible for Program participation and any associated stipend offered by

NRAEF. NRAEF reserves sole discretion in determining eligibility. NRAEF will use an impartial judging panel to review and evaluate each application to find eligible applicants who best fit the criteria as it relates to the goals and mission of the Program. If selected, the applicant will be notified August 13, 2026. Once notified, the applicant must formally accept the opportunity by August 27, 2026, including agreement to the terms and conditions and requirements for participation, otherwise the acceptance may be forfeited, and another eligible applicant may be selected. Once the applicant accepts the opportunity, NRAEF may share applicant information with American Express and its affiliates (“American Express”). The applicant must complete all participation requirements by March 31, 2027, including but not limited to in-person participation, virtual participation, and any assessment opportunities.

It is anticipated that thirty (30) eligible applicants will be selected for participation in the Program for 2026.

All determinations regarding eligibility, these terms and conditions, the selection process, participation in the Program, completion of the Program, stipend amount and achievement of associated milestones for payment, adherence to these terms and conditions, and any associated events are made at the sole discretion of NRAEF.

### 3. Program Participation Requirements

Participants must comply with the NRAEF’s [Antitrust Policy](#) and conduct all activities in strict accordance with antitrust laws. Participants may not discuss or exchange competitively sensitive information, including current or future prices, wages, costs, and profit margins. Program discussions are for general education and leadership development only.

Participants are required to complete all Program components, including at a minimum:

In-Person Event.

- Full attendance at the in-person Restaurant Academy event scheduled for September 23–24 in Washington, DC

Virtual Coursework & Cohort Engagement

- Completion of all required virtual training modules assigned by NRAEF, estimated to take 4 to 10 hours

- Participation in a minimum of three (3) virtual cohort sessions

Assessments and Evaluation

- Completion of a pre-event assessment used to inform individualized learning modules
- Completion of all required surveys and feedback instruments, including a post-cohort evaluation
- participate in Program evaluation and research activities

Participants are required to participate in all components of the Program and fulfill all requirements within the designated four-month Program period.

NRAEF will verify participation and completion.

During the length of the Program, participants are expected to:

- Remain employed in the same role identified in their application
- Continue operating their restaurant business (if applicable)

Failure to meet these conditions may result in removal from the Program, as outlined in the participation agreement. Exceptions may be made in cases of illness or emergency.

**If selected for participation**, NRAEF will also send a participation agreement for completion by the applicant containing additional terms for participation and the stipend along with a waiver and release form, and associated event code of conduct for completion (“Participation Agreement”). During the period following notification, and prior to executing the Participation Agreement, the applicant must not make any announcement or release any information concerning the Program without prior written approval of the NRAEF. All attendees of Program events must also comply with the NRAEF general requirements for conference attendance and registration. If NRAEF does not receive all completed and signed documents and/or any other requirements for participation are not met by August 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026, the applicant may not be eligible to participate, and another applicant may be selected to participate.

Program participation is non-transferable.

#### 4. Stipend for Participation

There is no fee to participate in the Program. Participants are eligible to receive a total stipend of up to \$5,000, certain travel expenses related to participation (up to \$750), and hotel rooms/meals associated with the in person convening in September, to help support their participation in the program as further outlined in the Participation Agreement, with distribution based on completion of certain Program milestones, such as attendance at the

in-person event, completion of all required coursework and cohort sessions and completion of the post-cohort survey.

Additional terms apply, and all terms related to participation requirements and potential stipends shall be separately documented in the Participation Agreement. Applicant is solely responsible for any state or federal tax liability in association with acceptance of a participation stipend.

Stipend eligibility is limited to the individual selected participant.

## 5. Notification of Changes

Throughout the application and Program process, applicants are required to notify NRAEF of any material changes from that presented in your application, including but not limited to:

- Change in employment or role
- Departure from their organization
- Sale or closure of their business
- Inability to commit to Program participation

Notification must be provided within one (1) week of the change. Some exceptions may apply.

## 6. Release of Liability.

By submitting an application, each applicant agrees to release, indemnify, discharge, and hold harmless NRAEF, American Express, and their respective parents, affiliates, subsidiaries, and advertising and promotion agencies, and the respective officers, directors, shareholders, employees, agents, and representatives of the forgoing (collectively, "Released Parties") from any and all injuries, liability, losses, actions, suits, and direct or indirect damages, consequential damages, incidental damages, punitive or exemplary damages, judgments, claims, and demands of any kind to persons, including, without limitation, death, or property resulting, in whole or in part, directly or indirectly, from the applicant's application and selection process for the Program

## 7. General Conditions

Released Parties are not responsible for lost, late, incomplete, damaged, inaccurate, stolen, delayed, misdirected, undelivered, or garbled applications, messages, email or mail or other

communications of any kind; or for lost, interrupted or unavailable network, server, Internet Service Provider (ISP), website, or other connections, availability or accessibility, or miscommunications or failed computer, satellite, telephone or cable transmissions, lines, or technical failure or jumbled, scrambled, delayed, or misdirected transmissions or computer hardware or software malfunctions, failures or difficulties, or other errors or difficulties of any kind whether human, mechanical, electronic, computer, network, typographical, printing or otherwise relating to or in connection with the Program, including, without limitation, errors or difficulties which may occur in connection with the administration of the Program, the processing or reviewing of applications, the announcement of the Program or in any Program-related materials. Released Parties are also not responsible for any incorrect or inaccurate information, whether caused by site users tampering or hacking, or by any equipment or programming associated with or utilized in the Program. Released Parties are not responsible for injury or damage to any person's computer related to or resulting from participating in this Program. Persons who tamper with or abuse any aspect of the Program, who act in an unsportsmanlike or disruptive manner, or who are in violation of these terms, as solely determined by NRAEF, will be disqualified and all associated applications will be void.

NRAEF reserves the right, at its sole discretion, to suspend, modify or terminate the Program and application and selection process for the Program at any time, and, if terminated, at its discretion, to have the judging panel consider from all eligible, non-suspect applications received prior to action taken or as otherwise deemed fair and appropriate by NRAEF, including, without limitation, if any portion of the application process is, in NRAEF's sole opinion, compromised by virus, worms, bugs, non-authorized human intervention or other causes which, in the sole opinion of the NRAEF, corrupt or impair the administration, security, fairness or proper submission of applications.

[Click here to contact us at rhlc@nraef.org](mailto:rhlc@nraef.org)

The deadline for submission of the Application is July 29, 2026, at 11:59pm ET.