

GRAB AND GO LESSON

Working with a Chef to Build Culinary Skills

Nutrition and Meal Management

Purpose: This handout provides the basic of culinary skills, types of chefs, and some strategies for working with a chef to build culinary skills in the CACFP.

Have you ever considered collaborating with a chef to build your culinary skills for preparing meals and snacks for those in your care? Basic culinary skills are necessary to prepare nutritious meals and snacks. Collaborating with a chef can build one's culinary skills and add more variety and appeal to the menu. This type of collaboration can give Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) operators more confidence when preparing food items and provide choices that are more appealing for children. Knowing some basic information about chefs may help to identify and collaborate with a chef to enhance your culinary skills.

Culinary Skills

Culinary is simply another word for cooking or preparing food. Although there are numerous culinary elements, knowing the basic cooking skills will help transform bland or unappealing meals into those that appeal to children and adults.

Basic cooking skills include:

- Knife skills
- Knowledge of how to use a standardized recipe with weights and measures
- Awareness of simple kitchen utensils and standard equipment
- Basic cooking techniques
- Cold food preparation
- Food quality standards
- Basic food presentation

On the other hand, enhanced culinary skills include applying more advanced techniques for being creative, diversifying seasoning and flavoring, incorporating cutting methods, and mastering advanced cooking methods. These skills can improve the nutritional value of meals and may even reduce waste.

Defining the Chef's Role

A chef is a highly trained professional who is skilled in all aspects of cooking but may also specialize in specific areas. A chef is equipped in introducing advanced culinary skills, planning a flavor-enhanced menu, and focusing on the creative presentation and appeal of food.

Chefs work in many different settings. Some examples include restaurants, schools, hospitals, or bakeries where they prepare large amounts of food for sizeable groups. Chefs that work in smaller areas can work in private settings such as a personal chef for individuals or families.

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Types of Chefs

There are several types of chefs, such as the following:

- Executive Chef (or Chef de Cuisine) serves as a kitchen manager where they typically manage inventory, payroll and budgeting, food-cost, personnel management, and menu planning.
- Sous Chef (or Assistant Chef) supports the Executive Chef. They tend to manage a staff of assistant chefs, cooks, and kitchen workers, as well as creating recipes for the menu.
- Senior Chef (formally called Chef de Partie) specializes in one particular area of the menu. They direct the prep work of kitchen staff and assistant cooks in their area.
- Demi Chef (similar to a Senior Chef) specializes in one type of dish and directs the prep work of staff key to that specialty. A good example is a sushi chef.
- Pastry Chefs are responsible for creating items for the dessert menu. They work with bakers, chocolatiers, and other dessert and pastry specialists. They have also had additional training that focuses on the production of desserts.

Collaborating with a Chef

There are a few key strategies for identifying and working with a chef for collaboration. Here are a few options to consider:

- Visit the American Culinary Federation (acfcchefs.org) and Share Our Strength's (nokidhungry.org) websites to identify local chefs and additional culinary information.
- Collaborate with a local chef to provide monthly training for all nutrition staff.
- Pursue a culinary course at a local community college or university.

There is a great benefit of having advanced culinary skills in the CACFP setting. The addition of these skills is the start of an exciting educational journey that teaches how to prepare and serve foods that are appealing to children. Working directly with a chef can take menu planning and meal preparation to a higher level and be a very rewarding experience. Visit the Culinary Institute of Child Nutrition at theicn.org/cicn for culinary information and strategies for identifying a chef. Also, search for the hashtag **#cicn** on social media for some of the recent publications.

References

Lowry, B. Chef Jobs. (n.d.). *Chef jobs, training, and career paths: Types of chefs*. <https://www.culinaryschools.org/chef-types/>

School Nutrition Association. (2018). *Culinary competencies for school nutrition professionals*. https://schoolnutrition.org/uploadedFiles/2_Meetings_and_Events/Presentation_PDFs/ANC_2018/Culinary-Competencies-for-SN-Professionals.pdf

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