



# Nova Scotia Restaurant Awards Nomination Criteria & Guidelines

Created by the Restaurant Association of Nova Scotia

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## Eligibility

To qualify for the NS Restaurant Awards:

- A representative from the establishment must nominate the establishment in order to be considered.
- Nominees must operate in Nova Scotia.
- Nominee must be operational (either as seasonal or year-round operators).

To qualify for the NS Restaurant Staff Awards:

- Must currently run a professional kitchen in a restaurant, bar, cafe, food truck or catering company
- Nominees must currently work in Nova Scotia.
- Nominees must be in a leadership position.



Restaurants may apply to more than one award category\*.

*\* Restaurants can only be nominated for one the Best of Regional Awards **OR** Limited Service Award but not both.*

### Nomination and Judging Process

Each nominee will be reviewed by the Restaurant Association of NS to ensure they meet the requirements. Qualified nominees will be included in a public vote. The top finalists in each category are based on the public vote. A panel of industry expert judges will then determine the winner in each category.

Judges will evaluate the winner based on (but not limited to) public feedback, rationale provided by the nominee, judges experience and expertise, local awareness.

### Restaurant Awards Criteria

Restaurant Awards	Nomination Criteria
<b>Best Restaurant (Regional award for each of the following three regions):</b> Halifax Regional Municipality  Cape Breton Island	Qualified Nominees for Best Restaurant must: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provide full-service dining</li><li>• Be licensed with a wine &amp; beverage menu</li><li>• Take payment at the end of the meal</li><li>• Have fully trained and knowledgeable staff in both FOH and BOH</li><li>• Provide a unique experience and offering</li><li>• Show consistency and excellence in the following areas:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Quality of food</li><li>▪ Service</li><li>▪ Atmosphere</li></ul></li></ul>



<p>Mainland Nova Scotia</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food &amp; Menu selection</li> <li>▪ Decor</li> <li>▪ Beverage</li> <li>▪ Amenities</li> </ul> <p><i>Note: Nominees can only be nominated for one regional award. Nominees must be located in the region they apply for.</i></p> <p><i>*Note: Restaurants can only be nominated for the Best of Regional Awards <b>OR</b> Limited Service Award but not both.</i></p>
<p><b>Best Limited-Service Restaurant</b></p>	<p>Qualified Nominees for Best Limited-Service Restaurant can include (but are not limited to) cafes, take-out, food trucks, fast food, and late-night eats. The nominees must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide limited-service dining where food is ordered at a counter and paid for upfront</li> <li>• Do not have to be licensed</li> <li>• Provide a unique offering that adds value to the customer and diversifies the industry</li> <li>• Demonstrate excellence and consistency in the following areas:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Quality of food and/or beverage</li> <li>▪ Speed of Service</li> <li>▪ Price</li> <li>▪ Atmosphere</li> <li>▪ Food &amp; Menu selection</li> <li>▪ Decor</li> <li>▪ Amenities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



	<p><i>*Note: Restaurants can only be nominated for the Best of Regional Awards <b>OR</b> Limited Service Award but not both.</i></p>
<p><b>Community Engagement Award</b></p>	<p>Nominees in this category can be any food and beverage-related business. Nominees must demonstrate how they are engaging with their local community. Restaurants who are nominated in this category must submit a 200-250 word description of a specific process, project, or initiative their business employs, invested in, or implemented to help combat or support their local communities. Examples of community initiatives could include (but are not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmental/eco-friendly</li> <li>• Accessibility</li> <li>• Food insecurity</li> <li>• Community support</li> <li>• Mental Health</li> <li>• Diversity and Inclusion</li> </ul>
<p><b>Best Beverages Award</b></p>	<p>Nominees in this category can be restaurants, lounges, cafes, or bars of any size. Nominees can be focused on any beverage, including wine, spirits, beers, cocktails, or coffee, but it must be a critical part of their overall operational strategy. Nominees in this category demonstrating excellence in their beverage offering by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Displaying a distinct knowledge of their beverage(s) of focus</li> <li>• Providing a unique, well-structured beverage selection</li> <li>• Having a beverage menu that acts as the establishment's signature</li> <li>• Having appropriate, well-trained people on staff or as an advisor to support their beverage strategy (i.e., a sommelier, mixologist, cicerone)</li> </ul>



<b>Best Atmosphere</b>	<p>Nominees in this category can be restaurants, lounges, bars, or cafes of any size. Nominees must have a space with an innovative design and unique decor. Whether the space is new, old, or a renovated establishment it must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Good choice in design materials and comfort for the patrons</li><li>• Design must add value to the customer experience</li><li>• Design should complement the physical environment or building or landscape</li></ul>
<b>Best Outdoor Dining Experience</b>	<p>Nominees in this category must have an outdoor patio space. Nominees show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uniqueness of outdoor dining offering</li><li>• Delivery of a Positive Ambiance</li><li>• Innovation in how they approach the outdoor experience</li><li>• Positive service experience</li></ul>
<b>Social Media Award</b>	<p>Nominees in this category use the power of social media as a significant part of their marketing strategy. Nominees can be focused on any one, or number of, social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok, Snapchat, etc.). Nominees show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A consistent, regular posting schedule</li><li>• A rapid response rate to consumers</li><li>• An engaged online community that likes, shares, and comments on posts</li><li>• Exceptional use of the tool in question</li><li>• A strong online brand identity and voice</li></ul>
<b>Local Hero Award</b>	<p>Nominees in this category display exceptional support for local agriculture and a commitment to increasing consumer awareness</p>



	<p>and consumption of local food.</p> <p>Nominees promote the benefits of buying local for farmers, rural communities, the provincial economy and the environment.</p> <p>Nominees show:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Local food products routinely used in the restaurant</li><li>• Familiarity with local suppliers</li><li>• Communication with customers about support for local producers</li><li>• Promotional events profiling local food products</li><li>• Participation in activities to promote local agriculture</li></ul>
<b>Best New Restaurant</b>	<p>Nominees in this category must be a food and beverage business that have been open between January of 2024 and October 1, 2025.</p>
<b>Hospitality Award</b>	<p><b>Nominated during the public vote stage by the public.</b></p> <p>Nominees in this category display exceptional guest service skills with a focus on the guest experience. Nominees can be any restaurant, bar, lounge, or cafe, of any size or style of service; however, where the establishment stands apart is in its ability to build relationships with its guests.</p> <p>This establishment demonstrates personality, passion, and goes above and beyond for its guests time and time again. The staff at this establishment do not hesitate to help a guest, they always acknowledge a guest and make a guest feel welcome. Here, the service is always five-star.</p>



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Restaurant Staff Awards Criteria

Restaurant Staff Award	Nomination Criteria
Best Chef Award	<p>Nominees set the standard for culinary achievement in Nova Scotia. They demonstrate skill and creativity in their cuisine, a commitment to mentoring and uplifting others, meaningful involvement in their communities, and a passion for championing Nova Scotia’s food culture at home and on the world stage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culinary Excellence – Create cohesive and appealing menus. Produce high quality meals.</li><li>• Leadership – Inclusive, supports upcoming talent, mentorship, promotes from within.</li><li>• Community engagement – Participates in their local community (ex: volunteering, participating local initiatives or programs such as Apprenticeship).</li><li>• Ambassador for Nova Scotia – Provides the best in their cuisine within NS. Initiative in building the Nova Scotia Culinary scene (ex: promoting NS product, championing a specific cuisine, bringing NS to national/international stage).</li></ul>



Best Bartender Award	<p>Nominees in this category elevate the craft of bartending through creativity, leadership, and community spirit. Nominees are recognized for their ability to design exceptional menus and drinks, foster inclusive growth within the industry, engage with their communities, and proudly represent Nova Scotia's culinary scene on local, national, and international stages.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Bartending Excellence – Create cohesive and appealing menus. Produce high quality drinks.</li><li>• Leadership – Inclusive, supports upcoming talent, mentorship, promotes from within.</li><li>• Community engagement – Participates in their local community (ex: volunteering, participating local initiatives or programs such as Apprenticeship).</li><li>• Ambassador for Nova Scotia – Provides the best in their talent within NS. Initiative in building the Nova Scotia Culinary scene (ex: promoting NS product, championing a specific cuisine, bringing NS to national/international stage).</li></ul>
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## Contact

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