



American Royal World Series of Barbecue® 2026 Invitational Contest Qualifying Criteria

Qualifying Period: July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2026

Qualifying Information:

- **2026 Invitational Contest updated qualifying criteria:** For the 2026 Invitational, eligible teams must have won a Grand Champion from a qualifying contest through our partnering sanctioning bodies from July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2026.

Qualifying Contest Criteria:

- The qualifying contest must be held between **July 1, 2024 and June 30, 2026**.
- Contests **MUST** have at least 15 competing teams the first year and **20** competing teams each subsequent year and be ran by an American Royal approved sanctioning body.
 - The lowered team count of 20 teams in second year contests is in effect starting **July 1, 2025**. Contests held prior to July 1, 2025 must have had 25 teams to qualify.
- State proclamations will no longer be required. In lieu of a state proclamation, all contests **MUST** be sanctioned by an American Royal approved sanctioning body. Qualifying contests **MUST** be open to all contestants.
- Contest categories submitted for judging **MUST** include beef, pork, and chicken to be considered a qualifier. To be considered a “competing team” for the qualifying contest, teams **MUST** submit entries for **ALL** contest categories required to be the Grand Champion or overall winner of that event.
- A state with only one contest **MUST** have a minimum of 15 competing teams to be considered and **MUST** be sanctioned by an American Royal approved sanctioning body. Qualifying contests must be open to all contestants.
- The sanctioning body must receive and send all necessary contest details, including Grand Champion contact information, to the American Royal at BBQ@americanroyal.com.

Invitations:

- Only Grand Champions are invited. No pass downs will be accepted.
- Teams who are Grand Champions and invited to the Invitational contest will receive an email notification from the American Royal inviting them and providing specifics on registration instructions.
- Invitations will be extended to the qualified team name/head cook combination. Should the team name or head cook change after qualifying, the team **MUST** enter the American Royal Invitational under the qualifying team name/head cook combination. Should the same head cook have qualified with more than one team, he/she may enter the American Royal Invitational Contest only one time.
- All teams who qualify and plan to participate in the Invitational contest are required to register online for the World Series of Barbecue. Qualified teams participating in the Invitational contest must also participate in the Open Contest during the World Series of Barbecue, complete and pay for your contest registrations.

Automatic Entries Go To:

**Grand Champion of previous year's American Royal Open Contest*

**Grand Champions of previous five (5) years' American Royal Invitational Contest*

Grand Champion of previous year's American Royal Legends Team Contest

**Grand Champion of previous year's Annual Jack Daniel's World Championship Invitational Barbecue*

**Grand Champion of previous year's KCBS Invitational*

**Grand Champion of current year's Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo World Championship Bar-B-Que Contest*

**Grand Champion of current year's World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest – Memphis in May*