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Not feeling much love these days at your restaurant job? We've got a prestigious and lucrative option for you—provided you're 38 or younger, were born outside the U.S. but are now a naturalized citizen or green card holder, and have worked in foodservice for at least five years. Apply for the 2010 Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise in the Culinary Arts, which will award \$25,000 to a foreign-born chef, artisan or innovator who "demonstrates outstanding early achievement." It's kind of a vague standard, but so what: even the four runners-up get \$5,000 apiece. What have you got to lose?



Each year, the New York City-based Vilcek Foundation honors the work of immigrants in two distinct fields of endeavors, in two different age divisions.

One category stays the same: biomedical research, with one established practitioner earning a Vilcek Prize and one up-and-comer awarded a Vilcek Prize for Creative Promise.

The second rotates between designated disciplines in the arts and sciences chosen by the foundation. Vilcek Prize awards have gone to people like filmmaker Mike Nichols and installation artists Christo and Jean-Claude ("The Gates" in Central Park, among many others). For the Creative Promise aspect, the foundation focused on architects in 2007, musicians in 2008 and this year, filmmakers. For 2010, it's cooks.

"Nothing is more basic to humanity than food, and nothing is so successful at bringing people together as a shared meal," says Rick Kinsel, executive director of the Vilcek Foundation. "Furthermore, the culinary arts flourish in America in large part because of its immigrant practitioners. We have them to thank for the fact that we in this country have only to step outside doors to sample the foods of the world. As a result, more than ever before, Americans are taking a greater interest in food—where it comes from and how it is grown—and have a deeper appreciation for the art and science behind a carefully prepared and beautifully presented meal."

So what do you have to do to get the \$25 grand? Just submit an application before the July 31, 2009 deadline. If you've ever applied for a scholarship, you already know the drill and the Vilcek people have made it easy. You can either download the relatively brief application form at www.vilcek.org/#/prizes/vilcek_prize_creative and fill it out or simply do the whole works online (<https://app.applyyourself.com/?id=vilcek>).

Considering the dollar amount at stake here, the application's requirements are not overwhelming. You'll have to answer a couple of short essay questions and the Vilcek people expect you to arrange for two letters of recommendation that will support your entry. In addition there are also the following requirements for supporting materials.



- Applicants should submit their work in one of three categories:
- CHEFS should submit a current menu along with a CD containing up to five digital images of plated dishes or of pastry creations.
 - ARTISANS should submit a CD containing up to five digital images of the product or products produced, along with any descriptive material. If you advance to the second round of evaluations you will be required to submit actual samples of your product for examination by the jury.
 - INNOVATORS should submit a CD containing up to five digital images of the innovation or object in question, along with any descriptive material.

After that, just throw in a copy of your naturalization paper and/or green card plus your current resume and you're in

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the game.

Initially, the Vilcek Foundation will narrow the field to five finalists, from whom the winner will be chosen in November 2009. Whoever prevails will receive \$25,000, a nifty piece of art and an all-expenses-paid trip to New York in the spring of 2010. The four runners-up get \$5,000 apiece, but no trip.

Is it worth a shot? Keep in mind that this process is entirely about documenting things you've previously done in your career. It's all paperwork, save for the five digital images.

So can anyone participate? The Vilcek people do have a couple of caveats about who is eligible to enter beyond the age, immigration background and citizenship status requirements we've already noted. Here's how they spell it out.

"Chefs include all those whose primary occupation is defined as cooking for others in a restaurant setting, whether as a regular chef or as a pastry chef. Private chefs are not eligible to apply.

"Artisans may work on a farm or have a small shop or production facility. They include confectioners, chocolatiers, cheese makers, bread bakers, charcutiers, affineurs, and others who work with food on a small scale. Producers of packaged or bulk products like pickles, jams, or crackers are ineligible for the prize.

"Innovators are those who have created a novel culinary-related product or object that is crucial to others' transformative work with food."

The Vilcek Foundation will rely on judges to pick the winners. Who's doing the judging? "A panel of distinguished jurors—chefs, restaurant critics, food writers, editors and educators—will evaluate each application based on the quality of production, the level of creativity, clarity of vision, impact and the individual's ability to present his/her work in a professional manner."

In other words, they'll be making it up on the fly. and it sounds like there's a certain "we'll know it when we see it" quality to the stated standards. But that's OK, because the Vilcek Foundation is elevating the foodservice profession to the level of more traditional art forms. We hope they get plenty of solid applications, and good luck to all those who apply.

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