



IRG NextGen Leaders Program

COMPLETE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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Table of Contents

- 01. Program Overview & Strategic Case
- 02. Who This Program Is For
- 03. The Three Department Tracks
- 04. Certification Levels & Program Structure
- 05. Level 2 Capstone — Business Impact Project
- 06. Level 3 & 4 Leadership Impact Capstone
- 07. Mentorship & Coaching
- 08. Suggested Reading
- 09. Compensation
- 10. Application Process

01 | Program Overview & Strategic Case

The IRG NextGen Leaders Program is Iconic Restaurant Group's formal leadership development program for culinary, food & beverage, and multi-unit operations professionals. Participants train within the IRG Legacy Leadership Institute™ — IRG's own proprietary leadership development curriculum — while simultaneously building the role-specific fundamentals required to lead at their level. This is a real job with real responsibility and a clear certification path from day one.

The Strategic Case

WITHOUT THIS PROGRAM	WITH THIS PROGRAM
- Leadership gaps filled by outside hires who don't know IRG culture - Higher recruiting costs and longer ramp-up time - Turnover when leaders don't fit the brand or the team - No bench when a GM, Executive Chef, or MUM leaves - Inconsistent standards across locations and concepts	- Leaders built from inside — fluent in IRG systems and culture - Lower recruiting costs and faster performance ramp - Higher retention — people stay where they are invested in - A ready bench for every opening and leadership vacancy - Consistent certified standards across all IRG properties

Benefits at a Glance

OPERATIONAL	STRATEGIC
- Stronger management consistency across all properties - Leadership-ready talent for every opening and transition - Faster performance ramp — participants are embedded before certification	- Positions IRG as an employer of choice in all four states - Builds future Directors, Executive Chefs, and Brand Leaders - Attracts top culinary, hospitality, and operations professionals

02 | Who This Program Is For

EXTERNAL CANDIDATES

- Recent graduates (within 24 months) with a degree in Hospitality, Business, Culinary Arts, Communications, or any related field
- Hospitality professionals with 2+ years of direct restaurant or hospitality experience (no degree required)
- All candidates must be authorized to work in the United States

INTERNAL IRG CANDIDATES

- Current IRG non-management team members identified for a path into management
- Must have received a formal promotion or a written referral from their direct manager
- Referral must speak to the team member's work ethic, performance, and leadership potential — not just tenure
- Internal candidates complete the full application process

03 | The Three Department Tracks

Participants select one department track at the time of application. This is where they spend the majority of their program — building the skills, standards, and leadership competencies required for their target role.

Culinary

Executive Chef · Sous Chef · Kitchen Manager · BOH Catering Lead

What this track is	Develops leaders who can run an IRG kitchen at the highest level — maintaining food quality and consistency, managing a culinary team, driving BOH efficiency, controlling food cost, and upholding the culinary identity that makes each IRG concept iconic.
Roles this develops	Kitchen Manager · Sous Chef · Executive Chef · BOH Catering Lead
Certification track	Level 2 (Kitchen Manager · Sous Chef · BOH Catering Lead) · Level 3 (Executive Chef)

Food & Beverage

General Manager · Assistant General Manager · Bar Manager · FOH Catering Lead

What this track is	Develops leaders who can run the full guest experience at an IRG restaurant — from front-of-house service and bar program execution to team leadership, labor management, and financial performance.
Roles this develops	Bar Manager · FOH Catering Lead · Assistant General Manager · General Manager
Certification track	Level 2 (Bar Manager · FOH Catering Lead · AGM) · Level 3 (General Manager)

Multi-Unit Operations

Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage Director · Catering Director

What this track is	Develops leaders who manage performance, brand standards, and people development across multiple IRG locations — translating company vision into operational consistency at scale.
Roles this develops	Beverage Director · Catering Director · Director of Culinary · Director of Operations
Certification track	Level 4 (Director of Operations / MUM / Catering Director) — requires Level 3 as prerequisite

04 | Certification Levels & Program Structure

The IRG Legacy Leadership Institute™ is organized across ten curriculum pillars and four certification levels. The NextGen Leaders Program enters at Level 2, 3, or 4 depending on the participant's target role. Each level combines the Legacy Leadership Institute™ curriculum with department fundamentals training — the role-specific knowledge and skills that make the certification meaningful in practice.

The Ten Curriculum Pillars

#	PILLAR
1	Leadership & Culture Excellence
2	Hospitality & Guest Experience Excellence
3	Shift Management Excellence
4	Labor Leadership & Management
5	COGS Management & Kitchen Operations Excellence
6	Bar Management & Beverage Excellence
7	Brand Management, Community Connection & Digital Presence
8	People Management & HR Excellence
9	Operations Success Planning (OSP)
10	The Legacy Project — Leadership Impact Capstone

LEVEL 2 — IRG Certified Business Leader™

9-Month Program · Kitchen Manager · Sous Chef · BOH Catering Lead · Bar Manager · FOH Catering Lead · AGM

Overview

Level 2 is designed for leaders stepping into department ownership. Over nine months, participants build the foundational leadership skills, operational knowledge, and business acumen required to manage a department, own a set of KPIs, and think like a business operator.

What Participants Develop

- Shift leadership, hospitality standards, and brand fundamentals
- Labor management and scheduling — owning labor % week over week
- COGs and kitchen operations — understanding food cost and controlling variance
- Bar program basics — executing beverage standards and conducting bar walks
- Brand and community engagement — review management and local marketing
- HR and people management foundations — onboarding, compliance, and coaching
- Operations Success Planning (OSP) foundations — structured observation and follow-through
- Department fundamentals in their home track — menus, service standards, and brand-specific procedures

How They Are Assessed

Written assessments, observed shift evaluations, documented field applications, and systems proficiency checks — all completed within the nine-month window. Each assessment has defined passing standards set by the Legacy Leadership Institute™.

LEVEL 3 — IRG Certified General Manager™

12-Month Program · General Manager · Executive Chef

Overview

Level 3 is the full general management certification — total business ownership, community leadership, brand stewardship, and the Leadership Impact Capstone (The Legacy Project). Over twelve months, participants build on everything from Level 2 and advance into full restaurant or kitchen leadership.

What Participants Develop

- Advanced COGs and kitchen operations — food safety leadership and cost management cadence
- Full bar program certification — KPIs, financial management, and building a bar culture
- Full brand certification — digital presence, community leadership, and brand stewardship across all channels
- Advanced HR — payroll mastery, employee relations, recruiting, and recognition culture
- Full OSP certification — complete Operation Success Planning cycles with MBO outcomes
- The 6-Month Monthly Leadership Development Program — structured monthly leadership themes
- The Legacy Project — a full 9-phase business impact initiative with measurable results
- Department fundamentals at the GM or Executive Chef level — P&L ownership, team development, and concept standards

How They Are Assessed

Full business review presentation to the Director of Operations, Balanced Scorecard review across all five quadrants, brand and bar program portfolio audits, 360° feedback, and the Legacy Project Capstone Presentation to the Executive Leadership Panel — minimum weighted score of 3.0 required.

LEVEL 4 — IRG Certified Performance Coach™

12-Month Program · Director of Operations · Director of Culinary · Beverage Director · Catering Director

Overview

Level 4 is market-level leadership. Over twelve months, participants develop the skills to manage performance across multiple locations, develop GMs and Executive Chefs beneath them, and drive portfolio-wide KPI results.

What Participants Develop

- Multi-unit financial leadership — market-level P&L, portfolio COGs, and labor management across locations
- Brand portfolio management — consistency, digital presence, and brand health across multiple concepts
- Bar program portfolio leadership — driving bar certification and beverage standards across all managed GMs
- Advanced HR — multi-state labor law, HR financial acumen, and market-wide people strategy
- Advanced OSP — High Impact Visit methodology, market prioritization, and GM development through coaching
- Change leadership — managing stabilization plans and driving measurable improvement at scale
- Legacy Project sponsorship — serving as Executive Sponsor for a Level 3 participant through all 9 phases
- Multi-unit department fundamentals — managing operational standards, brand voice, and team development across a portfolio

How They Are Assessed

Market performance review with Executive Leadership covering all Balanced Scorecard metrics, brand portfolio audit, GM coaching portfolio, HR Financial Review presentation, and Legacy Project sponsorship portfolio.

05 | Level 2 Capstone — Business Impact Project

What It Is

The Level 2 Capstone is a focused Business Impact Project — a practical, real-world assessment of the participant's ability to observe, analyze, and present a leadership-caliber recommendation. It is simpler in scope than the Level 3/4 Legacy Project but holds the same standard: grounded in real observation, specific in recommendation, and presented professionally.

The Three-Part Structure

PART	NAME	WHAT IT INVOLVES
1	The Observation	Identify one specific operational, financial, guest experience, or team challenge within the participant's department. Document the current state with data — not just a feeling. Supported by the Manager Coach.
2	The Recommendation	Develop a specific, actionable recommendation. Must include: what will change, how it will be implemented, who is responsible, and how success will be measured.
3	The Presentation	A 15-minute presentation to the Manager Coach and at least one additional IRG leader. Covers the problem, the evidence, the recommendation, and expected impact. No implementation is required at Level 2.

Evaluation Criteria

DIMENSION	WEIGHT	WHAT EVALUATORS LOOK FOR
Problem Identification	25%	Was the right problem identified? Is it grounded in real data, not assumptions?
Analysis & Evidence	25%	Is the evidence specific? Does the root cause go below the surface?
Recommendation Quality	30%	Is the recommendation specific, realistic, and connected to the evidence?
Presentation Clarity	20%	Is the story told clearly and confidently in 15 minutes?

06 | Level 3 & 4 Leadership Impact Capstone

What the Legacy Project Is

Each participant identifies a meaningful business opportunity, develops a strategic solution, leads implementation, and delivers measurable results.

The 7 Deliverables

DELIVERABLE	WHAT IT IS	DUE
1. Opportunity Brief	One-page identification of the strategic opportunity, why it matters, and why now	Weeks 1–2
2. Project Proposal & Approval	Full problem definition, scope, expected impact, timeline, stakeholders, and success metrics — approved by Coach and Executive Sponsor	Week 3
3. Research Summary & Findings	Operational data, team interviews, process observations, benchmarks, and root cause analysis	Weeks 4–5
4. Business Case & Implementation Plan	Solution options evaluated, costs and benefits estimated, risks identified, phased execution roadmap	Week 6
5. Executive Approval	Formal presentation to senior leadership for go/no-go decision — no execution without approval	Week 7
6. Results Dashboard	Live tracking of all success metrics vs. objectives — updated weekly throughout execution	Week 14
7. Capstone Presentation	Complete project story delivered to the Executive Leadership Panel	Week 16

9-Phase Journey

WEEKS	PHASE	FOCUS
1–2	Opportunity Discovery	Walk the floor. Read the data. Interview the team. Identify the real opportunity — not the obvious one.
3	Proposal Approval	Define the problem, scope, impact, timeline, and success metrics. Earn leadership approval before investing in research.
4–5	Research & Analysis	Gather data, conduct interviews, observe processes, benchmark, and run root cause analysis.
6	Strategic Recommendation	Evaluate options, build the business case, estimate costs and returns, write the implementation plan.
7	Executive Approval	Present recommendation to leadership. Earn go/no-go decision. No execution without approval.
8–13	Implementation	Lead the project. Coordinate the team. Update the Results Dashboard every week. Own the outcome.
14	Results Analysis	Close the implementation period. Populate the full Results Dashboard — every metric vs. baseline and target.
15	Final Report	Document what worked, what did not, what surprised you, and what must be sustained.
16	Capstone Presentation	Deliver to the Executive Leadership Panel. Tell the full story. Earn the credential.

Evaluation Criteria

DIMENSION	WEIGHT	WHAT EVALUATORS ARE LOOKING FOR
Strategic Thinking	20%	Did you identify a real, non-obvious opportunity? Did your analysis go below the surface?
Business Analysis	15%	Is your research rigorous and evidence-based? Does your business case quantify cost and return accurately?
Leadership & Initiative	20%	Did you lead — not just manage? Did you coach and influence beyond your formal authority?
Execution Excellence	20%	Did the plan actually happen — on time, at standard, with accountability?
Measurable Business Results	15%	Can you quantify what changed — financially, operationally, for guests, and for the team?
Communication & Presentation	10%	Did you tell the story clearly and confidently? Did you handle Q&A with poise?

07 | Mentorship & Coaching

Every NextGen Leaders participant receives three levels of support throughout the program. Each serves a distinct purpose.

ROLE	WHO	RESPONSIBILITIES
Manager Coach <i>Direct Supervisor</i>	GM or senior manager at the assigned restaurant or department	- Weekly informal check-ins and day-to-day guidance - Monthly formal 1:1 — documented - Signs off on all certification milestones and assessments - Facilitates department fundamentals training alongside the curriculum - Sponsors the Level 2 Business Impact Project
Mentor <i>Outside Chain of Command</i>	A leader from a different track or property	- Monthly career guidance conversations - Broader perspective beyond the immediate department - Safe space to discuss challenges without chain-of-command dynamics
Executive Sponsor <i>Senior IRG Leader</i>	Managing Director, Brand Director, or C-suite	- Quarterly formal review sessions — documented - Reviews and approves the Legacy Project (Level 3 & 4) - Confirms graduation and certification sign-off

08 | Suggested Reading

While required reading is not part of the NextGen Leaders program, these two books are strongly recommended — both because they directly inform principles in the training manual and because they will make you a better leader inside IRG.

The One Minute Manager <i>by Blanchard & Johnson</i>
Unreasonable Hospitality <i>by Will Guidara</i>

09 | Compensation

NextGen Leaders participants are compensated based on their certification level and target role, benchmarked against U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics data for Food Service Managers (SOC 11-9051) in IRG's four operating markets. Salaries are set at or above the 25th–50th percentile for the applicable role and state.

LEVEL 2 — IRG Certified Business Leader™

Restaurant Manager · Sous Chef · Bar Manager · BOH/FOH Catering Lead

STATE	SALARY RANGE	ROLES
Tennessee — Nashville	\$45,000 – \$52,000	Restaurant Manager · Sous Chef · Bar Manager
Texas — Austin	\$48,000 – \$55,000	Restaurant Manager · Sous Chef · Bar Manager
North Carolina	\$48,000 – \$55,000	Restaurant Manager · Sous Chef · Bar Manager
Florida	\$46,000 – \$52,000	Restaurant Manager · Sous Chef · Bar Manager

LEVEL 3 — IRG Certified General Manager™

General Manager · Executive Chef

STATE	SALARY RANGE	ROLES
Tennessee — Nashville	\$55,000 – \$62,000	General Manager · Executive Chef
Texas — Austin	\$60,000 – \$68,000	General Manager · Executive Chef
North Carolina	\$60,000 – \$68,000	General Manager · Executive Chef
Florida	\$56,000 – \$63,000	General Manager · Executive Chef

LEVEL 4 — IRG Certified Performance Coach™

Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage Director · Catering Director

STATE	SALARY RANGE	ROLES
Tennessee — Nashville	\$70,000 – \$85,000	Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage/Catering Director
Texas — Austin	\$78,000 – \$95,000	Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage/Catering Director
North Carolina	\$75,000 – \$92,000	Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage/Catering Director
Florida	\$72,000 – \$88,000	Director of Culinary · Director of Operations · Beverage/Catering Director

10 | Application Process

APPLICATION WINDOWS

COHORT	APPLICATIONS OPEN	PROGRAM STARTS
Spring Cohort	October 1	February / March
Fall Cohort	April 1	August / September

STEP 1 — ONLINE APPLICATION | irghospitality.com/careers

- Full name, contact information, preferred state and location
- Resume — required
- Department track: Culinary, Food & Beverage, or Multi-Unit Operations
- Target role and certification level (Level 2, 3, or 4)
- Years and type of relevant industry experience
- How they heard about the program
- Internal candidates: referring manager name and title, confirmation of promotion status

STEP 2 — TWO ESSAYS (250–400 words each)

Both essays are read before any interview is scheduled.

Essay 1 — Why IRG?

“Why are you interested in the IRG Leadership Fellowship Program, and what do you hope to gain from the experience? How do you see this program helping you achieve your long-term career goals?”

Essay 2 — Your Leadership Experience

“Describe a time when you had to lead — formally or informally — in a challenging or fast-moving situation. What did you do, what was the outcome, and what would you do differently today? If you have not held a formal leadership role, describe a moment where you took initiative and influenced a result.”

STEP 3 — VIDEO INTERVIEW (~20–30 min)

Selected applicants record video responses to 2–3 questions. Dress professionally.

STEP 4 — BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW (30–45 min)

Finalists interview with an IRG recruiter and a department lead or Managing Director. STAR format — Situation, Task, Action, Result.

STEP 5 — OFFER & ONBOARDING

Accepted candidates receive a formal offer letter with salary, start date, department track, certification level, and assigned location.