



TIPS FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES **Seeking Cantors for High Holiday Service Positions**

A. Preparing Your Committee

1. Be sure your search committee reflects the diversity of your congregational community in terms of age, gender, and other key demographics.
2. Take attendance at meetings.
3. Rotate among the committee members the delivery of appropriate *Div'rei Torah* at the start of each meeting. It sets the tone of seriousness and a Jewish focus for your task at hand.
4. Stress confidentiality. This cannot be overemphasized.
5. Commit to using e-mail **only for non-confidential messages**.
6. Ask committee members to turn cell phones off during meetings, out of respect for one another and the importance of the group process.
7. Make it a priority to keep your congregation informed of the committee's progress via the Temple bulletin. No names of cantors should be mentioned until the moment a contract is **signed and sealed**. A member of the committee, or its chair, should serve as a liaison to the Temple Board of Trustees.
8. Remember that every message, letter, phone call, and conversation -- whether between congregants or to candidates -- reflects on your congregation.
9. The chairperson of the search committee should be familiar with *Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships*. This is a booklet put out jointly by the URJ and the ACC, and is available on the ACC website at www.accantors.org.
10. As soon as you receive a cantor's resume, either call or e-mail her/him to say that you have received the information. Indicate a time frame that candidate can expect to hear further from you. A form letter or a form e-mail is less appealing to a recipient than a personalized communication.
11. It is always a good idea to maintain contact with your URJ district director. He/She will often have insights into your particular congregation's dynamics regarding the search process.
12. Please keep in mind that the Placement Director is more of a go-between than a matchmaker. S/he can, in some cases, provide background material about individual candidates, but will know some candidates better than others. Please feel free to discuss with the Placement Director any questions or concerns about candidates, their resumes, CD's, interviews, etc. Although s/he will not recommend one cantor over another or point your committee in a particular direction, s/he is available to guide and inform you as you conduct your search in accordance with your congregation's goals and values.



B. The Phone Interview

1. Phone interviews can be stressful for the candidate. Pitch the first few questions lightly and with some humor, if possible. The result will be that you will get a clearer impression of the real person.
2. Give the candidate a clear idea about when he/she will be hearing back from you.
3. Never pursue references (even casually) **until you have received permission from the cantor**. The cantor is required to inform her/his current congregation that he/she is "in Placement" only when a second interview is scheduled.
4. Caution your search committee members that confidentiality must be strictly maintained. It is a small Jewish world, and every candidate's privacy must be respected.
5. If you reject a candidate at whatever point, inform him/her right away, preferably by phone or letter. (In this particular situation, email is not a good option.) As difficult as it is, it will be helpful to the cantor if you make this contact and take the time to explain to him/her why the committee has chosen not to continue.

C. The Recording

1. Many search committees request that the candidates send recordings for consideration. This step can be helpful in narrowing your search. We ask that you request a recording after a preliminary phone interview is conducted.
2. A caution: recorded sound is only so accurate. A cantor on the *bimah* conveys liturgical meaning with more than voice. Presence, *kavanah* (religious focus), *ahavat elohim* (love of God), and chemistry cannot be conveyed electronically.
3. **The ACC Office does not store or send recordings.** Candidates are instructed to send their recordings directly to congregations, at the request of the search chair, **after** the phone interviews. If you do request a recording, be sure to inquire about when it was recorded.
4. Please note that many cantors have the ability to sing in more than one style, but may not have a recording that showcases the total variety of their vocal talents.

D. Negotiations should take place with only one candidate at a time!

- All offers should be made in writing.
- If a candidate turns down your offer, ask him/her why. Share the reasons with your committee.
- In preparing a contract, the *Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships* will be helpful to you. You may download a copy from the ACC's website.



E. Postscript

1. Be sure to complete the search process survey that will be sent to you after your search is completed. It is tremendously useful to us to learn about how the process went for you and to hear of your overall suggestions for the process and for our candidates.