



TIPS FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES **Seeking Cantors for Full-Time/Limited Service Positions**

A. Preparation/Initial Set-Up

1. The first order of business is to ensure that all members of the search committee are familiar with their job description as members of the search committee, and with the contents of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission's Placement Procedures document. A sample Cantorial Search Committee Member Job Description is available on the ACC website at www.accantors.org.
2. Be sure your search committee reflects the diversity of your congregational community in terms of age, gender, and other key demographics.
3. Take attendance at meetings.
4. 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.
5. Stress confidentiality. This cannot be overemphasized.
6. Commit to using e-mail **only for non-confidential messages**.
7. Ask committee members to turn cell phones off during meetings, out of respect for one another and the importance of the group process.
8. 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.
9. Remember that every message, letter, phone call, and conversation -- whether between congregants or to candidates -- reflects on your congregation.
10. 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.
11. 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. However in general, it is a good idea to stay in contact with all candidates by calling/mailling them on a bi-weekly basis. The most common complaint we get from candidates is that they "feel as though they are left dangling" when weeks go by without any contact.
12. PLEASE FEEL FREE TO CONSULT ABOUT **INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES** WITH THE PLACEMENT DIRECTOR. SHE WILL BE ABLE TO DISCUSS WHAT MAKES A GOOD SHIDDUCH AND HOW TO ASCERTAIN THE POTENTIAL FOR ONE IN THE PARTICULAR CONTEXT OF **YOUR CONGREGATION'S SEARCH**.



13. It is always a good idea to maintain contact with your URJ regional director. He/She will often have insights into your particular congregation's dynamics regarding the search process.
14. It is a good idea to ask candidates for their input on the search process that your committee has defined. This shows mutuality and respect for them and for their input.
15. 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. We do **not** recommend speed interviewing for the purpose of screening cantorial candidates. It may conserve time for busy committee members, but it is unnecessarily stressful for candidates and may leave a skewed impression. We suggest that a more dignified format, albeit more time-consuming, is a traditional phone interview of approximately 45 minutes.
2. 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.
3. Steer clear of the really tough questions in a phone interview. If there is an issue or a concern regarding the candidate, address it first in a one-on-one phone conversation rather than in a group interview situation.
4. In a phone interview, address the topic of the candidate's personal time (time with family, time for study). Indicate that she/he can, in fact, expect to have free personal time for refreshment of spirit.
5. The goal of a phone interview is to see whether or not there is a potential for chemistry. Devise your questions accordingly.
6. Be creative. For example, ask the cantor about a favorite Bat/Bar Mitzvah student or to relate a favorite pulpit anecdote or to describe an ideal worship moment.
7. If you are going to use **SKYPE**, which is superior to the traditional phone interview, we recommend that you give your candidates ample notice. Most ACC members will not have webcam software and will need either to purchase or borrow it.
8. Give the candidate a clear idea about when he/she will be hearing back from you.
9. 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.
10. 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.



11. 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. The Interview/Audition

Guidelines for Interview Expense Sharing by Congregations

- If a cantorial candidate is approached about piggy-backing one interview trip to a searching congregation upon another, the candidate should refer the requesting search chair to the placement director to discuss the question. Likewise, if the candidate believes that two searching congregations might benefit from sharing travel expenses, the candidate should bring this to the attention of the placement director to pursue. The candidate should not respond directly to any search chair about a combined trip.
- The placement director will respond to the requesting search chair, or will initiate contact with a search chair suggested by the candidate, and put him/her in touch with the other congregation if appropriate.
- If both search chairs can coordinate the schedules, flights, costs, etc and can agree that both congregations' interests are being served and if the candidate agrees that the arrangement is in his/her best interests, the plan should be submitted to the placement director for approval.
- If the placement director approves of the plan, it may go forward.
- The responsibility to make good on any reimbursements lies with the search chairs.



- The candidate should not be involved in the process of collecting monies on behalf of either congregation. S/he should submit receipts for expenses as directed by both search chairs separately.
 - It is not a good idea for three or more congregations to coordinate interviews. It becomes too cumbersome and too onerous for the candidate.
1. Consult with the cantor and with temple staff before finalizing arrangements and meetings, meals and tours for the visit. Do not run your cantorial candidate ragged. Note: Hotels are always better than home hospitality, *heimish* as the latter may seem.
 2. When you schedule an on-site interview, allow plenty of downtime for the candidate before the audition.
 3. ***It is very important to arrange for a competent accompanist. An unskilled instrumentalist will put the cantor at a disadvantage and will distort the audition. Provide all candidates with the accompanist's phone number and mailing address so that conversations may take place and sheet music may be exchanged in advance of the audition.*** Schedule ample, pre-arranged rehearsal time with the accompanist.
 4. Provide water.
 5. Interviews should take place **AFTER** auditions!
 6. For the audition, ask the candidate to prepare representative pieces of music including but not limited to compositions from High Holidays, Shabbat, life-cycle, and children's music, but refrain from requesting too many specific composers. One mistake made by many well-intentioned congregations is to script the entire audition, listing specific texts by specific composers. This does not allow a cantor to demonstrate what is meaningful to her/him. **What the cantor chooses will also teach you about him or her.**
 7. An additional note: **Kol Nidrei is not an audition piece.** One cannot replicate the somber atmosphere of Erev Yom Kippur during an audition. If there is one audition no no, it is to ask a candidate to sing Kol Nidrei.
 8. Please consider giving a prospective candidate advance notice for classroom teaching, Torah chanting and the like. Details such as class size, age, and topic will be helpful for preparation.
 9. The single most important factor in job satisfaction for cantors is the rabbinic-cantorial relationship. Your committee needs to spend time devising a means of determining if a good, collegial relationship is possible. Details of a lengthy meeting between cantorial candidate and rabbi(s) should be mapped out in advance.
 10. Do not short-change the time the cantor spends with the educator and administrator. Getting a grasp of the congregation's educational programming is a primary goal for any candidate. The relationship between senior staff members and cantor is also of great importance.



11. When initiating that all-important discussion of worship style, be clear about how you define “congregational participation.” Your committee should have worked this through in advance of interviews, as that phrase can mean many different things to different people. Ask the cantor about her/his preferred definition.
12. Do not equivocate if your committee has concerns about a particular cantor. Express these, and challenge the resulting answer. A well-prepared candidate will not be thrown by this and should welcome the chance to respond.
13. Do not cover up any congregational problems you are experiencing. This will not shock the candidate. If you expect a cantor to be upfront with your committee, that cantor ought to be able to expect the same from you. Of course, you will also want to discuss how the problems are being addressed.
14. Be prepared to describe the current cantor, his voice, her skills, work style, etc. If there are issues with the current cantor, these should be addressed privately, at an appropriate time, between search chair and candidate. This procedure should be applied as well to the current rabbi, educator and administrator.
15. Don't leave out details of your congregation's social action program. All cantors will be interested in how your community expresses its Jewish values.
16. Do not hesitate to praise a candidate for whatever reason. She/he will not automatically assume that this signals a job offer is imminent. The cantor's reaction to praise will inform your process and will warm the atmosphere. In addition, if eventually rejected, the cantor can look back upon something positive from which to build.
17. It is your search chairperson's responsibility to ask each interviewee some version of this question: **Is there anything in your record which would give a congregational search committee pause when considering your candidacy?** As with any interview, the asking and answering of such questions – and manner in which the committee handles the candidate's response – should be done in accordance with national and local law, as well as Temple policy.
18. An expert on your area's attractions should be prepared to meet with the candidate so that he/she can begin to imagine a rewarding life-style in your community.
19. A committee member with a grasp of the budget should meet briefly with the cantor so as to discuss proposed salary, benefits, etc. This should in no way resemble a negotiation. Rather, it should be only an orientation to the congregation's pertinent budget lines.
20. Be clear about the search committee's timetable. Send the cantorial candidates home with some idea of when a decision will be made.
21. It is crucial to visit a cantor in his/her current pulpit. Although there will be differences between that congregation and yours, so much about a cantor can be learned by watching pulpit style, and interaction between cantor and rabbi and between cantor and congregation. These things are not apparent in an audition. If it is at all possible, send a delegation (at least three committee members, preferably not friends!) to see each finalist prior to making a final decision.



22. Ideally, when the search committee's recommendation comes to the Temple board, it should be a unanimous one. The members of the search committee may differ as much as they like during meetings, but once a decision is reached, each member should embrace it wholeheartedly. No one should leave the final committee meeting without the intention of getting 100% behind the new cantor.

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

24. All offers should be made in writing.

25. If a candidate turns down your offer, ask him/her why. Share the reasons with your committee.

26. 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. At a final meeting of your search committee/transition team, craft a paragraph or two summarizing the placement process. How did it work in your congregation? Were there glitches? Were these successfully repaired? Which aspects of the process went well? What suggestions would you make to the ACC's Placement Director? To cantorial candidates? To other search committees?
2. 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.
3. The URJ has materials designed to help congregations with many kinds of clergy transitions. Contact your URJ District Director in order to obtain these materials.
4. If you have questions about a farewell service for an outgoing cantor or about an installation service for your new cantor, your District Director will also have URJ materials to guide you in planning these important congregational milestones.
5. If you have questions about conferring emeritus status upon your retiring cantor, the *Guidelines for Cantorial Congregational Relationships* and the ACC's Code of Ethics will be helpful to you. Both are available for download on the ACC's website.