

# PLACEMENT PROCEDURES OF THE

## JOINT CANTORIAL PLACEMENT COMMISSION

As revised November 2023, with addendum added March 2024

### INTRODUCTION

This booklet, **Placement Procedures of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission**, is the Reform movement's official guide for Cantorial placement, governing both congregations seeking Cantors and Cantors seeking positions.

#### The Cantor

The Cantor, traditionally called the *Chazan*, is a member of the clergy. The Cantor participates in leading worship services and officiating at sacred life cycle events. The Cantor performs various other duties within the congregation, depending upon the size and character of the community and its needs. The Cantor also shares in the educational, programmatic, and pastoral work of the congregation, and performs other duties suitable to the size and character of the community, consistent with congregational custom and practice.

Selection of a Cantor by a congregation is a critical and sensitive task with far-reaching implications for the character, spirit, effectiveness, and success of a congregation, as well as for the career of the selected Cantor. It should involve participation of all constituencies of the congregational community and be conducted according to careful procedures and with mutual respect and courtesy for the Cantor and congregation.

# The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission

The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission (JCPC) is a national body whose members represent the American Conference of Cantors (ACC); the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR) and its Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music (DFSSM); and the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ). The JCPC establishes policies and procedures while overseeing the placement process for congregations. It has no adjudicative function after the placement process is completed, and it does not undertake to review or resolve disputes between congregations and their incumbent Cantors. (Any such conciliation or arbitration must be referred to the National Commission for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships, henceforth referred to as NCCCR.) Placement of Cantors in non-pulpit positions is not within the jurisdiction of the JCPC. From time to time, the JCPC may review and revise current placement procedures.

The jurisdiction of the JCPC extends to (1) URJ-affiliated congregations in good standing; (2) to non-URJ congregations affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism or the Federation of Reconstructionist Congregations and Havurot pursuant to their election to list with the JCPC and pay an appropriate fee; and (3) to other non-affiliated congregations for placement assistance, with the express written approval of the appropriate URJ Congregational Support Center.

## Constituent Members of the JCPC

The JCPC includes four representatives each from the American Conference of Cantors, the Union for Reform Judaism and the Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. In addition to these twelve representatives, there shall be a seat of chairperson, held by a member of the ACC, and a seat of vice-chairperson, held by a representative of the URJ. Ex-officio seats are held by the Director of Placement for the ACC and the DFSSM Director of Fieldwork; the President of the ACC; the President and the Chairman of the Board of the URJ, and the President of HUC-JIR or their representative, and the Director of the DFSSM. Cantors who are in placement are not permitted to be members of the JCPC, excepting those serving in an ex-officio capacity. Likewise, lay members of the JCPC may not serve if their congregations are currently in placement.

**ACC:** The American Conference of Cantors is the Reform movement's professional organization of Cantors. Its members are graduates of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music, as well as graduates of the Cantorial Certification Program of the DFSSM. Membership is also extended to qualified individuals who have passed a rigorous certification examination administered jointly by the DFSSM and the ACC. Membership may further be extended to Cantors who are graduates of the H. L. Miller Cantorial School of the Jewish Theological Seminary or other accredited and accepted cantorial seminaries, and who have met additional criteria established by the ACC. All aforementioned persons are Regular Members. The status of Regular Members begins on the date of ordination, certification, or, in the case of graduates of other seminaries, admittance to the ACC.

**HUC-JIR, DFSSM:** Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion is the seminary of the Reform movement. Its Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music trains students to become Cantors who will serve as clergy primarily in URJ congregations.

**URJ:** The Union for Reform Judaism provides services to and coordinates the work of its member Reform synagogues in North America, and in conjunction with the World Union for Progressive Judaism.

## Definitions of Other Terms:

**Associate Members:** Those members who fall into one of the following categories:

- a. Cantors who are graduates of seminaries recognized by the ACC (excepting HUC-JIR) who have taken and passed an entrance exam and a psychological test - but have yet to be voted into ACC Regular membership.
- b. Those who were granted Associate Member status prior to the year 2007.

**Student Cantors:** DFSSM students entering their second, third, fourth and fifth years of study are eligible to serve part-time in congregations while enrolled at HUC-JIR. Placement for students is facilitated through HUC-JIR. (See “Where to Apply.”)

**DFSSM Ordination Candidates:** DFSSM students in their final year of study at HUC- JIR seeking placement in positions that commence in the contractual year following their ordination are under the jurisdiction of the JCPC, and therefore subject to these placement procedures.

**ACC Director of Placement:** The person employed by the ACC who facilitates and oversees Cantorial placement activities, working cooperatively with congregations and Cantors.

## WHERE TO APPLY

1. For ACC Cantors (including DFSSM Ordination Candidates), congregations should apply *only* to the office of the **Joint Cantorial Placement Commission, 1375 Remington Road, Suite M, Schaumburg, IL 60173. Telephone: 847-781-7800; fax: 847-781-7801; email: [placement@accantors.org](mailto:placement@accantors.org).** Placement information can also be found on the ACC Website, at [http:// www.accantors.org](http://www.accantors.org).
2. For DFSSM Student Cantors, congregations should apply to the Director of Fieldwork, found online via <http://huc.edu/directory> or by telephone: (212) 824-2274. Placement activity at the DFSSM is for supervised internships from September to June, conducted through a matching process generally culminating in March of each year.

# ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDIDATES

## Regular Members:

All Regular Members are eligible to apply for pulpits in relation to congregational size, as described in the following criteria adopted by the JCPC:

Tier	Congregational Member Units	Minimum Years of Cantorial Experience
Tier One	Up to 699	Open to all Regular Members
Tier Two	700 plus	Open to all Regular Members of 3 or more years.

Note: For purposes of placement eligibility, the number of family units in a congregation is determined by the current online edition of the URJ Directory of Member Congregations at [www.urj.org](http://www.urj.org); click on the “Find a Congregation” icon.

## Congregations of Fewer than 401 Member Units

Congregations of fewer than 401 member units may engage a Regular Member, an Associate Member, or a Student Cantor, but may only apply in **one** category at a time. The *DFSSM Student Guidelines* as well as this *Cantorial Placement Procedures* booklet should be consulted in order to assist congregations in determining which category may best serve their needs.

## Congregations of 401 to 699 Member Units

On or about March 15 of each year (immediately prior to the opening of Student Cantor placement), congregations of 401 to 699 member units which have been unable to obtain the services of a Regular Member or DFSSM Ordination Candidate may request the permission of the JCPC to withdraw from regular placement in order to seek the services of a Student Cantor for a one-year interim period. A Student Cantor may serve

such a congregation for no more than one year, after which the congregation must reapply for a Regular Member for the following year.

## Associate Members

Congregations may interview Associate Members of the ACC only after all candidates in the two categories of Regular Members and DFSSM Ordination Candidates have been canvassed for their interest, and only if no qualified applicant is found. Associate Members are then eligible for placement under the following conditions:

1. Associate Members do not become eligible for placement until 60 days after the date of earliest eligibility that DFSSM Ordination and Certification candidates may enter the placement process. The current date of earliest eligibility for DFSSM Ordination and Certification candidates is on or about January 2, and thus for Associate Members on or about March 2.
2. Associate Members are eligible to serve only in congregations with Tier 1 placement status.

## Additional Categories

Dual Members of the American Conference of Cantors and the Cantors Assembly:

Members of both professional cantorial organizations are allowed to register and to conduct searches simultaneously through both associations.

Dual Members of the American Conference of Cantors and the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

Members of both professional organizations are allowed to register and to conduct searches simultaneously through both associations.

Dual Members of the American Conference of Cantors and the Association of Reform Jewish

Educators:

Members of both professional organizations are allowed to register and to conduct searches simultaneously through both associations.

## Interim Cantors:

Congregations may, in certain circumstances, find it advisable to engage an Interim Cantor for a brief period, generally up to one year. The Director of Placement can be of assistance in determining when this may be helpful. Those serving as Interim Cantors are expected to serve in this position no more than one year. This position is open to all tiers.

## Congregations with more than one Cantor:

Some congregations may wish to add an additional Cantor to their staff. The JCPC will list those positions as Associate Cantor, Assistant Cantor, reporting directly to the Senior Cantor, Chazzan Sheini or as Co-Cantor. These will be considered “Tier 1” level positions.

## Limited-service Cantors:

Congregations may seek to engage a Cantor solely to officiate at Shabbat and/or Holy Day worship services for a predetermined fee. Requests to include other limited duties in this category must have the approval of the Director of Placement and the JCPC. Cantors and congregations should refer to the document *Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships* for further details.

## High Holy Day positions:

What follows is a basic guideline for congregations that have hired Cantors to serve them over the High Holy Days and for Cantors who have committed to serve these congregational communities.

Usual and customary for High Holy Day worship commitments include:

- Rosh Hashanah Evening
- Rosh Hashanah Morning (one day)
- Erev Yom Kippur
- Yom Kippur (the entire day)

The fee schedule should be adjusted if the congregation would like the Cantor to participate in any of the following additional services: S'lichot, Shabbat Shuvah, Tashlich or a second day of Rosh Hashanah. The fee schedule should also be upgraded if the Cantor is expected to conduct services in the absence of another clergy person, or to deliver sermons or *Divrei Torah*.

The Cantor will work in conjunction with the Senior Clergy of the congregation in planning the appropriate liturgical and musical elements of the service. It is highly recommended that the High Holy Day orders of service be formulated no later than 30 days prior to the Cantor's first service. It is also recommended that the congregation utilize a trained organist/pianist to accompany the Cantor and that ample opportunity for rehearsal be provided.

Additionally, if a congregational or professional choir is to be participating in worship, ample time must be allotted for the Cantor to rehearse with them. There may be an additional fee for rehearsal time.

The American Conference of Cantors (ACC) will provide the Congregation with salary guidelines.

**An ACC Cantor shall be reimbursed for all reasonable expenses, including but not limited to:**

- Airfare and baggage fees
- Ground transportation to and from the pertinent airports
- Car Rental fees (if necessary)
- Mileage (according to IRS guidelines) covering all trips made in connection with High Holiday services
- Lodging
- Meals
- Music ordering, mailing, transcription, etc. (to be discussed/approved in advance)

The Cantor will send in all expense receipts according to the congregation's policy. The Cantor can expect to receive salary and reimbursement within 14 days of the final service performed by the Cantor.



# PLACEMENT PROCEDURES

## For the Cantor

Only Regular and Associate Members of the ACC in good standing, and DFSSM Ordination Candidates are eligible for placement. All placement candidates commit to seek placement for congregational positions only through the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission. Discussions regarding a change in position must be referred to the Placement Office.

## Application and Resumes

1. All applicants for placement shall provide the ACC Placement office with one electronic copy (by e-mail) of a complete and accurate professional resume as well as a placement application. The application covers the period of the placement season, generally August 1 through July 31 of the following year. If not placed by that time, the applicant is required to fill out a new application.
2. A Cantor seeking to be considered for an available position should inform the ACC Placement office (under the auspices of the JCPC). If eligible, the Cantor's professional resume will be sent to the congregation's Search Committee. Thereafter, the ACC Placement office must be kept apprised of the progress of the candidate's status with each congregation to which that candidate has applied. A Cantor may not contact a congregation directly until the Cantor's resume has been sent to that congregation, and the Cantor has agreed to seek and accept placement through the JCPC.
3. The JCPC list of congregations seeking Cantors is maintained on the ACC website. This area of the website is password protected and only accessible to ACC members. All members have access to the pulpit title, location, and complete pulpit description. The information contained on the Placement List is confidential.

**A Cantor under contract, whether oral or written, is ineligible to apply for any position that commences prior to the termination of that Cantor's contractual commitment, without the express written consent of the president of the Cantor's present congregation. Therefore, such consent is required on behalf of any Cantor entering placement before the beginning of the last year of their contract unless the Congregation has breached or manifested an intention to breach the contract. A copy of this consent must be sent to the JCPC.**

**However, if the clergy has an “at-will” contract or “termination without cause” language in their contract, there is no need to complete the permission form from your synagogue's president should the clergy choose to enter placement (see page 11). The relevant language from the clergy contract must be emailed to the Director of Placement before entering placement.**

## **Interviews and Contract for the Cantor and Congregation**

1. Once in receipt of candidates' resumes, congregations may request a first interview with any number of candidates, to be conducted either in person, by telephone or via other electronic media (e.g., Skype, Zoom, etc.). Candidates may accept any number of first interviews with congregations.
2. Congregations may request any number of subsequent interviews with any number of candidates. Candidates may attend any number of subsequent interviews with any number of congregations. Prior to attending any second in-person interview with a congregation, a candidate must inform the president of the congregation where that Cantor is presently employed, of each subsequent interview the candidate plans to attend. Congregations and candidates (including DFSSM Ordination Candidates) may negotiate the terms of prospective employment through any means of communication during and after the first interview described above.
3. All positions offered by a congregation must be in writing, signed by the president of the congregation, and delivered to the candidate. Each such offer should include a description of the candidate's

prospective duties, length of employment, compensation, benefits, and any date by which the candidate must accept the offer. Negotiations between the parties may continue as to the terms of employment while an offer of employment remains extant. The Director of Placement is available to both the Cantor and congregation to assist with any coordinating and facilitating the parties may find helpful during this period.

4. The candidate's acceptance of any offer must be in writing, and delivered to the congregation. The candidate must immediately inform the Director of Placement of any offer that is accepted. This accepted offer may be amplified through a more formal contract of employment. **Upon accepting an offer from a congregation, a candidate must immediately cease negotiations and interviews with all other congregations, and must immediately notify the Director of Placement that an offer has been accepted, identifying the congregation.**
5. Once a Cantor and Congregation have agreed to enter into a contractual agreement for a period of more than one year, it is strongly advised that both parties set the terms for all years of the contract. Setting salary and benefits for only one year and leaving the remaining years open to further discussion is insufficient and undermines the covenantal nature of the relationship between Cantor and Congregation. Therefore, when a multi- year contract is written, we recommend that all terms for all years of the agreement be determined and agreed upon at the outset.
6. It is important to note the covenantal nature of clergy contracts with congregations as stated on page 10 of the Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships. The contract between congregation and clergy therefore must emulate the highest values and holy nature of the work they do in partnership with each other. Therefore, it is important to note that "at-will" contracts and/or "termination without cause" language is inconsistent with the covenantal nature of the relationship between clergy and congregation. Such language as "at-will" or "termination without cause" will deem a contract as being no contract at all. Hence, the congregation or the clergy may enter placement at any time.
7. Upon a candidate's accepting employment with a congregation, the Director of Placement shall remove the congregation from the list of those congregations seeking candidates. The candidate and the

congregation shall each send to the Director of Placement under the auspices of the JCPC copies of the congregation's offer of employment, and the candidate's acceptance of employment.

8. The JCPC strongly suggests that the protocols and procedures of the National Commission on Cantorial-Congregational Relationships be incorporated within all contracts and/or letters of agreement.

## For the Congregation

Since its inception, the Placement Commission has formulated rules and regulations that lead to the fair and orderly process of placement between ACC members and URJ congregations. You will find the rules that the members of the ACC are pledged to uphold included in this booklet. The essence of the rules is the pledge that all Cantors of the ACC who are seeking full/part-time or limited service congregational positions will do so only through the Office of Placement and only in consultation with the Director of Placement. Those seeking placement for HHD positions are eligible to explore multiple listings (excluding DFSSM Student Placement). The URJ congregations make that same pledge.

## Credentials

Congregations should be aware that pulpit vacancies may attract applications from individuals of questionable character and credentials. Members of the American Conference of Cantors will discuss congregational placement only through the Office of Placement and only in consultation with the Director of Placement. Any application received directly from a Cantor, soloist, song leader, or anyone outside of the JCPC should be forwarded to the Director of Placement at the ACC office.

## The Search Committee

**The JCPC most strongly suggests that congregations intending to engage a Cantor first form a Cantorial Search Committee including representatives of its various constituencies, and, at its earliest stage, consider and evaluate, with the Senior Clergy and others as appropriate, the needs, expectations and criteria for selection of a Cantor. This will help to ensure that the search process is, as far as**

**possible, a deliberate and considered effort to meet those needs and criteria. Vocal and musical excellence, religious knowledge, spiritual and personal character, teaching abilities, and compatibility with other clergy are among the qualities the committee should consider. The Director of Placement stands ready to assist the congregation in helping to ensure a successful placement process.**

## Procedures and Timeline

### 1. Applications

- a. The congregation, once it has applied to the Placement Office, will download an application form from the ACC website requesting information that describes the congregation and its needs/requirements for a Cantor. The form should be completed and signed by the Cantorial Search Committee Chairperson(s), the congregational President, the Senior Clergy Person(s) of the congregation, and the Executive Director or Administrator of the congregation. This form should be sent electronically to the ACC office.
- b. Upon receipt and acceptance of the completed application, the Director of Placement of the ACC will post the application to the “Cantors Only” section of the ACC website.
- c. The Placement Department of the ACC will then provide to the congregation the professional resumes of eligible Cantors who express interest in the position.
- d. A congregation that has a special interest in an eligible Cantor who has not expressed previous interest in said congregation should make it known promptly to the Director of Placement. The Director of Placement will then make an initial contact to determine the Cantor’s interest.

### 2. Resumes

- a. A congregation may not contact a Cantor directly until it has received the Cantor’s professional resume and has pledged in writing to seek and accept placement through the JCPC.
- b. No person – including a Rabbi or other Senior Clergy of a congregation in placement – may contact anyone in the Cantor’s current congregation or community, nor communicate with any references listed without the express written permission of the Cantor in question.

### 3. The Sound and Video Files

- a. Many search committees request that the candidates send recordings for consideration. This step can be helpful in narrowing your search. It is suggested that you request a recording after a preliminary phone or web conference interview is conducted.
- b. A caution: recorded sound has its limitations. 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.
- c. 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 initial phone or web conference interviews.

### 4. Interviews

- a. When the congregation, through the Search Committee, narrows its focus to (a) particular candidate(s), arrangements may be made with each candidate for a delegation to visit that Cantor's current congregation. Such a visit would give the Search Committee an opportunity to see and hear the Cantor in relationship with congregants in the candidate's present congregation.
- b. To maintain the integrity of the placement process, we ask that interviewing candidates for a given pulpit not be made aware of the identity of other candidates for that same pulpit.

**Moreover, the need for confidentiality in the Cantor search process cannot be overstated.**

Thus, public concerts open to the whole congregation, as well as live streaming or recording of auditions and interviews for viewing by anyone other than the congregational Search Committee, members of the Board of Trustees, and the Professional Team, are not permitted.

- c. In keeping with the highest ideals of Reform Judaism, a congregation shall **not** request that an interviewing cantor engage in the business of the search process on Shabbat or Festivals. This includes leading worship, whether publicly for the congregation, or privately, for the Search Committee. Furthermore, Shabbat or Festival participation may compromise a candidate's confidentiality.

- d. If the congregational By-Laws require a vote of the entire congregation for confirmation of a new Cantor, the Cantor will have been fully vetted by the congregational Cantor Search Committee and the congregational Board of Trustees. In such cases, only one candidate is being presented to the congregation for approval, and the confidentiality of the candidate will have been waived in writing.
- e. Before making a decision, it is essential that the candidates meet with the Senior Clergy and other key members of the professional staff and lay leadership. Additionally, a candidate's spouse/partner may also be invited to visit the community. Although protocol may vary, all congregations are responsible for absorbing travel costs and arranging for hospitality for each invited Cantor, and, if applicable, that Cantor's spouse/partner.

#### 5. Contract for the Cantor and Congregation

Congregations are directed to refer back to the section entitled “For the Cantor, Interviews and Contract” (see page 10) for further information on interviews and offers of employment.

## IN CONCLUSION

It is the hope of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission that the Cantor and Congregation always honor the sacred nature of their relationship. Congregations and Cantors may want to refer to *Brit Kodesh-Sacred Partnership*, a joint publication of the URJ and Synagogue 2000. In addition, the JCPC suggests that, once a Cantor has been chosen, the congregation form a transition committee to help assure a smooth transition process. The JCPC also recommends that when a Cantor is succeeding a retiring Cantor, both familiarize themselves with the ACC Code of Ethics and the **NCCCR Guidelines** with regard to the relationship between the Cantor and Cantor Emeritus.

Once again, the Placement Director and the JCPC are ready to assist in this period of transition.

May the work of your Search Committee be successful, thus strengthening your congregation, the Cantorate, the Reform Movement and the greater Jewish community.

# Addendum pertaining to Low-Residency Limited-Service

## Cantorial Positions - March 2024

In response to a rising need articulated both by congregations and by cantors for low-residency limited-service cantorial positions, the JCPC will pilot a placement category for such positions for the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 placement seasons. Low-Residency Limited-Service positions will be listed alongside High Holy Day positions on the ACC Placement list.

### Low-residency Limited-service Positions:

Congregations 400 member units and fewer may seek a cantor on a **very limited basis of not more than 20 hours per month** for a low-residency limited-service position. Congregations larger than 401 member units may seek to participate through a variance granted by the JCPC. These positions can be defined by total number of visits per year or by monthly frequency (i.e. 14 times per year or once or twice per month) and may or may not include the High Holy Days. If the pulpit does include the High Holy Days, please refer to the section on High Holy Days for guidelines. If the cantor does not live within the community of the congregation, all reasonable travel expenses must be reimbursed to the cantor. Duties, schedule, remuneration, and benefits should be determined and formalized through a letter of agreement.

An ACC Cantor shall be reimbursed for all reasonable expenses, including but not limited to:

- Airfare and baggage fees
- Ground transportation to and from the pertinent airports
- Car Rental fees (if necessary)
- Mileage (according to IRS guidelines) covering all trips made in connection with High Holiday services
- Lodging
- Meals
- Music ordering, mailing, transcription, etc. (to be discussed/approved in advance)

Low-Residency Limited-Service pulpits will be treated like High Holy Day pulpits in regards to the placement exclusivity requirement described in this document. Both cantors and congregations may seek sacred partnerships through JCPC placement and by other means. Cantors in Full time/Limited Service JCPC



placement may also apply to Low-Residency Limited-Service and High Holy Day pulpits while officially in placement, though they may not pursue congregational pulpit relationships outside of placement. Additionally, we recommend that Low-Residency Limited-Service Relationships be initiated on a one-year term, the scope of duties, and remuneration outlined in a Letter of Intent that both parties sign. After an initial year of relationship, the congregation and cantor can decide to renew for an additional number of years or move on to form new sacred partnerships.