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# A SEASON OF TRANSITION

## A Guide to *Congregations* for Placement with the **Cantors Assembly**

### GUIDELINES FOR PLACEMENT

Welcome to the Cantors Assembly Placement process. We hope to service you and your congregation's needs successfully. Know that we are only a phone call or an email away at any time to address your questions and/or concerns throughout this important time for your congregation (a complete list of contact information may be found at the end of this document).

On the following pages you will find some guidelines to help you through the Cantorial Placement process. Please note that the Placement season generally runs from November to June. Finding a Hazzan to fill your job description and the spiritual needs of your congregation can usually be accomplished within this time frame.

### Transition

The transition to a new clergy person is an opportunity for a synagogue to take a look at itself, assess its needs, and create a vision for its future. We encourage you to form focus groups within your congregation to understand the direction in which you are growing. Be sure to enable the congregation to say good-bye to the Hazzan who is leaving. It is important for people to be able to channel their emotions through a Shabbat service, an open house or other celebratory event, which will allow the community to express itself and come to some sense of closure. One needs to say farewell before welcoming a new person.

### Committee Setup

The chair of the Cantorial Search Committee needs to be organized, respected, and personally committed to Conservative Judaism. The individuals on the committee generally represent varying viewpoints in the synagogue, but do not need to represent all positions, though it is good to be open to different opinions. The professional staff of the synagogue is not included on Search Committees, but they are included in the search process at the appropriate time.

The size of the committee should be limited; smaller groups work more efficiently. At the same time, it is important to be inclusive of the different arms of the synagogue. Somewhere between 7-10 members may be optimal.

It is important to get to know each other as a committee before the search process starts, and to set ground rules for the meetings. How often will the committee meet? What happens if someone misses an interview with a candidate? How will decisions be made? How will the committee keep track of the information gathered on the different candidates?

It often takes more time and energy to go through this process than one expects, and the parameters need to be set in place at the beginning so one knows what to do as different circumstances arise and the process continues.

It is good to have someone on the committee appointed to be a correspondent with the candidates. This person can also serve as a contact person with our Director of Placement. **Keep us informed of your process and also keep candidates updated as to their status.**

### Application Notes

We encourage you to take your time and be accurate in filling out the Congregational Questionnaire. It is the document that gives a picture of your community as a whole, as well as your synagogue. It is not only informational but also an opportunity for you to be reflective. Make sure you are representing your synagogue as it stands today – not only in the figures listed on the page, but in the sentiments expressed regarding your mission, goals, and spiritual needs.

When filling out the Congregational Questionnaire, please note that there is a difference between a job description and the section that asks you to delineate “the three most important priorities of our Hazzan.” The answer to the former is generally a list of duties, such as: preparing B’nei Mitzvah students, presenting musical programs, and visiting the sick. The answer to the latter is often more general and topical, such as: assist in a redesign of worship services or develop a more extensive B’nei Mitzvah program.

### Budget

You will need to set aside money to pay for travel expenses for your candidates to visit your community. Another option is to have someone donate miles to pay for air fare. With your final choice there will most likely will be a second visit. When possible, hotel accommodations are preferable to home hospitality. Your candidate will appreciate some privacy during this stressful time.

### The Process

After we receive your application and an accompanying job description, a descriptive summary of the position is added to the CA website and sent to our member candidates seeking placement. You can write that description if you desire; a sample follows:

Stamburg, VT  
Beth Israel is an egalitarian congregation of about 450 families. Ploni has been the Hazzan for 8 years. Ploni Almoni has been the Rabbi for 15 years. The Hazzan officiates at services and life cycle events. The Hazzan will be asked to attend minyanim on Monday, Thursday, and Sunday mornings, as well as train Torah readers for a triennial reading. The Hazzan will be expected to coordinate the B'Nai Mitzvah program. S/he will participate in the religious school program by implementing a music curriculum, teaching trope and congregational melodies, and serving as a resource for various educational programs at the synagogue.

Based on that description and the information included in your Congregational Questionnaire, a Cantor may request his/her resume be sent to you. Once it has been sent from the placement office, we recommend that you contact the Cantor to acknowledge receipt of the resumé and inform him/her of your timeframe. You can confirm to whom a candidate should send recordings containing a samples of his/her voice, davening, and vocal styles, as well as any additional supporting materials.

Based on the information from these sources, you can then schedule a first interview. This is most often a telephone or video-conferenc interview. Schedule the phone call or virtual meeting at a mutually convenient time for both your committee and the candidate. It is not appropriate for the committee to call a candidate and interview him/her without any warning. During the meeting, your committee can be present in its entirety, but have one or two people do the talking for the committee. Allow for questions on the part of the candidate as well, and have your questions prepared ahead of time.

If you have eliminated a candidate from further consideration, it is important to inform the candidate of your decision in a timely way. No one should be left wondering how s/he stands in your process of consideration. If you're not sure yet, it is appropriate to tell candidates, "We hope to be able to let you know your status by...*December 15.*"

After you have decided on the top two or three candidates, it is time to bring them to the congregation for a visit, perhaps over a Shabbat. If that is not possible, make sure that the visit for each candidate is consistent. Assuming your visit is over Shabbat, host the candidate and his/her spouse, remembering to consider issues of Kashrut and travel on Shabbat.

If they have young children traveling with them, provide babysitters at appropriate times. If their children are older, try to find age-compatible activities and social partners.

Programming for the weekend includes: Meetings with professional and lay leadership and opportunities to see the candidate "in action" through teaching, speaking, leading davening, interacting, etc. Bear in mind that the candidate and his/her family will also want to get a feel for the community by visiting schools, the JCC, and understanding real estate options.

They will also be interested in locations of grocery stores, drug stores, and kosher food options.. Some of the larger questions they might be asking themselves include: What will my quality of life be in this community? Will my children be comfortable here? What is available culturally? What are the commuting times to cemeteries, hospitals, etc.?

### **A weekend schedule may look like this**

1. If possible – arrival on Thursday to allow enough time to program many opportunities to get acquainted with the candidate.
2. Friday morning – see schools while in session; meet with appropriate professionals in those areas, if applicable. Trip to the synagogue to see the facility; review the particulars of the service with the Rabbi, if they haven't been addressed already (choreography, special customs, etc.).
3. Time to meet with other synagogue professionals – Educational Director, Executive Director, Ritual Director, Youth Director – anyone the Hazzan might work with on a regular basis.
4. Don't forget to feed the candidate and his/her family!
5. Some relaxation time should be included in the afternoon.
6. Shabbat dinner at a home with the Rabbi, synagogue officer or board member.
7. Shul (or reverse this order if appropriate, if you have services first, then dinner).

8. Shabbat morning – services.
9. Lunch – one option is to have a congregational lunch to allow members to approach the candidate and get to know him/her and the family.
10. Another option – lunch at someone's home with a smaller group, perhaps including children of a similar age bracket, if applicable.
11. Shabbat afternoon – relaxation time.
12. Mincha/Ma'ariv at shul.
13. Saturday night: an adult get-together at someone's home, or a dinner out with a few people, depending on how late Shabbat concludes.
14. Sunday morning: Minyan.
15. Meeting with the Search Committee.
16. Perhaps teaching in Hebrew school.
17. The spouse may be driven around further in the community and/or an activity may be planned for the spouse and any accompanying family.

### **Evaluation**

It is useful to have a standardized method of evaluating each candidate. For example, you might develop a form that has spaces delineating your priorities for the type of Hazzan you are seeking. Include the synagogue professionals at this stage. They need to have a voice in how they think they would work in partnership with the individual.

### Communication

Communication with the candidates is crucial. Please send a confirmation email/letter that you have received the resumé and will be in contact with them within a certain amount of time. If a candidate has sent recordings and/or materials to you, please confirm that they have been received. It is helpful to inform the candidates of your timeline for decision-making.

Remember to remain in contact with the Cantors Assembly, through the Director of Placement and/or the Placement Coordinator. By staying in touch with us, we will know whether you are in need of further attention from us. After you have formally offered the position to a candidate and are in negotiations, please inform the placement office and the Director.

Also remember to communicate with your congregation. Be sure to effectively publicize that a candidate for the Cantorial position at your synagogue is visiting. Make announcements from the Bima, send a special email and/or announcement to the members of your community, send flyers home with the religious school students, and/or post to your website and social media, send a special email. If there is enough lead-time, put information in the synagogue's newsletter. You want the congregation to be a part of the process as well.

### From the Cantor's Perspective

Bear in mind that the Hazzanim you are considering have a variety of details to take care of from their end, especially if there are children involved in the move to your community. They could be readying their house for sale and will need to be informed on the available real estate in your area. Find an agent to show them housing options while they are visiting. See if you can make an arrangement with the JCC to see about holding spaces for the Cantor's children in the summer camp or other programs.

Help the Cantor with information on school registration, a tour of the Day School(s) in the area and a meeting with potential teachers. Hold spaces for his/her child(ren) at the Day School even if you are not sure you will need them. You do not want your new Cantor dissatisfied at the start of his/her tenure if there is no room at the school due to the length of the search process (which could run beyond the time for school registration).

Remember that a Hazzan is interviewing you and the community as much as you are interviewing her/him. Allow time for reflection and digestion of the information s/he is taking in. Allow time for her/his questions during the interview process. When you invite a candidate for a Shabbat visit, forward information and/or links about the city/community to the candidate.

### Negotiations

From *Aseih Lecha Rav*, by Rabbi Elliot Salo Schoenberg, p. 34-36:

The Board should give the Search Committee the authority to agree on compensation and benefits with the Hazzan. The group negotiating with the Hazzan should be empowered by the full authority of the Board, so that, what they agree to with the Hazzan, will reflect both the commitment and the consensus of the Board. It has been our experience that when compensation and benefits discussion is left to a different group other than the Search Committee, disagreement about expectations and policy sometimes ensues. It is unethical for the Board or the Hazzan unilaterally to reopen the process of negotiating or change financial arrangements after the committee and the Hazzan have reached an agreement.

The Board should give the Search Committee instructions, including parameters for the negotiations. It is best if two or three people, not a single individual, negotiate with the Hazzan. Negotiations should conclude in less than a month. The goal should be a negotiation that is done fairly, in a timely fashion, with

clear guidelines, and with hope for the joint future of the Hazzan and congregation.

It is common for Hazzanim, like other professionals, to seek counsel of both an accountant and an attorney to assist in negotiations. In a recently completed survey of rabbis who sought new pulpits, when asked, “What was the most difficult part of the process?” the overwhelming response was “negotiating.” As a result, it is becoming more commonplace for some rabbis and Cantors to ask a third party, most often an attorney, to represent them in negotiation.

Hazzanim represented by counsel are able to focus on the spiritual relationship so strongly desired by both congregation and Hazzan. Both congregation and Hazzan should be careful not to take personally any decisions about finances.

#### **Once a Hazzan is in Place – Transition**

Once you hire a new Hazzan, the Search Committee may become the Transition Committee. Aid your new Hazzan in the process of getting to know your city/community and the culture of your community and synagogue. Make him/her feel welcome. Have a welcoming Shabbat, write an article for your local Jewish paper--it is valuable public relations for your synagogue as well.

Consider how there will be a transfer of duties from your previous Hazzan to your current one. Communicate the customs of your synagogue to the new Hazzan – what are the office procedures? What are the spoken and unspoken rules? How are supplies ordered? Who is the computer maven? When are staff meetings?

Other ideas: supply a list of the places your Hazzan will need to go frequently such as area hospitals, funeral chapels, cemeteries, and the Jewish agencies – JCC, Federation, other synagogues in the area to meet colleagues.

If the Cantor has children, furnish a list of age-appropriate activities – zoos, parks, movie theaters, malls, libraries, etc. Provide him/her with a subscription to the local Jewish newspaper.

Help the new Hazzan to integrate quickly into your community and to make new friends.

#### **Installation**

This is an important time of transition in the life of your synagogue. Just as we mark transitions in our personal lives through ceremonies – naming and brit, Bar/Bat Mitzvah, wedding, etc. – it is useful for a community to channel its emotions into an installation ceremony to mark this new beginning. Our Director of Placement can assist you in planning such an event. An installation is usually held sometime during the first year of a Hazzan’s tenure.

#### **Sample Placement Timetable**

1. Form Committee, Prepare Application, and Consult Focus Groups: **September-November**
2. Resumés Arrive for Review: **November-February**
3. Telephone/Video-conference Interview: **December-February**
4. Candidates Brought in for Interviews: **February/March**
5. Final Candidate Interview: **March/April**
6. Decision/Offer: **April**
7. Negotiation/Closure: **May**
8. Start: **July/August**
9. Installation: **Within the first year**

## **CANTORS ASSEMBLY PLACEMENT OFFICE CONTACT INFORMATION**

Cantors Assembly Placement Office  
55 South Miller Road  
Suite 201  
Fairlawn OH 44333-4168

### Placement Coordinator: Crystle Martin

Phone: 330.864.8533 x201

Email: [crystlemartin@cantors.org](mailto:crystlemartin@cantors.org)

Hours: M, T, W, TH -10:00 am to 4:30 pm ET  
F 10am – 3pm ET

### Director of Placement, Hazzan Jeremy Lipton

Phone: 330.864.4168 x204

Email: [jeremylipton@cantors.org](mailto:jeremylipton@cantors.org)

Hours: M-F, 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM ET