
A SEASON OF TRANSITION

The **Cantors Assembly** Placement Guide for *Congregations*

GUIDELINES FOR PLACEMENT

Welcome to the Cantors Assembly placement process! We hope to support you and your congregation's needs successfully. Please 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 placement process. Please note that our year-round placement season generally runs from November through June, while High Holy Day placement begins on February 1 and continues until the end of *Yamim Noraim*. Finding a Hazzan to fill your job description and the spiritual needs of your congregation can usually be accomplished within these time frames.

Transition

The transition to a new clergy person is an opportunity for a synagogue to look inward, 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 and evolving. If applicable, 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 members of the community to express themselves and achieve some sense of closure. One needs to say farewell before welcoming a new person.

Committee Setup

The Chair of the Search Committee should be organized, respected, and personally committed to the religious and ritual tenants of the congregation. 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 members of the synagogue's professional staff are generally not included on search committees, but should be 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 and facets of the synagogue. We suggest that 7-10 members may be the optimal number of committee members.

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 relating to 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. **Please make it a priority to 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 to be accurate in completing the online Congregational Questionnaire. It will serve as the document that gives others an overview of your community, as well as of your synagogue. It is not only informational but also an opportunity for you to be reflective. Please make sure that you are representing your *shul* as it stands today – not only in the data you choose to share, but also 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 create a budget line to pay for all travel-related expenses when you invite select candidates to visit your community. Some offset these expenses by using donated airline

miles or points to pay for travel. With your final candidate choices there will most likely be a second visit. When possible, hotel accommodations are preferable to offering home hospitality. Your candidates will appreciate some privacy during this stressful time.

The Process

After we receive your completed Congregational Questionnaire and optional job description, a short descriptive summary of your position will be added to the CA placement website, in addition to being sent to our active member candidates. If you desire, you may write that description; a sample follows:

Stamburg, VT
Beth Israel is an egalitarian congregation of ~450 member units. Ploni has been the Rabbi for 8 years; Ploni Almoni has served as the Hazzan for 15 years. In addition to regular *Bima* responsibilities, the Hazzan will be asked to participate in *minyanim* on Monday, Thursday, and Sunday mornings, as well as prepare a cadre of *Torah* readers (Triennial cycle). In addition to coordinating our B'Nei Mitzvah program (12-15 students per year), the Hazzan will participate in the Religious School program by implementing a music curriculum, teaching trope and congregational melodies, and serving as a resource for the other educational arms of the *shul*.

Based on this brief description, as well as the extensive information included in your Congregational Questionnaire, a Hazzan may request that their resumé be sent to you. Once you receive it from our placement office, we recommend that you contact the Hazzan to acknowledge receipt of their resumé, and to inform them of your timeframe. You should also confirm to whom they should send any additional supporting materials, and/or audio or video samples of their interactive experiences, voice, davening, and/or vocal styles.

Based on the information from these sources, you might then schedule a first interview. This is most often a video conference or telephone interview. Please schedule this 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 expect to interview them without any warning. During the meeting, your committee might be present in its entirety, but we suggest that one or two people are designated to speak on behalf of the committee. Be sure to have your questions prepared in advance, and allow adequate time and opportunity for questions from the candidate.

If you have eliminated a candidate from further consideration, it is important to inform them of your decision in a timely way. No one should be left wondering how they stand in your process of consideration. If you are unsure of a candidate's viability, it would still be appropriate to inform them (e.g., "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 each of them to the congregation for a visit, perhaps over a *Shabbat* weekend. If that is not possible, please make sure that the visit for each candidate is consistent. Assuming the visit is over a *Shabbat*, host the candidate and their spouse, remembering to consider issues of *Shabbat* observance and *Kashrut*.

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 should include 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 their 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 their 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 them and their 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 the Religious School.
17. The candidate and/or spouse may be driven around further in the community, and/or activities 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. Be sure to include your 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 candidates is crucial. Please send a confirmation email 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 other supporting 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 need further attention from us. After you have formally offered the position to a candidate and are in negotiations, please inform the Placement Coordinator and the Director of Placement.

Also remember to communicate with your congregation. Be sure to effectively publicize that a candidate for the Cantorial position at your synagogue will be visiting. Make announcements from the *Bima*, send special emails and/or announcements to the members of your community, communicate through your Religious School students, and/or post to your website and to social media. If there is enough lead-time, put information in the synagogue's newsletter. You will surely want the congregation to be a part of the process.

From the Cantor's Perspective

Please keep in mind that the Hazzanim you are considering have a variety of details to arrange on their end, especially if there are children involved in a potential 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 arrange with the JCC about potentially 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 their 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 their 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).

Please remember that a Hazzan is interviewing you and the community just as much as you are interviewing them. Allow time for reflection and digestion of the information they are taking in. Allow time for their questions during the interview process. Before you invite a candidate for a *Shabbat* visit, send additional 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 the counsel of both an accountant and an attorney to assist in negotiations. In a recently completed survey of clergy 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 clergy to ask a third party, most often an attorney, to represent them in negotiations.

Hazzanim represented by counsel are able to focus on the spiritual relationship so strongly desired by both the congregation and the Hazzan. Both the congregation and the 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 them 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, etc.) and/or 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 them 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 ritual and ceremony – 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 Search Committee, prepare Congregational Questionnaire, consult focus groups: **September-November**
2. Resumés arrive for review: **November-February**
3. Video conference/telephone interviews: **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 Website:

<https://www.cantors.org>

Cantors Assembly Placement Website:

<https://cantorsassemblyplacement.com>

Cantors Assembly Placement Office

55 South Miller Road, Suite 201

Fairlawn OH 44333-4168

Placement Coordinator: Crystle Martin

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F 10:00 AM - 3:00 PM ET

Director of Placement: Rabbi Hazzan Jeremy Lipton

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