

A Handbook of Placement Procedures of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission

For Congregational Search Committees and Cantors In Search

Revised October 2026

Joint Cantorial Placement Commission
of the
American Conference of Cantors
Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion
Union for Reform Judaism

1375 Remington Road, Suite M, Schaumburg, IL 60173

847-781-7800

placement@accantors.org

www.accantors.org

Cantor Mary Rebecca Thomas

Director of Placement

Schedule a conversation: <https://calendly.com/accantorplacement>

847-278-7407 | mthomas@accantors.org

Introduction

[The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission](#)

[American Conference of Cantors Staff and Lay Leadership](#)

[The ACC Cantor](#)

[The Search Committee](#)

[Placement Procedures for Congregations and Cantors Seeking Full-Time or Limited-Service Cantors](#)

[Key Dates for Placement](#)

[The Placement Application](#)

[JCPC Policies Related to the Application and the Start of Your Search](#)

[Exclusivity](#)

[Base Compensation](#)

[Family Leave](#)

[Implicit Bias Training](#)

[Tier System](#)

[HUC-JIR DFSSM Student Cantors](#)

[Distinct Positions and Roles](#)

[Cantor and Senior Cantor](#)

[Congregations with more than one cantor](#)

[Sole Clergy](#)

[Limited-service Cantor](#)

[Interim Cantors](#)

[Resumes and Vision Statements](#)

[Confidentiality, References, and Public Performances](#)

[References](#)

[Public Performances](#)

[The Interview Process](#)

[Portfolio Materials: Musical and Non-Musical](#)

[In-Person Interviews](#)

[Extending an Offer](#)

[Contracts](#)

[Placement Process for Students in the HUC-JIR Ordination Class](#)

[Additional Information for Cantors Seeking Full-Time or Limited-Service Positions](#)

[Placement Eligibility and Key Dates](#)

[Search Exclusivity](#)

[Confidentiality and Ethical Behavior](#)

[Contractual Eligibility for Placement as defined by the JCPC](#)

[Members of Other Professional Organizations](#)

[Accepting an Offer](#)

[High Holy Day Positions](#)

[Low-Residency Limited-Service Cantorial Positions](#)

[Conclusion](#)

Introduction

The Joint Cantorial Placement Commission's Handbook of Placement Procedures serves as a guide for congregations and cantors, outlining the policies and procedures required by the JCPC for congregations and cantors engaged in placement. The policies and procedures captured in this document have evolved over a period of years and reflect the cumulative experience of congregations, cantors, ACC staff, and our partners from the URJ, HUC-JIR, and the CCAR. As such, this document is edited annually and we welcome ongoing feedback to help our process improve.

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. The JCPC, representing the Reform Movement, thus has the responsibility to formulate policies and procedures to ensure the orderly placement of cantors in URJ congregations. These policies are intended to provide order to the process and to ensure fairness and dignity to cantors and congregations in search. ACC members in placement and that URJ congregations in search are pledged to uphold the policies included in this document.

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, 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.

American Conference of Cantors Staff and Lay Leadership

The administration of the Handbook of Placement Procedures is managed by ACC Director of Placement, Cantor Mary Rebecca Thomas. Cantor Thomas works with both cantors and

congregations in placement, and has the responsibility to uphold the rules of the Joint Cantorial Placement Commission as well as to make recommendations to the JCPC regarding placement issues. Cantor Thomas works in close collaboration with Cantor Erin Frankel (Director of Member Services), Rachel Roth (CEO), and Cantor Rebecca Moses (ACC Vice President), as well as the Placement Advisory Group (PAG).

The ACC Cantor

An ACC Cantor is a clergy member whose life is shaped by a deep relationship with God, Torah, and the people of Israel, and who is called to lead the congregation in music and prayer as a devoted cultivator of spiritual life.

As a spiritual leader, the cantor attends sensitively to the joys and challenges of communal life, offering pastoral care, teaching sacred music and Jewish texts, and guiding learners of every age. The cantor may serve as visionary sole liturgical leader, or as a collaborative partner among clergy, always committed to nurturing prayer, strengthening Jewish identity, and sustaining the congregation's spiritual and educational growth.

Cantorial ordination is granted upon the completion of an undergraduate degree in a university followed by graduate study in the cantorial program of Hebrew Union College's Debbie Friedman School of Sacred Music. Graduates of the DFSSM become **Regular Members** of the ACC upon ordination. Cantors who are ordained by other programs that the ACC and the URJ have identified as accredited seminaries which achieve the appropriate expectation of study, content, and experience are eligible for membership in the ACC. These individuals will be ACC **Associate Members** for the first two years of their membership. After such time, they will become Regular Members. These seminaries are: Abraham Geiger College; Academy for Jewish Religion, California; Academy for Jewish Religion; Hebrew College, Boston; Jewish Theological Seminary, Miller School; RRC & Gratz College - Masters in Jewish Music; and The Seminario Rabínico Latinoamericano.

The Search Committee

The board of trustees of a searching congregation delegates the responsibility of cantorial search to a special committee of the congregation. The search committee has the responsibility and the mission to establish and uphold the policies in this handbook, as well as those articulated on the first page of the placement application, and to define the procedures that will enable the committee to recommend to the board and the congregation the candidate that will be their next cantor. Since the search committee has this delegated responsibility, it is crucial that the search committee's membership represent a cross section of the congregation's membership. This includes making sure that there is representation from marginalized communities, various cohorts that comprise the synagogue as a whole, and key constituencies with whom the cantor will work. The size of the committee will vary from congregation to congregation.

The search committee must maintain confidentiality with regard to the names of the candidates while also advancing transparency by putting into place procedures to inform the congregation of its progress during the search.

The Senior Rabbi of the congregation, or Senior Cantor when hiring an additional cantor, typically serves on the search committee. Additional congregational clergy and professional staff should have ample opportunities to meet with candidates, particularly during in-person visits, and to share feedback regarding candidates with the committee. The Senior Clergy or the Search Chair may be the primary contact to the Director of Placement.

Placement Procedures for Congregations and Cantors Seeking Full-Time or Limited-Service Cantors

Key Dates for Placement

The vast majority of clergy contracts in the Reform Movement commence on July 1. Accordingly, the placement process aligns to enable congregations and cantors to transition to new positions during the summer. As such, congregations may begin posting positions the first business day of August each year for positions starting the following July. **This year, the earliest date a congregation will have been able to post was Monday, August 3, 2026 for a position beginning July 1, 2027.**

There are times when a position may begin on another date, which will be noted on the application and the JCPC Placement list. As most searches are geared toward having the cantor begin on July 1, most offers tend to be extended between November and February each year.

Congregations should be aware that there are three different dates when ACC Members can officially enter the placement process. The earliest date for ACC Regular Members to enter placement was also the first business day of August, this year **Monday, August 3, 2026**. The Ordination Class of HUC-JIR, DFSSM will enter placement on **Monday, December 7, 2026**. Finally, ACC Associate Members may enter placement on **Friday, January 15, 2027**.

Additionally, the ACC in coordination with the CCAR requires a **hold on remote and in-person interviews from December 23, 2026 - January 3, 2027**. Communication regarding scheduling interviews may occur during this period with the understanding that response times may be delayed due to travel and family time. No interviews can occur during this timeframe.

With this information in mind, we encourage search committees to create a schedule of meetings for their process and to hold time on the synagogue calendar for potential in person interviews.

The Placement Application

Congregations should begin their search by exploring the [placement resources available on the ACC Website](#). This is where congregations can download the most up to date version of the placement application, along with other resources like these guidelines, sample job descriptions, and salary information. The application is designed to provide as much information as possible to the searching cantor regarding the searching community, its history, the existing staff of the congregation, and the compensation and benefits being offered. The completed placement application should be returned to the Placement Office as soon as possible. The application will then be posted on the ACC website in an area accessible only to members.

Additionally, congregations may choose to post their future listing as “Coming Soon” prior to the opening of the placement season or the completion of their application as early as the late spring of the previous year.

JCPC Policies Related to the Application and the Start of Your Search

Exclusivity

Congregations in placement for Full-Time or Limited-Service Cantors agree to search exclusively through the ACC and in accordance with these policies and procedures during the time they are in Placement. Congregations should be aware that pulpit vacancies may attract applications from individuals outside of the placement process. Members of the ACC will discuss congregational placement only through the official placement process and only in consultation with the Director of Placement. Congregations in ACC placement may not consider any applications received directly from an individual outside the placement process. Similarly, ACC members in placement for Full-time or Limited-Service pulpits pledge to only seek pulpit positions through the ACC process while in placement.

There may be circumstances when it is appropriate for a congregation to withdraw from ACC Placement to interview candidates from outside of the ACC. The decision to withdraw should be made in consultation with the Director of Placement. A congregation can withdraw from ACC placement only after all open ACC member applications have been closed.

Base Compensation

The JCPC, in alignment with the Rabbinic Placement Commission, requires that congregations provide a range for proposed base compensation in their application. We articulate this requirement after extensive study validating that publishing salary ranges ensures more successful cantorial searches and narrows the gender pay gap. A congregation’s application is not considered complete and will not be posted without a stated salary range.

Family Leave

Paid family and medical leave is more than a benefit in contracting, “but should rather be a fundamental worker’s right, a fundamental human right, and a fundamental obligation of any community.” (CCAR Resolution, 2021). As such, the JCPC requires the congregation in search to describe any existing family and medical leave policy on the application. The gold standard of family leave in the Reform movement is [defined by the Women’s Rabbinic Network here](#).

Implicit Bias Training

The JCPC, in alignment with the Rabbinic Placement Commission, and in partnership with the URJ, requires that all search committee members participate in implicit bias training and congregational board members are encouraged to attend. Training is provided by the URJ Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion team for congregations in clergy search. These webinars are offered throughout the year and [more information can be found here](#).

Tier System

Congregations in placement are divided into two tiers based on the number of congregational member units. The tier system is based on the understanding that there is a connection between a Cantor's experience and successful placements. Cantors are eligible to apply to congregations based on years of experience in the field and their status as a Regular or Associate Member. Assistant, Associate, and Interim Positions in congregations of any size will be listed in Tier One. A Tier Two congregation that is unsuccessful in search, having interviewed all available eligible candidates, may request to interview candidates from Tier One by way of a variance from the JCPC.

Tier	Congregational Member Units	Eligibility Criteria
Tier One	Up to 699	• Open to all Regular Members • Open to Associate Members on January 15th
Tier Two	700 or more	• Open to all Regular Members of 3 or more years • Open to previously Associate Members who have served a minimum of 2 years as cantor at a URJ congregation, and have been a Regular Member of the ACC for at least one year.

HUC-JIR DFSSM Student Cantors

Congregations of fewer than 401 member units may engage an ACC Cantor or a DFSSM Student Cantor, but may not pursue JCPC Placement and DFSSM Student Placement simultaneously. The Director of ACC Placement and the Coordinator of Fieldwork for the DFSSM should be consulted to determine the appropriate timing to enter or exit either placement process.

Congregations of 401 to 699 member units which have been unable to obtain the services of an ACC Member 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 or Associate Member for the following year.

Distinct Positions and Roles

Cantor and Senior Cantor

As a spiritual leader, the cantor attends sensitively to the joys and challenges of communal life, offering pastoral care, teaching sacred music and Jewish texts, and guiding learners of every age. The cantor may serve as visionary sole liturgical leader, or as a collaborative partner among clergy, always committed to nurturing prayer, strengthening Jewish identity, and sustaining the congregation's spiritual and educational growth. A cantor may also attain the title of Senior Cantor, with or without the responsibility of supervising additional cantors. The role of a cantor within a specific congregation varies and should be defined in a job description.

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 or Assistant Cantor (reporting directly to the Senior Cantor), Cantor Educator, or Co-Cantor. These will be considered "Tier 1" level positions, regardless of congregation size.

Sole Clergy

Congregations may hire a cantor to be the sole clergy of the congregation. These positions are often cross-posted with the CCAR. In the event that the position is cross-posted, congregations are required to offer the same salary range in both postings.

Limited-service Cantor

Congregations may seek to engage a Cantor for less than full-time work that is specific and defined. Job descriptions for these roles should be carefully crafted to ensure appropriate boundaries are in place for both the cantor and congregation. Limited-service positions are distinct from the low-residency limited-service positions described later in this document and are subject to the same placement policies and practices of full-time positions while in search. Cantors and congregations should refer to the document Guidelines for Cantorial-Congregational Relationships for further details.

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.

Resumes and Vision Statements

Once the congregational application is posted to the ACC Placement List, eligible cantors may request that their application materials be sent to specific congregations. The placement office will send the materials of any cantor in placement to any congregation that the cantor in placement chooses, so long as they have the years of experience required by the Tier System.

Eligibility for Placement:

Cantors

An ACC Cantor is eligible for placement if they are: 1) a member in good standing of the ACC, 2) are not currently excluded from placement due to ethics proceedings or findings as determined by the The Committee on Ethics and Appeals, and are 3) in the final year of a contract. Candidates currently under a contract that does not expire by the posted start date of a new position are only eligible for placement with the written consent of the president of their current congregation.

Congregations

URJ member congregations in good standing are eligible for all categories of placement. A congregation currently navigating ethics proceedings according to its own congregational Code of Ethics shall confer with the Director of Placement to determine if there are ethics matters of which applicants should be made aware. Non-URJ congregations are only eligible for High Holy Day and Low-residency Limited-service postings described later in this document.

Candidates' resumes and cantorial vision statements will be sent to congregations at the cantor's request by email to those indicated on the congregation's application for receipt of resumes. Copied on the email will be the Director of Placement and the candidate. The search committee should reply all to confirm receipt of the cantor's materials. From this point forward, further communication about the interview process should continue between the congregation and cantor directly.

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.

Please keep the Director of Placement informed of the status of each candidate as you move through your process.

Confidentiality, References, and Public Performances

The names of the candidates and their resumes are considered confidential, and may not be shared beyond the search committee.

References

It is important that you learn as much as possible about the qualifications of each candidate. However, do not call any reference or anyone else in the cantor's current congregation or community without first securing permission of the cantor. Experience has shown that the cantor's relationship with the present congregation can be adversely affected if inquiries are made prematurely. Candidates in the final year of a contract are not required to disclose their placement status until a second in person interview is scheduled. If a second in person interview is scheduled, the cantor must inform their synagogue president. As the process moves forward, the congregation should ask the candidates for references both in and out of their present congregation.

Public Performances

The need for confidentiality in the search process cannot be overstated. Consequently, public auditions open to the whole congregation and congregation-wide communications disclosing the identity of the candidate are not permitted. Live streaming or recording of auditions and interviews is only permissible for viewing by members of the congregational Search Committee, members of the Board of Trustees, and the Professional Team. In such instances where recordings for this purpose are needed, the candidate must be informed prior to the event that it will be recorded.

The Interview Process

The Reform Movement has repeatedly affirmed that in religious life all genders and sexual identities share equal rights and responsibilities. The search committee is expected to consider all candidates who apply through the ACC: cantors of all genders, sexual identities, races, older and younger cantors, married and single cantors, and second career cantors.

It is the search committee's purview to design a process to use to evaluate each candidate, including the option of initial conversations by phone and one or more full-committee zoom interview. The committee is not mandated to provide multiple interviews to every candidate who applies but it is advantageous to arrange an initial conversation or interview for each candidate. The impressions derived from an initial interview, together with professional materials, will help the search committee decide which candidates to continue considering. It is crucial that the search committee prepare well thought-out questions for all phases of the search.

Internal Candidates

Congregations considering both an internal candidate, who currently serves the congregation, and external candidates through placement should ensure that all have access to the same information and are considered equally with parallel interviews and interactions with the congregation. Like external candidates, internal candidates must be ACC members in placement who have applied to the congregation through the placement process.

Local Candidates

Local and remote candidates should have the same parallel interactions with the search committee, including conducting Zoom interviews.

Should a candidate decide to withdraw their candidacy with a particular congregation, the candidate should immediately notify the Director of Placement and provide their reasoning. Similarly, should a congregation decide to conclude its consideration of a particular candidate, the Director of Placement should be notified immediately and reasoning provided. This information is requested so that congregational search chairs and cantors can receive valuable, timely, and constructive feedback. The cantor or congregation are then responsible for timely informing the other party that they are not continuing.

Portfolio Materials: Musical and Non-Musical

Cantors in placement will prepare a portfolio of a variety of musical and non-musical samples of their work to share with congregations during the interview process. Musical selections may be in either audio or video format and non-musical samples may include items like sermons or lesson plans. Search committees are encouraged to first engage with the cantor in an initial interview before engaging with their portfolio materials. Success in placement largely hinges on the interpersonal chemistry between cantor, other clergy, and congregation. Bias, both positive and negative, can be introduced based on the cantor's portfolio. Some cantors may organize these additional placement materials on a website. In this case, the website is likely linked on their resume. Whereas, other cantors may organize their files in a digital folder. After an initial interview, if the congregation is interested in continuing the process with the cantor, the search chair should ask the candidate directly for their portfolio materials if they are not linked directly on their resume.

In-Person Interviews

The goal of the initial series of remote interviews and review of portfolio materials is to determine which candidates to invite for an in person interview. The invitation to an in person visit is an indication to the searching cantor that their candidacy is being taken very seriously.

Congregations are responsible for the cost of travel and hospitality for each invited candidate. Congregations are required to use a hotel for overnight stays, and not the home of a congregant. Parameters for covered expenses and whether the congregation will arrange travel or reimburse the cantor for their expenses should be discussed prior to any arrangements. It is always recommended that travel be booked refundable when possible, as sometimes either the cantor or congregation may choose not to move forward with a scheduled visit. Any non-refundable expenses incurred for a canceled visit are the responsibility of the party who withdrew from the arrangement, either cantor or congregation.

The in-person visit should include the opportunity for the candidate to visit the congregation and the broader Jewish community. The candidate should have scheduled time to meet the members of the congregation's professional staff. There should be a formal interview with the search committee and an audition opportunity.

As mentioned above, no portion of the candidate's visit should be open to the entire congregation, nor may the candidate participate in leading public worship. 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.

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.

A cantor invited for a second onsite interview is obliged to inform the president of their current congregation prior to such interview, and should keep that individual informed of their progress in placement.

After each interview the committee should assess its reactions to the candidate. If the committee decides that the candidate will no longer be considered for the position, the candidate should be informed in a timely manner in writing or by telephone call. The Director of Placement should be informed that the candidate is no longer under consideration and given the reasons for the decision.

This information is requested so that the candidates can receive valuable, timely, and constructive feedback.

The search committee may choose to send one or more delegates to observe the cantor in their present congregation over Shabbat. This used to be a common practice, but happens with far less frequency because of the broad availability of livestreaming and online worship. Should the committee decide that a site visit is necessary, it should be scheduled only with the express permission of the candidate.

Extending an Offer

When the committee has identified its top candidate, an offer should be presented to the cantor in writing, signed by the president of the congregation, outlining the basic terms of the offer. An offer should include a description of the candidate's prospective duties, length of employment, compensation, benefits, and the date by which the candidate must accept the offer. Conversation between the cantor and congregation may continue as to the terms of employment while an offer of employment remains extant. Both congregation and cantor should inform the Director of Placement when an offer is made.

The candidate's acceptance of any offer must also be in writing. The candidate must immediately inform the Director of Placement of any offer that is accepted. Upon accepting an offer from a congregation, a candidate must immediately cease negotiations and interviews with all other congregations. Similarly, the congregation must also immediately close its search with any other candidates and inform the Director of Placement that all applications have been closed. An accepted offer may be amplified through a more formal contract of employment.

It is common for a cantor, and sometimes for a congregation, to retain a lawyer to help with negotiation conversations. It should not be seen as adversarial, rather as a way for the parties to maintain distance from the more challenging aspects of contractual negotiations while beginning to create a sacred and trusted relationship.

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 a case, only one candidate may be presented to the congregation for approval, and the confidentiality of the candidate must first have been waived in writing.

Acceptance and Placement Status

Once an offer is accepted in writing and both parties enter contract negotiations the following should occur:

- **Candidate Requirement:** The candidate should promptly withdraw from all other active searches and notify those congregations.
- **Congregation Requirement:** The congregation should inform all other active candidates in a timely manner that an offer has been accepted.
- **Search Status:** Once the ACC is notified that both parties have agreed to basic terms and are entering negotiations, the congregation's search status will be changed to "In Negotiations" and no new candidates will be able to apply. The search will be officially closed when final negotiations conclude, the contract is executed, and the congregation's leadership publicly shares the news of the hire with its members. The Congregation must notify the ACC when the criteria for closing the search have been met.

In the unlikely event that contract negotiations stall and are not successfully concluded, both the congregation and the cantor may reopen their searches.

Contracts

The contract should incorporate the spirit and language of the [Guidelines for Cantorial - Congregational Relationships](#).

The JCPC recommends that the agreement between cantor and congregation be formalized in a contract. A contract check list appears on the [ACC website under Hiring Resources for Congregations](#) to assist you as you formulate the contract.

It is important to note the covenantal nature of cantorial contracts with congregations. The contract between congregation and clergy must emulate the highest values and holy nature of the work they do in partnership with each other. "At-will" contracts and/or "termination without cause" language are considered to be 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.

Placement Process for Students in the HUC-JIR Ordination Class

Most HUC-JIR, DFSSM ordination class students will enter the search process for congregations where they have no prior experience. Students may also be considered for positions at congregations where they serve as student cantors or interns.

Ordination Class Eligibility

For the 2026/2027 Placement Year, HUC-JIR, DFSSM students will enter placement on **Monday, December 7, 2026**. Prior to this date, ordination candidates will be approved to enter placement by the Director of the DFSSM based on appropriate academic progress toward ordination.

Consideration for Student Cantors and Interns

Students may find themselves serving as HUC academic year student cantors or interns in a congregation that is considering hiring a cantor. In such a case, the congregation may enter into search and the student may apply for the position through ACC placement. The congregation also has the option of offering the position to the student prior to going into search during the student's ordination year. A student may choose to accept the position without going through ACC placement, but may not accept the position either verbally or in writing prior to being academically cleared for placement by the DFSSM Director.

Additional Information for Cantors Seeking Full-Time or Limited-Service Positions

Cantors in placement should read this entire handbook and familiarize themselves with the process as described in the handbook. What follows are additional considerations for cantors in placement. More detailed information about placement materials, frequently asked questions, and general guidance is available on the ACC website under [Placement for Cantors](#). All ACC Members considering placement should consult directly with the Director of Placement in preparation for search.

Placement Eligibility and Key Dates

ACC Regular and Associate Members in good standing, and DFSSM Ordination Candidate Student Members, may be eligible for placement based on their contractual status described below.

Search Exclusivity

All ACC Members who enter placement for Full-Time or Limited-Service positions commit to seek placement for congregational positions only through the JCPC. If a cantor decides to apply to non-URJ congregational positions, they must put any JCPC search on hold. Preliminary conversations with non-URJ congregations, before a formal interview, are allowed. In the case of such unique situations, the Member will contact the Director of Placement for further conversation. Additionally, a DFSSM Ordination Candidate may consider an offer of a post-ordination position from their current student pulpit during the ordination year.

Confidentiality and Ethical Behavior

As we ask congregations to keep the identity of cantors in placement confidential, so too should cantors in placement keep elements of placement confidential and exercise discretion throughout the process. The contents of the placement list are confidential and for the use of ACC Members only. You may discuss your placement options with your close family and confidants as you make decisions. Please take care with how much you share about your placement process with colleagues. Some may not wish to disclose their own placement status and you may inadvertently cause harm to a colleague in placement. Please reread the [ACC Code of Ethics](#) prior to entering placement, ensuring that you adhere to it in its entirety, paying particular attention to its guidelines on placement and transition matters.

Contractual Eligibility for Placement as defined by the JCPC

Cantors in the final year of a contract are eligible for placement. Cantors under contract, whether oral or written, are ineligible to apply for any position that commences prior to the termination of their contractual commitment, without the 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. The consent form is available from the Director of Placement and the completed consent form must be sent to the Director of Placement.

However, if the cantor has an "at-will" contract or "termination without cause" language in their contract, there is no need to complete the consent form should the cantor choose to enter placement (see page 11). The relevant language from the clergy contract must be emailed to the Director of Placement before the Cantor enters placement.

A cantor may only interview for a congregation after the Placement Office, under the auspices of the JCPC, has sent their resume to the congregation. The cantor must keep the Director of Placement apprised of the status of their candidacy at all congregations to which they have applied. A cantor may not contact a congregation directly prior to applying through the ACC Placement Office.

A cantor who has a prior relationship with a congregation, including as a former employee, contracted speaker, or cantor-in-residence, among other things, but who is not currently employed by the congregation, must report their prior relationship to the Director of Placement before applying to the position. In the interest of transparency, the Director of Placement may encourage the candidate to disclose such prior relationship to the congregational Search Committee and will keep a Record of Previous Relationship on file for the duration of the placement season.

Members of Other Professional Organizations

ACC members who are also members of the Cantors Assembly, the Central Conference of American Rabbis, or the Association of Reform Jewish Educators may conduct concurrent searches with multiple organizations. In such cases, the ACC member should disclose the concurrent searches to the ACC Director of Placement.

Accepting an Offer

Congregations are required to present an offer to the cantor in writing. If an offer is extended verbally, it should immediately be followed by a written offer. The cantor may take time to consider the offer and negotiate the terms presented in the offer or ask additional questions about elements of a forthcoming contract that may be of particular importance to them.

A cantor may be a candidate for more than one congregation at a time. However, once a cantor accepts a position, the cantor must notify all other congregations that their candidacy is being withdrawn. Once a position is accepted, the cantor may not interview for any other position and must notify any congregations where they have open applications. If in-person interviews have already been scheduled at other synagogues, the cantor is required to cover whatever costs have been incurred for the visits, thus it is always recommended that refundable travel is booked when possible.

Even in the absence of a signed contract, so long as there is an agreement to the terms of the future contract presented in the offer letter and a meeting of the minds, acceptance of the position has taken place. Therefore, the congregation, too, is obligated to notify all of its other active candidates that the position is no longer available. The placement is considered complete when negotiations have concluded, the terms of the contract have been agreed upon, and the placement is announced.

In the event that a cantor receives an additional written offer with explicit terms from one congregation while negotiations with another congregation are pending but incomplete, the cantor may choose to “accept the second offer or decline the offer. If they choose to accept the offer, they may not negotiate the terms of that offer until they have withdrawn from the previous congregation.

A cantor who accepts a new position is required to give their current congregation timely notice. It is important to read through contract stipulations that may affect this timing. Timely notice generally means approximately six months prior to the cantor beginning their new position, but there can be exceptions to this timing.

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 congregations.

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 adjusted 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 in hotel (Home hospitality is not permitted)
- 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.

Low-Residency Limited-Service Cantorial 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 also seek a low-residency limited-service Cantor 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 High Holy Day Positions guidelines above. 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. Congregations under 400 families may also consider seeking a DFSSM student cantor, though may not search for an ACC member and DFSSM student simultaneously and should confer with the Director of Placement and the Coordinator of Fieldwork at the DFSSM to determine when to enter or exit either process.

ACC Cantors 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 all engagements
- Lodging in a hotel (Home hospitality is not permitted)
- 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, Low-Residency Limited-Service relationships should be initiated for an initial one-year term, with the dates, 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.

Conclusion

It is the hope of the JCPC that the Cantor and congregation always honor the sacred nature of their relationship. Once an offer has been accepted, the JCPC recommends that the congregation establish a transition committee to help ensure a smooth transition process. The JCPC also recommends that when a Cantor is succeeding a retiring Cantor Emeritus, both familiarize themselves with the ACC Code of Ethics with regard to the relationship between the Cantor and Cantor Emeritus.

The Director of Placement and the JCPC are ready to assist both Cantors and congregations throughout the search process. May each Search be successful, thus strengthening congregations, the Cantorate, the Reform Movement and the greater Jewish community.