

The NCCCR Guidelines for Ongoing Mutual Review in the Synagogue

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The National Commission on Cantorial-Congregational Relations (NCCCR) recognizes the need for cantors and congregations to engage in constructive and ongoing mutual review. Based on its experience with cantorial-congregational relationships, the NCCCR recommends a process whereby lay leaders and cantors can, on a regular basis, evaluate their joint progress toward reaching mutually-designated goals.

Ideally, this review should take place in the form of an ongoing and informal dialogue. The leadership team for this process, made up of both lay people and clergy, should be engaged in a partnership to strengthen the synagogue and the Jewish people. The NCCCR recommends that the cantor and the synagogue president initiate and encourage this review process, always guided by key Jewish values of integrity, honesty, accountability and truth.

The process should include a regular clarification and re-evaluation of measurable goals and objectives, a review of leadership development, professional growth, and the encouragement of a lay-cantorial team effort in all congregational affairs. The NCCCR strongly discourages the use of congregational surveys in the review process. Experience demonstrates that as a review vehicle the survey method is counter-productive to achieving measurable and meaningful results and success.

We strongly suggest that the mutual review team be comprised of no more than three individuals:

1. Temple President, Chair of Personnel Committee or other designate
2. One individual in synagogue leadership, designated by the cantor.
3. One individual in synagogue leadership, mutually agreeable to the cantor and the president.

At all times, the role of the senior rabbi in relationship with the cantor should be one of ongoing support and dialogue as partner and co-clergy. This should be an open and supportive communication, as it should be between the cantor and all of the other clergy and professional staff members in the synagogue. These valuable working relationships should be maintained separately from the review process.

It will be most valuable for both the congregation and the cantor if this review process occurs at regular intervals, the timing of which is mutually agreed-upon by everyone involved. Since Board leadership repeatedly changes, we urge that the continuity and integrity of this sacred process be maintained by insuring that at least some of the individuals participating in the process remain involved in the mutual review over a period of years.

We recognize that decisions made around the time of contract renewals and negotiations are often emotionally charged. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that this process occur separately from and prior to making any contract decisions.

The mutual review process should address and evaluate the following considerations:

1. Progress made toward priorities and objectives agreed upon jointly during the previous year. The definition of priorities is vital, and agreement between the cantor, the other clergy members and the congregation is imperative for the success of these working relationships.
2. Interaction and collaboration of the cantor with the senior rabbi.
3. Interactions between the cantor and other synagogue individuals and constituents (i.e. other clergy members, committees, trustees, officers, congregants, staff).
4. Administrative and planning skills, creativity and effectiveness in problem-solving by the cantor.
5. Areas of strength and achievements of the cantor and of the congregational leadership.
6. Areas for growth for the cantor and for the congregational leadership.
7. Development of mutually agreed-upon, measurable goals and objectives to be achieved in the next synagogue year and a system for monitoring their progress.

In order to assist in this process, the following are examples of some appropriate and helpful topics that should be included in the review dialogue. These examples are not exhaustive, and they can be adjusted to the needs of the individual congregation's lay leaders and the cantor:

- What did the lay and cantorial leadership find most meaningful about their work together during the past year? What did they find most challenging?
- What are the congregation's priorities for the cantor? What are the cantor's priorities for the congregation?
- What are the opportunities available for professional cantorial growth and lay leadership development that best support a healthy working relationship and environment?
- How can we best gather any concerns expressed by congregants and staff regarding the functioning of the congregation's clergy, staff, board and committees, and address them in a way that is helpful and enables growth in the relationship?
- How do the clergy and lay leadership feel about the congregational support that is available or unavailable for programs and projects?
- How should the lay and cantorial leadership adjust their methods of interaction, in order to support the congregation to achieve its mission and vision, becoming more effective, more spiritual (Jewish/religious) and more relevant to the lives of the congregants and the fulfillment of its leaders?
- What aspects of responsibilities could not be given adequate attention this year?
 - How could these still be met or re-evaluated?
 - What kinds of additional resources could be provided in order for these responsibilities to be reasonably met?

Adopted by the National Commission on Cantorial-Congregational Relationships



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January 24, 2014
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