



The Search Process

Beginning the Online Search Process – An Overview

Conservative *kehillot* looking to engage a new rabbi post their jobs through the RA Career Center and do not need to place any outside advertising. This ensures that *kehillot* will engage rabbis that have a strong commitment to Conservative Judaism and have been trained in a way to best meet the needs of a Conservative *kehilla*. Congregations [electronically sign an agreement](#) that commits them to this covenant. Every RA member internationally will see your congregation's listing.

To start your rabbinic search, you need to register on our [e-placement online system](#). To register, go to www.rabbinicalassembly.org. At the top of the page, click on "quick links" then on the drop-down menu, select "congregations." If you do not already have an account, click "Register" on the left side bar. Fill out the registration form with all the appropriate information. The asterisk (*) indicates required fields. Enter your own login name and password and record it, because you will need it later to access your account. When you are ready, click on "submit" indicating you have accepted the "Placement Code."

A congregation needs to be in good standing with USCJ to be approved. Once USCJ confirms the congregation's status, the RA Career Center approves your registration. This process is generally completed within two business days.

While you wait to be approved, you may download several resources from the [Help Page on the e-placement site](#): 1) The "[Model Engagement Agreement](#)" is the mutually accepted standard contract advocated by USCJ and the RA since 1991. It may be modified to meet individual and congregational needs. 2) The "[congregational questionnaire](#)," which you will be emailed when you are approved, as well. The completed questionnaire is the foremost source of facts, values and stories about your congregation to the rabbis. It is helpful to review this as soon as possible. 3) A few quick manuals about the search process.

Once you are approved, work with your search committee to fill out the congregational questionnaire. When you have completed the questionnaire, log back into your account to upload and post it. Once you are logged in, click on the tab on the left, "Placement Documents." Then click the gray box "Browse" to upload your questionnaire from your own computer. There is no monthly deadline for uploading your questionnaire to the RA. You may upload your questionnaire 24/7. The RA Career Center will review your submitted questionnaire, making certain that all of the questions have been answered completely. The Career Center will simultaneously e-mail the incumbent rabbi to confirm the availability of the position so that the search can begin. The incumbent rabbi must confirm via e-mail that they are leaving and that all is squared away between the rabbi and congregation.

Congregational questionnaires are generally approved within 24 hours and your congregation's main contact is notified via email. Once a *kehilla's* questionnaire is approved, it is immediately available for viewing to all rabbis in the Rabbinical Assembly.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire is your first contact with potential candidates and the foremost source of



information about a congregation. It presents your synagogue's characteristics to interested rabbis and serves as a "congregational resume." Rabbis take questionnaires very seriously and read and screen them carefully. A wise congregation understands this and responds appropriately. The questionnaire gives your first impression and your first opportunity to market yourself to individual rabbis.

You may find the questionnaire lengthy at first. Your committee must work hard and deliberate deeply to fill it out. Rather than see the length as an obstacle, frame it as an opportunity to do the proper preparation work for the search. See the questionnaire as a guide, expand it as necessary to complete the picture of your congregation. The questionnaire should fully tell the story of your congregation's achievements and contributions. As your committee wrestles with the questions, your congregation's strengths and needs should become clearer.

It is critical that the information in the questionnaire (especially opinion questions) reflect a congregational consensus, not the opinion of a few individuals. A questionnaire filled out by one individual will appeal to a candidate who matches the expectations of one individual, not the full range of the congregation. The more specific information you provide the candidate about your congregation, the more helpful you will be, and the deeper their understanding of it. This understanding helps to clarify if an individual would be comfortable as the rabbi of your community and prevents wasting time on the part of the congregation and the candidate.

The RA Career Center requires that you supply either a specific compensation number or a range based on experience. If you leave this question blank or write "negotiable," the questionnaire will not be processed. We understand the wish for the widest latitude in financial matters, but candidates need to know a compensation range to determine whether it is appropriate to apply. Additionally, a preconceived and stated compensation range creates accountability on the part of the employer and gender equity in hiring. Congregations should be aware that when the compensation is not competitive, rabbinic candidates generally decline to apply. Sometimes the chair of the search committee will say, "if the right candidate applies we will find additional resources to increase the compensation." While this statement may be true, experience shows that this does not help attract additional candidates. Listed compensation packages should be viewed as estimates. Once the position is offered; there will be further negotiations about both salary and benefits.

You should use the questionnaire as a template. Fill it out as-is, with no changes to the questions. If there is a question you do not understand, feel free to reach out the RA Career Center staff. They are happy to review the document to make sure it presents your congregation in language that rabbis appreciate and will discuss it with the chair of your search committee. When you have finished a first draft of the questionnaire, distribute a copy to all members of your search committee and to the incumbent rabbi to elicit their reactions. At this point, you should also be in touch with your [USCJ Kehilla Relationship Manager](#).

Receiving Resumes & Rolling Referrals

Once your questionnaire is posted, the opening in your synagogue will be on the RA Career Center Job Board on the member's section of the RA website. The online job board is visible 24/7 for RA members in Europe, Israel and South America, and North America.

Rabbis interested in applying to your congregation will send resumes electronically through the e-placement system, with the option of submitting a short note. Additionally, rabbis have the option of



including a cover letter with their submission. All resumes will be forwarded by e-mail to the main contact designated on your original registration page. The resume will be an attachment to a formal email from the RA Career Center. The Career Center website is the only agent in the Conservative Movement that is permitted to forward a resume to a congregation and all contact between rabbis and congregations must be initiated by and through the Career Center.

A rabbi can apply to any position listed on the RA Job Board to which they are eligible by seniority. There is no minimum or maximum number of resumes that a congregation may receive. This open and rolling application system has advantages as well as disadvantages. While it means your congregation receives many resumes, the process may take more time than you first anticipated. The number of resumes a congregation may receive varies. A small congregation (250 units or less) receives five to ten resumes on average. Highly desirable congregations often receive between eight and fifteen resumes.

Your congregation may receive resumes as long as your position is listed, but we strongly recommend a self-imposed cutoff date so that the process may proceed in a timely fashion. We recommend that a search committee no longer accept resumes after the congregation has been listed for three months, or when telephone interviews have been concluded.

Reviewing Resumes

Next, your search committee must review all the resumes you received. Remember, a resume presents a general outline of a candidate. You can only discover detailed information in an interview. You should send a letter of acknowledgement to each rabbi whose resume you receive. When you acknowledge the receipt of a resume promptly, you set a positive tone for future communication and build good will. The email should include a description of your planned procedure. This is a professional responsibility of your congregation.

A search committee is not obligated to interview all candidates who have submitted resumes. By the time you are receiving resumes, your search committee should have already established clear preliminary grounds for elimination or acceptance. A resume serves as a vehicle to determine whom your committee wishes to interview. Most congregations grant a phone interview to all applicants. When you complete this initial screening, it is necessary to inform all candidates whether they will be given further consideration. Within two weeks of receiving a resume, you should be able to decide whether you will move forward with that candidate.

Position Status

There are four possible statuses for a position on the RA Career Center job boards: Open, In Review, In Discussion, and Closed. A congregation "in review" is no longer accepting new resumes but has not yet made any decisions about candidates. Once a congregation is "in-review," it will not receive any more resumes through e-placement. When a congregation has made an offer to a rabbi and the rabbi has accepted, it should be listed as "in discussion" to indicate that contract negotiations are under way. Again, a congregation listed as "in discussion" will not receive more resumes through the website.

Do not delay your process. Good candidates will be pursued by many congregations. Remember, the search committee should endeavor to make decisions in a timely fashion. Please communicate with the RA Office to indicate how you would like your status updated. The congregation will continue to



be listed as "Open" on the job board until you indicate otherwise.

Length of Search Process

Our experience is that the properly prepared congregation with accurate self-perceptions and a healthy process will conduct a search in six months or less. Most congregations and rabbis conduct their employment search decisions six months to a year before the end of a rabbinic contract. As a result, most rabbis and congregations post questionnaires in late winter (December or January) and should conclude before Passover in the spring. Sometimes in congregations where the rabbi is retiring, or a decision is reached particularly early, a congregation may be listed in September or October. However, **even with an early listing, the active placement season when most resumes are sent, is still from December to April.** Even if congregations start late in the "Placement Season" they can be through active consultation with the RA Career Center. When searches do take two seasons it is generally because the expectations of the congregation were out of line with reality and congregations were too picky. There is no exact timeline for search, and while the Career Center can only suggest parameters, everyone agrees that shorter is better than longer. The goal is for the shortest search period possible, within one placement period.

Disclaimer and Reference Checking

The Career Center does not prescreen resumes and reference checking is the sole responsibility of the congregation. The Career Center advocates that all references be checked in detail and that you consult multiple sources. The decision of who is a good match for the congregation belongs to the congregation itself, as it does to the rabbi. Each congregation will establish criteria that work for it.

The Career Center job boards are solely a referral service. By sending a rabbi's resume to a synagogue for consideration, the RA Career Center does not make any representations of the rabbi's ability or character. Resume referral does not constitute a recommendation or endorsement of candidacy. No recommendations are ever made or withheld about individual candidates. Questions relating to judgments about the rabbi's suitability for the position applied for or overall performance as a rabbi must be considered and resolved by the individual synagogue to which the rabbi has applied. **The fiduciary responsibilities of synagogue leadership that applies to all areas of congregational life apply here very specifically. It is solely the responsibility of your synagogue's Search Committee or designees to actively screen, confirm and validate whatever information is given it by candidates, both in writing and in any other form, before entering conversations, deliberations and negotiations with a rabbi. Current and past officers of the congregations who are familiar with the rabbi's work are great sources of information.**

In addition, there may be facts about particular rabbis that are known to parts of the RA but are not known to the Career Center. Various issues about a rabbi's performance or conduct may be brought to the attention of the RA, and some of these may result in disciplinary action being taken by the Va'ad HaKovod or other arms of the Assembly. Some of these disciplinary actions are confidential, and would not be disclosed to the JPC or to other members of the RA. Accordingly, by sending a rabbi's resume to a synagogue for consideration, the Career Center expressly does not represent that the rabbi has not been subject to discipline by the RA for performance or conduct that might be relevant to the synagogue's decision making process. While the RA encourages rabbis applying for positions to discuss any potentially relevant circumstances, including any disciplinary history, synagogues should be aware of the possibility of such a history, and decide for themselves the manner, if any, in which they choose to address the issue with candidates they are considering.