

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

## STRENGTHENING THE ETHICS PROCESS

### RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY

*2023 FINDINGS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE  
RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY:  
A REPORT BY SACRED SPACES*

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# Overview

The Rabbinical Assembly (the RA) is a complex organization representing Conservative/Masorti rabbis worldwide who work in diverse professional settings, are bound by varying legal and organizational policies, and represent a multitude of cultures and identities.

As part of a larger strategic planning process,[1] Sacred Spaces was hired to assess the RA's Code of Professional Conduct and the procedures and practices of the Va'ad HaKavod, which is the committee tasked with handling ethical complaints about RA member rabbis. The assessment consisted of multiple mechanisms to collect, review, and audit information related to the perceptions of and experiences with the ethics process and the overall culture of the RA as it impacts how members understand, uphold, and respond to professional ethics.

This Executive Summary is an overview of the larger assessment report, which is organized by methodology, themes, recommendations, and appendices.

- Methodology outlines the scope of the assessment and the different mechanisms used to review, audit, and collect data.
- Themes and Findings represent the voices of assessment participants and do not include commentary or analysis from Sacred Spaces.
- Recommendations are based on data analysis and Sacred Spaces' expertise and are offered as guideposts to aid the RA in strengthening their ethics processes.

The Findings and Recommendations offered by Sacred Spaces are informed by the experiences and insights of people who participated in all aspects of the assessment.



## Acknowledgements

Sacred Spaces is grateful for all the individuals who gave their time to help us better understand the various facets of the Rabbinical Assembly that impact their ethics processes. To the victim-survivors[2] whose input deepened our understanding, we thank you for offering us the opportunity to listen and learn, and we know that words of gratitude are not sufficient. We heard repeatedly that the decision to share your lives and experiences was predicated on the belief that there can be a safer and more respectful rabbinate and a more transparent and coordinated process when misconduct occurs.

Many organizations do not voluntarily invite a proactive and public assessment process for reflection. We want to highlight the significant participation of the Conservative/Masorti rabbis from around the world. We thank the RA's leadership for their vulnerability and trust in this process and the members of the Task Force[3] for overseeing the Assessment and meeting with Sacred Spaces monthly to share insights and reflections. Appreciation also goes to partners and colleagues across the denomination and those working to end abuses of power who provided additional diverse perspectives and expertise.

בן זומא אומר, איזהו חכם, הלומד מכל אדם, שנאמר מכל מלמד השכלתי.

Ben Zoma said: Who is wise? One who learns from every person, as it is said: "From all who taught me have I gained understanding" (Pirkei Avot 4:1). Throughout this assessment, we have heard from more than 550 people and have done our best to follow this guidance.



## Shared Understanding

- Sacred Spaces would retain independence in how it reviewed and collected information and the development of ensuing recommendations.
- Those who requested to speak to Sacred Spaces during the information gathering process about their experiences with the RA's ethics process would be provided the opportunity to do so.
- No identifying information about assessment participants would be shared with the RA.
- The assessment would not reopen prior Va'ad HaKavod cases nor make recommendations about the outcomes of past or current cases.
- While the assessment was a proactive request from the RA, the process would not be taken any less seriously than if it was born out of complaint or lawsuit.
- There would be transparency about the assessment process and final recommendations beyond RA leadership.[4]

## Overarching Themes & Findings

- There is wide support for the Rabbinical Assembly's (RA) undertaking to revise its Professional Code of Conduct (Code) and strengthen the Va'ad HaKavod (VHK) process to address ethical violations.[5]
- Members of both the RA and the public believe it is the RA's responsibility to protect the sanctity of the Conservative/Masorti rabbinate by supporting rabbis in upholding the ethical standards of their profession.
- Rabbinic misconduct has an enduring impact on victim-survivors and the community.
- The inherent power differential between rabbis and other members of the Jewish community should be accepted as a reality of the role, and boundary setting is imperative in all aspects of rabbinic life.
- Creating sacred Jewish spaces is something that victim-survivors want realized.

- Those who participated in the assessment reported little to moderate familiarity with the Code and VHK.
- Much of the operation of the RA has some interconnection with the Code and the VHK, such as placement decisions, membership approval, the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, and the interactions the members have with each other and the experiences they have in their communities.

## Findings: Code of Professional Conduct

- The Code should be updated to be more relevant to everyday interactions, reflect the tenor of times, provide clarity to members about professional boundaries, and account for the diversity of RA membership.[6]
- RA members want to be part of the Code revision process and are interested in ongoing engagement and learning opportunities about ethics.

## Findings: Va'ad HaKavod

- There are different perceptions about the VHK's purpose and role with some competing tensions.
- The majority of misconduct experienced by complainants[7] included one or more of the following behaviors: harassment, sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct, abuse of power, and interfering with leadership/authority.
- The work of the VHK is sacred, and the committee needs to have the expertise and support to handle the complexity of ethics complaints.[8]
- The RA needs an enhanced system for tracking types of complaints received, including inquiries received by the RA that never reached the VHK.
- VHK processes and procedures should be formalized to create a standardized, fair, and trauma-informed approach to case handling. Both VHK complainants and respondents[9] expressed that the lack of consistency and standardization negatively impacted their experience with and confidence in the VHK process.
- Many complainants discussed the emotional and spiritual impact of going through a complaint handling process and suggested a more holistic response that informs and supports the parties to the complaint and other individuals and organizations impacted by ethics violations.



## Additional Findings

- RA members outside of the United States want more connection to the RA with an understanding that the cultural, legal, and social relationships between rabbis and their communities is not the same across cultures and communities, which can be both an asset and a challenge when addressing concerns about ethics.
- For those who personally experienced or witnessed RA Code violations and decided not to report, both RA members and members of the public said they didn't report because of the following: lack of awareness of the reporting process, fear of retaliation or other repercussions, the status/position of power of the person engaging in the behavior, lack of trust in the RA/VHK, concerns about damaging the reputation of a friend/family member who engaged in misconduct, or because they themselves took steps to address the behavior directly.
- There are increased vulnerabilities for abuse of power during times of rabbinic transition.
- The RA, individual rabbis, and the denomination-affiliated organizations each have a role in helping protect the Jewish community from rabbinic misconduct and creating safer and more respectful communities; they all could benefit from greater coordination and collaboration.

# Methodology

Sacred Spaces used several data collection and audit methods to gain a deep understanding of the RA and its membership in relation to ethics and the complaint handling process. Sacred Spaces collected data through:

## Surveys

Sacred Spaces developed two comprehensive surveys, one for current RA members and the other for members of the public. Each was disseminated in English and Hebrew.[10]


- A U.S.-based researcher and another in Israel worked together to ensure integrity in the collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data for a global survey.
- The RA membership survey was designed to gauge perceptions, knowledge, and experiences pertaining to the Code and VHK, and to gain insight into RA's overall culture. It offered one of the first opportunities for the RA to hear from its members about misconduct that they personally experienced or witnessed.
- Four hundred and seventy-one (471) rabbis participated in the membership survey, accounting for a 32% membership response rate.
- The public survey was designed to hear from individuals who have reported an ethics concern to the RA and/or participated in the VHK process. Thirty-eight (38) people responded to the survey, of which 9 reached out directly to the RA about a concern about a member.

## Interviews & Listening Sessions

Interviews and listening sessions[11]enabled stakeholders to have in-depth conversations about their understanding, experiences, and insights on challenges and strengths of the current ethics process.

- Sacred Spaces conducted 61 interviews, each lasting, on average, an hour.
- Individuals interviewed included those who participated in the VHK and a diverse set of RA members and individuals from RA partner organizations.
- Regardless of the interviewees' interest in participating in the assessment, each interviewee was asked: 1) if they had ever read the Code; 2) if they had an interaction with the VHK process as a committee member, witness, complainant, or respondent; 3) what an "ideal" ethics complaint process would like; and 4) their ideas for how the RA could be more supportive of rabbis understanding and upholding the Code.



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- Thirteen (13) people participated in two listening sessions, one for seminary students and the other for RA members working in non-congregational settings. The 90-minute sessions were held over Zoom.
  - Through the interviews and surveys, Sacred Spaces heard from 46 complainants, 40 respondents, 35 individuals who served as witnesses or in a supportive role during a VHK case, and 47 people who formally participated in VHK case handling on behalf of the RA.

## **VHK Case File Review**

Sacred Spaces examined redacted VHK case files to better understand the procedures used by the VHK and uncover themes pertaining to grievance processes.

- Sacred Spaces created criteria for both case file selection and review.
- Sixteen (16) files were pulled, organized, and de-identified, accounting for approximately 30% of the VHK cases closed between 2004 and 2020.[12]
- Two reviewers examined each file independently.

## **Document Review, Internet Scan, & Meetings**

The RA provided a multitude of documents related to the ethics process for review, including the Code of Professional Conduct, VHK Guidelines, and Joint Placement Rules. Sacred Spaces also reviewed Codes of Conduct related to other denominations and faiths, and conducted a scan of social media and other sources for public commentary about the Code, the VHK, and other issues related to the ethical behavior of RA rabbis.

Sacred Spaces met monthly with the RA Task Force to discuss current events and the impact of the assessment and met twice a month with the RA staff member who served as the liaison to the Task Force. Various other meetings occurred throughout the assessment as requested by the RA to facilitate understanding of the assessment and alignment with the strategic planning process.



# Recommendations

In offering recommendations, Sacred Spaces took into account the assessment findings, including the weight of the issues and what is most likely to enhance accountability, safety, fairness, and effectiveness in the near future while longer-term models are under consideration. There are various permutations that the RA can pursue to handle ethics complaints. No system is perfect; each has advantages and drawbacks. Many of these recommendations outline best practices that should apply whether the ethics process continues to exist within the RA alone or evolves over time to be denomination-wide or cross-denominational.[13]

Two foundational changes regarding the purpose and scope of the VHK are outlined first. Subsequent recommendations are grouped by the values identified by Sacred Spaces to strengthen the RA's ethics process. There are ten in total. The full report contains more than 70 recommendations organized by current practice, proposed practice, and the rationale for the proposed changes, where feasible. This executive summary highlights central recommendations under each value with a brief rationale.

## Fundamental Shifts

Sacred Spaces recommends that the scope of the VHK be focused on complaints that fall into the category of professional ethics. Violations of membership requirements related to administrative issues (e.g., payment of member fees or obligation to keep current address on file) should be removed from the Code and complaints about halakhic/ritual issues (e.g., conversions) should be removed from the VHK's purview, and these obligations should be included in documents separate from the Code of Professional Conduct and handled by RA processes outside the VHK.

Instead, the purpose of the Va'ad HaKavod should be:

To **protect** those served by the RA rabbinate, **safeguard** the sanctity of the name of the rabbinate, and **support** individual rabbis.



# Expertise

The work of the VHK is sacred, entrusted to a small group of people. The VHK must be positioned to carry out its responsibilities efficiently and credibly. This includes harnessing the expertise of secular professionals, reducing bias, increasing diversity, and standardizing practices. The following recommendations are oriented towards restructuring the VHK to include more expertise, support, and oversight.[14]

## **Create a Professional Staff Position**

- Rationale: Overseeing a centralized complaint intake process, serving as a liaison to the VHK, and monitoring cases for retaliation and compliance is a full-time responsibility that requires specialized training. Having a staff position whose role is dedicated to ethics will help improve coordination and communication with the parties, standardize the response to complaints, and maintain a focus on ethics for RA members.

## **Add an External Expert as an Advisor on Every VHK Case**

- Rationale: Given the sensitive and complex nature of many of the issues coming before the VHK, having an expert advisor who is trained on the issue raised in the complaint will improve the depth of understanding of the VHK. By establishing a standard practice of integrating experts as advisors on every case, the VHK will also be more efficient, not needing to wait for outside professionals before engaging in fact finding.

## **Restructure the Role of the VHK Chair**

- Rationale: Shifting the role of the Chair away from the duties of handling individual complaints frees the Chair to guide VHK operations. This promotes compliance of the overall VHK process as well as mentorship and support for VHK members. Restructuring this role also allows the Chair to increase the capacity of committee members to handle complaints by overseeing a robust onboarding process and continued education.

## **Formalize Selection of VHK Members & Expand and Diversify the Committee**

- Rationale: Creating a role description and adopting an application rather than appointment process promotes transparency and will help recruit committee members who reflect the multiplicity of the RA membership. Doubling the number of VHK committee members in the coming years will expedite VHK processes, reduce burnout of VHK members, increase the opportunity to diversify each panel, promote recusal, and allow each case to be assigned its own fact-finding and decision-making panel.



# Transparency

Transparency is promoted through broad awareness of the VHK processes and internal clarity about complaint handling protocols and practices.

## **Overview of VHK Protocols Are Shared Publicly**

- Rationale: RA members and the public both need access to information about the Code and the VHK in order to understand the professional ethics requirements and how to navigate the reporting process if there is a perceived violation. These processes are meant to guide and protect the rabbinate as well as the community the rabbinate serves. Demystifying the complaint process helps build trust. At the same time, the VHK needs its own internal, revisable protocols to guide its process and promote consistency in case handling.

## **Create a Confidentiality and Participation Policy**

- Rationale: Providing parties with information so that they can make informed decisions is always a best practice. At the outset of their involvement, complainants and respondents should be told what personal information may be shared during the VHK process.[15] This creates an opportunity for ongoing conversations with parties and helps build trust in the process. Similarly, parties should understand how and under what circumstances the VHK will proceed if a complainant or respondent decides not to participate in the complaint handling process.

## **Professionalize Channels of Communication**

- Rationale: Individuals who serve on the VHK should not use their personal or employer's email address, phone numbers, or letterhead to communicate with parties during case handling. This is a breach of their own privacy, and it does not allow the RA to account for the interactions between VHK members and parties. VHK communication should occur through official RA-designated channels. This includes VHK calendaring,[16] where interviews and other activities can be seen by the RA Ethics Director and Chair.



# Access

Removing barriers to reporting rabbinic misconduct fosters safety and autonomy in reporting, promotes confidence in the RA, and increases the RA's chance of receiving information that will help protect Jewish communities. Sacred Spaces recommends that the RA:

## **Accept Anonymous Reporting**

- Rationale: Adding the option for anonymous reporting lets people know that the RA values all information, encourages reporting, and understands that removing the requirement of sharing personal details may facilitate some individuals' willingness to make a complaint, even as sufficient detail will still be necessary to move a complaint forward.

## **Create Multiple Pathways for Complaint Filing**

- Individuals should have the choice to make a report in a way that is most comfortable to them. This means acceptance of complaints that are written, made orally over the phone, submitted electronically, delivered in person, or given through other avenues (e.g., a third-party reporting system).

## **Design a Centralized Intake Process**

- A centralized intake system improves coordination and communication with the parties and standardization of response to complaints. Having a professionally trained staff member in this role promotes a trauma-informed response to complaints and assists with case management.



# Accountability

By increasing knowledge and transparency of the VHK's processes and decision making, the RA can better promote safety, accountability, and trust, both in the rabbinate and across the broader community. This means standardizing VHK documentation practices and communication protocols.

## **Issue & Share Written Findings**

- Rationale: The VHK should outline and document its findings of fact, recommendations, and rationale to support its actions in case handling. The VHK should also provide written notification of outcomes to both the respondent and complainant.

## **Create Third Parties Notification Protocols**

- Rationale: Notification to third parties<sup>[17]</sup> reduces secrecy around misconduct and allows organizations to implement their own safety mechanisms, if needed, during or after VHK case handling. A protocol outlines whom to notify, when to notify, and what information to include in the notification.

## **Actively Monitor for Compliance**

- Rationale: As with some of the other recommendations, this recognizes that the VHK committee members are volunteers. Their time should be concentrated in areas of the process that are best suited to rabbinic involvement and for which they receive training. Assigning monitoring to the RA Ethics Director standardizes monitoring and builds in separation from the adjudicatory function of the VHK.

## **Maintain Records**

- Rationale: All VHK files should clearly outline the basis of the complaint, what steps the RA took, and outcomes. Files are the RA's accounting of the process and the steps undertaken to thoroughly investigate a complaint. Having the files also assists in determining patterns of behavior if there are future complaints or should the handling of a case be called into question.



# Safety

These recommendations aim to guide the RA in implementing measures to enhance safety for individuals involved with the VHK process and for the greater Jewish community.

## **Prohibit Retaliation**

- Rationale: Organizations are strengthened when they view reporting as beneficial rather than harmful. Cultivating this culture requires supporting individuals who report concerns, clearly barring retaliation, and providing a way for those who believe they are facing retaliation to seek assistance.

## **Uphold Mandated Reporting Requirements**

- Rationale: Given the many variances in legal systems, the RA should include clear guidance about members' obligations to report. Rabbis should be expected to keep confidences except in cases of suspected or actual child abuse, and other information they are mandated to report by law.[18]

## **Act on Public Information**

- Rationale: The RA should utilize public knowledge of potential misconduct and apply its decision-making framework to determine if any action through the VHK is needed, including an investigation. Eliminating the requirement of a complaint in instances of public knowledge allows the RA to be more proactive and responsive to safety concerns.

## **Remove Teshuvah as a Consideration in VHK Case Handling**

- Rationale: When placed in a grievance process, teshuvah (repentance) is often conflated with safety and accountability. Instead of determining whether teshuvah has occurred, the VHK should focus solely on whether the person fulfilled the conditions placed on them by the VHK as a direct result of their misconduct.

## **Do Not Require Mediation & Joint Appearances**

- Rationale: Many RA ethics complaints are rooted in a potential violation of abuse of power, and mediation should never be used to resolve these situations. It is never recommended to have the parties together before the VHK during an investigation. Mediation can be undertaken at a post-determination stage if all parties consent and trained mediators are involved.



# Fairness

Fairness includes creating a system that examines complaints in ways that reduce potential bias in fact finding and decision making, ensures that all parties are heard, and accounts for power differentials between parties.

## **Implement a Formal Process for Recusal**

- Rationale: The RA is a relatively small membership organization, and members may have close relationships with one another. While these relationships need not pose a conflict of interest, in any process where weighty decisions are made, it is best practice to routinize discussions about perceived or potential bias.

## **Use a Standard of Proof for Fact-Finding**

- Rationale: A standard of proof is the amount of evidence needed to demonstrate that a violation of the Code occurred. Having a standard guides VHK panel deliberations and ensures that the same criteria are applied across all complaints. Preponderance of the evidence<sup>[19]</sup> is the standard most often used in similar processes, such as workplace investigations, professional ethics grievances against attorneys and psychologists, civil actions, and Title IX hearings on university campuses. Given these systems' similarities to the RA's ethics process, we recommend that the RA considers adoption of this standard as well.

## **Create a Decision-Making Framework for the Acceptance of Complaints**

- Rationale: To enhance fairness and standardization, the RA should have a set of questions and criteria that guide decisions about whether a complaint 1) goes to the VHK and 2) requires the empaneling of VHK committee members.

## **Separate the Process for VHK Fact-Finding and Decision-Making by Having Two Distinct Panels**

- Rationale: Bifurcation of the complaint handling process helps reduce bias. It permits those with the investigatory function to focus solely on fact-finding and not be influenced by the potential outcomes dependent on their findings. Having a separate panel review findings of fact and proposing recommendations brings additional perspectives to the VHK process.



# Support

The emotional and psychological toll of rabbinic misconduct can be profound. The RA should build a culture of care and support for individuals who are involved in the RA's ethics complaint process.

## **Allow the Presence of a Support Person**

- Rationale: The VHK is not a legal decision-making body, but an adjudicatory body. Allowing complainants and respondents to have the support of an individual who does not serve in an advisory or advocacy role when they interact with the VHK affirms the humanity of the parties.

## **Offer Pastoral or Emotional Counseling**

- Rationale: Spiritual or pastoral counseling was consistently named as a need by both complainants and respondents, and it should be provided for VHK Committee Members and RA staff as well. VHK complainants and respondents should be offered the opportunity, when involved with the VHK, to access short-term counseling that can assist in promoting their emotional wellbeing.

## **Explore the Creation of a Multidisciplinary Response Team for Organizations**

- Rationale: A prompt organizational response to rabbinic misconduct reduces its impact and the disruption to the community and organization. Involving the local organization contributes to a better understanding of the VHK process so that a safety lens can be applied.

# Integrity

RA members are expected to uphold the sacredness of the rabbinate by acting with integrity. This includes supporting and honoring colleagues and respecting the safety and humanity of others.

## **Prohibit Harassment, Discrimination, Sexual Misconduct, and Other Forms of Abuse in all Rabbinic Relationships**

- Rationale: Rabbis are part of the fabric of the community. Rabbis build trusted connections with community members, and often the demand for a rabbi's time is immense. It can be difficult to maintain a balance between professional and personal commitments, so intentional and unintentional exploitation can occur. Both personal boundaries and a professional ethics code are necessary to proscribe a rabbi from engaging in harassment of any kind, including sexual harassment, discrimination, stalking, sexual exploitation, bullying, and other forms of maltreatment and abuse. This applies in all relationships, including those with whom rabbis have a personal, familial, or professional relationship.

## **Foster Respect and Professionalism Among Rabbinic Roles**

- Rationale: Much of the Code is built on the notion that one rabbi has more power than another, whether based on age, seniority, or employment. For example, the concept of hasagat gevul (trespassing/infringement of boundary) connotes an assumption of "poaching" or engaging in rabbinic activities that undermine the authority of another rabbi. This tone of control is then in tension with other areas that call for collegiality, kindness, and support. Rabbis should work together for the good of the community and honor the position of the mara d'atra/senior rabbi. Rabbis should also value the expertise of other rabbis and call them in to assist with programming, services, and other activities. Trust and cooperation should be promoted among rabbis in all professional and communal settings.



### **Foster a Culture of Reporting**

- Rationale: The responsibility of addressing abuses of power cannot rest solely on the shoulders of those who have been harmed, and rabbis in particular have a responsibility to take action if they become aware of misconduct by their colleagues. At the same time, victims of rabbinic misconduct may themselves be rabbis, and they should have the ability to turn to their colleagues for assistance without fear that a provision in the Code will compel their colleague to report the information. As such, these recommendations urge reporting of known Code violations without mandating it while prohibiting behaviors that may cover up or otherwise interfere with handling of misconduct.

### **Clarify Addiction in Relation to Ethics Violations**

- Rationale: It is not illegal to have an addiction, nor should an addiction itself be a violation of the Code. Addictions can, however, interfere with a rabbi's ability to conduct themselves professionally. It is important that rabbis receive education about engaging in high risk and addictive activities and how such activities can impact their personal and professional lives.



# Inclusion

The RA Code of Conduct should be relevant and inclusive for its diverse membership, and creating a sense of inclusion within the RA will help counter some of the isolation rabbis may feel in maintaining personal and professional boundaries. These recommendations are ways to advance connection, inclusion, and engagement in the RA's ethics processes and overall organizational culture.

## **Review Pronoun Usage in the Communication**

- Rationale: Addressing people with pronouns that reflect their identity is a sign of respect and leaves room for all to present themselves authentically.

## **Establish Community Interaction Guidelines for Members**

- Rationale: RA forums are utilized by many members as a source of learning and connection. To preserve the value of the forums, RA members should be expected to uphold the Code in all areas of their life, including in-person and online interactions with their colleagues.

## **Increasingly Leverage the Expertise & Diversity of the Members**

- Rationale: RA members are interested in contributing to their professional organization, such as helping to revise their Professional Code of Conduct to make it more relevant and accessible for a global organization. The cultural, linguistic, and professional diversity among the RA members position them to have input and serve as reviewers for the Code and accompanying documents.



# Embodiment

This section's recommendations aim to assist RA members in upholding their professional ethical duties while fostering collaboration and coordination with other Jewish professionals to cultivate safety and accountability across the Conservative/Masorti denomination.

## **Provide Guidance**

- A transparent process that provides members the ability to ask ethics or policy advice and receive answers increases the likelihood that they will raise questions proactively rather than waiting for conflict to arise.

## **Increase Education & Affirm Commitments**

- Rationale: When enacting any policy or protocol, no provision will successfully prevent or account for all abuses of power. To keep ethics front and center, the RA should establish a professional responsibility (ethics) continuing education requirement, ask members to review and uphold the Code as part of their annual membership renewal, include relevant provisions in rabbinic employment contracts, and provide ongoing education about ethics through newsletters, study groups, and podcasts.

## **Denomination Response to Abuse and Misconduct**

- Rationale: To keep the Jewish community safe from abuse, there must be a coordinated and collaborative response to misconduct. This came to light during the assessment; while not the responsibility of the RA, it is a call to action that denomination-affiliated organizations may want to consider:
  - Mutual reporting of ethics violations.
  - Prohibitions of hiring or placement of professionals when certain types of misconduct have been committed at the individual or at the organizational level.
  - The ability of ordaining intuitions to revoke ordinations for certain violations.
  - Eliminating the issuance of non-disclosure agreements when certain forms of misconduct have occurred.
  - Explore a truth and reconciliation process informed by victim-survivors with the opportunity for victim-survivors to share and, more importantly, be heard by individuals who have held or currently hold leadership positions.



# Conclusion

Throughout the assessment, participants consistently mentioned the significant strides that the RA has taken over the past few years, including heightened outreach, involvement, and engagement. They expressed appreciation for these efforts and see focus on the Code of Professional Conduct and strengthening ethics processes as central to the RA's mission. Since the outset of this assessment, the RA has already begun to implement recommendations as findings were emerging.


We also know that there is much work ahead for the RA. To commit to adherence and ongoing learning, the new Code of Conduct must be developed with wide member input and engagement. Furthermore, the revised documents must be developed with systems for ongoing revision that can adapt to new realities. The VHK toils in some of the most fraught issues facing our Jewish communities today. The responsibility held by the VHK is great and the potential impact even greater.

We end this report, as we began, honoring the voices of those who have been impacted by rabbinic misconduct, recognizing the complexity of the VHK's work, and acknowledging the commitment of the RA and its membership to create a more robust professional ethics Code that can clearly guide a sacred rabbinate.

May God bless this extensive endeavor the RA has undertaken, helping the RA succeed in its efforts to foster an ethical, moral rabbinate that holds its members to the lofty standards they have committed to and upon which the Jewish community depends.

# End Notes

1. At the time Sacred Spaces was hired, the Rabbinic Assembly was already beginning a committee tasked with examining gender and power and an overall strategic planning process to create a 21st-century organization that better supports this global and diverse network.
2. The term ‘victim-survivor’ in this summary refers to any individual who related that they had directly experienced some form of abuse or harassment, whether or not they filed a complaint with the RA. We also recognize that individuals who have experienced abuse and personal violations may refer to themselves differently or may reject a label altogether.
3. The Task Force was comprised of members from the Va’ad HaKavod, the RA’s Gender and Power Committee, RA professional staff, and a United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Board Member.
4. The RA made information about the assessment public by issuing press releases, posting information on its website, promoting the surveys, and publishing articles in newsletters.
5. The Code and VHK are shortened references used throughout this summary.
6. For example, assessment participants requested more guidance pertaining to interpersonal relationships, including professional relationships outside of a congregational setting.
7. A ‘complainant’ is someone who brought a complaint or concern about a potential Code violation to RA’s attention.
8. VHK committee members also indicate that the subject of some complaints requires expertise beyond their rabbinic training and noted that their role is demanding due to its time commitment, the impact of hearing misconduct allegations, and the responsibilities of supporting both parties.
9. A ‘respondent’ is a current or former RA member (i.e., rabbi) about whom a complaint was filed.
10. The membership survey was also offered orally in Spanish for those who were not comfortable completing it in Hebrew or English.
11. Listening sessions are focus groups where a small number of people from an affinity group are brought together to share their thoughts on a set of pre-developed questions.

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12. The last large revision to the Code of Professional Conduct was in 2004.
  13. Abuses of power and the need to handle professional ethics violations are not exclusive to any one organization, profession, or denomination. Sacred Spaces suggests that the RA seriously consider organizing a VHK process that operates across the denomination or in partnership with rabbinic organizations from other denominations. A shared or unified system allows organizations and denominations to learn from each other's experiences, create shared language and expectations, propel improvements forward more broadly, share the risk and responsibility inherent in this work, and prevent rabbinic offenders from moving from organization to organization.
  14. Since these recommendations carry significant costs, if the RA is unable to follow this recommendation fully or immediately, there are gradations that can be considered for implementation.
  15. Individuals who are considering making a report are in the best position to understand what can promote or compromise their own safety, including the potential impact of sharing information that identifies them. Therefore, it is best practice to have a complaint process include explanations of instances where information may be shared prior to asking someone for details about the report.
  16. Protections can be placed on the calendar and even on specific events to limit who can access the calendar to protect confidentiality. The RA should also consider developing a system to code case names so that if there is a breach of security, cases are not identifiable.
  17. Third parties can include a respondent's employer, ordaining institution, professional licensing boards, and other known places of leadership.
  18. Rabbis should be expected to uphold their local laws. Provisions of the military around confidentiality are considered local law.
  19. This standard means that conduct is more likely than not to have occurred.