

RCA Semicha Standards

Approved by Executive Committee

December 22, 2015

1) Membership Application

A) An applicant must submit a completed RCA membership application form, <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/ApplicationForm.doc>, and the items it requires.

B) At least one of each applicant's three required recommendations must be from a rabbinic faculty member of the applicant's yeshiva who has personal, first-hand knowledge of the applicant. It must testify to the applicant's character and learning ability. This recommendation must include how long the recommender has known the applicant, and under what circumstances.

NOTE: SSC, Membership Committee, and the RCA office will jointly create and publicize to applicants an approximate application timeline so that RCA staff and applicants alike can share expectations about how long to expect things to take. Rejection procedures must be included.

2) Beit midrash learning requirement

To qualify for RCA admission, an applicant's semicha must be the culmination of at least six years (for at least five hours a day) of documented post-high school learning in a traditional beit midrash setting. (This excludes on-line semicha programs.)

3) Semicha granted by a yeshiva

A) The RCA prefers semichot granted by established, yeshiva-based semicha programs. Such a yeshiva must have at least twenty students in residence, barring unusual circumstances. Its rosh yeshiva must be recognized by the Semicha Standards Committee. (See below for privately issued semichot, yeshivot which do not meet the above requirements, and other applicant circumstances.)

B) The semicha curriculum shall require (at a minimum):

- 1) איסור והיתר, יו"ד חלק א'
- 2) Two of the following five areas of הלכה למעשה study:
 - a) נידה
 - b) אבילות
 - c) עירובין
 - d) שבת, significant sections
 - e) קידושין וגירושין
- 3) Testing on 1) and 2) must be done on a regular basis, in a supervised setting,
- 4) Regular attendance at shiurim in Talmud and halachah.

NOTE: The RCA prefers but does not require that a semicha program provide pastoral training to its musmachim. Regardless, RCA Placement discusses the importance of pastoral training with both employers and RCA chaverim applying for positions requiring such skills.

The RCA's Membership Committee is tasked with carefully examining each applicant to ensure that his outlook is consistent with the "Core RCA Principles" found at <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/RCAIntroForJoinUs.pdf>.

NOTE: The Semicha Standards Committee recommends that the Membership Committee determine what level of formal general education (high school diploma, college degree, etc.) should be required for an applicant to qualify for RCA membership.

4) Applicants with semicha from “private” masmichim or from a semicha program which does not meet the above criteria

A) The Semicha Standards Committee must recognize that the private masmich or the yeshiva’s rosh yeshiva is both a *talmid chacham* and actively involved in the realm of *psak halachah le’ma’aseh*.

B) Each applicant must fulfill requirements above, 1), 2), and 3b).

C) Extra scrutiny of candidate required: Requirement (1b) is of particular significance for these applicants. Therefore, if the RCA office and Semicha Standards Committee chairman believe that the required recommendation from the rabbinic faculty member of the applicant’s yeshiva does not clearly indicate a significant personal relationship between the recommender and the applicant, they will forward the letter to the entire committee for further review. Phone calls to the recommender or others may be made to gain confidence in the applicant’s character and learning ability.

5) Evaluation of a yeshiva or private masmich not previously approved by the RCA

A) Regardless of whether a yeshiva semicha program fulfills the requirements of 3a), its representative shall fill out and submit <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/RequestForInformationAboutYeshivaForRCA.doc>.

B) For a private masmich, <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/RequestForInformationAboutPrivateMasmich.doc> must be completed by, or in direct conversation with, the masmich.

The RCA office (Barry Kornblau) and Semicha Standards Committee chairman shall review the document upon receipt, and forward it to the members of the Semicha Standards Committee for evaluation, any requested follow-up information, and whether to determine whether to submit a final recommendation to the Executive Committee.

C) A visit to a yeshiva shall be required if the Semicha Standards Committee believes such a visit may resolve a specific concern it has about a yeshiva. A visit shall also be required if no committee member has first-hand knowledge of the yeshiva or if the Committee cannot obtain reliable first-hand information from the broader RCA membership about the yeshiva. Under circumstances similar to the above, the RCA office staff and the SSC chairman shall call a private masmich.

6) Ongoing evaluations of approved yeshivot

Upon approval of these guidelines, SSC will systematically review each yeshiva and private masmich that is currently RCA-approved (<http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/ApprovedYeshivot.pdf> and <http://www.rabbis.org/pdfs/ApprovedPrivateMasmichim.pdf>) for compliance with these guidelines.

Subsequently, the Semicha Standards Committee will renew each approved yeshiva’s certification every five years unless it identifies circumstances requiring a more frequent investigation.

7) The Executive Committee shall determine whether to accept the Semicha Standard Committee’s recommendation to add or remove a yeshiva or a private maschim to/from the RCA approved lists.

8) Exceptions to these guidelines and accompanying procedures:

The following two types of applicant may submit an RCA membership application even when they do not meet all of the above criteria:

A) Someone employed or seeking employment in an area other than (a) synagogue rabbinate or (b) military, prison, or health care chaplaincy.

B) Someone who became a rabbi after a different first career or later in life. (The rabbinic credentials, Torah learning, and general background of such an applicant require individualized analysis.) The applicant shall clearly explain the reasons for the changes in his life direction, including why he did not

pursue the rabbinate as a first career. He must submit a detailed character reference from his primary former employers.

After receiving all required application documents from either type of applicant, an RCA staff person must speak directly and in detail about the applicant to the rabbi providing the letter required by 4c), above. After reviewing all application materials as well as the RCA staff person's "4c)" report, the RCA Executive Vice President, the chairman of the Semicha Standards Committee, and the chairman of the Membership Committee may, by unanimous agreement, direct the Semicha Standards Committee and Membership Committee to evaluate such an applicant on an ad-hoc basis in order to determine whether to recommend that the Executive Committee accept him as member.

9) Familial relationships of applicants

A familial relationship between an applicant and the rabbi or yeshiva granting him semicha potentially impairs the RCA's ability to properly evaluate the validity of that semichah. (An applicant is considered 'related to a yeshiva' if a male or female relative, whether a rabbi or not, as defined below, has direct or indirect power or influence over his yeshiva's decision whether to grant semicha to a given individual.) Any such known familial relationship requires specific scrutiny and approval by the RCA's Semicha Standards Committee. Sometimes, the applicant and semicha-granting rabbi or yeshiva are related as direct ancestors and descendants; siblings; first cousins, or first cousins once-removed; aunt/uncle and nephew; or, great aunt/uncle and great nephew. In such cases, the semicha-granting rabbi (and, in the case of a 'related yeshiva', another, non-related rabbinic member of its semicha program's faculty) must submit a letter to the RCA confirming that the musmach received his semicha only after being tested and evaluated in a fashion identical to its/his other musmachim, and detailing the content and substance of that testing and evaluation. In the case of a yeshiva, the letter must additionally state that the musmach spent at least one year in full-time residence at the yeshiva during which he mastered the halachot in preparation for the semicha it granted him.