

Introduction: The Semicha Standards Committee (SSC) currently operates under the mandate of a 2004 Resolution, “[Requirements for Institutional Semicha Granting Certification](#)”. In order to enable the Semicha Standards Committee to carry out their responsibilities more efficiently and with greater clarity, the Semicha Standards hereby proposes that the following document, reflecting some ideas of that resolution, entirely replace it.

Proposed Draft of Semicha Standards

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.

NOTE: The task of evaluating an applicant’s hashkafah lies beyond the scope of the Semicha Standards Committee. 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 the private masmich or the yeshiva’s rosh yeshiva.

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>. 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.

B) 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:

A) An applicant whose credentials and background fit none of the above categories may seek admission to the RCA on ad-hoc basis by submitting, in writing, a completed application form, relevant documents, and other pertinent information to the RCA office. He must have mastered the curriculum defined in 3b) and must conform to the RCA Core Principles, just as is required of other candidates. Together, the Semicha

Standards and the Membership Committees shall review this material and, if warranted, interview the applicant, to determine whether to recommend the applicant for approval as a member by the Executive Committee.

B) Requirement 4c) shall apply, with an additional requirement of a direct, detailed conversation with the rabbi providing that letter.

C) An applicant who became a rabbi after a different first career or later in life shall also clearly explain the reasons for the changes in his life's direction, including why he did not pursue the rabbinate as a first career. He also must submit a detailed character reference from his primary former employers.