

# ANNUAL REVIEWS

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Does your church hold annual reviews? If not, then you should pursue the idea! The annual employment review, or performance appraisal, is an important tool we musicians have to assess our standing with our employing church or synagogue. Think of the review as a conversation between you, the musician, and your employer—a conversation for which both have prepared. Admittedly some, whether employee or employer, get anxious about the prospect of an annual review, but both sides can take steps to make it a positive experience.

The AGO's National Committee on Career Development has put together guidelines to aid in preparing for a review. The guidelines summarize the review process and provide sample questions and forms that can be tailored to your individual situation. These guidelines can help if you are in a church or synagogue that already conducts annual reviews, or if you want to work with your employing institution to develop a review format.

## Why an annual review?

Ideally, the annual review should be the culmination of a year's worth of ongoing formal and informal interactions between the musician and other staff, committees, and members of the congregation. The evaluations and feedback of an annual review are most useful when there are no surprises. For both the musician and the institution, the review offers an assessment of the musician's work in three key areas: people skills and working relationships, music and worship skills, and business and administrative skills. For the institution, the review provides essential information for the budget process in support of the music program.

## What is a review?

An employment review is, essentially, a communication tool. An annual review, along with frequent intervening communications, can help foster good relationships among the musician, the clergy, and the congregation. It can also act as an early warning of potentially serious problems. When AGO profes-

sional concerns committees are presented with conflicts between a musician and the clergy or congregation, often the underlying problem is a lack of communication.

Part of the review process is to set goals for a coming period of time, so that the next year's review becomes an opportunity to go over previous goals and accomplishments. On a more administrative level, the review can aid both the musician and the institution in short-term and long-term planning; for example, in planning services or musical activities, or making organizational changes. The review is also a good time to take stock not only of people but also the facilities of the institution as they relate to the overall music program.

## What helps the review work?

Behind the review are some key assumptions about the relationship between the musician and the church or synagogue that are crucial to the review's success:

- you have a current contract and job description;
- there is a certain level of trust between the parties, so both can be open and honest;
- the institution recognizes that music is an integral part of its overall ministry.

## What is the process?

Most commonly, the review process begins with a written form with questions or statements related to the musician's job. Both the musician and the reviewer complete their own copies of the same or similar form in advance of a scheduled review meeting. The review form does not need to be lengthy, nor the questions highly detailed, but it should cover the major categories of the musician's work. To help in crafting a review form, the guidelines offer topics and sample questions as well as a model form that are to be adapted to the employing church or synagogue's own situation.

At the review meeting, the musician and reviewer go over each other's forms, noting agreements, differences,

and information that one person may have included but the other didn't. What follows should be a frank, candid discussion covering areas of strength as well as areas needing further development or improvement. This is also when, ideally, both parties can discuss their working relationship with each other and how it might be strengthened.

An important part of the review meeting is to discuss and agree upon goals for the coming year, and plans or ways to accomplish them. While most of the focus for the goals will be on the musician, this is also an opportunity for the reviewer, as a leader or representative of the church or synagogue, to take on goals that will strengthen the relationship between the musician, the ministers, and the institution.

During the meeting it is important that both parties take notes. These are not only a record of the conversation, but they become the basis for consolidating comments of the musician and the reviewer onto one form. After the consolidated form is prepared, the musician and reviewer sign it, and copies are made for each other.

## More about the meeting!

The review meeting is to be dedicated to the review—it is not a quick lunch at the local diner! The meeting should be held in a place that offers complete privacy, with the expectation that there will be no interruptions—no phone calls, no beepers, no cell phones, no intruding administrators.

## Who is your reviewer?

The AGO Career Development Committee, in preparing the guidelines for reviews, can speak only in general terms, and the guidelines will need to be tailored to differing situations. This is particularly so with regard to religious institutions, which abide under a range of governing models or policies. Whereas in most business organizations a fairly clear set of working relationships defines who will review which employees, this may vary widely in a church or synagogue. For example, your reviewer could be the head minister, the director of music, or the chair of the music committee or the personnel committee. If your employing institution does not now conduct personnel reviews, you will need to work with both the lay and ministerial leaders to develop a process. That process should reflect the true working and authority relationships within the institution, and within its governing structure.

Reviews take thought, time, and preparation, but in the end they are worth it. Reviews can help build good working conditions and maintain good working relationships. They can also strengthen our position as professionals, as well as further our careers and lead to advancement.