

INTRODUCING YOUTH TO TZEDAKAH MISSION STATEMENTS

Developed by:
Rabbi Jonathan Spira-Savett (js3@post.harvard.edu)
Sue Schwartzman (tzedakahsue@aol.com)

Introduction

This material was developed as the culmination of the inaugural Western Massachusetts B'nai Tzedek Shabbaton in December 2003. Various activities and workshops on Shabbat, Saturday evening, and early Sunday morning flowed into the mission statement workshop. By the time participants got to this point, they had opportunities to talk with peers in a general way about priorities and thoughts about tikkun olam and their own identities, they had experienced two workshops on aspects of philanthropy and the "Torah of Money", and they had participated in an extended simulation of philanthropists meeting organizational leaders.

The process described here can be lengthened and spread over several meetings. We owe a good deal of the approach to the book *Inspired Philanthropy*, by Tracy Gary and Melissa Kohner. We also thank Iva Kaufman of the UJC Planned Giving and Endowment Department, who helped us sharpen the flow of this workshop. Both Sue and Jon are working on variations of this cluster of exercises for groups that meet over a period of time, and we will publish them as we write and test them.

1. Warmup: Priorities in Tzedakah (10-15 minutes)

There seem to be five essential axes around which people make decisions about priorities in Jewish philanthropy. For each pair of choices ask, "Would you be more likely to volunteer or give money for projects that..." and then have participants move to the right or to the left depending on their responses.

<i>LEFT</i>	<i>RIGHT</i>
serve Jews	serve anyone
give food or meals	lobby to raise the minimum wage
help Jews in your city	help Jews in Israel
provide food, shelter, or medical care	provide education or preserve the earth
help Americans	help people in the poorest countries

After each question, ask one or two people from each side to briefly explain why they moved left or right. Some people end up in the middle, or leaning slightly in one direction, and they also have a chance to explain why.

As a brief warmup, this first exercise gives people a chance to hear and remember ideas that have come up in prior discussions, or raises for the first time some questions to return to in this workshop and of course again and again. If there is more time or enough staff, poster sheets could be put up to record responses and thoughts for each stance.

Next, participants have a chance to write down some preliminary thoughts, primed perhaps by the previous conversation (you can print this on a page of its own):

Answer either or both of these questions to get your thoughts going.

If you could use your money to change (up to) three things in the Jewish community or the world, or to solve three problems, what would they be?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are three of your core values?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

2. What is a Tzedakah Mission Statement (10 minutes)

Begin by explaining that a tzedakah mission statement is simply a description of the most important values and goals you intend to work toward through your giving. It is always a work in progress--you can change it as you learn things or change your mind. Having a tzedakah mission statement enables you to focus, so you don't feel like you are just giving money to every request or piece of mail that comes your way, and so you do feel that you are doing the most you can for the things that are most important to you.

At the shabbaton we began by presenting an example of a tzedakah mission statement--the mission of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation:

To enhance the vibrancy of Jewish life in Western Massachusetts and beyond through education and experiences that impart the knowledge and values of our heritage and the joys of being Jewish.

You could at this point present one or several sample mission statements, of individuals or philanthropies (in and out of the Jewish community).

At the retreat, we wrote down in rank order the allocations made in the philanthropy simulation the previous evening. One could do a similar thing by passing out a list of grants made by a foundation or of giving by a particular family. Ask, "What values or priorities seem to be important to that group of people, based on what you see on the list?" All kinds of responses are good and should be written on the poster paper--general ones such as "Jewish life" or "environment", or more specific like "day schools" or "college students' connections to Judaism." As words or concepts are tossed out, record them on posters and comment on how they tie back to one or more of the organizations "funded" in the simulation or by a real grantmaker.

It may be helpful at some point to note the difference between being committed to a particular organization, to a particular issue that different organizations might each address, or to a more general value or principle. Mission statements can be written in all of those ways. We explained at the end of this review and analysis that a mission statement is a record of this list of values, or of the most important ones to a person or group.

If you began with a single sample mission statement, at this point hand out a list of mission statements from Jewish foundations or other philanthropies, and talk about them briefly.

3. Writing Your First Tzedakah Mission Statement

Pass out the form that follows and go over it. It is a learning document for recording not only a short statement, but the reasons and thoughts that go into it and the questions the writer still has. Emphasize that this is a form to record thoughts or decisions that can always be amended or revised. For the shabbaton we printed it on thick paper to make it feel like an important document that participants should feel proud of and put in a prominent place where they can find and refer to it. We collected copies of everyone's statement, to learn how young people do it and in order to mail home to each participant a nice, clean copy.

Your name _____

My Personal Tzedakah Mission Statement

You can touch on any of the following:

- * issues I care about most*
- * beliefs about my role in affecting the world*
- *how being a giver shapes me/my identity as Jew or person*
- *texts or ideas that have helped me define my mission*
- *how I set priorities among communities, issues, or organizations*
- *first steps I intend to take*

Organizations I am interested in

Things I should get more information about or would like to think more about