

Teaneck-Bergenfield Tzedakah Committee

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24 Tevet, 5765
January 5, 2005

Dear Friends:

As you are aware, the Teaneck-Bergenfield Tzedakah Committee has been in operation for over seven years now. Over the past few months, we have received many calls from the community, especially from those who have recently moved into the community, requesting information on the committee and how we operate. We hope this communication will provide the community with up to date information regarding our work.

The overall purpose of this committee is to screen individuals and organizations that wish to collect funds in our community and, when appropriate, to grant certificates for those in valid need of tzedakah. We verify that the organizations represented are represented correctly and that individuals collecting enjoy an honest reputation. Our goal is to give you the ability to be able to give with a happy heart and with the joy that accompanies giving and being in the position to be able to give.

We developed our system after reviewing many similar programs in other major American cities. Never the less, our process is quite different than other Tzedakah Committees. We have tried to develop a screening process that is friendly and we see ourselves as providing a service to those in need, wishing to help them out.

If a person would like to obtain our certificate, they must first complete an application (available in English, Russian, and Hebrew). We have four types of applications--one for each of the most common reasons a person solicits funds. These include: Individual Need; Institutional Solicitation; Medical Need; and Hachnosas Kallah.

This application is submitted to the committee with supporting documents (letters of reference, other certificates, etc.). After a review of the documents, a committee member will personally speak with at least two people who know of the individual wishing to collect funds. One of the references must be a personal Rav who is known to us personally or by reputation. For example, if a person is requesting to collect on behalf of an organization in Israel, we will make personal contact with a Rav to confirm that they know of the person and will confirm with the organization that the person is authorized to collect on behalf of the organization. **Without making personal contact with these references, we will not grant a certificate.**

Often, when an individual requests a certificate (for personal need) and they live in the New York area, in addition to the verification noted above, a representative of the committee will make a home visit to interview the applicant. This personal contact allows us to gather additional information that will be helpful for the committee to make a decision.

After a committee member completes the verification process, a written report is prepared, including the recommendation of the committee member. The information is then submitted to one of our local Rabbaim. Rabbi Pruzansky and Rabbi Neuburger have been involved with the committee thus far. After their careful review (and at times personal investigation) the application is approved or denied and the individual is notified. If the person provides us with all the information we need, the process generally takes about 1 week from beginning to end although in special cases, this time is substantially reduced. There have been many occasions where we have been able to complete the verification process and issue a certificate in 24 hours. The process takes much longer when we are awaiting information or are having trouble contacting the references.

In the past 12 months, we have processed about 200 requests for certificates. We have approved 144 of these requests. The majority of those not approved were due to lack of information submitted, nonresponsiveness to questions from the committee or our inability to speak with the two references. If at any time we refuse to grant a certificate, we inform the person in writing and offer the individual an opportunity to meet personally with the committee.

If a person comes to your home without a certificate, please encourage them to call the Tzedakah Committee to request an application. They can call the Tzedakah Committee's phone number, 201 836-4562 or contact Dovid Schild at dschild@mdu-inc.com or call 201 343-9090, X 100. Or you may take their name and address (or fax number) and call either number and an application will be sent to them immediately.

We have received a number of questions regarding the committee. Below, please find the most common questions that have been asked of the committee over the last few months and the answers to these questions.

Q. People come to my home and say they applied for the certificate months ago. Why does it take so long?

A. For the past year, we have been processing applications in an average of one week. If someone says this to you, please take their name, address and phone number and contact Dovid Schild. Their application could be lost or you may be speaking with a person that has not responded to our request for additional information or documentation.

Q. What about all the meshulachim that come around in shul during davening.

A. This is an issue that each shul must address. We do, however believe that every person collecting in our community should have our certificate. You can be helpful in favoring those that have one.

Q. The same people come every few weeks to my home. What am I to do?

A. Each family should establish their own policy in consultation with their Rav.

Q. Often, three or four people come at the same time. Only one has the certificate. Are all the people in the group approved by the committee?

A. Only the person with the certificate has been screened and approved by the committee. You must check the picture on the certificate carefully to be sure that the person collecting is the person that has been approved by the committee. Be sure to check the date and never accept a photocopy of our certificate. All certificates have two signatures and a raised seal to insure its authenticity. Check it carefully!

Q. Who are these organizations that the meshulachim request the checks be made out to? When reviewing my canceled checks, often the endorsement just doesn't seem to be right.

A. Unfortunately, many of the meshulachim that come to our community with a real need to collect do not have a formal way to cash checks. Therefore, they use a not for profit organization to cash their check. Also, since the check is made out to an authorized tax-exempt organization, you receive a tax deduction. We recognize that this is not the optimal situation, however the committee is unable to address this issue at the present time.

Q. I understand that the drivers often receive a large percentage of the proceeds. Is this true?

A. We have spoken to most of the regular drivers that come into our community. Our investigation found that many of them receive up to 33% of what is collected. Some, however, are paid an hourly basis. We recognize this as a major issue, however, the committee is unable to address this issue at the present time.

Q. Is there a published list of individuals that have been reviewed by the committee and their application denied?

A. No, this information is not currently available. We cannot provide this information as that would cast aspersions on someone who simply did not respond to our requests for references. If you have questions on a specific individual, you may contact Dovid Schild for more information.

Q. Are certificates from other communities valid? Why does each community have to have their own process? Why can't there be one committee that does the approval for all of New Jersey/ the metropolitan area?

A. In our investigation, early in the committee's work, we contacted nearly a dozen communities to learn how their verification process was done. Several have impressive processes in place. Yet no other committee that we contacted requires personal contact with references, a process that is the foundation of our approval process. We share information when appropriate and respond to "alerts" and other common concerns that the other communities address. We continually learn from each other. However, every community has developed a system that services their needs depending on the available manpower. We felt that we could enhance the process with a verification that included personal contact with the references. We very much support a universal approval process, but to date, although we have spoken about this to other communities, no one or organization has addressed this need.

We hope that this correspondence answers the many questions regarding the committee. We are in need of volunteers, including people to assist in the verification process, translators (Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian) and people (Russian speaking) who are available to assist with home visits in Brooklyn. If you would like to volunteer, please contact Dovid Schild.

Sincerely,

The Teaneck-Bergenfield Tzedakah Committee