

Philanthropy DotCom

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There is no word for accountability in the Hebrew language, but that may change as a result of the efforts of a Hebrew University professor. Eliezer Jaffe's field is not philology – it's social work, a major part of which is keeping track of non-profit and philanthropic organizations and making sure that they do what they advertise.

The site is based on his recently updated book *Giving Wisely*, originally published in 1982 as a guideline for donors from abroad.

The *Giving Wisely* Internet site contains 27,300 full and partial profiles of non-profit organizations (NPOs) which come under categories such as aid for the needy, disaster relief and education. There are some 90 categories enabling potential donors ample and diverse choices for the disposal of surplus funds.

Jaffe is optimistic that the site will make leaders of non-profit organizations more savvy and aware of the competition. Such awareness may induce them to provide better and more in-depth information from which profiles will be compiled.

Unlike the book – which can only be updated with each new edition – the Internet site can be constantly updated as new information comes to hand and existing information becomes obsolete.

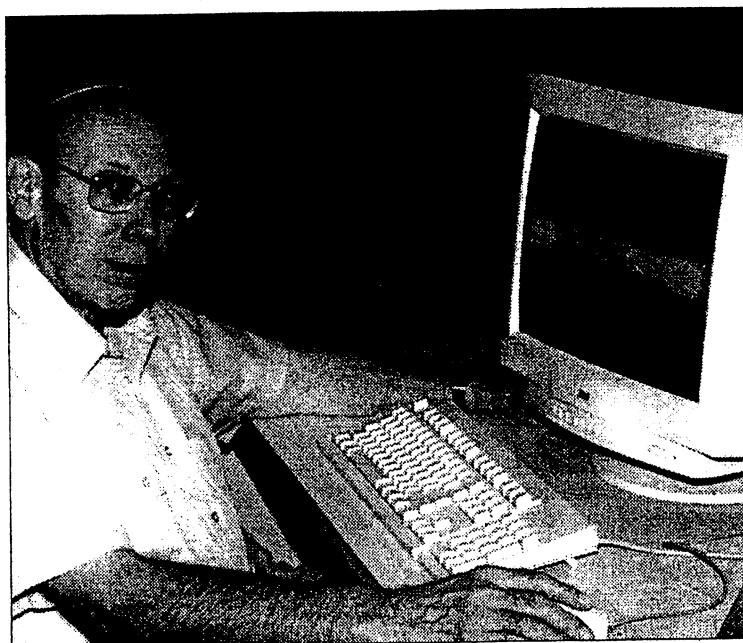
The website is incorporated into the M.A. program in management of community and non-profit organizations and public policy at Hebrew University.

"It's a gigantic field" says Jaffe, noting that in a market economy the government provides basic services but leaves it to the business community and the third sector or volunteers to introduce and maintain other services.

On a per capita ratio, Jaffe discloses, there are more non-profit organizations in Israel than in the US.

"Israel is a country rich in non-profit organizations," says Jaffe, underscoring again and again the extent to which the NPOs carry the ball for the government.

First there was e-mail, then there was e-shopping and e-commerce, and now there's e-philanthropy – thanks to a new website that lists more than 27,000 non-profit organizations in Israel.



Hebrew University professor Eliezer Jaffe has just launched the website *Giving Wisely*. "This will help a lot of people who want to receive services, volunteer or give money," he says.

However to be a registered non-profit organization and to meet all the criteria needed for tax exemptions requires a relationship with government ministries.

An *amuta* or non-profit organization must register with the Interior Ministry's Registrar of Amutot to prove that it is legally constituted.

Although non-profit organizations are staffed by volunteers, they also use paid employees who bring a lot of income tax to the Ministry of Finance, says Jaffe.

Jaffe is upset that while *amuta* files at the Interior Ministry can be freely inspected by members of the public, the Finance Ministry files of the same organizations are closed and treated in the same manner as personal income tax files. In other words, they're private. Jaffe who is

opposed to such a policy says, "There should be unlimited public access to all NPO files. There must be transparency because the public is the NPO's best watchdog."

Another important point related to the accessibility of files is the public's right to services.

"If they don't know that services are available, they can't benefit from them," says Jaffe. "It's the right of the public to receive information including financial reports."

Such reports he says should be published on government internet sites or sites such as *Giving Wisely*. In addition to the NPOs there are some 1,500 foundations operating in Israel, some of which are also profiled on the *Giving Wisely* website.

Jaffe himself is part of that volunteer sector, chairing and administering The Israel Free Loan Association which provides loans to new immigrants and needy Israeli families. It has an impressive reference committee and board of directors which include leading figures from Israel and abroad, including Rabbi Dr Shlomo Riskin, Natan Sharansky and Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.

Funded by private donations grants and legacies, the IFLA – since its inception – has allocated more than \$15.5 million of interest-free loans, at the rate of some 200 per month. The loans range from \$1,000 for personal needs to \$15,000 for small business.

The IFLA – registered and approved as a non-profit organization with tax deductible status – is run by a small paid staff of six and 15 regular volunteers. The IFLA wants to expand its assistance categories to help young couples buy their first apartment with an interest-free mortgage as well as to provide larger loans to all categories of borrowers.

Aside from the IFLA, the 66-year-old Cleveland, Ohio born Jaffe, who has lived in Israel since 1960, has impeccable credentials in the area of social concerns. He served on several prime ministerial committees on social welfare policy, and introduced major reforms when he headed the Jerusalem Municipal Department of Family and Community Services.

He is a consultant to several foundations and private philanthropists in Israel and abroad, and is the recipient of numerous prizes for his work.

Jaffe sees the new *Giving Wisely* internet site as multi-purpose.

"This will help a lot of people who want to receive services, volunteer or give money," he says.

Now philanthropists living outside of Israel can check out organizations and get in touch. Regardless of geographical distance the relationship no longer has to be remote and impersonal.

The website address is <http://www.givingwisely.org.il>. The text is available in both English and Hebrew.