



State Comptroller and Ombudsman
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Ministry of Religious Services

Activity of the Jewish Identity Division in the Ministry of Religious Services

Abstract

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Background

A government decision in September 2013 established the Directorate of the Jewish Identity as a division within the Ministry of Religious Services. The goal of this division, as defined in the government decision, is to act “for the advancement and strengthening of Jewish identity among various social groups and for the intensification of awareness and self-identification within the Israeli society with the basic elements of Jewish identity and the Jewish and national legacy to all parts of the Jewish people”. In order to implement its goal, the division’s activity is undertaken in cooperation with different organizations with which it forms agreements.

Key figures

September **2013**

Establishment of Jewish Identity Division

79 million NIS

Division budget in the year 2019


67%

Rate of budget utilization in 2019

131 million NIS


The budget utilized by the division in the years 2015 to 2019


Audit Actions


 In the months of August to September 2019, the State Comptroller’s Office examined activities of the division in the domain of transactions including compliance with elementary principles of competitiveness and equality of opportunities; support and budgeting; control and supervision; and lack of conflict of interests. The audit was carried out in the Jewish Identity Division and in the Ministry of Religious Services - in the accountancy office, in the legal office and in the procurement section. Supplementary examinations were conducted in the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration, the Ministry of Justice, and in the General Comptroller’s Office in the Ministry of Finance. Supplementary checks were made in a number of associations carrying out projects for the division.


The Situation Reflected in the Audit Findings





 The ministry's website contains a page detailing the activities financed by the division. But the information does not contain references to the associations executing the activities, their specific dates, their location, the participating fee, etc..

 **Goals measurement** - The division has set quantitative goals for its activities focused on results - number of participants and the geographic distribution of activity - but it did not set up measures of outcome which check the quality of the activities, such as measuring the impact of activities on the participants and whether the government decision's goal was achieved - i.e. strengthening Jewish identity.

 **Public tenders publication** - In the year 2019, the division stopped performance of transactions by means of tender exemption by law (in a joint venture or by a transaction with the Jewish Agency) and began undertaking transactions by tender, so that there was additional incentive for competitiveness and equal opportunity; however, the findings of the audit indicate that during the years 2014 to 2018, in six out of nine transactions concluded by the division, which had begun with exemption from tender, the associations currently conducting the project also won the subsequent tender; in one transaction two associations won jointly, and in two transactions, the supplier was changed.

 **Transactions up to 50,000 NIS** - The division's examination of the offers received in the framework of the limited competition procedure was not optimal: in 16 out of 17 transactions examined by the audit, out of three price proposals received for each transaction, only one was in the range of 50,000 NIS, therefore the other two offers provided were rejected and only one offer complying with the rules was left. In five out of 17 cases (about 30%), the cheapest or the best economic offer was not selected; in four cases (about 24%), the division had not a basis for comparison in order to select the best offer.

 **Coordination with other ministries** - Although the division had taken steps to advance coordination with the Ministry of Education in regard to transactions in domains in which the Ministry of Education subsidizes and supports, the coordination referred to a general examination of the activities' subject matter without examining the planned activity details and without referring to all the activities types included in the various plans. It was further found that 2 out of 13 associations which were declared eligible for receiving a subsidy from the division, had received subsidies also from the Ministry of Agriculture, and there was no coordination between the ministries in this matter.

 **Double payment made by the division for activities financed by it** - The audit has found that the division had paid a total of 28,000 NIS to two different associations for the same activity conducted during the months of July-August 2018 in the same place and the same time. In his response to the audit report draft, the division manager reported that the issue had been taken care of and that a demand for a refund was issued to the relevant associations.



Conflict of interests regulation - When the Division Manager took office in 2014, he did not formulate a conflict of interest arrangement although this was required. During the audit, such an arrangement was formulated.



The division has created a pilot program for measurements and assessment of one of the projects by an external company. The company had detailed, in a report submitted in May 2019, recommendations and rules for the selection of criteria and measurement guidelines for projects assessment.

Main Audit Recommendations



It is recommended to include in the division website information regarding activities carried out by it, their goal and their locations in Israel and in regard to the method of registering with the organizations carrying out the programs.



It is recommended that the division formulates a uniform policy concerning the manner by which the various associations may provide online reporting regarding the activities planned and carried out by them, including the number of participants, by regional cross-section` on the basis of such reports, the division will formulate an annual report for all activity. It is further recommended that the division set qualitative goals regarding the measure of efficiency of its activities and their contribution to the strengthening of Jewish identity, and which examine compliance with its goals. In this framework, it is desirable to consider integration of feedback provided by the public which will enable the division to assess the measure of satisfaction of the participants in its activities.



It is recommended that the division formulate an orderly mechanism for coordination with other ministries, especially with the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture in everything related to its activities.



In order to ensure control and supervision of the execution of its plans, the Ministry of Religious Services must consider the implementation of the Minister of Finance guidelines regarding control and supervision of bodies subsidiary to public institutions, including projects concluded by contractual transactions; it should also consider the allocation of at least 0.5 percent of the for the execution of qualitative and quantitative control and supervision activities.



It is proposed that the division, in coordination with the accountancy office of the ministry, consider integrating in its call to offers in the request for price proposals, a structured digitized form in which the required services and goods are detailed. In this manner, the price proposals will include all the items required and only them, so that a comparison between offers is possible. Also, it is proposed to consider to emphasize in that form that the price proposal shall not exceed 50,000 NIS, and that the inclusion of additional items by the offeror must be made in a separate section.

Summary

The situation as seen in the examination of the division transactions, points to the need for a significant improvement of some of its activities, and especially the creation of coordination mechanisms between the division and other ministries – the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Agriculture, and a fundamental improvement of the control and supervision conducted by the division on the associations executing its plans and of the transactions made by it.

Main plans which the division had executed for Jewish identity, 2013

The plan	Plan goal	Countrywide deployment
"Periphery" project	Characterizing Jewish identity values as a likable, uniting and dominant element within Israeli society in general, and among youth and youngsters from the periphery, in particular.	30 centers countrywide
Seminaries for students.	Intensification of Jewish identity awareness among the country citizens with emphasis on the students population.	30 centers countrywide
Events during the course of the annual calendar.	Intensification of students' familiarity and self-identification with central themes of the legacy of the Jewish and / or Israeli nation.	30 centers countrywide
A plan for Jewish identity in the community.	Nurturing Jewish identity as a pivot of mutual connection in the family, the community and the Israeli society.	Countrywide
Zionism and Judaism	Establishing study groups of youngsters for ongoing volunteer work in different Zionist organizations.	Countrywide
Family, including connectivity plans ("Close to Heart").	Intensification of family values and prevention of family crises, connection among people, and nurturing communal fabric and unity by means of common ideological activity.	Countrywide

Source: Division data