

Spirituality/Meaning Division Charter

International Positive Psychology Association

(Version 2.0)

This Charter is a member-created document written to outline key information and structure for the Spirituality/Meaning Division. It is designed to serve as a roadmap for works to be done by the division members and to clarify the underlying focus, priorities, values and connection to the wider IPPA goals that drive such work.

To ensure that this remains a relevant guiding document and aligned to the overall IPPA mission, this Charter will be reviewed annually at a minimum and revised as necessary.

Name

Spirituality/Meaning Division of IPPA (SMD)

Context

The International Positive Psychology Association (IPPA), founded in 2007, aims to promote the science and application of positive psychology, facilitate collaboration, and share findings with as many people and organizations as possible.

In regard to the SMD, Drs. Ryan Niemiec and Itai Ivtzan observed the lack of attention spirituality had been receiving in the science of positive psychology, despite a substantial, wide-reaching, cross-disciplined research base that has unfolded over a long period of time. At the same time, the science of meaning had exploded and landed solidly among researchers and practitioners in positive psychology and IPPA. This distinction is made stark when one considers the highly successful IPPA conference in Melbourne 2019 and the (approximate) number of substantive talks (defined as a keynote, invited talk, symposium, workshop) on meaning (N=20) vs. spirituality (N=0), while minimal-reach entries (defined as posters, roundtables, conversation hours) as meaning (N=14) and spirituality (N=5).

While these areas of spirituality and meaning are distinct from another there are also many parallels. A division that explored, studied and shared those unique pathways, parallels, and distinctions, seemed to be warranted not only to bring benefit to the IPPA community but the larger positive psychology community, and the far more expansive community at large. The well-being benefits associated with each is substantial.

Niemiec and Ivtzan brought the idea for such an initiative/division to numerous IPPA members and non-members – thought leaders, researchers, and practitioners – and received overwhelming enthusiasm. They then met regularly to advance the idea, brainstorm committees and programs, and discuss how such a Division would bring benefit to its members as well as to the IPPA organization. They consulted with and were advised by several key IPPA staff along the way. They placed two open “calls” to the full IPPA membership to involve any interested member. In addition, they turned to select people in their own networks to gauge interest in participating as well as engendering the additional benefit of bringing in new paid IPPA members. These efforts resulted in 200 opt-in participants, including researchers, educators, thought leaders,

practitioners, and students. Approximately 30 countries are represented in this mix (see attached list of names, without e-mails). This was viewed as a “signature list” reflecting the interest in such a Division. Additionally, a survey of IPPA membership, sent by the executive director, found that 44% of respondents were interested in exploring the topic of spirituality/meaning in the context of positive psychology at IPPA. Therefore, within IPPA – not to mention outside of IPPA – there is significant interest in these areas.

In the Winter and Spring 2020, Ivtzan and Niemiec conducted 3 open meetings. These meetings were framed as part of a “spirituality/meaning initiative, with the hopes of becoming an official Division.” They were *practical* (sharing in small groups how individuals were using spirituality/meaning to cope with the coronavirus pandemic), *personal* (sharing of one’s spiritual journey in small breakout groups), *pragmatic* (openly discussing intentions, hopes, ideas for this potential Division), and *productive* (3 initial start-up committees convened and began working toward future goals). These meetings averaged live attendance of about 50 people with a maximum of 100.

Details available to all:

- Meeting 1 ([recording link here](#))
- Meeting 2 ([recording link here](#))
- Meeting 3 (working meeting of various committees, thus not recorded)

As a result of meeting #3, a draft of the Division charter was brought to the next level (Charter Committee); scientific themes/topics within spirituality/meaning were outlined for future literature review, summarizing, and disseminating (Science Committee); and initial articles that bring the science to the general public were discussed (Popular Writing Committee).

The SMD charter draft was submitted to IPPA’s executive director on July 10, 2020 for presentation at the IPPA Board Meeting the following week.

Guiding Principles of the Division

We value and strive to be an inclusive, open-minded group that does not allow one’s spiritual, religious, and/or non-religious beliefs to be considered superior or to be prioritized over others. We believe that the science and practice of spirituality and meaning are transformative, providing human beings with an essential path for psycho-spiritual well-being. Therefore, the focus of any and all research, discussion, and work done by or for this Division is not an attempt to validate religious rituals, beliefs, customs or institutions. It is not an attempt to elevate any one particular religion or set of spiritual beliefs.

Because of the sensitivity and entrenched biases and stereotypes surrounding this topic, we assert that *science* is the starting point of all our discussions and work. We acknowledge the fact that some spiritual experiences might not be fully examined by contemporary science and we remain open to such experiences as a part of our exploration and research process. We aggregate, catalyze, conduct and disseminate the science of spirituality and meaning. From that science, best practices can be highlighted and outlined, and those practical applications, in turn, can inform the science.

Vision

To contribute to the science and understanding of what it means to be human, including the experience of a life of fulfillment, wholeness, and interconnectedness.

Mission

Simply put, the Spirituality/Meaning Division aims to advance the science and practice of spirituality and meaning.

The Division catalyzes, aggregates, and communicates on the science of spirituality & meaning, and in turn, shares and explores evidence-based practices therein for the benefit of individuals, groups, and society. It brings spirituality more strongly into the fold within positive psychology and emphasizes connections across backgrounds (e.g., ethnic, racial, gender, spiritual, religious) and across professional disciplines, within the Division, among other IPPA Divisions, and with related groups outside the Division. While psychology and positive psychology are often subjective – and spirituality even moreso – we turn to the science to inform the education and practice. Science is the default.

Foundational Definitions

Spirituality is universal yet it has many dimensions. The specific content of spiritual beliefs varies amongst cultures, but all cultures have a concept of an ultimate, transcendent, sacred force. From a scientific standpoint, spirituality is consistently defined by scientists as the search for, or communion with, the *sacred* (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones & Shafranske, 2013). This has become nearly a consensual definition among scientists in the study of spirituality as this definition is reflected in approximately two-thirds of studies on the topic (Kapusinsky & Masters, 2010). Three common elements tend to sit within definitions of spirituality by researchers:

- the sacred or the transcendent (beyond the ordinary),
- a connection or relationship with the sacred, and
- the search for ultimate meaning or purpose (Maysless & Russo-Netzer, 2017).

The word “sacred” most commonly refers to God, higher power, divinity or qualities associated with the divine, such as transcendence, ultimacy, boundlessness, and deep connectedness. People can experience the sacred through a variety of channels, such as a sense of connection, closeness, or oneness with the transcendent, a theistic being, oneself, humanity, all living beings, or nature and the environment.

A key point is that spirituality could be both a result of meaning/purpose or the source of meaning/purpose. While meaning may closely relate to spirituality – and for some people “meaning” is their source and journey for spirituality – it is a distinct construct.

The science of meaning has consistently delineated three main types of meaning –

- coherence - making sense of life, understanding how everything fits together,

- significance - feeling that life matters, knowing the value of life, and feeling that appreciation for oneself/others, and
- purpose - taking action for the greater good, following one's calling (George & Park, 2016; Martela & Steger, 2016).

Spirituality and meaning, as a sense of interconnectedness to something beyond ourselves and a sense of purpose, have been shown in many studies to enrich people's lives and foster well-being. There are correlations to increased optimism, greater resilience in the face of and following trials, and a sense of direction in one's life, to name a few.

Examples of Themes of Spirituality/Meaning

What follows is a small sampling of potential areas of research, practice and exploration in the Division.

- Consciousness, wholeness, coherence, significance, purpose, existential meaning, transcendent experience (spiritual experiences), non-duality, self-actualization, religious conversion, cultural differences in spirituality, conscious capitalism, authenticity, spiritual embodiment, spiritual leadership and entrepreneurship, meaningful work, forgiveness, gratitude, creativity, awe, love, bravery, fairness, humility, elevation, character strengths, mindfulness, spiritual issues in psychotherapy, spiritual development, morality, social justice, peace, environment, mysticism, spirituality and addiction, flourishing congregations, prayer, personal transformation.
 - While religion – religious rituals, religious beliefs, and religious practices – are absolutely welcomed areas for scientific exploration and sharing in this Division, they are not the starting point or the primary focus of the Division. Religion is viewed as one of *many* pathways toward the sacred or self-transcendent or toward that which facilitates deep meaning.

Objectives

The SMD objectives are aligned under IPPA's key mission strands as well as several related areas/objectives:

- To advance the scientific study and ethical application of positive psychology. Our divisional approach within this overall objective is: using scientific rigor, to specifically explore and design practice applications/interventions that further develop and utilize spirituality/meaning as a means toward well-being and flourishing practices and to communicate these interventions with wider communities for further study, and use.
- To facilitate collaboration among researchers, teachers, students, and practitioners of positive psychology around the world and across academic disciplines.
- To share the findings of positive psychology with the broadest possible international audience.
- To foster and enable open dialogue and critical thinking discussion on these topics as vehicles for further research and communication.

- To connect Division members from across the world, enabling collaboration across countries and institutions. This includes a deliberate pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion in regard to not only membership, but also participation and collaboration.
- To prioritize the role of high quality, ethical research through credible research sources, partnerships and collaborations, etc.
- To actively bridge gaps between research and practice, helping individuals and groups understand legitimate uses of science.
- To maximize access to resources across nations and cultures (e.g., translations of key materials into non-English languages).
- Have a strong presence at the biennial IPPA conferences, and enable connections amongst members between the conferences.
- To work collaboratively external organizations and networks to disseminate research and advance practice.

Activities

The following activities by Division leadership and members will be deployed to fulfill the SMD mission and vision:

- 1) Identify existing and needed research in the spirituality and meaning spheres. Critical to this is actively engaging researchers, practitioners, and professionals across multiple disciplines, countries, and backgrounds.
- 2) Translate academic research into practical, evidence-based tools and applications, with easy-to-understand information communicated for users.
- 3) Collaborate across the Divisions of IPPA. Support other Divisions around spirituality and meaning. Other Divisions already have a “meaning” sub-committee; invite and coordinate a collaborate exchange among both Divisions. Members from each Division can then liaise, synergize, and collaborate across Divisions.
- 4) Test the impact of spirituality/meaning/well-being interventions within and across relevant settings, including impacts on individuals, groups, organizations and communities.
- 5) Develop synergistic partnerships with other organizations around the world with shared values.
- 6) Communicate research findings and practical knowledge, developing a database for all interested in this focused area of study.
- 7) Build a presence at the biennial IPPA World Congress and IPPA events.
- 8) Represent organizational interests to IPPA. Positively influence future policy development, initiatives and the overall development of IPPA.

Examples of potential avenues to serve the mission/vision of SMD and its members include:

- Science and Spirit series [live/recorded webinar]: conversations - thoughtful, engaging interviews with leading researchers and thought leaders on the science of spirituality and meaning.
- Spirituality Publication: peer-reviewed
- IPPA conference integration - ideas
 - A track on S/M that runs through the conference

- 1-2 awards, maybe only science awards (student and scientist); research and/or intervention competitions
- Data blitz
- Symposia, workshops
- Pre-conference spirituality retreat
- Social hour at IPPA conference
- Create spiritual experiences throughout in coordination with conference leads, e.g., spiritual circle ritual; mindfulness meditation, walking meditation, spiritually oriented strengths observation, etc.
- Transcendence Strengths in Your Life [presentations]: Tagline: “From the science and into your life”; presentations on the science of particular strengths and how that can be applied to connect outside of ourselves
- Connecting with the Sacred [retreat, online]: Mindfulness, meaning, and character strengths virtual retreats. These are akin to “days of mindfulness”.
- Flourishing congregations [live online forum, with special interest topics]: an open forum/discussion platform to explore ways to use the science of positive psychology as a lens to view religion, religious practices, and contemporary issues (e.g., extremist behavior/violence). Avenue for challenging/improving religion, people who are religious/spiritual, and the communities that sustain them.
- Special Topics: Peace/conflict resolution; environment and pro-climate behaviors; social justice and anti-racism [roundtable discussions, online]

Division Membership

IPPA-SMD aims to be collectively led and member-inspired. Our goal is to build and grow a strong membership base with a productive mix of academics, researchers, educators, students, practitioners, and professionals. We are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and hence seek a broad membership, spurred by IPPA’s international focus in its work. We envision this including organizational leaders, religious clergy, spiritual thinkers, teachers, psychologists, counselors, social workers, coaches, managers, physicians, nurses, other helping professionals, as well as non-professionals with an interest in the science of spirituality/meaning. Division membership is open to all Members and Students of IPPA. Division membership lasts for the length of one’s IPPA membership, and involves the following benefits and responsibilities:

- Division members are encouraged to actively participate in webinars, committees, topic groups, or forums, and/or contribute resources to the online database to help build knowledge within the community.
- Division members can volunteer to be a part of member-led committees and leadership roles, including regional members who organize members for local meet-ups and aid with membership engagement efforts.
- Division members are eligible to vote in Division elections and contribute to ongoing dialogue about Division activities.
- Division members will have access to the resources shared within the community.
- Division members can sign up to receive regular updates about Division activities and research findings.

Communication

Communication with members will occur through direct email and a member-only online portal accessible via the IPPA network (ippanetwork.org). A Division specific online forum will be available for direct communication amongst members. Additional communications will include:

- An annual report to the IPPA Leadership and Board of Directors by the President or Vice-President (or approved executive committee member).
- An annual report on Division activities.

Leadership

The Division will be headed by an Executive Committee. This will include the President, Vice-President, Secretary and Member-at-large. The initial executive committee will serve a 4-year term in order to initialize and advance the Division objectives. Subsequent elected committee members will serve two-year terms. Executive committee members may run for no more than two consecutive terms. Executive committee members are voting members. Upon successful completion of a term, executive members are permitted to run for a different office. Once the Division is established and running, additional Executive Committee members may include: Immediate Past President and President-Elect.

As the Division develops and given IPPA's dual emphasis on the advancement of scholarship and practice, it is anticipated that the leadership structure should inherently reflect both of those interests, with a mix of academics and practitioners serving leadership roles and a range of backgrounds and cultural mix.

The roles and responsibilities are as follows:

1. Division President

The Division President is the highest-ranking elected officer, who presides over and supports all activities of the Division.

Sample responsibilities include, but not limited to:

- Consulting with Division members and IPPA leadership to identify and develop programs, offerings, and activities that advance the mission of the Division and IPPA.
- Serving as the primary spokesperson for the Division.
- Reporting to the IPPA Leadership and the Board of Directors on an annual basis about Division activities, main accomplishments, membership levels and financials, and any challenges or future plans that would benefit from IPPA support.
- Ensuring that Division members' interests are represented in IPPA Board meetings and discussions through collaboration with IPPA Leadership.

2. Division Vice President

The Division Vice President is the second-ranking elected officer in each division and assumes the highest-elected position at the next election.

Sample responsibilities include, but not limited to:

- Collaborating with the Division President in fulfilling the goals and objectives of the Division by providing continuity to established programs and by formulating future programs.
- Assuming the responsibility of the Division President in his or her absence.
- Accepting responsibilities, such as overseeing special projects and being a committee member/project team liaison.

3. Division Secretary

Sample responsibilities include, but not limited to:

- Serving as the chief administrative officer for the Division.
- Assuring the maintenance of records and compliance with Division and IPPA policies and procedures.
- Oversight of communications, including recording minutes of division meetings, initiating correspondence both within the division and between the division and IPPA, liaising with committees, and sharing knowledge internally.
- Supporting social media platforms for the Division and IPPA.

4. Division Member-at-large

Sample responsibilities include, but not limited to:

- Serving to support various committees for the Division.
- Monitoring financial aspects of the Division, assuring all financial transactions (income and expenses) are recorded in a transparent manner.

Additional members may include

Immediate Past-President

The Immediate Past-President serves in an advisory role to the President and President Elect on an as-needed basis.

Sample responsibilities include, but not limited to:

- Utilizing and sharing experience gained as a previous President to provide advice and leadership regarding past practices.

President Elect

- Learning the inner workings of the Division and sharing experience to advance the Division's vision and mission.

Division Committees

Committee leaders may attend Executive Committee meetings but are non-voting participants. Additional committee leaders may be developed over time as needs arise.

(These were the initial committees discussed prior to the formal creation of the Division)

- Charter Committee: (this is currently envisioned as a short-term role but could be extended as either an *ad hoc* or standing committee based upon need.) Responsible for the member-led creation and liaison with IPPA leadership regarding approvals process for the Division Charter. The purpose is to establish and outline the scope and structure of the division, communicate this to wider IPPA and gain official division status.
- Writing Committee: Oversees, contributes to and ensures a sufficient pipeline of and high quality of all divisional written material for the general public. This includes online and print.
- Science Committee: Oversees the compilation and collection of credible and high quality research articles and material in order to build a repository of knowledge surrounding spirituality and meaning in positive psychology.

(Following formal establishment of the Division - these will be launched immediately to build the essential initial work and communications of the Division)

- Internal Communications Committee: Liaises and builds network across divisions within IPPA to foster collaborative knowledge and resource sharing, study and learning.
- Outreach Committee: Connects and Builds relationships with individuals and organizations outside of IPPA who can partner and/or support the division through academic, professional or other resources contribution.
- Practice and Programs: Oversees, develops and distributes practical application / programs, supported by the science and research, that bring spirituality more strongly into positive psychology practices, education and interventions

(To be considered at a later date and once the Division is established - these committees will solidify and advance the purposes of the Division)

- Publications Committee: Oversees an annual, peer-reviewed publication offered by the Division to the world.
- Conference Committee: Oversees divisional involvement and promotion at biennial IPPA World Congress and other key conference events. Acts as point of contact.
- Special Topics Committees: Oversees and organizes activity with regard to a specific research/practice topic area. For example, subcommittees could focus on the environment, peace/conflict, or social justice, as they dovetail with spirituality and meaning.

Potential future Divisional sub-groups identified could include working groups on:

- Environment (which received 60% interest from the broader IPPA membership in a survey conducted by IPPA's executive director)

- Peace/Conflict (which received 42% interest from the broader IPPA membership in a survey conducted by IPPA's executive director)
- Social & Racial Justice (not evaluated)

Leadership Meetings

Division leadership will convene meetings as follows:

- Periodic meetings to share and discuss progress made towards the Division's vision, coordinated and sanctioned by elected officers
- Division business meeting to be held at the IPPA World Congress
- Committee-specific meetings may be held outside of the general Division meetings

Appointment and Election Process

To secure an initial, strong foundation and start, the founding members will select a team of Executive Committee members for the first executive committee cycle. These will be nominations within the original group of 200+ IPPA Members who expressed interest in and came together for the spirituality and meaning meetings, as well as include the founding members. This initial Executive Committee will finalize the charter, share with the IPPA Board for final approval, allow members to review and provide further comments/edits, ratify the charter, and will lead the Division.

In subsequent cycles, the Executive Committee will invite nominees from the IPPA Membership base. Nominations can be self-nomination or nominated by others. To be an official candidate, individuals will submit a short biography and statement of purpose as to how they would contribute to the Division, communicating their motivation and intended approach in pursuing the role. These submissions will be shared with all Division members for a period of time before voting, wherein members may submit questions via a general forum for candidates to respond. Division members will then be invited to vote for the nominees, and election will be based on majority vote. To ensure continuity of the Division, in the case of insufficient nominations for any role, leadership will be appointed from within the Member base by the Executive Committee.

Resources and Support Available from IPPA

IPPA will provide the Division with access to IPPA membership and the Board. Depending on available resources and as appropriate, the Division can apply for funds from the Association by submitting a detailed proposal and budget to the Board of Directors. IPPA Leadership will help to promote the opportunities and activities of the Division to members and contact lists, encouraging greater participation, and will also make appropriate introductions to relevant researchers and scholars on the Board or within its network. In addition, the Association will share access to existing communication systems, and work with the Division to determine the best way to house information online.

Charter Development

This charter draft, version 1, was prepared by Ryan Niemiec, Itai Ivtzan, and Erin Driscoll Haynes (committee lead), with support and consultation from Paulette Moreno, Diane Rogers, and Tamara-Knapp-Grosz.

Charter draft shared by Ryan Niemiec in July 2020 to the IPPA Executive Director for Board review and approval. Following IPPA Board edits, a revised charter was shared in August 2020.