

Spirituality/Meaning Division Charter

International Positive Psychology Association

(Version 3.0, revised June 2024)

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 for the Creation of SMD

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 recent decades. 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 distinctions can be made between spirituality and meaning, 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 IPPA members. These efforts resulted in 200 opt-in participants, including researchers, educators, thought leaders,

practitioners, and students. Approximately 30 countries were represented in this mix. 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.

As a result of the third, “working committee” meeting, 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 strive to 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

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 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. Science is the default that informs the education and practice.

Foundational Definitions

Spirituality is universal yet 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 the closest there is to 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, numerous character strengths, 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 with 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) The SMD aspires to communicate with and offering programming that serves people outside of IPPA and that this might serve as a pathway for future IPPA membership. In this way, SMD aspires to “give away” some of its programs to both serve and support others as well as to serve IPPA.
- 6) Develop synergistic partnerships with other organizations around the world with shared values.
- 7) Communicate research findings and practical knowledge, developing a database for all interested in this focused area of study.
- 8) Build a presence at the biennial IPPA World Congress and IPPA events.
- 9) Represent organizational interests to IPPA. Positively influence future policy development, initiatives and the overall development of IPPA.

Programming Ideas (from initial charter draft)

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]

Programming Offered by SMD (revised for 2024)

The Spirituality/Meaning Division adds value to IPPA by communicating, educating, advancing, and supporting the science and practice of spirituality and meaning to bolster the many layers of well-being and the management or transcending of suffering (see SMD charter for scientific definitions of spirituality and of meaning). The SMD therefore offers 4 *streams* of programming each year. Each stream taps into a different lens to support the mission and the participant experience. The lenses are **Science**, **Experiences**, **Practices**, and **Connections**.

1. *Scientific Speaker Series (Science lens)*: Launched 3 years ago, this series features a scientist in the field of meaning and/or spirituality and offers them a platform to share their research. These experiences also include Q&A. Facilitated by leaders of SMD.
2. *Spiritual Experiences Group (Experience lens)*: Launched 3 years ago, this bimonthly series offers a safe place, along with a proven structure, for mindful listening/mindful speaking around spiritual experiences. Such experiences might be mystical, meaningful, religious, transcendent, and/or everyday life interactions. They are often surprising, commonplace, awe-inspiring, mysterious, confusing, hopeful, life-giving, and/or upsetting. Facilitated by leaders with extensive experiences working with groups (SMD executive team members).
3. *Practice of Spirituality/Meaning Series (Practice lens)*: Launched in March 2024, this series features a distinguished practitioner working in spirituality and/or meaning. These are virtual workshops. The emphasis is on applying wisdom and meaning in everyday life. Facilitated by SMD executive team or committee.

4. *Spirituality & Meaning Retreat (Connection lens)*: The planned launch for IPPA’s first-ever, half-day retreat is June 7, 2024. A “true” retreat is about coming home to ourselves. It is about rejuvenating ourselves. It focuses on deepening and expanding (or returning) to our personal, self-growth practices. These SMD retreats are about all of those things, AND they emphasize connections – connections that come in the form of self-connection, as connection with others on the positive psychology journey, and connections outside of oneself – to the universe, the transcendent, to something greater and life around us. Facilitated by SMD executive team or committee.

Division Membership

IPPA-SMD aims to be collectively led and member-inspired. Our intention 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 approved executive committee member). This includes a review of Division activities.

Leadership

The Division will be headed by an Executive Committee.

Executive Committee:

The Executive Committee will include the President and 3-5 additional Executive Committee Members (i.e., Members-at-Large). Elected Executive Committee members and the President will serve three-year terms. The terms are staggered so that the entire Executive Committee is not replaced in a given year, thus ensuring continuity and consistency in the work. Executive Committee members/Members-at-Large are voting members. Upon successful completion of a term, Executive Committee members are permitted to run for the office of President or run for the Executive Committee/Member-at-Large for a second term. The President is permitted to run for two terms of Presidency; these may or may not be consecutive terms as President. Therefore, the maximum number of terms for any individual in SMD is three (and these three terms can be consecutive, although with the staggered role as mentioned). Said another way, an individual could pursue, consecutively or non-consecutively, any of the following:

- President – President – Member-at-Large
- President – Member-at-Large – President
- President – Member-at-Large – Member-at-Large
- Member-at-Large – Member-at-Large – President
- Member-at-Large – President – Member-at-Large
- Member-at-Large – President – President

As the Division develops and given IPPA's dual emphasis on the advancement of scholarship and practice, 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. All Executive Committee members are expected to Chair/lead one or more committees/initiatives to support the Division. All Executive Committee members must be members of the International Positive Psychology Association and remain in good standing with the Association.

Advisors:

SMD may have advisors that support the Executive Committee in its leadership. Advisors are not voting members. They may be invited to attend occasional leadership meetings. The Past-President is a formal Advisor to the Executive Committee. The expectation is the Past-President will serve this role for at least 6 months and then as deemed helpful by the Executive Committee.

Chairpersons:

Chairpersons lead committees and initiatives of SMD. In addition to Executive Committee members serving as chairs, other SMD members may be invited to lead particular committees, if agreed upon by the Executive Committee. Examples of committees include:

- Awards Committee
- Science Committee
- Practice Committee
- Retreat Committee
- Communications/Social Media Committee
- IPPA World Congress Committee

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. *Executive Committee (Members-at-Large)*

This will vary based on the committee or initiative each member Chairs.

- 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.
- Creation of promotional materials, IPPA news digests, scientific findings, practice findings, etc. to distribute to all IPPA members, SMD members, and the general public by means of IPPA's social platforms and Executive Committee members' platforms.
- Leading the aggregation, dissemination, and championing of scientific findings in spirituality and meaning.
- Leading the aggregation, dissemination, and championing of best practices in spirituality and meaning.
- Leading and promoting the Spiritual Experiences Group.
- Leading/chaired, recruiting speakers, and promoting the Scientific Speaker Series.
- Leading/chaired, recruiting speakers, and promoting the Practice Series.
- Leading and promoting the Spirituality Retreat.

Potential future Divisional committees/initiatives/working groups:

- Environment / Nature Connection (which received 60% interest from the broader IPPA membership in a survey conducted by IPPA's executive director in 2021)
- Peace/Conflict (which received 42% interest from the broader IPPA membership in a survey conducted by IPPA's executive director in 2021)
- Social & Racial Justice (not evaluated)
- Interfaith (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.

Election Procedures

New executive committee members formally start in January/February following the election.

Leading up to that, the prior year has the following general markers:

- July/August: announce openings and call for nominations (self- or other-nominated) for upcoming January to the SMD and larger IPPA members, as well as word-of-mouth. Process, deadlines, and criteria for election, including IPPA and SMD membership, are clearly explained. Candidates formally apply by submitting their bio and statement of leadership experience and fit with the SMD.
 - Preferred candidates have experience on SMD committees, as speakers for SMD, and/or have been active members in engaging with the programming for over a year. Submission information and deadline are shared.
- September: Elections open for 2 weeks. Candidate name, bio, and brief statement of experience/interest are shared. Reminders to vote are shared on two or more occasions to SMD members and to general IPPA members through, at a minimum, the main IPPA social platform (and ideally shared at least once by email from IPPA admin).
 - In the event of an actual tie in vote count, the SMD executive committee calls a “special meeting.” The majority of members (more than half) must be present. The committee members review and discuss the “tied” candidates and vote. The winning candidate will have more votes (by at least one) than the other. In the event of a tie, the committee repeats this process an additional time. If the vote remains tied after two Executive Committee votes, then the President’s vote becomes the tiebreaker.
- September: Within one week of the final day of the election, the candidates are notified of the results. In addition, a press release on the election results goes to SMD members by different avenues – engage platform, email, newsletter (and the larger IPPA membership in news digest mailing).
- October: newly elected SMD Executive Committee members begin to attend general meetings as “observers” to help them train and be updated on processes and projects.
- January/February: newly elected SMD members begin their “active voting status” (i.e., 3-year term) on SMD.

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.

The SMD, in 2024, championed new approaches to create additional revenue streams for IPPA, such as the half-day spirituality retreat, as well as programming with different rates for members and non-members. SMD has solicited (and received verbal support from IPPA) to receive a small percentage (e.g., 10%) of revenues to earmark specifically to support IPPA members to attend the world congress or other special events; this would be prioritized to individuals with a financial need or those serving on the Executive Committee who would not otherwise be able to attend such events.

Charter Development and Revisions

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.

The charter revision (version 3), focused on furthering detail to election proceedings and Executive Committee officers, was drafted in the first and second quarter of 2024 and discussed by the SMD Executive Committee in May 2024. This was ratified unanimously by the executive committee in June 2024.

Revisions can be made to the charter. Revisions require formal discussions among Executive Committee members and in some cases IPPA board members and other IPPA leadership members may be consulted. After all information has been shared to the entire Executive Committee in writing and through verbal discussion – including original charter content, revised charter content, rationale for change, potential impact of change – the committee may vote to accept some, none, or all of the proposed changes. A majority vote rules.