

Sacred Design Lab

Introduction

NB: We developed this rubric over 18 months from 2023-24 and shared it with a dozen funders and stakeholders for review. Based on their feedback – combined with our learning from conducting global spiritual innovation research and launching a US-based hub for spiritual innovation – we determined that the funding landscape for spiritual innovation is not yet ready to use a tool like this. There is more foundational identity and field-building work to be done to raise awareness of spiritual innovation and innovators and to grow the presence of their work in funder portfolios. The foundations we spoke with were not in a position to use a rubric of this kind, even if they found it interesting and potentially valuable in theory. We believe that the funding landscape for spiritual innovation needs to develop before we come back to this rubric for further revision. Toward this end, we are convening funders for a webinar on spiritual innovation in September 2024. We stand ready to develop and share this rubric at such time as there is greater demand for an evaluation tool. Until then, it will remain in beta.

This rubric is designed for funders and other stakeholders seeking to support spiritual innovation. We hope it will help you to identify promising innovations and innovators and communicate internally and externally about what they need and why.

In the rubric, we introduce a series of categories to consider. The categories derive from Sacred Design Lab's definition of spiritual innovation, which is "A novel way of addressing spiritual longings that contributes to the flourishing of individuals, communities, and ecosystems."

The categories are not intended to be the final word, but rather an informed attempt to identify key ingredients of healthy, mature spiritual innovation and innovators. We introduce a developmental scale, from high-potential but untested efforts, to those with demonstrated but constrained success, to those which are thriving and sustainable.

An important limitation to this rubric is that each element must be understood within a project's and innovator's own context. The “number of potential participants” that is “significant”, for example, would differ widely if the project were in Cairo or rural Chile. An innovator's connection to lineage will look different in Mombasa than it will in Amsterdam. We encourage you to consider each category relative to the circumstances, history, and setting of the innovation and innovators.

Finally, no rubric will ever replace relationships over time. In the work of supporting spiritual innovation, we hope for deep collaborations among innovators, funders, and other stakeholders to help cultivate a vibrant future for spiritual life all over the world.

Spiritual Innovation Rubric

Each category may be considered on a three-point scale from less to more (see sample on p5):

- 1-Untested potential or low performance
- 2-Demonstrated potential with limitations that could be overcome
- 3-Demonstrated success and significant indications of future success

We strongly caution against using the scores on this rubric as the sole factor in making decisions with regard to funding or other support for spiritual innovators. The field of spiritual innovation is vast and varied and it is highly unlikely that any single instrument will adequately capture all of the variability and pathways to success. However, we believe in the value of this rubric as part of an overall assessment of any innovation or innovator.

Additionally, we suggest that this rubric be treated as both formative and summative in nature. While scoring highly on this rubric indicates likelihood that a new spiritual effort will take hold in the world, we also believe the rubric has utility in a formative way by revealing the areas where a new innovation might need additional support, maybe even in areas its leaders have not yet considered. For example, it is easy to imagine the rubric revealing a spiritual innovation that is generally successful but struggling to break through to the next level because its leaders have not yet considered how to develop new leaders (pipeline) or connect participants with one another (belonging). This kind of revelation can help point the direction not just for funders and stakeholders, but for project leaders themselves.

Categories

Innovative

- Novel: Provides a new concept, context, offering or pathway for engaging spirituality.
- Rooted: Grows out of and / or learns from existing spiritual or religious systems or traditions.

Spiritual

- Belonging: Participants experience caring for one another and contributing to something that matters.
- Becoming: Facilitates moving toward meaning, purpose, and / or wholeness.
- Beyond: Connects to a sense of ultimacy, transcendence, or something more.

Effective

- Content: Addresses spiritual longings in a way that is relevant, credible, compelling, and coherent.
- Engagement: Demonstrates understanding of participants and works with them in meaningful ways.
- Impact: Leads to flourishing people who contribute to the greater good.

Accessible

- Liberatory: Designed to meet unmet needs and / or serve those who are underserved, without financial barrier.
- Trustworthy: Clear pathways in and out of the experience; leaders and stakeholders are known and accountable.
- Opportunity: Meaningful to people at a range of skill and commitment level, with pathways for growth.

Sustainable

- Financial: Relationship of revenue to expenses enables the project to create, deliver, sustain, and grow what it does.
- Structural: Sound approach to organization and leadership, with safeguards against unethical activity.
- Ecological: Project activities and outcomes do no harm and / or contribute to the health and vitality of the planet.

Far-Reaching

- Availability: Discoverable and welcoming to a significant population of potential participants.
- Resonance: People in the intended population recognize the value of the offering and demonstrate increasing commitment to its values and practices.
- Scalability: Opportunity for widespread impact, influence, or effect on a large number of people.

Leadership

- Alignment: Leaders match in skillset and personal qualities what the project needs.*
- Pipeline: Processes are in place to identify and support new leaders.
- Integrity: The approach to leadership matches the values being espoused.

*We are developing a body of work at Sacred Design Lab to support qualities of leadership for spiritual innovation.

Sample Portion of Rubric

Category	Description	Less		More
		Untested potential or low performance	Demonstrated potential with limitations that could be overcome	Demonstrated success and significant indications of future success
<i>Innovative</i>				
Novel	Provides a new concept, context, offering or pathway for engaging spirituality.	SAMPLE		
Rooted	Grows out of and/ or learns from existing spiritual or religious systems or traditions.			

Extended Example

In order to help illustrate how the rubric might be used, we provide an extended example of one well-known, recent spiritual innovation commonly regarded as very successful, OneTable. “Inspired by ancient Jewish wisdom, OneTable (www.onetable.org) is a national non-profit that empowers folks (21-39ish) to find, share, and enjoy Shabbat dinners, making the most of their Friday nights.”

Innovative

- Novel: Provides a new concept, context, offering or pathway for engaging spirituality.
OneTable does not offer a new concept, context or offering, but does offer a new pathway for engaging spirituality.
Rating: 2
- Rooted: Grows out of and/or learns from existing spiritual or religious systems or traditions.
OneTable is clearly rooted in ancient Jewish practices and traditions as Shabbat dinners are a central part of Jewish practice.
Rating: 3

Spiritual

- Belonging: Participants experience caring for one another and contributing to something that matters.
OneTable provides not only a system for people encountering one another regularly, but also resources to help them go deeper with one another.
Rating: 3
- Becoming: Facilitates moving toward meaning, purpose, and / or wholeness.
The resources provided by OneTable for how to host a dinner emphasize community and connection to a larger purpose.
Rating: 3
- Beyond: Connects to a sense of ultimacy, transcendence, or something more.
OneTable's explicit connection to Shabbat dinners in their Shabbat guides and rituals emphasize a connection to an ultimate concern as well as to an ancient tradition and people.
Rating: 3

Effective

- Content: Addresses spiritual longings in a way that is relevant, credible, compelling, and coherent.
OneTable content is rich and varied, teaching people both how to create a ritual as well as how to tap into existing rituals and conversations that reflect contemporary values but are directed to the spiritual.
Rating: 3
- Engagement: Demonstrates understanding of participants and works with them in meaningful ways.
OneTable provides guides for hosting dinners as well as partners or cash to supplement food preparation.
Rating: 3
- Impact: Leads to flourishing people who contribute to the greater good.
Shabbat dinners address loneliness in an era of disconnection. While there are many ancillary benefits from people feeling more engaged spiritually and socially, OneTable does not put service at the center.
Rating: 2

Accessible

- Liberatory: Designed to meet unmet needs and / or serve those who are underserved, without financial barrier.
Yes. OneTable provides a way to connect individuals with no place to go a Shabbat community as well as finances to participate.
Rating: 3
- Trustworthy: Clear pathways in and out of the experience; leaders and stakeholders are known and accountable.
OneTable excels in making hosting or participating in Shabbat dinners easy and accessible for everyone. From online sign-ups to guides for beginners, there are clear pathways in with low barriers. It's unclear how people leave in a good way if they have been regularly hosting dinners.
Rating: 2
- Opportunity: Meaningful to people at a range of skill and commitment level, with pathways for growth.
OneTable offers two primary roles: participant and host. There are not really additional levels or roles to play within the organization outside of a few people who employed.
Rating: 2

Sustainable

- Financial: Relationship of revenue to expenses enables the project to create, deliver, sustain, and grow what it does.
OneTable has a diversified funding structure including a SaaS offering, research and evaluation, partnerships and philanthropic support. While full financials are not available the cost to participants is \$0 and the available revenue offerings appear robust.
Rating: 3
- Structural: Sound approach to organization and leadership, with safeguards against unethical activity.

OneTable has a Code of Conduct and a Privacy Policy. Additionally, there is a governing Board, an Education Advisory Board and a Technology Advisory Board. All of these appear to be in line with best practices.

Rating: 3

- Ecological: Project activities and outcomes do no harm and / or contribute to the health and vitality of the planet. OneTable is not explicitly engaged in practices or efforts to do no harm. Health and vitality of the planet are embedded, but not central.

Rating: 2

Far-Reaching

- Availability: Discoverable and welcoming to a significant population of potential participants. OneTable clearly has appeal to all Jews, but also makes strides to welcome non-Jewish participants or to those who might be considering Judaism. However, the exclusive focus on Friday night Shabbat dinners is inherently exclusionary to many.

Rating: 2

- Resonance: People in the intended population recognize the value of the offering and demonstrate increasing commitment to its values and practices.

OneTable's own commissioned research indicates a high degree of loyalty and commitment.

Rating: 3

- Scalability: Opportunity for widespread impact, influence, or effect on a large number of people. OneTable's Shabbat dinners have a ceiling on their appeal. Their white label SaaS offers a bit wider range of appeal, but is not central to mission. The Jewish population and those interested in Shabbat dinners is large numerically, but not statistically.

Rating: 2

Leadership

- Alignment: Leaders match in skillset and personal qualities what the project needs.* OneTable does a screening for hosts that appears to be effective, but more is needed to assess the qualities of staff and OneTable leadership. However, existing benefits of working at OneTable as listed on the website are robust and include professional development and time off for spiritual development.

Rating: 3

- Pipeline: Processes are in place to identify and support new leaders. Onetable has clear processes in place to support the leadership of hosts. Internal processes for staff leadership are not clear, but can be presumed to include standard hiring procedures given the resources available on their website.

Rating: 3

- Integrity: The approach to leadership matches the values being espoused.

By all appearances and available statements as well as public appearances indicate yes. For example, their staff page is listed by department in alphabetical order, thus resulting in their Executive Team being listed somewhere other than the top of the page.

Rating: 3

Total Score: 53/60

1: 0

2: Novel, Impact, Trustworthy, Opportunity, Ecological, Availability, Scalability

3: All others

Overall Assessment: OneTable is clearly a strong and successful spiritual innovation with great promise into the future. It is highly sustainable and likely to be able to meet new challenges as they arise. Existing programs could be strengthened with additional support focused on the areas where they scored “2,” as long as those efforts stay within mission. In general, OneTable scores very highly and is a model organization.