

General Questions about “Tapping into the Spiritual Power of the Arts”

A Project of the Wings to the Spirit Foundation, Inc.

What is the purpose of this deepening?

The long-term objective of this deepening is to assist local Bahá’í communities to develop their capacity for service through the arts, in order to increasingly channel the vitality of the arts to facilitate outreach, and to enhance the core activities of community life within the framework of the present Plan. The deepening helps participants gain the spiritual insights, attitudes and skills needed to carry out simple acts of service involving arts, while raising awareness of the great potential of the arts to contribute to the spiritual well-being of the community and of humanity as a whole. Please see the deepening’s Introduction for an explanation.

For whom is the deepening intended?

At the present stage, the deepening is to be offered in service to the spiritual needs of the population of a single community and cluster where the project is located.

In more general terms, the deepening is intended not only for those who practice an art form but also, and mainly, for the general public – that is, anyone, whether in the Bahá’í community or the community at large, who has even a passing interest in the subject of the arts. The deepening’s contents are of a general nature, the skills learned in its “practices” are basic, and it is designed for the lay person rather than for specialists. It has proven to be of interest to people from all walks of life and may serve as an additional portal of entry to the Bahá’í community.

Is the project to develop this deepening being guided by Bahá’í Institutions?

Yes. The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has provided guidelines for the current stage of the project. Among these guidelines is the provision that the project will seek a community in the United States, whose Local Spiritual Assembly would be willing to host the project, and whose surrounding cluster agencies could monitor and evaluate the effects of the deepening as it serves the community and evolves over time.

The deepening is a project of the Wings to the Spirit Foundation, Inc., a Bahá'í-inspired non-profit organization based in Gulf Breeze, Florida, U.S.A., dedicated to supporting the aims of the present Plan through the arts. Drafts of the deepening have been shared with the Universal House of Justice, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, three Counselors, three Auxiliary Board members, and other institutions.

Those who facilitate or participate in the deepening in the project's "home cluster" will be in close touch with local institutions and grassroots community activities, since the simple practices recommended by the deepening involve service through the arts to devotional programs, study circles, children's classes, youth activities, and programs of social discourse and social action.

Is this deepening part of the Ruhi Institute?

No. Though the learning approach used in the deepening is the approach found in courses of the Ruhi Institute, facilitators are instructed to clarify that the deepening is not connected with the Ruhi Institute, is not part of the institute program, and does not replace or divert resources from the institute process.

Book 7 in the Ruhi Institute series already has a section on the arts. Why do we need a separate deepening on the subject?

Book 7's treatment of the arts is very valuable. Its purpose, as stated in the book, is to help tutors "to appreciate the role of artistic endeavors in the activity of a study circle." It is intended for people who have taken the previous books in the institute series, and is designed to prepare them to serve as tutors. So its focus on the arts, contained in one unit, is mainly for helping tutors learn to employ the arts within study circles, and is necessarily brief.

The purpose of the present deepening is much broader. Dedicated entirely to the arts, it is able to go into greater depth on the subject than Book 7 does. It is intended for anyone with an interest in the subject. Its purpose is to help channel the spiritual vitality of the arts into teaching (not only in study circles but in many other contexts), and into enhancing the spiritual life of the community. Its only pre-requisite for participants is to have taken the Ruhi Institute's Book 1. Please see the deepening's Introduction for a complete explanation.

We are concentrating on the objectives of the Five Year Plan. Is it possible that this deepening would be a distraction?

On the contrary, the entire purpose of the deepening is to support the objectives of the Five Year Plan. It is designed to help prepare those with an interest and inclination, to greatly enhance the teaching, outreach and community building efforts involved in the present Plan and future Plans, through an effective participation of the arts.

Why is it necessary for participants in this deepening to take Book 1 of the Ruhi series first? For seekers who have not taken a deepening of the Ruhi Institute before, and who are interested in the arts, why not make this their first exposure to a deepening that uses the Ruhi Institute’s approach to learning?

There are basically two reasons why Book 1 needs to be taken first. First, in terms of content, this deepening assumes that participants have absorbed from the Writings in Book 1 a heightened awareness of some of the spiritual dimensions of life, including a prayerful attitude and the life of the soul. That is the indispensable basis on which the present deepening builds.

Second, in terms of the learning process, this deepening also assumes that participants have become familiar with the participative approach to learning found in Book 1, involving memorization of passages from the Writings, reflection on their meaning, and occasional group discussion. It is important, therefore, for participants to be accustomed to interacting with the Writings and to be familiar with the Ruhi Institute’s approach to learning before taking the present deepening.