



# REPORT

*From the office of the...*

## **Spark Director**

TO:	Members of the Executive Board
FROM:	Deeptha Ramakrishnan (she/her)
SUBJECT:	Spark Report #1
DATE:	June 15 <sup>th</sup> , 2023

## **Yearplan Update**

Hello! Over the past few months of my transition into the role of Spark Director, there have been many accomplishments within the Service, alongside challenges. Starting with executive hiring, my AD and I have hired a lovely team, all of whom bring diverse perspectives to the service. We recruited our team with the aim of having individuals from different faculties, with a variety of years, and with differing Spark experience, with one individual having no service experience at all! We believe that this form of a team allows for new ideas to be considered, and for Spark to grow as a service, innovating and developing existing aspects of the service in order to better serve the first year population. Professional school acceptances caused us to have to change a few team members, but all in all, we're extremely happy with how things have turned out.

Due to unforeseen delays finding a common time amongst our Promotions and Publications team for Media Training, we had to push back our TL Hiring plans by a week. This was challenging, especially considering the fact that we had to update our graphic with a new date and change our marking deadlines and interview days, all while my AD and I were trying to make sure executives were kept abreast of these changes. However, now that we've finalized dates, these challenges have been overcome.

We've also made strides in promoting our service to potential first year students through May@Mac, where we had many current and past executives help out with our booth, and received interest and engagement from those we spoke to, which was great!

Through the creation of our Year Plan, and navigating previous transition reports, and our ideas, we've been able to brainstorm and have been implementing many new initiatives as listed within the plan, and we are excited to see them come to fruition over the course of the year!

## **Events, Projects, & Activities**

### *General Service Usage*

Though we have begun hiring, our service has currently not opened for usage. Programming is projected to begin in July, with the start of Summer Programming.

### *Projects & Events: May@Mac (Complete)*

Spark attended May@Mac, where we had the chance to interact with prospective first year students and other high school students. We were

able to chat about their experiences, their worries about university, and share Spark's programming and they way it could potentially aid in their transition to university. We utilized the large pull up banner, along with a premade trifold board to showcase important information about our service. A sweater and mini banner were also put on display. We also encouraged students to take a picture of Spark's contact information, so they would be able to stay abreast with updates. We decided on this as opposed to taking email addresses, since a lot of students we were speaking to were still in high school for at least the next year, so sending them emails about service programming might be overwhelming. This way, they can choose to engage in Spark as they see fit and when they see fit. This event required no use of budget, or distributive supplies.

#### *Projects & Events: Executive Hiring + Transitioning (Complete)*

In the month of May, we wrapped up executive hiring, and once the team was finalized, we sent out rejection letters. In our rejection letters to candidates who had interviewed, we included fast tracked candidates to direct TL positions (1), or to TL interviews (4). These were individuals with extensive service experience, who we believe would be good candidates for the service from past experiences. In the letters of other candidates, we included an interest form for TL hiring, where they would get an email upon the release of the TL written application encouraging them to reply. This was an albeit tedious process, but we believe that this will encourage engagement from interested upper year students from a variety of programs in our service and its programming.

Through the end of May and June, we have had weekly meetings with the executive team, enabling us to work on TL hiring questions and get to know each other. My AD and I have ran various initiatives during this time to aid in the transition. Firstly, we opened up Personal Goals, for executives to reflect upon their past experiences, document their aspirations for the year both within and outside of their roles, and highlight how we can best support them throughout the year in their endeavours. These led to 2on1 meetings with myself, my AD and the executive in question, where they had the chance to chat about their ideas, thoughts, and how they felt in the role as of now. This also gave us a chance to get to know them in an individual setting, to encourage sharing of perspectives, and to allow them to get to know us better and feel better integrated in the team. Lastly, through providing transition reports and year plan formulation, co-ships have had the chance to start communicating with each other and getting to

know one another. This will also aid in their development of teamwork, and fostering a kind and positive Spark Family.

#### *Projects & Events: Team Leader Hiring (On-Going)*

Team leader applications will open June 13<sup>th</sup>! The written applications will be made available on the MSU Jobs page (thank you, Renee!) and a graphic will be uploaded to our Instagram and Facebook accounts. The written application, as in years prior, will be a Microsoft Form with general questions, and 4 application questions for them to mark. These questions were formulated through selecting integral themes to Spark, and generating questions that aim to highlight these themes and ascertain certain qualities within candidates that make them poised for the TL role. Applications will close on June 27<sup>th</sup>, and marking for executives, after consolidating scores with marking pairs, will be due on July 5<sup>th</sup>. Written applications will be anonymized to ensure objectivity.

Interviews will be conducted between July 11<sup>th</sup> and July 15<sup>th</sup>. Based on a When2Meet, interview times with the most executive availability were also selected. Interviews will be held virtually on Zoom, and will be 1 hour in length. There will be 4 individual station, run by pairs of executives, and a group station run by myself and my AD. We decided to implement a pair system this year when marking questions, so there would be at least 2 perspectives per candidate. The remaining two executives, along with myself, are considered *flex execs*. These executives are those on our team with previous interview experience. Rather than be responsible for running only one station, they will fill in for other executives who are unable to make their timeslot. This allowed us to make accommodations for our executive team, who had varying availabilities. We are planning to hire around 25-30 TLs this year, and having anywhere between 80 and 90 interviews, depending on quality of candidates. Offers will be sent out by the 17<sup>th</sup> of July. Interview feedback forms will be sent out afterwards as well to highlight room for growth.

We are planning on implementing a new system this year to support our goal of horizontal growth, and ensure that we have as diverse a TL team as possible. Through our 'TL Rep Program' (name is still under debate), we are hoping to have at least one individual per faculty on our TL team. This will be accomplished by selecting the top 4 candidates with the highest marks on the written application from each faculty for an interview. The remaining candidates will be evaluated together irrespective of faculty and be selected for interviews based on their written application scores, and executive input. After interviews, the top scoring candidate, or the

candidate with most potential (after debriefing with the executives) will be recruited on the team. The remaining candidates will be placed in a joint pool and recruited based on executive opinions and scores. Further consultation with the VP Admin will be conducted through the implementation process to ensure smooth execution.

#### *Projects & Events: Summer Programming (On-Going)*

With Spark having absorbed some of the responsibilities of MSU Horizons, the Events Coordinators will be responsible for ideating and providing Summer Programming. This year, member Ashley is responsible for programming, and has been in frequent communication with me to discuss ideas. She has come up with two webinars: 'Sites and Services' and 'Faculty Fair'.

'Sites and Services' is an MSU-themed revamp of a previous webinar, where Spark will collaborate with Macademics where possible to highlight important McMaster resources such as websites, and MSU services. Around 5-6 MSU services will be invited to present their service to first year students, its function, and opportunities for getting involved. This will hopefully serve to increase engagement across both Spark, and the other services featured.

'Faculty Fair' is a webinar that has been conducted in years past, where we reach out to the Welcome Week coordinators of each faculty and offer the opportunity to send a few representatives to present information about their faculty, programs, opportunities to get involved, course information, future steps, etc. This gives a chance for Spark to make itself known to a large body of first year students across different faculties, and the interaction with Welcome Week individuals will allow this event to directly reach first year students.

Ashley has started reaching out to campus partners for sponsorships or gift cards we can give away to attendees of the webinars to hopefully promote attendance. We have reached out to the campus store, TwelvEighty, The Phoenix, Union Market, and other campus partners. However, we have yet to hear back as of now – will have more updates in my next report.

Emails have also been sent out to Welcome Week coordinators, and we have been receiving responses from them. Ashley has yet to decide which MSU services to feature, and will begin reaching out to them soon once she has.

### *Projects & Events: First Year Formal (Upcoming)*

First year formal is an event traditionally co-hosted by Spark and FYC. Due to Spark's early start of operations, our Events Coordinators Yaseen and Ethan are aiming to complete venue booking, date selection, and bus logistics by the end of the summer. We had planned to host the event in around October, in order to promote it during Welcome Week and build off the momentum, however we have recently learned that the FYC Coordinator won't be able to assist us until August, and the first year students likely won't be hired in time for us to receive their input and feedback by the proposed date of the event.

Yaseen and Ethan have reached out to Fayth, former FYC coordinator, who suggested to them to host the event sometime in the Winter semester, however this now interferes with a lot of the year plans generated by the Events Committee, and mine and my AD's overall service wide year plan. Therefore, to determine future steps, my AD and I will reach out to the former Spark Director Kyobin to ask for her advice, and schedule a meeting with the VP Admin to ask for their advice as well. Hopefully we can do this by the end of the month, so we can then have a meeting with Yaseen and Ethan to provide them an updated time line, and handle changes to their year plan.

### **Outreach & Promotions**

### *Summary*

As of now, we have conducted outreach and promotions through our Executive Team Hiring process conducted in April. We promoted this through a graphic on Instagram, and received upwards of 125 applications, which we were pleasantly surprised by!

With the start of summer programming very soon, other MSU services and their members will be contacted by Ashley, and these collabs will also service to highlight Spark to a new audience, and encourage engagement with the service both amongst first years and upper years.

Lastly, with Team Leader hiring launching tomorrow, we will engage in more promotional and outreach initiatives, such as the graphic included below for Instagram. Our Promotions and Publications coordinators are working hard on 2-3 reels to upload during our hiring period, and more graphics showcasing various ways in which applicants can get involved in Spark!

### *Promotional Materials*



msu\_spark




**MSU spark**

# EXECUTIVE HIRING

**APPLY NOW!**

- Sessions (x3)
- Events (x3)
- Outreach & Engagement (x2)
- Promotions & Publications (x2)

**Application Deadline: April 12th | 11:59pm**

[msumcmaster.ca/jobs](https://msumcmaster.ca/jobs) 🔍




190



3



75



141

### Overview ⓘ

Accounts reached	4,259
Accounts engaged	337
Profile activity	325





This could be you!

**MSU Spark Team Leader  
— HIRING —**

**Apply at [mcmaster.ca/jobs](https://mcmaster.ca/jobs)**

**Applications are due:  
June 21 at 11:59pm EST**



*Social Media Engagement since the Previous Report*  
*Instagram (last 30 days)*

Accounts reached	2,556 +96.1%	>
Accounts engaged	7 +40%	>
Total followers	5,927 -1.3%	>

*Twitter*

I currently don't have access to the Spark Twitter account, and will make sure to Kyobin about obtaining access to it.

*Facebook*

I also haven't been added as an Admin on the Spark Facebook page, and will contact Wooder to arrange this.

## Finances

### *Budget Summary*

So far, Spark has only spent \$100 on the TL hiring graphic, as we have only recently received our budget. In the coming months, I will likely have to order merchandise and promotional materials, such as TL tshirts, Spark stickers, rave cards, and lanyards, just to name a few items!

<b>ACCOUNT CODE</b>	<b>ITEM</b>	<b>BUDGET / COST</b>
5003-0125		50
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	50
6103-0125		3700
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	3700
6494-0125		400
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	400
6501-0125		3600
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	100
	REMAINING IN LINE	3500
6802-0125		500
	TOTAL SPENT IN LINE	0
	REMAINING IN LINE	500
<b>TOTAL BUDGETED DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>8250</b>
<b>TOTAL ACTUAL DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>100</b>
<b>REMAINING DISCRETIONARY SPENDING</b>		<b>8150</b>

## Executives & Volunteers

I am having such a lovely time getting to know my executive team members. Everyone is so kind and enthusiastic for their roles, bringing new ideas to the table and contributing their diverse perspectives. I am so excited to see how the year plays out with them! Morale on the team seems good as of now, they are all still getting to know each other and growing

comfortable in their roles, and I think the morale and environment will only grow more positive with time.

We have started weekly meetings to provide an opportunity for discussion and bonding. This is facilitated by having fun check in questions at the start to enable the team to get to know each other better! Given the busy hiring period, these meetings are usually packed with information, however our team is enthusiastic and on top of their responsibilities, which has been nice to see.

My AD and I have held 2on1s with the executive members at the end of May, in order to see how they were doing in their roles one month in, review their personal goals for the year, provide suggestions on ongoing tasks, answer any questions, and most important, make them feel supported within their roles. We wanted to ensure we completed this at the end of May because June and July are very busy months for the executives given TL hiring and its associated responsibilities, such as question and marking criteria generation for written applications and interviews, marking written applications, and conducting interviews. My AD and I would also like to host 2onCo meetings with ourselves and each co-ship, to further review their year plans, and discuss next steps!

After TL hiring, we hope to provide an executive thank you present for all their hard work during TL hiring, potentially can provide \$10 gift cards, or look into other options.

For Team Leader transitioning, we hope to have a lovely orientation event over the summer to supplement the existing guidebook that is provided for them, so they can feel included in the Spark community, and begin forming connections with their peers!

## **Successes**

### *Communication*

With a larger team, communication can sometimes be challenging.

Therefore, making sure that expectations regarding timely communication, and methods of communication were made aware to team members ahead of time was something myself and my AD really wanted to establish prior to the busy period of our service. We've established numerous avenues of communication, such as monthly 1on1s, emails, Facebook messenger, and even open communication during meetings. This has enabled us to better support our team, and also for them to be made aware of important events and deadlines. We've also been receiving great communication and engagement from the team as the weeks go on and as people are growing more comfortable in their roles and with each other, something I'm really

glad is happening, as it will be essential to maintain during busy periods of our services. It will also allow for better collaboration across committees, and set a precedent with Team Leaders when they are hired, all of which sets the foundation for a well-oiled service.

### *Creativity*

The role of a Spark executive requires a lot of creativity, whether this is through the generation of new ideas, or the adaptation and improvement of existing ones. Something I wanted this year was a lot of new ideas within the service, to give it a breath of fresh air of sorts, and to try different things we maybe haven't done before. I know change can be challenging, and straying from the beaten path is scary at times, so I was worried that our executive team may not be as keen on novelty as I was. However, I've noticed that they've been very creative and have a wide array of revamped and new initiatives they'd like to implement this year. Upon further reviewing year plans and constructing my own, I am excited to see how these plans manifest, and how creative our team is!

## **Current Challenges**

### *Logistical Management and Scheduling*

As we're currently preparing for a wave of hiring, my AD and I have been trying our best to plan dates out well ahead of time and to be cognizant of the busy schedules of our 12 person team. However, we've been having some scheduling challenges, resulting in us having to push our hiring dates back. Fortunately, we started early and budgeted for delays, minimizing cause for concern, although changing dates has led to us having to reschedule promotional timelines, and deadlines. When considering interviews and scheduling, we have to find 10 hours during a 5-day time span where as many executives as possible, minimum 7, are free to facilitate interviews. Given everyone's busy schedules, this has been hard to facilitate. However, after having an honest and transparent conversation with our team about the challenges we're having, and how their flexibility in terms of availability and transparency regarding barriers to attending interviews is important in our planning stage, we've been able to determine times that work for interviews, and have been able to account for and accommodate those with circumstances preventing their attendance.

### *Promotions and Publications Executives*

Given the amount of material required to be generated by the promotions and publications coordinators this summer, including summer programming, TL hiring, and Welcome Week initiatives, I worry that the 2 coordinators Katie and Linda might have a lot on their plates. I hope to mitigate this by trying my best to help where I can, and checking in as much as possible to make sure they're doing well. Additionally, I've established a Promotions Committee of TLs for them to also receive help with their tasks, which I hope alleviates the burdens. However, this is something I am cognizant might be a challenge in the coming months.

### *Events Executives and First Year Formal*

Similar to the Promotions and Publications executives, the Events Team has had to start their programming almost immediately upon hiring, with Ashley launching summer programming planning early this month, and Yaseen and Ethan working on First Year Formal logistics. I worry that they might get burnt out by the end of the summer, or that they may have felt rushed into their transition to the role. I hope that the 1on1s we're hosting monthly this year will help me be able to keep tabs on their workload and areas I can support them in, and I hope it also gives them an opportunity to communicate their worries and questions with me as well.

In regards to First Year Formal, I personally feel worried about the logistics of the event, and ensuring that it's a success, given what happened last year. At times, it feels as though I'm handling the burden of trying to reason out scheduling and timeline details myself, as I don't want to worry the Events Coordinators or stress them out in any way. However, I think arranging meetings with the VP Admin and Kyobin will allow me to feel supported in my role, reflect on the experiences of last year, and identify areas of improvement. It will also allow me to run my ideas by them, and to work around the challenges we're facing with our timeline and that of First Year Council's, to hopefully determine one that is both promotionally and logistically wise, and aligns with the needs of both services.

### **Miscellaneous**

N/A. Thank you for reading this report!