Year Plan

Spark
2024/2025

MSU spark

Submitted by:
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Introduction

Dear Executive Board Members,

My name is Serena Bansal (she/her), and I am grateful and beyond excited to lead Spark this year. I've been a part of Spark since my second year at McMaster, first as a Team Leader, briefly as a Sessions Coordinator, and as the Director last year. It's safe to say that Spark has been a significant and extremely memorable part of my undergraduate experience. When I think about my time on the service, from 2022 until now, Spark has always felt like such a warm and encouraging environment that brings people with a passion for mentorship and uplifting each other together.

I'm sure most of us can look back at our first year of university with a mix of feelings: excitement, nervousness, anticipation, and curiosity for what the future holds. Spark aims to create a welcoming space that fosters exploration as first year students discover their place within the university community. The cornerstone of our service are our weekly mentorship sessions, which pair 2-3 upper year students, called Team Leaders, with groups of first year students. Each week of sessions covers a different theme related to first year success in engaging ways. We also host numerous events and workshops throughout the year, which aim to build community amongst first year students and prioritize wellness. Our programming encourages first year students to build and demonstrate their leadership skills through various initiatives. The final pillar of our service is the online resources we publish through social media, which provide further information to aid in the first year transition. Through our programming, the Spark Executives and Team Leaders cultivate community amongst first years across diverse programs, backgrounds, and interests over the shared experience of navigating university life for the first time.

While Spark aims to serve first years, it is truly as much a community for the Team Leaders and Executives as it is for the first year students. Hearing first years talk about how valuable their experience with Spark was, and seeing how proud the upper years are of the first years and their growth, brings me a lot of joy. It really affirms the mission of our service and makes me want to give that experience to as many people as possible.

Returning as Director this year, I feel I have a rare opportunity to directly take what I've learned from my experiences and support my team in building on what we accomplished last year. Serving as the Spark Director last year was the greatest privilege, and I look forward to bringing even more to the role this year. I really hope to give back and create the same environment within Spark that provided me with a sense

of community, friendship, and support, ultimately giving me the confidence to fulfill this role.

I am looking forward to learning and growing alongside the Spark community this year. Thank you for reading this year plan and I'd be happy to answer any question that may arise!

Warm regards,
Serena Bansal
Spark Director, 2024/2025

Vision for Service

Overarching Vision (I.e., What is the *ultimate* goal you have for your Service?)	Spark's purpose is to support students during the entire course of their first year at McMaster, from transitioning out of high school, to adjusting to the university environment, and looking ahead to second year and beyond. The first year experience is far from stagnant. Thus, my ultimate goal for the service is to cater programming to the evolving needs of students throughout their first year journeys and diversify the nature of Spark's initiatives so students can engage with our supports in ways that best suit them.
Description	Spark's main function is to provide weekly mentorship sessions to first year students, where they are placed in small groups with 2-3 upper year students. Spark's events, outreach initiatives, and promotions/publications aim to reach a broader audience than those involved in sessions by providing opportunities to forge connections, take on leadership roles, and learn more about themselves and their place within the McMaster community. Working towards achieving the overarching vision for the service requires a two-pronged approach: 1) Modifying sessions programming to better represent the needs of students throughout first year: Garnering high interest and retention in our winter mentorship sessions has long been a challenge faced by the service. Feedback from first years and Team Leaders has indicated that by the time the winter semester rolls around, first years are more so looking for support aimed towards preparing for the rest of their university careers. While Spark sessions do address this, I'd like to place a greater emphasis on this in future years. 2) Expanding on the initiatives external to sessions, allowing our service to reach the broader first year community. The weekly mentorship sessions cater to a certain population of first year students, those who would like to commit to the program and appreciate the consistency and long-term connections forged through it. However, Spark is a service that aims to support *all* first year students, regardless of if they choose to participate in sessions.

	By a) holding more events and workshops that students will find beneficial to their personal and professional development, b) designing outreach initiatives to widely disseminate valuable resources and supports to the first year community, and c) promoting these supports and resources in ways that resonate with students, we can work towards addressing their diverse needs.
Benefits	Efforts towards accomplishing this goal will ensure that incoming students feel supported by the programming and initiatives our service provides. If our service doesn't align with the needs of first year students as they change throughout the year, we aren't supporting them in the best ways possible. Keeping this goal at the centre of our efforts will also help the service be accessible to students seeking different levels and forms of support. Overall, working to improve our service will create an environment where students feel confident when transitioning into and out of first year through opportunities that allow them to explore the university community, find their place at McMaster, and feel a sense of belonging. This will also confer the benefit of encouraging Executives and Team Leaders to continue making strides in their roles, knowing that people are benefiting from their efforts.
Year 1 Goals (2024/25)	This year, I plan to focus heavily on shifting the focus for winter sessions programming towards supporting students as they think about life beyond first year. Working with the Sessions Coordinators to draw from previous sessions content, consider student feedback, and incorporate fresh ideas will be integral to achieving this. Some indicators that can help determine whether this plan will translate into improved support for first years include an increase in first year retention during Spark sessions compared to previous years, as well as feedback surveys. Even reserving 5 minutes at the end of each session for first years to answer brief questions and rate the session based on prompts such as "how likely are you to recommend attending this session to a friend?" or "how well did this session adequately address your questions regarding [X] topic?" can give us a sense of how the session was received. The Life After First Year Event Series (see details in Projects/Events Timeline) is a new initiative we plan to launch this year, which will also expand the scope of our service towards laying the foundations for support beyond first year. Attendance from this event series can be compared to our typical first year transition support events that focus more on community building in the fall semester to provide a metric of success.

Year 2 Goals (2025/26)	Year 2 will focus more on increasing engagement outside of sessions, through events, outreach initiatives, and promotions and publications. The idea here is to take themes from Spark sessions and provide support and resources relating to these themes in various, lower-commitment formats. We hope to test the waters with this type of programming through Spark's First Year Newsletter (see see details in Projects/Events Timeline) this year. In year 2 and beyond, this may look like more frequent editions of the newsletter or producing more social media publications and campaigns. This will both help us reach a broader first year audience to support those who may want to engage with Spark outside of sessions, while also increasing awareness of our service for those who would like to partake in sessions and were previously unaware of them. Assessing our progress here could be done through tracking social media engagement, where we would expect to see increased engagement as we publish more resources, as well as sign-up numbers for the newsletter.
Year 3 Goals (2026/27)	While it is certainly important to provide support for students once they begin first year and as they plan ahead for second year, the summer before the start of first year is also a pivotal point when students are seeking support. Our Summer Programming currently consists of 2 webinars, one featuring faculty representatives and another showcasing services and supports on campus. However, I believe there is a potential to expand our Summer Programming to cover more topics and better support students during this time, whether it be help with course selection, living on residence vs. off-campus, etc. A good performance indicator for this might be attendance compared to previous years' summer programming.
Partners	**First Year Council (FYC):** FYC is an important collaborator for planning and executing First Year Formal. Being entirely comprised of first years, working with the council could be beneficial to reach various first year communities. **Maroons:** Spark ran an exam-destress event with the Maroons last year which was well received by students. We plan to work with the Maroons to host this event/some version of it this year. **Macademics:** Spark typically collaborates with Macademics to execute our Summer Programming, which we plan to continue this year.

	Maccess & DEN: These services have previously been a part of Team Leader training and something we hope to revive this year to ensure Team Leaders feel prepared to support first years. **SWHAT:** Our off-campus housing information event in collaboration with SWHAT as a part of their Wellbeing Week was found to be very beneficial to students, and something we hope to run again with their support. **FCC:** Spark typically collaborates with the FCC on our food and nutrition session in the winter, which we hope to continue. We are also looking to host a food and nutrition event this year. **SHEC:** We collaborated with SHEC on our mental health and wellbeing session last fall, which is a partnership we look forward to continuing. **Residence Life:** Since residence is filled with our target audience, we aim to create more of a partnership with residence life this year by encouraging displays of our graphics on residence TV screens, putting posters in residence buildings, and asking CAs to inform students about Spark if they are looking for support. **Archway:** Spark has a harder time reaching first year students living off-campus and feel that our service could really benefit this population. Working with Archway could help us reach this audience. **Student Success Centre (SSC):** The SSC typically helps with Spark's session on opportunities in the community, providing resources on cover letters, resumes, and interviews. We'd also like to further this partnership by exploring their potential involvement in our "Life After First Year" event series. **Welcome Week Coordinators & Reps:** Communicating with Welcome Week Coordinators will help us expand our reach during Welcome Week and allow us to further engage with a greater body of first years.
How can VP Admin support you?	The VP Admin can support Sanjanaa (AD) and I by being available to help us through any major challenges we face when implementing the projects and initiatives we have planned for the year and providing resources/contacts that would be helpful as we work

	towards our goals. Seeing as there are several new initiatives we would like to implement this year, feedback on how to best execute them would be appreciated!

Project/Events Timeline

Spring/Summer Term

July	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Team Leader Hiring**
Why and how?	The Team Leaders are an integral part of our service. They facilitate the weekly mentorship sessions for first year students, bring our programming to life, and are often the first people students using our service turn to for support, advice, and encouragement. Thus, it is imperative that we hire a team that is passionate about mentorship and first year success, and reflects the values of our service. Below is our tentative hiring timeline: • July 2: Written applications release • July 16: Written applications close • July 17-24: Written application marking by Execs • July 25: Interview offers sent out • July 27: Interview offer response deadline • July 28-July 31: Interviews • August 1: Final decision made with Execs • August 2: Offers sent out • August 7: Deadline to accept offer
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	**1. Executive Team Input** Seeing as we have recently onboarded our Executive team and the number of new individuals we have on our team, I sense that they may be hesitant to share their ideas regarding written application and interview questions. Input from the Executive team is important when hiring Team Leaders because of how closely the Executives and Team Leaders work together and rely on each other. Sanjanaa and I plan to provide various avenues for Execs to share ideas throughout the hiring process, both during weekly meetings and asynchronously, so they feel comfortable contributing.

| | We have also just concluded individual check-ins with the Execs, putting a specific emphasis on acquainting those new to the service with our team structure and goals ahead of hiring.

2. Executive Team Availability

Spark typically receives around 200 applications for 30-35 positions, making written application marking and interview facilitation quite an extensive process. Interviews will be conducted in groups, which will require ~7 Execs present during each interview timeslot. I anticipate some challenges with scheduling and Executive availability during interviews, so Sanjanaa and I will make sure to coordinate interview schedules well in advance. I will also prioritize being attentive to the Execs and their needs during this time to mitigate burnout. |
|---|---|
| Who? | D/AD, Executive Team |
| Priority Level (highlight one) | <mark>High Priority</mark>   Moderate Priority   Low Priority |
| **Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):** | **Summer Programming** |
| Why and how? | Spark's summer programming is an important initiative to introduce first year students to both our service and the resources available for them on campus. The summer before the start of university can be daunting and have students feeling lost, so this is way to make them aware of different aspects of the university community. This will take the form of two webinars, one focusing on services and the other on faculties. The services webinar will be interactive in nature and feature representatives from different MSU services and other McMaster services, while the faculty webinar will have representative from each faculty. |
| Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them? | We currently don't have a significant social media reach to the incoming class of first year students. Additionally, due to it being the summer, we won't be able to raise awareness through physical promotions on campus. Thus, I foresee it being difficult to garner high engagement with the webinars. |

	Asking the services and faculties involved to promote our summer programming and encourage students to attend will expand our reach and ensure that the work the Events Coordinators put into this initiative is making a difference for students.
Who?	Events Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority

August	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Team Leader Onboarding & Orientation**
Why and how?	After deciding on our team of Team Leaders, it is necessary to ensure they are well acquainted with their roles and have all the tools they need to best support first year students. We also want them to feel welcome in the Spark environment and begin to get to know the team they'll be working with for the year! Orientation will take place online so it the most accessible for everyone on the team and will include an introduction to our goals as a service, community norms, training situationals, and a chance for the team to socialize. This year, I would like to involve representatives from other MSU services (e.g. Maccess, DEN) that can provide training on how to address specific situations concerning accessibility and diversity, equity, and inclusivity during their sessions, which is something previous Team Leaders have expressed could be beneficial to them.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	The main challenge I see here is engaging everyone in an online format for training and orientation. It can be difficult to gauge how comfortable Team Leaders feel with the content and in their roles virtually, and meeting online is a barrier to creating personal connections within the team. We plan to make this session as interactive as possible and provide opportunities for icebreakers, discussion, and questions. We also plan to hold a social early in the year before our

	sessions programming starts to encourage more community building amongst our team.
Who?	D/AD, Executive Team, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	<mark>High Priority</mark> Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Finalizing Fall Sessions Programming**
Why and how?	Spark's weekly mentorship sessions are our main form of programming and the basis of our service. Groups of first year students will be paired with 2-3 Team Leaders for 8 weeks in the fall semester. Each week, they will explore a different theme related to first year success. Creating the 8, hour long sessions is a big endeavour and requires a great amount of research and creativity. While the Sessions Coordinators design our sessions, feedback from both Sanjanaa and I, as well as input from the rest our of Executive team will help support them in this task. Ensuring this is completed well in advance to the beginning of sessions in September will be integral to creating the best possible experience for first year students engaging with our service.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	**1. Catering Sessions to the Wide Range of First Year Student Needs** Feedback from our previous year of sessions has made it very clear that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to providing mentorship and support for first year students. Some students come to sessions for the resources, information, and opportunity to connect with upper year students, while others appreciate the chance to relax, make friends, and build community with each other. It is a challenge to create sessions that meet both needs and are meaningful to everyone who engages with them. Consulting feedback from first years who have attended sessions previously, as well as gathering more perspectives from the

	team will hopefully help to create programming that resonates with as many individuals as possible.
	2. Sessions Coordinator Burnout Creating sessions requires immense effort on behalf of the Sessions Coordinators. Throughout the summer, I aim to provide the Sessions Coordinators with as much support as they need, checking in regularly, and helping out wherever I can. Seeing as this is the first time they'll be creating sessions programming for Spark, I realize this may be a learning curve for them, making it all the more important that I support them in their roles.
Who?	Sessions Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#3):	**Welcome Week Presence**
Why and how?	Welcome Week is an important time for our service because campus is mainly filled with our target demographic: first years! Our typical Welcome Week presence involves having a booth at at least one of every faculty event, where we talk to students about our service, hand out physical promotional items, and give them a chance to sign up for fall sessions. This year, I'd like to expand awareness about our service by asking Welcome Week Coordinators to inform their reps, and by extension, the students in their faculty, about the support that Spark provides throughout the year.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	**1. Logistical Challenges** Typically, many individuals on the Spark team are involved in Welcome Week in some capacity, whether it be as reps, CAs, or in other positions. This makes it challenging to ensure that we maintain presence at our booths, as well as during Welcome Week in general. Asking the Team Leaders to volunteer to represent Spark throughout the

	week will be very helpful in alleviating some of these challenges.
	2. Breaking Through the Noise Welcome Week is an extremely busy time, and with so much happening on campus, it can be easy for the service to get lost within all the other activity. Last year, we found that small initiatives like giveaways, photo contests, and handing out physical promotional items was an effective way to draw attention to Spark, so we plan on continuing these and coming up with new, creative ways to stand out.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority <mark>Moderate Priority</mark> Low Priority

Fall Term

September	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Night Before Classes**
Why and how?	Night Before Classes is a staple Spark event, well-loved by first years, Team Leaders, and Executives. The day before school starts can be nerve wracking, and knowing exactly where you have to go to get to class is something that makes it just a little easier to take on the next day. The event is drop-in, and students will come out to MUSC-Mills Plaza, where Team Leaders help them find their class locations based on their schedules.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	The main difficulty with executing this event is coordinating logistics. Since the event is drop-in and usually has a large attendance (200-300 students), it can get easily disorganized, with students having to wait for Team Leaders to return from previous tours, and Team Leaders managing large groups of students. Modifying the event so students sign up for time slots could help with crowd

	control. Since the event happens on Labour Day (the night before classes), we usually run into the challenge of most buildings on campus being locked, so we can't show students their exact classrooms/lecture halls, which is what they are typically looking for. I'd like to explore options to overcome this challenge as we plan for it.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	<mark>High Priority</mark> Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Sessions Enrolment Promotions & Launch**
Why and how?	Sessions being such an important part of our service, promoting sessions enrolment is the main way we encourage first years to engage with out service. By focusing on promoting sessions in the weeks between Welcome Week and before sessions begin, we hope to stand out as a service that can provide sustained support for students throughout the year. This year, we plan to reach out to Residence Life and use their connections to the first year student population to spread the word about our service. Additionally, we found that making announcements in popular first year classes was incredibly effective, and something we plan to do even more of this year.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	**1. Logistical Challenges** Everything from room bookings to organizing Team Leaders into sessions groups proves to be a challenge, given that we have 16 separate sessions that happen throughout the week. The paramount way to mitigate this challenge and ensure that Team Leaders feel like they are well prepared to run sessions is to begin this process as soon as possible, even in late August if need be. **2. Low Retention** While enrolment in Spark sessions is typically high, the percentage of students who consistently show up to sessions after registering does drop. While the nature of

	our service is that we provide support for students when they need it, meaning they do not have to commit to attending every session, this challenge calls into question what we can do to better cater to student needs. Oftentimes, sessions groups that start out with high attendance at the beginning of the semester remain this way because they build friendships and community within the group, while those with low attendance tend to see even less engagement as the semester goes on. Taking first year student feedback into consideration, and creating a positive, supportive environment for them in sessions can help increase retention.
Who?	D/AD, Promotions & Publications Coordinators, Outreach & Engagement Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#3):	**Fall Sessions Kick-off**
Why and how?	This is a new initiative I would like to start for the service this year, inspired by feedback from first years, previous Team Leaders, and Executives. I think a barrier between registering for sessions and making the decision to attend them is a lack of knowledge about the service/sessions, as well as a disconnect between first years and Team Leaders before sessions begin. This event will serve as a mixer before the first week of sessions, for first years who have registered for sessions to interact with each other and the Team Leaders and Executives who make up the service. I hope that it will serve as an opportunity for the sense of community within the service to further grow. Depending on the success and results we see from this initiative, we may repeat it in the winter term.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Seeing as this is a new initiative, and that too during a busy month for the service, I anticipate that it may be challenging to plan and execute the event. The turnaround time between the sessions registration close date and the start date of sessions is generally very tight to get the most

	number of registrants possible, so we may have to adjust this as well. We have an extra Exec in the Outreach & Engagement Coordinate position this year, which we believe will help with this new initiative.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority <mark>Moderate Priority</mark> Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#4):	**Sessions Training for Team Leaders**
Why and how?	Sessions training occurs for 8 weeks in the fall semester and is where Team Leaders are trained on the session content for the upcoming week by the Sessions Coordinators. It ensures that Team Leaders feel prepared to run the session with the first years in their sessions group, gives the Sessions Coordinators an opportunity to test out some of the activities they've created, and is a chance to exchange feedback. Sessions training is also a great way for the team to come together on a weekly basis, which strengthens our service community.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	An ongoing challenge with sessions training is that there is sometimes a lack of engagement from Team Leaders, making it difficult to gauge how the content is being received on their end. This year, I'd like to place an emphasis on ensuring sessions training is as engaging as possible and provides opportunity for discussion and debriefs.
Who?	Sessions Coordinators, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	<mark>High Priority</mark> Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#5):	**Spark Stars and Spark Ambassadors Launch**
Why and how?	Spark Stars and Spark Ambassadors are both opportunities for students to take on more of a leadership position in the service, while still being in first year. Spark Stars awards are provided to students who demonstrate

	exceptional commitment to the sessions mentorship program. The Spark Ambassadors program allows first years to shadow Executives in their roles and have an input in some of our sessions programming, events, and initiatives. These initiatives both help to further engage first years with our service and foster longevity within Spark.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Variable engagement from first years in these initiatives can make it difficult to plan, as little interest may discourage the first years involved from continuing with these two programs, while excess engagement may present scheduling and budgetary challenges. Opening registration well in advance can help us adapt to the challenges that may arise.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority ==Moderate Priority== Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#6):	**Fall Executive/Team Leader Intramural Team**
Why and how?	Our winter ultimate frisbee intramural team last year was a big hit. We saw a lot of engagement from the team, and it was something they clearly looked forward to participating in each week. This year, I'd like to begin participation in intramurals in the fall, which will provide the team another opportunity to bond and get to know one another outside of the Spark environment. We plan to launch this again in the winter term after assessing interest.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Since Team Leaders may not know each other at the beginning of the year, there may be lower engagement compared to what we saw in the winter semester. I plan to gauge interest before signing up for intramurals and get the Team Leaders; input on choice of sport to encourage their participation.
Who?	AD, Executives, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority ==Moderate Priority== Low Priority

October

Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	1on1 Check-Ins with Executives/Team Leaders
Why and how?	The Executives and Team Leaders are the backbone of our service and it is of utmost importance to ensure that Sanjanaa and I are there for them, just like they are there for the first years. Having short, 20-minute meetings with each Team Leader will ensure their voice is heard in the service and help us learn to support them in a way that is best for each one of them. It also gives them a chance to provide us with feedback. While Executives and Team Leaders are always welcome to approach us with anything they'd like to share, this provides an intentional space to do so. Check-ins with Executives will occur on a more frequent basis (likely bimonthly), while check-ins with Team Leaders will be once a semester.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Due to the volume of individuals on our team, scheduling check-ins and accommodating to everyone's schedule can be challenging. Splitting check-ins between Sanjanaa and I will help to address this.
Who?	D/AD, Executives, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority

Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	Open Session
Why and how?	This is a new initiative I would like to introduce to Spark this year. Once registration for sessions closes at the beginning of the semester, first years cannot join sessions. Unfortunately, many first years find out about Spark after registration has closed and may feel that they have missed out on engaging with sessions. This year, we plan to host an open session for any first year to join, regardless of whether they have registered for sessions or not, as the fourth or fifth session. This will give them a taste of our programming, after which they can choose to register and continue coming weekly. Depending on the success of this in the fall, we may also implement it in the winter term.

Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Since this session will not require registration to attend, it will be difficult to estimate attendance ahead of time. Our usual sessions rooms are quite small (capacity of 10-12), and it may be difficult for Team Leaders to adjust to an influx of students for this session. It may help to combine many of the sessions groups for the open session week to accommodate.
Who?	Sessions Coordinators, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#3):	**Spark's First Year Newsletter**
Why and how?	This initiative was proposed by one of our Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, and something Sanjanaa and I are excited to implement. We find that it is difficult to reach out to first year students who aren't registered in sessions, and we hope this newsletter will help to increase awareness about our service. The frequency of the newsletter release is yet to be determined. We plan for it to feature specific events, resources, and organizations on-campus relevant to first year students.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Seeing as this is a new initiative with no previous material within our service to base this off of, we would be creating the content and figuring out how to best disseminate the newsletter from scratch. However, we plan to use the help of our Outreach & Engagement committee of Team Leaders, which should spread the workload of this project.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, Outreach & Engagement Committee (Team Leaders)
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority

November

Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	First Year Formal
Why and how?	First Year Formal is Spark's biggest event in terms of attendance, budget, and planning required. While the event will take place in mid-November, planning will begin in mid-July. First Year Formal provides an opportunity for first year students to have an exciting night while building community and getting to know others in their cohort. The main logistical considerations for running this event are selecting the venue, catering, AVTEK, and décor. Additionally, a strong promotional plan must be carried out to ensure high engagement and ticket sales.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Having worked on this event last year, the main challenges I anticipate we will face are: **1. Low Engagement** First Year Formal is a difficult event to promote to first years. Students typically like to attend their faculty formals and find it difficult to justify spending more money on another formal, which is why it is beneficial to hold this event early in the year, before faculty formals begin. On the other hand, holding the event early on makes it difficult to garner interest as students tend to attend events of this nature in groups, which they may not have formed at this point. Thus, it is imperative to implement an effective promotional strategy ahead of time. **2. Liaising with First Year Council (FYC)** First Year Formal is a collaborative event with FYC. However, since the members of FYC are appointed at least a month into the school year, when much of the planning is complete, it is difficult to take their ideas and opinions into account. I plan to discuss how we can best include FYC members into the process of planning and executing this event.

	3. Budget Concerns
	Last year, we received feedback that the ticket price was a big barrier for students interested in attending. I really believe that the most effective way to significantly boost attendance at this event is to reduce the price. However, with the cost of the venue, catering, and AVTEK, I expect it will be difficult to figure out a ticket price that doesn't drain our budget while also considering our target audience. Working with the VP Finance will help to alleviate these challenges.
Who?	Events Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	==High Priority== Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Fall Social Media Publication**
Why and how?	Every semester, Spark releases at least one "publication", which provides information about a topic beneficial for first year students to learn about. Some topics from previous years include first year electives, recipes to cook in your dorm/off-campus house, meal plans, McMaster apps, etc. This is just another way for our service to expand its reach and engage with students who haven't registered for sessions or attended our events.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	This task requires a significant effort from our Promotions & Publications Coordinators, to both come up with the content and the design for the publication. Making use of our Promotions & Publications Committee of Team Leaders will help support in the preparation of the publication.
Who?	Promotions & Publications Coordinators, Promotions & Publications Committee (Team Leaders)
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority ==Moderate Priority== Low Priority

December

Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Fall Closing Ceremonies**
Why and how?	Closing Ceremonies are a place to celebrate the first years who participate in sessions during the fall semester. Similar to the Fall Sessions Kick-Off, it provides an opportunity the first years to get to know the broader service outside of their sessions groups. It is also an important time to promote registration for winter sessions. Finally, Closing Ceremonies is a chance to acknowledge all the hard work our Team Leaders have put into bringing Sessions to life for the first years.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Other than finding a date to maximize attendance, I don't foresee any major challenges with this event.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators (organizers), D/AD, Team Leaders, Executives
Priority Level (highlight one)	<mark>High Priority</mark> Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Finalizing Winter Sessions Programming**
Why and how?	We aim for the winter sessions content to be completed by December, so Sanjanaa and I have time to provide feedback and for it to be implemented. This is also a great opportunity to incorporate feedback received from Team Leaders and first years over the course of the fall semester, so we can best meet their needs with our programming.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Seeing as the Sessions Coordinators have already developed 8 sessions for the fall semester, it can be difficult to come up with fresh ideas for the new set of winter sessions. I have encouraged the Sessions Coordinators to reference sessions content from past years for inspiration. I also plan to reserve some time during weekly exec meetings to brainstorm ideas with the whole team, which can alleviate some of the pressure on the Sessions Coordinators.
Who?	Sessions Coordinators

Priority Level (highlight one)	<mark>High Priority</mark> Moderate Priority Low Priority

Winter Term

*Much of our winter term programming follows a similar format to the fall term. Please see above for further details on repeated initiatives.

January	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Winter Team Leader Refresher Training**
Why and how?	Similar to Team Leader training in August, refresher training will remind Team Leaders about Spark's community norms and how to best support first year students. We will use this space to discuss challenges Team Leaders may be facing in their roles (e.g., low retention, having difficult conversations) and how to effectively address them.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	I do not foresee any major challenges with this initiative other than finding a time that works for most of the team to hold training.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, Promotions & Publications Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority <mark>Moderate Priority</mark> Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Sessions Enrolment Promotions & Launch**
Why and how?	The winter term presents a fresh opportunity to spread the word about sessions programming and encourage first years to join our weekly sessions.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	1. **Addressing Spark's Position as a Transition Support Program** Spark is largely seen as a service meant to help students transition from high school to university. However, by the

	time winter term rolls around, many students feel as though they do not require the same support they once did in the fall. Spark's winter promotions should reflect a shift in focus akin to that featured in our sessions, from the transition from high school to university to the transition from first year to second year and beyond. **2. Lack of Welcome Week** As previously discussed, Welcome Week is an extremely important time to promote our service in the fall, but without such a large-scale opportunity in the winter, it will undoubtedly be harder to make students aware of our service. Making intentional efforts to reach out to students through social media, in-person presence (e.g., Campus Connect), and partners (Residence Life), will help increase awareness.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators, Promotions & Publications Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#3):	**Sessions Training for Team Leaders**
Why and how?	Weekly training for Team Leaders on the upcoming week's sessions content continues to serve the same purpose as in the fall.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	The Team Leaders would have already attended 8 weeks of training in the fall semester, which makes it challenging for it to remain engaging in the winter. However, by making sessions content different in the new term, we hope they will continue to find value in sessions training.
Who?	Sessions Coordinators, Team Leaders
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#4):	**Spark Stars and Spark Ambassadors Relaunch**

Why and how?	Both initiatives continue to allow students to take on more of a leadership position in the service. These will help to cultivate future leaders who can potentially carry on the mission of our service.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Keeping this program fresh for first years who have participated in the fall may prove to be challenging. Brainstorming ways to involve the first years in different ways as a team can ensure the program will be beneficial to new and returning first years.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority

February	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Life After First Year Event Series**
Why and how?	This year, I'd like to work on expanding Spark's scope to better cater to the needs of first year students in the winter term. The "Life After First Year" (name TBD) event series aims to address questions and concerns for students about their university experience in second year and beyond. This may take the form of several consecutive events during a single week or over the span of a few weeks. Some topics of interest include program specializations, off-campus housing, cooking/meal prep, summer job searching, etc. Partnering with other MSU Services or organizations on campus could both expand our reach with this event and create higher quality events with their expertise.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	The logistics of coordinating with different services and organizations may be challenging, which is why it is necessary to begin planning this event well in advance. Given the fact that this initiative involves organizing multiple events, I would work to prevent burnout of the Events Coordinators by checking in regularly and making adjustments to the event structure depending on their needs.
Who?	Events Coordinators

Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority

March	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Winter Social Media Publication**
Why and how?	Our winter publication will help expand our reach to the greater first year community. The topic will likely focus on looking beyond first year so students can begin/continue about what the year ahead might look like for them.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Already having put creativity and effort into their first publication in the fall, it may be challenging to design another publication. I've found that discussing these matters with the Executive team as a whole can provide a source of inspiration.
Who?	Promotions & Publications Coordinators
Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority Moderate Priority Low Priority
Service Goal/Project/Event (#2):	**Spark Yearbook**
Why and how?	The Spark Yearbook is a small token of appreciation for our Team Leaders who work so hard throughout the year to create a positive experience for first year students. This serves as something they can look back on with (hopefully) fond memories of their time as a part of Spark.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Past members of our service have expressed that a physical copy of the Spark yearbook would be a nice keepsake. This seems like a great way to commemorate the Spark community, as Team Leaders can write messages for each other in their yearbooks. However, this will undoubtedly be expensive. Additionally, this would be a significant task for our Promotions & Publications Coordinators to accomplish, so I would encourage them to consistently gather pictures and work on this throughout the year.
Who?	Promotions & Publications Coordinators

Priority Level (highlight one)	High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority

April	
Service Goal/Project/Event (#1):	**Winter Closing Ceremonies**
Why and how?	Winter closing ceremonies is our final initiative as a service. All first years registered with Spark, Team Leaders, and Executives are invited to celebrate their accomplishments throughout the year. It is an opportunity to thank everyone for their hard work. We will also be announcing the winner(s) of the Spark Achievement in Leadership Scholarship at winter closing ceremonies.
Potential difficulties? How can you overcome them?	Other than finding a date to maximize attendance, I don't foresee any major challenges with this event.
Who?	Outreach & Engagement Coordinators (organizers), D/AD, Team Leaders, Executives

Increasing Spark's Presence

Service Webpage

The Spark webpage currently does a good job of providing an overview of our service's main programming, detailing the structure and benefit of the weekly sessions mentorship program, as well as information about the Spark Achievement in Leadership Scholarship. However, sessions are just one way of engaging with Spark. In the past, it's been talked about to aggregate Spark's resource publications that are usually only posted on social media and provide a link to the collection on the website. This could serve as a "resource hub" for first year students looking for information about various topics that this population is usually curious about and may provide another avenue by which students become more interested in our service. I would also like to add a feedback form that is constantly open on the website for students to provide suggestions regarding what they would like to see from our service. We regularly collect feedback from the first years and upper years involved in the service, but considering additional feedback can give us some insight into better addressing the needs of more students external to the service in future years. Lastly, while feasibility may be a concern due it changing on a semesterly basis, I think it could be beneficial to include our sessions registration link on the Spark webpage. From the current webpage, the best way to access this link is by visiting our Instagram page, then clicking the link in our bio, and seeing it on our carrd.co site. Making the link more easily accessible to interested students may reduce barriers to signing up and participating.

Social Media

This year, we've seen a lot of success and an increase in our social media engagement through posting reels and photos of our team members, events, and regular Spark operations, rather than relying solely on graphics. This year, I hope to continue this trend and post more photos to show the faces behind the service. From a first year student's perspective, it can be daunting to sign up and attend sessions without much of an idea of the environment our service creates for students, and this is a way for us to show Spark as the warm, welcoming environment it is. One way I aim to do this is by posting weekly sessions recaps, where we feature photos from each week of sessions so other students have an idea of what Spark sessions are like, encouraging them to sign up. I would also like to bring back social media initiatives such as the "Normalizing

Failure" campaign, which feature the experiences of upper year students when they were in first year to help current first year students feel less alone.

A big goal for our service this year is to increase engagement with the current cohort of first year students. Since Spark only aims to serve students for one year of university, our content quickly becomes irrelevant to our followers at the end of the year and we have to regain access to our target audience. I would like to make an effort to increase the number of current first year students on our Instagram page, through strategies such as encouraging students to follow the page during Welcome Week and asking Instagram accounts typically followed by first year students such as the McMaster Residence Life and McMaster University Admissions pages to promote our content.

Merchandise & Apparel

I plan to purchase merchandise/apparel both internally for our team and to hand out to the larger student body. Spark Team Leaders are traditionally provided with t-shirts that clearly display the Spark logo so they are easily identifiable during Welcome Week and other summer events such as Night Before Classes. I will also be purchasing Spark hoodies/crewnecks for our team. Last year, we shifted to a more neutral colour and subtle logo for our hoodies, which was both very well received by the team and effective in promoting our service. Team Leaders frequently wore the Spark hoodie outside of Spark events, and many were asked about the service simply because of the hoodie. We ordered these as a volunteer appreciation gift towards the end of last year, but I would like to order these as soon as possible so they can be worn throughout the year given how effective they were in increasing awareness.

Stickers are a small token that we typically hand out many of to the larger student body during Welcome Week and at events. These are quite popular and helps as a reminder of the service for students. This year, we are also thinking of purchasing an item associated with Spark's branding, but again, more subtly displaying our logo, so first year students will both use it and remember the service. We are currently brainstorming what this would look like, but one idea we have is a tote bag with Spark's slogan, "shine brighter", and the Spark logo on a smaller scale. We hope this will have a similar effect to the hoodies purchased for the team.

Physical Promotions

Given the challenges previously mentioned with social media reach to the current first year cohort, especially at the beginning of the year, physical promotional pieces are vital to our service. Purchasing rave cards at the beginning of each semester with information about Spark sessions and a QR code directing students to the sessions registration link is an effective way to draw attention to sessions programing. We plan to hand these out during Welcome Week, at events, in front of popular first year classes, and by sliding them under residence doors. Posters about our sessions and events are also important and help draw attention to our service when individuals do not follow us on social media. This year, I would like to ensure our posters are put up in residence buildings as well, as these are areas guaranteed to be filled with our target audience.

Team Management

As with any service, the Spark Executive and Volunteer teams are absolutely integral to our functioning and thus should be made to feel supported and uplifted in their roles. Over the years, I have found a special quality of Spark's team to be how warm and inviting it is, and it is my goal to continue cultivating an environment where everyone feels like they belong and have a space within the Spark community. As Director, I see it as my responsibility to ensure my team feels heard, appreciated, connected, and empowered to bring their visions for the service to life.

Executive Management

Every single member of our Executive team plays an instrumental role in our operations, making it essential that I focus on individual wellbeing and maintaining overall positive team dynamics. I have seen how the individuals on this team care about the mission of our service, and how much effort and creativity is required on their part to provide first years with high quality programming. Our weekly Executive meetings are an important part of Executive management, as they allow me to check in with Executives and ensures that everyone is up to date on the various initiatives within the service. It also serves as a chance for Executives to get to know one another and creates a more cohesive team.

This year, I'd like to hold more 1on1 check-ins every other month to connect with my team on an individual basis. Individual check-ins provide a space for the Execs to share their experiences on the team and for me to learn how I can further support them in their roles. Seeing as they carry a lot of responsibility, I want to ensure they feel like they can always ask for help and that they aren't alone in their roles. With these check-ins, I can

make overall improvements to the service that take their feedback into consideration so we can continue doing things they enjoy and change things around where necessary. Hosting socials and budgeting to account for Executive appreciation gifts are some additional initiatives that can reward Executives for their efforts and facilitate team bonding.

The benefit of having a larger Executive team is that each person brings their own unique skills and ideas to the table, and when we put these together, we have an opportunity to create programming that caters to the diverse needs of the students we aim to serve. It also gives the Executives a chance to exercise their creativity and come up with new ways to help our service grow that they are passionate about. Encouraging them to pursue initiatives that they feel strongly about will promote genuine enjoyment with their involvement in Spark.

Besides their passion for first year success, a big reason why individuals join the Spark Executive Team is for the opportunity to hone their leadership skills. I will prioritize encouraging them to take on various leadership roles in the service, whether it is leading their committees, taking on a mentorship role with Team Leaders, or holding more responsibility when it comes to the initiatives they decide to implement.

Volunteer Management

Our Team Leader team consists of ~35 individuals who show up week after to week to take the sessions programming designed by the Sessions Coordinators and deliver it to first year students. They also help with volunteering at events, contributing to outreach initiatives, and conceptualizing promotional materials. They put a lot of effort into ensuring that Spark feels like safe space and welcoming service for students to access and demonstrate personal investment in the success of the first years in their sessions groups. Since we have many more Team Leaders than Executive members, it can be difficult to get to know everyone and show our appreciation for their efforts on a personal level. Thus, 1on1 check-ins with either Sanjanaa or I are an important part of volunteer management, as they allow us to connect with each Team Leader and assess how we can better support the team in carrying out their roles.

Something I'd like to place an extra emphasis on this year is incorporating Team Leader feedback, specifically for sessions programming. The design of fall and winter sessions is the responsibility of our Sessions Coordinators and these are mostly created well in advance of sessions training, making it can be difficult for to incorporate feedback from Team Leaders, especially due to the tight turnaround time between sessions training and the sessions themselves. However, when Team Leaders have the chance to

provide feedback and see their input being considered in our programming, it gives them a chance to even more of a difference through the service. Along with our regular feedback forms, dedicating time to feedback about how the first years found the previous week's session and how the Team Leaders found the current session presented in training can help us uncover what works well and what doesn't, overall creating a better experience for the Team Leaders and by extension, the first years.

Last year, we made a conscious effort to introduce more fun and social opportunities for Team Leaders to build community within the service. Since they are split into separate sessions groups and sessions training times, these initiatives promote more intermingling between Team Leaders so they can get to know the whole team, rather than just the Team Leaders they see on a regular basis. Some of these initiatives include Team Leader socials, which we plan to have at least one of per semester, our fall and winter intramural teams, and Tag-a-TL (semester long game where Team Leaders are assigned each other as targets and have to tag their targets around campus). Starting these initiatives early in the year will set us up for a strong overall team dynamic.

The final thing I'd like to address with Team Leader management is addressing disappointment with low sessions attendance and retention. The Team Leaders are usually very excited to work with and build connections with the first years in their sessions groups, and it can be discouraging when sessions turnout is low. There are many factors that go into maintaining retention which are out of the control of Team Leaders. There is a noticeable difference in how Team Leaders feel about their experience on the service when they have consistent attendance during their sessions, because they can actually provide mentorship, which is what they joined Spark for. I hope to help make sure Team Leaders feel as though their effort and contributions to the service are valued regardless of sessions attendance, and ensure they feel appreciated for their commitment to the team.

Master Timeline

Month	Tasks
May	- Executive team hiring - Service table at May@Mac

June	• Executive team onboarding and orientation • Planning for Team Leader hiring with Executive team • Executive team year plans due • Establish weekly summer Executive meeting time • Hold 2on1 Executive check-ins with D/AD
July	• Hold weekly summer Executive meetings • Host co-ship x D/AD check-ins to review year plans • Prepare promotional materials for Team Leader application launch (graphic, reels, past Team Leader testimonials) • Team Leader written application launch • Team Leader written application marking by Executives • Team Leader interviews • Finalize offers to Team Leaders • Plan summer programming webinars (reach out to faculty Welcome Week coordinators and service directors) • Complete fall sessions 1-4 • Reach out to Welcome Week coordinators to plan Spark presence at faculty events • Begin planning First Year Formal Logistics • Order physical promotional items for Welcome Week (rave cards, stickers, t-shirts)
August	• Hold weekly summer Executive meetings • Team Leader Orientation • Team Leader Facebook group launch with team introductions • Host summer programming webinars • Reach out to FYC to continue planning First Year Formal (finalize theme and venue, begin working on AVTEK considerations and catering order) • Finalize all fall sessions 1-8 • Hold 2on1 Executive check-ins with D/AD • Book rooms for fall sessions • Plan Spark Ambassadors programming • Plan Night Before Classes event • Launch sessions registration • Host booths at faculty Welcome Week events • Host Welcome Week giveaway/photo contest • Develop promotional plan for sessions registration

	• Executive introduction posts
September	• Establish new weekly fall Executive meeting time • Host night before classes event • Launch fall intramural team • Begin creating weekly sessions graphics • Promote sessions registration across campus • Hold fall session kick-off • Organize Team Leaders and first-years into sessions groups • Begin weekly Team Leader training • Launch fall sessions • Begin playing Tag-a-TL game to encourage TL bonding • Finalize First Year Formal details • Continue planning for winter sessions • Launch spark ambassadors and Spark stars • Begin reaching out to sponsors for scholarship and exam care packages funding • Launch sessions feedback form for Team Leaders and first years • Begin preparing first-year newsletter
October	• Hold weekly Executive meetings • Host monthly 1on1s with Executives and Team Leaders • Release first year formal tickets • Continue running sessions and sessions training • Host open session • Begin Spark Ambassadors meetings • Take Team Leader photos • Complete winter sessions 1-4 • Hold Team Leader social • Host hike & hangout event • Begin working on fall publication • Launch first-year newsletter
November	• Hold weekly Executive meetings • Host first year formal • Launch a D/AD feedback form • Hold Executive team social • Continue holding sessions and sessions training

	• Launch fall publication • Plan fall closing ceremonies • Complete winter sessions 5-8 • Determine fall spark stars winners
December	• Host fall closing ceremonies • Order new rave cards for winter sessions promotions • Host 2on1 check-ins with Executives • Begin planning life after first year event series • Complete winter sessions • Distribute exam care packages • Reach out to first years to update them on their Spark Stars and Spark Scholarship progress • Release promotions for the Spark Scholarship
January	• Establish new weekly Executive meetings • Launch winter intramural team • Host Team Leader revival training • Promote Spark winter sessions registration by reaching out to Residence Life, Archway, FYC, and MSU services • Relaunch the Spark Ambassadors program • Continue Spark Stars • Launch winter weekly sessions and sessions training • Continue planning life after first year event series
February	• Hold weekly Executive meetings • Host 1on1s with Team Leaders and Executives • Host Team Leader social • Continue weekly sessions and sessions training • Hold the Spark your Heart event • Develop Spark Scholarship application Take Team Leader photos • Prepare winter publication • Host life after first year event series
March	• Hold weekly Executive meetings • Wrap up sessions programming and Team Leader training • Release winter publication • Organize and order the Spark yearbook

	• Release Spark Scholarship applications • Determine winter Spark Stars and scholarship winner(s)
April	• Host winter closing ceremonies • Hold weekly Executive meetings • Host monthly 1on1s with Executives • Host final event determined by events coordinators • Director, Assistant Director, and Executives write transition reports for incoming Executive members

Miscellaneous

N/A.