



## **Eight Guidelines for Potential Spark Partners**

*San Francisco Bay Area*

### **Background**

**Spark** is an award-winning, rapidly growing youth apprenticeship program. Spark works to reduce the high-school dropout rate with a unique apprenticeship program, focused on at-risk middle-school students. In partnership with California public schools and non-profits, Spark creates one-on-one apprenticeships in real workplaces, where youth explore careers and develop the skills and motivation to succeed academically. Funded by a number of major California foundations, including the Packard Foundation, S.H. Cowell Foundation, as well as leading California companies like Genentech and Gap, Spark is demonstrating a powerful new approach to the high-school dropout crisis, one that draws in new resources by turning workplaces into learning places. Spark was awarded the prestigious Draper Richards Fellowship in 2008, given to five early-stage non-profits from around the world with the highest potential for “broad social impact.” In January 2010, Spark also received the Ashoka Fellowship, recognizing the innovation and growth potential in Spark’s model. With a strong base of support in California, Spark is exploring growth opportunities both around California and in other parts of the United States.

### **Partnerships**

Spark works with school and non-profit partners who share Spark’s vision to inspire and equip struggling students to become successful in school and in life. Spark’s partners select the students who will most benefit from the program, deliver Spark’s Leadership Curriculum alongside the apprenticeship, and maintain steady communication with students, parents, and Spark staff. Spark focuses on creating and managing the apprenticeships themselves, while also providing training and ongoing support to partner staff. The program has demonstrated effectiveness in re-engaging struggling students, with significant gains in students’ confidence, motivation, and retention in high school.

In the Bay Area, Spark is currently exploring new partnerships with schools, districts, and non-profits. Spark aims to confirm new partnerships at least 6 months prior to program launch, in order to arrange for sufficient staffing, train partner staff, and identify mentors and apprenticeship hosts in the community.

The list of parameters below is intended to state the general characteristics of a successful partnership with Spark:

#### **1. Need**

Spark aims to serve students within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, and focuses on school sites at which 50% or more of the population is eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL). In practice, most of Spark’s current school sites are over 75% FRL. Within these schools, Spark focuses on those students who are most disengaged from learning and struggling academically.

#### **2. Program Demand**

Spark serves communities where there is a demonstrated demand for our programs from parents, students, and educators. Spark asks potential partners to demonstrate the readiness of students and families to participate in the program.

#### **3. Local Leadership**

The commitment of multiple leaders at the school site is critical to Spark’s success and sustainability. Key leadership commitments include the principal and at least two other leaders on site, whether teachers, counselors, afterschool program leaders, etc. These leaders commit to participation through Spark’s Memorandum of Understanding (MOU); even if the main partner is a non-profit organization, the school district must be a signatory to this MOU.





#### **4. Calendar**

Spark holds three apprenticeship sessions during the course of the year: Fall (October-December), Spring (March-May), and Summer (June-August). While not all partners offer summer programming, Spark asks school-year partners to offer both Fall and Spring apprenticeships. In each city served, Spark typically schedules all apprenticeships on the same day of the week (e.g., San Francisco Apprenticeships take place on Wednesdays, Redwood City Apprenticeships take place on Thursdays and San Rafael Apprenticeships take place on Tuesdays).

#### **5. Location**

Because of the logistics of arranging for students to arrive on-time at many different apprenticeship sites, location and access to transportation is a critical consideration. In urban areas, Spark typically relies on public transportation. In suburban areas, partners must be able to coordinate access to parent transportation or other forms of transportation to ensure students can travel to/from apprenticeships each week.

#### **6. Funding**

Spark does not charge partners a fee for our services. We provide training, support, and coaching for our partners on our Leadership Curriculum. We select, screen and train all volunteers and match them with students. Once the apprenticeship is set up several Spark staff members ensure the ongoing support of the match. The partner is responsible for volunteer background-check expenses (an average of \$10 per volunteer), as well as any transportation costs incurred in getting students to and from their apprenticeships. The partner is also responsible for any potential staffing costs for a member of the partner's staff to devote time to the Spark partnership; this varies significantly based on the partnership arrangement, as described in the staffing section.

#### **7. Staffing**

As described above, partner staff time is needed to attend trainings/orientations, implement the leadership curriculum, lead family communication, and provide weekly Apprenticeship support. Partners have flexibility in determining how to arrange staffing and which individual(s) will lead Spark-related responsibilities. Some partners have provided stipends for staff time, while others have budgeted hourly wage amounts for part-time staff. Spark is committed to working with each partner to help plan staffing.

#### **8. Data & Evaluation**

Spark places a strong emphasis on systematic data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and to ensure continued learning. To that end, Spark only partners in situations where the local schools and/or districts are able to provide, with parent permission, academic and enrollment data. Spark looks particularly at year-to-year matriculation in high school and ultimately graduation rates. In addition, Spark uses pre- and post-program surveys of students, parents, and mentors to gather feedback on other desired outcomes including greater confidence, motivation, and engagement with school.