

# SPARK

2024 Student Application Guide

# **SPARK 2024 Student Application Guide**

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## **Introduction**

Thinking about applying to SPARK? This document will guide you through planning a summer experience and preparing your application! If you have any questions about the program, please email [samantha\\_demelim@fas.harvard.edu](mailto:samantha_demelim@fas.harvard.edu). Below are also opportunities to learn more about the program and ask questions.

## Checklist

STEPS TO SERVE	EXAMPLES AND RESOURCES
<p><b>1. CONSIDER YOUR AVAILABILITY FOR SERVICE</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Are you an incoming Class of 2028 Harvard College student?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Is there a cause or community challenge that you would like to deepen your knowledge of or commitment to?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Will you be able to meet the program commitments? 80 hours of direct service (between July 1 -August 9) &amp; 20 hours of learning (including webinars, small group meetings, readings, and reflections).</li> </ul>	<p>- If you are taking a gap year, we encourage you to apply for SPARK next summer.</p> <p>- Email Samantha Levin (<a href="mailto:samantha_demelim@fas.harvard.edu">samantha_demelim@fas.harvard.edu</a>) with any conflicts — they will be handled on an individual basis.</p>
<p><b>2. BRAINSTORM &amp; CONTACT A SERVICE SITE</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Narrow your search: Are there any sites that you worked with during high school? Is there a new community challenge that you want to explore? Did your academic coursework spark a new interest for you?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Evaluate your potential site: Does the site have a mission that focuses on contributing to the common good? Ordinarily a service site will be a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization, but other sites will also be considered if you can make a strong argument for the organization’s contribution to the common good, betterment of society, and to the thriving of individual people. Sites should be wherever you consider home.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Do you have a resume for contacting your service site?</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Contact your potential site about the program — come with an idea of what you might work on but ask your site for any particular needs they might have. You can absolutely continue work done in high school, but is there a new spin you might take on it?</li> </ul>	<p>See the Appendix for materials to support reaching out to potential host sites and brainstorming ideas.</p> <p>You can use the Harvard Office of Career Services (OCS) site for help in creating a resume if you’d like to use one:  <a href="https://ocs.fas.harvard.edu/resumes-cvs-cover-letters">https://ocs.fas.harvard.edu/resumes-cvs-cover-letters</a>.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Based on your conversation, does the site have a substantial task or project for you to work on between the dates of the program, July 1-August 9? You do not need your entire project figured out, but a strong idea of a community need and some ideas of how you might tackle it. We will guide you through the process of refining your project.</li> <li>❑ Does the site offer a mentor who will be willing to meet with you at least 3 times during the course of the program, and offer help as you plan and complete your project? Does the mentor have strong knowledge of their field or the organization itself? Your mentor will be asked to complete a Memorandum of Understanding (an agreement between you and the site — a model will be sent to you if selected to participate). They will also be asked to complete a post-service survey.</li> <li>❑ Will the mentor be available between July 1 and August 9, when you would be participating in the program?</li> <li>❑ Could your project be completed remotely?</li> </ul>	
<p><b>3. LOGISTICS</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ <i>Computer and online access.</i> Participation in SPARK requires access to a computer and the internet. Do you have access to a computer with audio and visual capability that will allow you to do remote meetings with the online community of other SPARK participants?</li> </ul>	<p>If you would like to participate in SPARK but don't have access to the internet or a computer, please contact <a href="mailto:samantha_demelim@fas.harvard.edu">samantha_demelim@fas.harvard.edu</a> for assistance. Please note that you do not need to own a personal computer to participate in the program; a public computer with internet access, such as through a library, school, or internet café, should work for SPARK.</p>
<p><b>4. COMPLETE YOUR APPLICATION</b></p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Once you have confirmed details with your host-site, apply!</li> <li>❑ The application will ask you to submit a 500 word proposal about your potential project. Include specifics around your community need, how you know about the community need, how</li> </ul>	<p>Find a sample proposal in the appendix.</p>

	<p>you plan to learn more about the community challenge, what skills you will bring to the work, and specific ways you plan to tackle your community needs through your project. As mentioned above, the exact specifics of your project can be subject to change but lay out how you might potentially spend your time. Please include a plan for virtual engagement.</p>	
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### **Sample Project Ideas**

- Setting up a virtual activities program for nursing homes.
- Building a new educational curriculum for youth, parents, refugees
- Supporting a nonprofit's media and fundraising efforts
- Designing community surveys and analyzing data
- Building new systems for a food pantry
- Helping redesign a local support hotline
- Working for your local government on youth focus groups
- Supporting voter education
- Interning with a local Black Lives Matter chapter
- Designing a garden or historical site

## Reaching Out to Your Host Organization

The following are guidelines to help you reach out to potential sites where you may serve for the summer. We recommend starting with an email and then suggesting a phone call to discuss further.

Potential service sites may like to know:

- Who are you?
  - Name & hometown
  - Where did you go to high school?
  - Where are you going to college?
- What is SPARK?
  - A summer program in which incoming first-year Harvard College students participate in civic engagement and public service in their hometowns, through a project with a local organization.
  - The program requires students to spend 80 hours on a project addressing a community need.
  - Students in the program will interact with each other during the summer through online participation.
  - Students in the program will receive a stipend.
- Why do you want to work for this particular organization?
  - Is this a personal, professional, or academic motivation? Or some combination of these?
  - Why does this organization's work excite you?
  - What do you hope to learn?
  - What can you contribute?
- What do they need help with?
  - Do they have a role available?
  - What kind of work might you be doing?
- What do you need from them?
  - Agreement that you can serve.
  - Collaboration in planning the work/project you would do for them, to make sure your work is meeting a real need in the organization.
  - Agreement to meet with you at least 3 times during the course of the program: a meeting to solidify your plans for working at the site, a mid-term meeting, and a final meeting when you complete your project.
- Additional resources
  - Send a resume.
  - Offer a follow up call.
  - Link to the SPARK website (<https://publicservice.fas.harvard.edu/SPARK>).
- Express gratitude to your host site for their time, work, and potential mentorship

## Example Outreach Email

RE: Harvard SPARK Internship

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am an incoming first-year at Harvard, and I attended \_\_\_\_\_ High School right here in \_\_\_\_\_. I'm hoping to make a positive difference in our community before I leave for school through the Harvard SPARK Program. SPARK supports incoming Harvard first-year students to do public service in the community during the summer before they go to college.

I have been inspired by what our city has been doing for the homeless since I studied these efforts in high school. Moving forward, I hope to study \_\_\_\_\_ in college and would like to inform my professional aspirations by gaining experience in this field of service. The work \_\_\_\_\_ has been doing to protect, feed, and shelter individuals in \_\_\_\_\_ neighborhood motivates me greatly. I want to learn how your team brings such large-scale projects from the planning phase to reality, and I hope I could be helpful during this process.

Is there a role for me at the organization? If so, what sort of help do you need? I am flexible and open to learning new skills. I also have skills in web design, tutoring, and food preparation, in case these could be helpful in your organization.

In order for me to apply to the SPARK program (deadline is June 1, I need to write about the organization that I'll be working with and give a description of a project I would complete during my service, which would take place between July 1 -August 9. I'm attaching a resume here and am happy to send references or anything else you might need. I would also be glad to hop on the phone to discuss further.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Sample Project Proposal from the Class of 2023**

Isabella Goodchild-Michelman 3SP Proposal

Project Supervisor: *Meg Whiteley, HCUF Manager*

Hometown: *Spartanburg, South Carolina*

### **BACKGROUND**

According to the USDA, 13 % of Spartanburg city residents—more than 5000 people—are living in food deserts (low-income areas that are further than 1 mile from the nearest sufficient food outlet). Additionally, over 15% of Spartanburg citizens live below the poverty line. These statistics show that a significant percentage of Spartanburg County residents lack economic and logistic access to healthy food.

I have been very impressed with how Spartanburg’s Hub City Urban Farm (HCUF), a nonprofit teaching farm in downtown Spartanburg, has worked to increase food access in Spartanburg County and to educate citizens about healthy food cultivation and consumption. All Urban Farm produce is given to the HCUF Mobile Market, which distributes fresh produce to “food deserts” throughout Spartanburg County. When I learned of Harvard’s 3SP program, I immediately reached out to Meg Whiteley, Farm Manager at HCUF, to see how I could help with their initiatives.

### **ISSUE**

HCUF wants to expand its educational outreach to nearby school districts, but has struggled to convince schools to use their time and resources to participate in programs that do not teach to South Carolina curricular standards.

### **PROJECT PLAN**

*Create a portfolio of educational lessons for HCUF that aligns with South Carolina’s STEM curriculum*

- Analyze SC STEM curriculum for elementary and middle schools and select standards teachable on the Urban Farm
- Work on the farm to learn appropriate farming techniques that can be implemented in standardized lessons
- Design farm activities that teach the standards
- Test the effectiveness of the lessons by teaching them to students enrolled in Spartanburg schools’ summer programs



- Compile lesson plans into an online resource on the HCUF website so teachers can choose activities that will most benefit their classes.

## **IMPACT**

Classes participating in the HCUF educational program will work as volunteers on the farm, learn about food development and healthy eating, and complete an activity that communicates an SC STEM standard. By teaching required state standards in creative, hands-on ways, my lessons will incentivize schools to participate in the program, thus expanding HCUF's impact on the community.

## **QUALIFICATIONS**

- Three years of Envirothon competitions have given me extensive knowledge of sustainable farming and environmental practices necessary to design farm activities.
- I have gardening experience through creation of a pollinator garden (Gold Award project).
- I have educational experience and connections to Spartanburg school districts through my near-peer book club program.