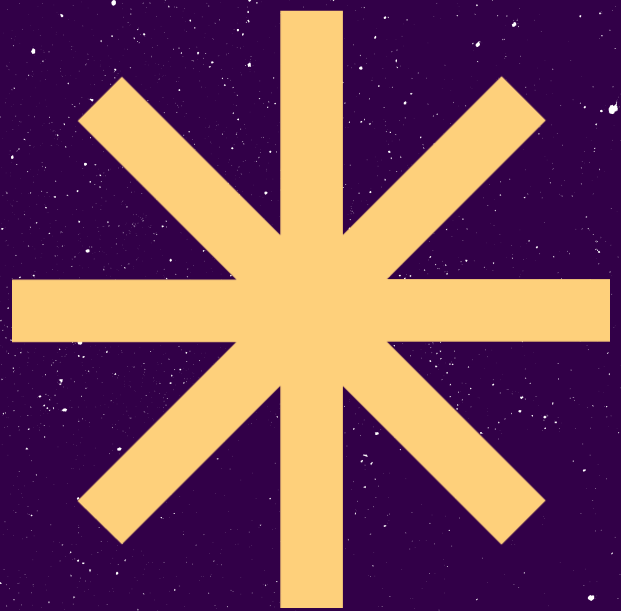


**Your idea  
could change  
the way we  
respond to  
mental health**

**Accountability report**  
*Spark Grants*



**When designing the Spark Grant program and application process we were trying to do things differently, as a partner and as a funder. This report shares our intentions, the process undertaken and our reflections and learnings.**

### **Program Intention**

We recognise that community and the organisations working closely with community are best positioned to identify needs, priorities, and opportunities when it comes to responding preventatively to mental health challenges. We created our Spark Grant program to provide the time and resources for people to be able to respond to what they are seeing and test an idea with their community.

In addition to funding, partners would have access to additional capability support over the term of the grant to aid in the exploration, testing, and presentation of their idea for future funding opportunities.

### **Why the Questions?**

The application questions were designed to ensure that we had enough consistent and comparable information to allow for assessment across and between applications. We wanted to understand people's ideas, but also how the organisation operates and how we might be able to work together.

### **Why so broad?**

As the first Spark Grant round, and at a time of great and diverse community need as a result of Covid-19 we chose not to select a specific focus or priority area within preventative mental health and wellbeing. We wanted to hear from applicants what was feeling most important or where they were seeing the opportunities. We also wanted an opportunity to get a feel for who's out there and what they are doing, while also being able to play a networking/ connecting role.



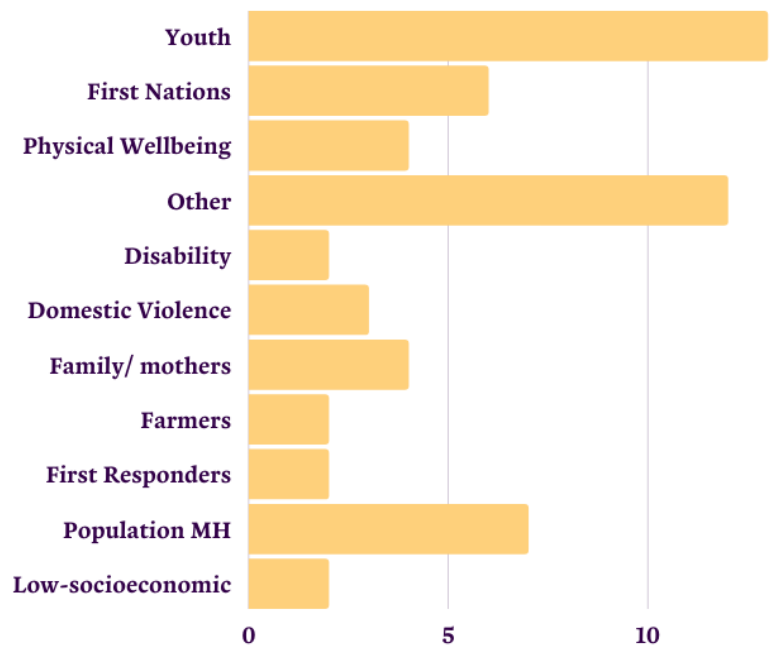
### **Application Format**

The application process design was informed by our values and the intention of Spark. Our goal was to make the time commitment and the burden of writing an application consistent with the scale of the opportunity. We also wanted to provide an opportunity for people to present their idea in a format that worked to their strengths and might be utilised for other purposes in the future. So we made the application process open format to make it more accessible and equitable to anyone or size organisation with an idea to share.

### **Selection Process**

The application and assessment process were designed at the same time to ensure everything we were asking applicants was relevant to how their application would eventually be assessed. We made this information available on our website and we encouraged applicants to meet with us in an informal information session or contact us through the website, email, or by phone. While applications were open, our Grants and Relationships Manager met with roughly 25 organisations and answered many more discrete questions via phone or email. Of these consultations 62% went on to submit an application. The intention was for the process to be transparent and for applicants to have an opportunity to find out more about who we are, what Spark Grants are and how their application would be reviewed.

After applications closed, the first step of our assessment process was having at least two of our three staff members conduct an initial assessment for eligibility and whether the application met the assessment criteria. For each application that met the majority of the assessment criteria, staff then reassessed - looking specifically for any considerations or opportunities and, depending on how strongly the application aligned with the assessment criteria, provided an overall ranking of Low, Medium, or High.



**Application priority areas**

The majority of applications met each of the defined assessment criteria and in order to narrow our decisions we stepped through the below series of questions to tease out how well an application met the following:

- Is it strengths based?
- Does it create connection?
- Does it adopt a holistic approach?
- Does it propose an alternative option, new approach, or fill a gap?
- Will it be driven by/with and for community?
- Does it address root causes?

From this process, we narrowed the applications down to a shortlist and provided this to our Board with an accompanying summary overview of the applications and the process to date. The Board were also provided with all original applications and encouraged to review and identify applications of interest that sat outside of those shortlisted. The Foundation team and Board then came together to make the final selection of six partners.

All applicants were then informed of the decision in the week 31 May- 4 June before the announcement was made public the following week.

We ran this as a strength-based assessment which means we were looking for what was there and what the heart of the idea and work was, instead of focussing on what wasn't. Applications were purely assessed on the information shared in the application - not on presentation style, length, writing, credentials, organisational size or past work. Consideration was not given to pre existing relationships or aspects of the idea discussed in information sessions.

## What we learned

Reflective practice and shifting how we do things based on what we learn are key to how we work. A few learnings we made during the Spark process are explained below.

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### ***Learning 1***

The question of what other supports or resources was too ambiguous and left some applicants feeling unsure, confused, or uncomfortable. The reason we included this question was to understand how we can come alongside as a partner and what external capability supports we may need to engage or develop. However, we have reflected that this question without a conversation needed to be worded more directly and with a clearer explanation of why we were asking and an idea of what other supports we could offer.

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### ***Learning 2***

Making the team available and accessible during the application process was really valuable. Lots of people made time to come and speak with us and we had the opportunity to learn about each other's work and explore the alignment of their ideas to Spark Grants. Of the people who came and used that time many reflected an appreciation of the opportunity to understand each other better. Next time we run Spark we'd like to think of how we can make this accessible for more people by offering some Zoom sessions or times outside of business hours.

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### ***Learning 3***

When organisations and people are used to working in a KPI and outcomes driven sector it can be really difficult to shift mindsets from solutions to exploration and being comfortable in the unknown. This is something we have already seen and learned from the Our Town initiative during the capability building phase and is something we think is really important to ensure responses are reflecting community wants and needs. We are going to reflect on what resources and communications we can include next time to better set the scene.

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### ***Learning 4***

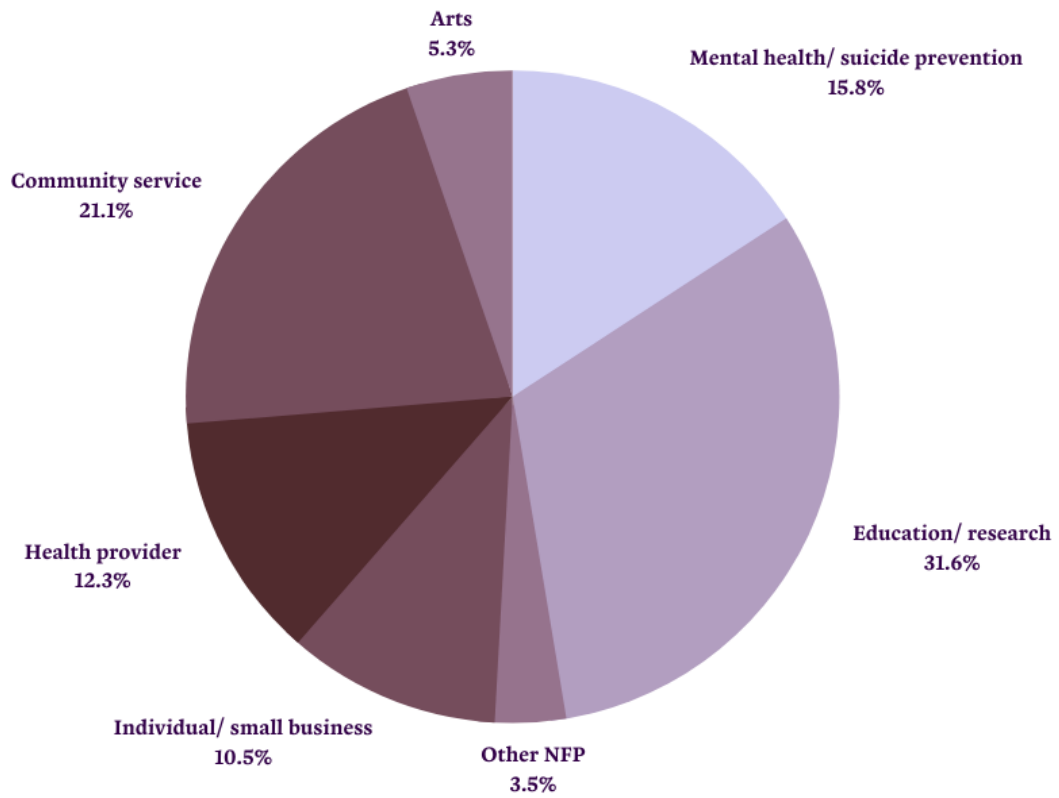
This is the first Spark Grant and the first Grant round the Foundation has run as a new team, meaning there were lots of unknowns for us too! We are going to reflect on our processes from design to selection and feedback to see how we can improve the experience for the applicant, ensure our decisions are informed by a broad array of voices and experience and we continue to confront and shift barriers of accessibility.

### ***Next Steps***

These learnings along with the feedback we receive from applicants will inform the design and implementation of our next grant round and all future practice.

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## Sector of applicants



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## Methodology of applications

