



Spark Seed

Supporting Frontline Innovation Through Spark Seed

Guidance Document

Introduction

Frontline Innovation Initiative

Spark Seed is a frontline innovation initiative from the HSE Spark Innovation Programme. It empowers health and social care staff to turn ideas into action, supporting small-scale, impact-focused projects that improve healthcare delivery, patient care, staff experience, and system efficiency.

Applicants can access up to €5,000 in funding, develop valuable skills in human-centered design and pitching, and gain national recognition for their projects. Applications are open all year round, with two pitching events annually (Spring, Autumn). Please take note of the pitching dates before you submit your application form.

Pitching Dates



About Spark Seed

What is Spark Seed?

Spark Seed supports frontline healthcare workers to explore new ideas or trial practical, impact-focused projects. It provides access to skills training, funding, and a platform to share and scale innovation across the HSE.

Purpose of Spark Seed

Funding

Up to €5,000 to test your healthcare innovation in your workplace.

Knowledge Sharing

Share and promote innovations nationally across the HSE.

Upskilling

Learn design thinking and pitching skills through our bespoke Design Thinking workshop (CPD points available). Fully funded for HSE & Section 38 employees.

When to Apply

When is Spark Seed Open for Applications?

Spark Seed is open to applications year-round. Shortlisted applicants are invited to pitch at Spark Seed pitching events, held twice a year - November and March.

Who is Eligible to Apply?

All frontline healthcare professionals employed by the HSE or Section 38-funded organisations are eligible to apply. This includes Consultants, NCHDs, Nurses, Midwives, Health and Social Care Professionals, and Pharmacists.

The lead applicant must be one of these eligible professionals. If you have an innovative idea but do not belong to one of the listed groups, you may still apply as long as the project lead is an eligible professional.

Projects must:

Be led by a frontline healthcare worker, from the eligibility list above.

Address unmet healthcare needs

Be trialled with a modest budget

Be deliverable within 12 months

How Do I Apply?



Attend A Design Thinking Workshop

There are workshops 5–6 times per year.

Applicants must complete a Design Thinking Workshop before submitting an application.

[Register Here](#)



Apply Online

Submit an online application form.

[Application Form](#)



Pitch

Present your idea to a panel and receive constructive feedback. This is an online pitching event.



Funded

Access up to €5,000



Completing your Project

Projects must be finished within 12 months.



Reporting & Promotion

Submit a short final report. Spark will promote your project across the HSE.

Why Apply

For Frontline Healthcare Workers

- Opportunity to turn ideas into action with funding, training, and support
- Empowerment to make real improvements for patients, colleagues, and services.
- Access to a national network of healthcare innovators.

For Managers

- Investing in staff-led innovation boosts morale, retention, and ownership.
- Builds skills in design thinking, pitching, and measuring impact.
- Support staff to improve services and maximise resources with innovative solutions.

Applicant Testimonials

“The whole Seed process was a great learning experience....it was absolutely fantastic.”

“Spark Seed gave me the impetus to get my project started.”

“The training was wonderful and the advice and guidance is super supportive.”

Managing Funds

Finance

Funding letter

Successful Applicants will receive a funding letter from the Spark Team to share with your management and Finance Team. This confirms that Spark will reimburse your hospital/site for the agreed costs of your project. It will also have your unique project code to be used in relation to any future correspondence with Spark.

Initial Payment

Your hospital/healthcare site pays for the agreed costs of your project initially. HSE Spark can only transfer money to HSE sites, not outside agencies like educational institutions, third parties or personal accounts.

Reimbursement Process

Invoices

Please submit these receipts to the Spark team spark@hse.ie for reimbursement. Please include your sites unique Business Processing Code (BPC) with the invoice so we know where to send the money. Please reference your unique project code with all correspondence.

Reimbursement

The approved costs of the project will be reimbursed by HSE Spark to your site in the next transfer window.

Project Eligibility

Spark Seed supports practical, frontline innovation projects that can be delivered within 12 months and make a real difference to patients, service users, or staff.

As innovation is always moving forward, an idea that was once considered novel may now be viewed as common practice. This doesn't take away from

its value, it simply means Spark Seed is designed to support the next wave of new ideas.

Applicants are encouraged to think about what makes their idea different, fresh, or uniquely suited to their setting. Even small innovations can have a big impact when they introduce a new perspective, tool, or way of working.

Examples of Projects Not Eligible for Funding

App development

Projects involving artificial intelligence

Development of products or services with potential for commercialisation

Podcast development

Quality Improvement initiatives*

Training programmes for staff education

*unless they involve the implementation of new ideas, tools, or approaches that have not been tried before in your context.

Funding Cannot Be Used For

Publication fees

Undergraduate or postgraduate education

Booking venues

Clerical support

Whole Time Equivalents (WTEs)

Conference attendance

Clinical research

Catering costs

Travel expenses

FAQs

Who can apply?

Frontline HSE & Section 38 healthcare staff.

How much funding is available?

Up to €5,000 will be granted based on specific asks. Not every part of your project ask may be funded – it is up to the judging panel based on the merits of your pitch.

How long do I have to implement my project timeline?

Projects must be completed within 12 months.

If I am successful at pitch, will there be supports from the Spark Team during the implementation of my project?

Two optional mentoring sessions are available to support implementation. Innovators will be invited to schedule up to two mentoring sessions with a member of the Spark team during the 12-month period. It is the responsibility of the innovator to request these meetings should they be needed.

Do I need to write a report, if my project is funded?

Yes. Applicants must submit a short final report within 12 months of receipt of funding letter.

What kinds of projects are suitable?

Projects that are innovative, address an unmet need, on a modest budget to improve staff/patient experience/workflows

Who pays upfront?

Your hospital or site covers the agreed costs of your project initially. Spark will then reimburse your site once invoices are received by us.

What if I am shortlisted but cannot make the pitching event?

Please take note of the dates of the pitching events on our website before you apply. If you cannot be available to pitch, please withhold your application until the next round of Spark Seed.

I want to apply for Spark Seed funding but I have not completed a Design Thinking Workshop.

To be eligible to apply, applicants must attend one of the Design Thinking Workshop.

I attended a Design Thinking Workshop before. Do I have to do it again?

No. You only need to complete this training once to be eligible to apply for Spark Seed or any of the initiatives from the Spark Programme.

I was awarded Spark Seed funding in the past. Can I apply again?

Yes. You can apply for Spark Seed funding more than once. However this must not be for the same project. Spark supports testing of new innovative ideas within a service. Innovators need to capture and demonstrate the value of this project so that it can be financially sustained locally. Spark cannot provide recurrent funding for projects.

I was awarded Spark Seed funding for my project in the past. Can I apply again to extend the lifetime of the project or implement a different version of the project?

No. As above, Spark Seed funding is intended to test an innovation idea in the healthcare setting.

I do not have the support of my line manager. Can I still apply?

Local support is essential for any Spark Seed project to be successful. You will need your line manager's approval to apply. We strongly recommend engaging with your line manager and other key stakeholders as early as possible, so you have the backing and resources needed to implement your idea.

I have an innovation idea but don't know if I should apply.

Complete one of our free, online design thinking workshops to get fresh perspectives on your idea.

Get in Touch

Join the innovation conversation
by connecting with us on:



@programmeSpark



Spark_Programme



[linkedin.com/company/hse-spark-innovation-programme](https://www.linkedin.com/company/hse-spark-innovation-programme)



spark@hse.ie



www.hse.ie/spark



[@hse-spark.sky.social](https://hse-spark.sky.social)