



Women's Impact Fund Spark Awards

In 2024, Women's Impact Fund announced an evolution of its Spark funding model to make \$5,000 unrestricted awards annually to inspiring women leaders who work in direct relationship with community members to drive transformational change in Mecklenburg County. These leaders may include, but are not limited to, employees and volunteers working with nonprofit organizations, leaders of grassroots movements, community organizers, activists and more. Our first class of eight Spark Award recipients was announced in June 2024. [Learn more here.](#)

Spark Award recipients will have full discretion to use the funds in any way they choose to cultivate their individual care, renewal, growth, and healing. In addition, to the cash award, recipients will also receive a one-year WIF membership to provide additional opportunities for connection, leadership, and growth. Funding may also be allocated to provide honoraria for finalists, wellness or coaching support for recipients, and other events focused on creating connections among recipients, finalists, and the community.

Nominations will open January 6, 2025 and will be accepted through January 24, 2025.

Why is Women's Impact Fund making these investments?

Leaders working at the forefront of community change and transformation often dedicate far more time and energy than average employees in the course of their work. They are typically fueled by a passion for the mission of their organizations/causes and often sacrifice their own well-being in pursuit of that mission, resulting in an endless cycle of burnout and recovery. Research by the Society of Human Resources (SHRM) indicates that attrition from nonprofits is approximately 19% versus normal workforce turnover of approximately 12%. Many of these leaders also come from historically marginalized communities and have limited access to time off for rest as well as fewer opportunities and/or resources to engage in other forms of personal and professional renewal.

Philanthropy stands at a crossroads—a choice between maintaining the status quo and embracing radical transformation. It's a call to redefine our role as philanthropists, placing change agents at the heart of our efforts. By investing in the care of those we serve, we move beyond superficial support to create a compassionate force that propels leaders and organizations not just to survive but to thrive and amplify their impact.

Care-based philanthropy is not just a vision; it's a necessity for a more just and equitable future and the foundation upon which, when sustained, impactful work can be built.

- Shawnda Chapman, Ms. Foundation for Women

- Exhaustion, low pay, and poor benefits often characterize the working conditions in these organizations and are issues that funders — especially those practicing social change philanthropy — can address.
- As funders, we must do more to celebrate community-based work as transformational, recognizing the people behind these efforts for their extraordinary contributions. Currently, grants from WIF support only nonprofit organizations or projects/programs; Even unrestricted grants are typically focused entirely on the organization's overall operations — NOT the people inspired and dedicated to creating transformational change. We are missing a key opportunity to deepen our collective impact.
- We believe that people are the fulcrum of change. It is in our collective best interest to invest in the people who are dedicating themselves to drive community-centered change, and that everyone must have access to the opportunity to rest, renew, and grow.
- We envision that these reimagined Spark Awards will serve as a catalyst and model for other funders investing in our community's diverse ecosystem of leaders. Together, we can promote a culture of collective care, address burnout and encourage more investment in the people who are making change in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.



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Who is eligible to be nominated for a Spark Award?

We welcome nominations of inspiring women leaders who are working in direct relationship with community members to drive transformational change in Mecklenburg County.

Nominees may come from a diverse range of fields, including but not limited to art and culture, education, environment, health, human services, social justice, etc. They may be employees or volunteers working with nonprofit organizations, leaders of grassroots movements, community organizers, activists, and more. Nominees should be individuals on the frontlines leading the vital work of community transformation and positive change.

We particularly encourage nominations of women whose passion, commitment and demonstrated change-making efforts have gone without wide recognition or acknowledgment in the broader community.

Anyone who identifies as a woman can be nominated for the award. Our definition of gender identity is a person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. All nominees must be 21 years or older.

WIF staff, current members of the WIF Board of Directors, members of the WIF Spark Committee, and immediate family members of these individuals are ineligible. WIF members who receive an award would not be eligible for the free year of WIF membership.

Why are only women eligible?

Given WIF's history as a women-founded, women-led organization, as well as annual data from the Women's Philanthropy Institute's 2023 Women & Girls Index (WGI) indicating that less than 2% of overall charitable giving in the U.S. goes to women's and girls' organizations, the focus on women is a natural fit at this time.

How many awards will be made?

We may recognize up to ten (10) recipients this year. The 2025 awards will be announced in May 2025. We expect these awards to be highly competitive.

How can the funds be used?

Selected leaders will have full discretion to use the funds any way they choose to cultivate their individual care, renewal, growth and healing.

WIF trusts that leaders will have their own definitions of self-care, renewal, growth and/or healing based on their current needs and interests. Examples could include a wellness retreat, life/executive coach, professional development, ongoing wellness support or any other need identified by the recipient. We invite an expansive and exploratory approach to this work.

Recipients will receive an unrestricted award of \$5,000 in recognition of their efforts to affect change in our community. There is no request for a budget as part of this nomination. In addition to the cash award, recipients will also receive a 1-year WIF membership to provide additional opportunities for connection, leadership and growth.

Are these awards taxable?

Awards will be made payable directly to the individual and are subject to IRS 1099 income statement reporting



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by WIF. Accordingly, each award recipient will be required to submit a completed IRS Form W-9 before WIF will fund the award. All taxes and reporting of taxes will be the responsibility of the award recipient.

What are the reporting requirements at the end of the award period?

No formal written final report/presentation will be required. At the conclusion of the award year, recipients will be invited to share their experiences with the overall process and the impact of awards in an informal conversational setting with WIF members.

How can I submit a nomination?

Nominations require a primary and a secondary nominator. The online nomination form consists of a series of questions for both nominators, as well as background information for the nominee. **Nominees cannot self-nominate but can request others to nominate them.**

If you are nominating a woman for consideration, we recommend you coordinate with your fellow nominator and your nominee to ensure that the correct and most current contact information is provided. You may also work with your nominee to secure a second nominator.

Questions about the award objectives can be directed to spark@womensimpactfund.org. Our application platform, SlideRoom, has a support team who can assist with any technical challenges for nominators using the online platform.

WIF will host a virtual info session on Thursday, January 9, 2025 from NOON-1:00PM ([register here](#)) to answer questions about the nomination process. Please contact SlideRoom support directly for assistance with any technical challenges related to using the online platform.

Can WIF members submit nominations?

WIF members, other than those serving on the Spark Committee, are both permitted and encouraged to nominate a leader for consideration. WIF members are exposed to issues and leaders in our community every day through their work, board service, and volunteer activities, and this platform provides a concrete way for WIF members to engage by spreading the word, nominating, and ultimately, supporting fellow women who are doing transformative work in community settings.

How will recipients be selected?

WIF's Spark Committee will review all nominations, evaluating evidence of leadership, proximity, impact and overall commitment to change-making and community-building in Charlotte Mecklenburg. Applications will not be judged based on spelling, grammar, length, or writing styles.

Finalists will be invited for a brief virtual conversation with Spark Committee members who will make award recommendations to the full WIF membership for a vote.

We aspire to provide an honorarium to declined finalists to acknowledge their time and effort as well as to recognize their dedication and perseverance in pursuit of transformative change in our community.