



## Spark Award FAQs

Women's Impact Fund (WIF) recognizes inspiring women leaders driving transformational change in Mecklenburg County through annual \$5,000 Spark Awards. The awards are intended to support rest and renewal for these leaders and reflect a growing movement in philanthropy to support self-care and wellness in the nonprofit sector.

In addition to the cash award, recipients also receive a one-year WIF membership to provide additional opportunities for connection, leadership, and growth.

**Nominations are now open and will be accepted through January 31, 2026.**

### **What is the purpose of the awards?**

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 a cycle of burnout and recovery. 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.

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.

### **Who is eligible to be nominated for a Spark Award?**

Nominees may come from a diverse range of fields, including but not limited to art and culture, education, environment, health, human services, and social justice. Eligible nominees include women who are:

- Employees or volunteers of nonprofit or community-based organizations
- Grassroots or movement leaders working directly with community members

Because the award centers on community-embedded leadership, those whose primary role is consulting or providing contracted professional services are typically not eligible.

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. Additionally, staff and board members of WIF grant recipients that have received funding within the past two years 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 Women & Girls Index (WGI) indicating that only 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 will recognize up to ten (10) recipients and expect these awards to be highly competitive.

**How can the funds be used?**

Recipients will receive an unrestricted award of \$5,000 and will have full discretion to use the funds any way they choose to cultivate their individual care, renewal, growth and 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.

There is no request for a budget as part of this nomination.

**Are these awards taxable?**

Awards will be made payable directly to the individual and are subject to IRS 1099 income statement reporting by WIF. Accordingly, each award recipient will be required to submit a completed IRS Form W9 before WIF will fund the award. All taxes and reporting of taxes are 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 primary nominator should fill out the online nomination form and gather contact information for the nominee and secondary nominator. They will also need to upload a letter of recommendation from the secondary nominator.

Nominees cannot self-nominate but can request others to nominate them. Nominations are not permitted from family members of the nominee.

Questions about the award objectives can be directed to [spark@womensimpactfund.org](mailto: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 January 13, 2026 from 9:30-10:30 AM ([register through Zoom here](#)) to answer questions about the nomination process.

**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 in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, as well as demonstrated need for rest and renewal. 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.