



SPARK

ENDEAVOR PROJECT

HANDBOOK

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Founding Pilot School: St. Clairsville High School

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A Spark is just the beginning.

OBSERVE | INVESTIGATE | CREATE | TEST | ADAPT | DISCOVER | FINISH

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Planning items intentionally left flexible: exact timeline, Expo logistics, booth dimensions, People's Choice mechanics, awards/recognition format, and host-school forms may be finalized as program logistics develop.

Chapter 1 - The Spark Endeavor Project

What Is the Spark Endeavor Project?

The Spark Endeavor Project is, in its simplest form, a science and engineering project culminating in a public Expo. Its purpose, however, is much larger than producing something to place on a table at the end of the year.

Everyone has a Spark.

A question. A problem that bothers you. Something you think could work better. Something you want to understand. An idea that sounds a little ridiculous but makes you wonder, "What if?"

The Spark Endeavor Project gives students the opportunity to take that Spark seriously: investigate it, learn from others, create, test, change direction, fail, try again, and see where the idea can lead.

Applicable areas of science and engineering are intentionally broad and are not limited to a prescribed list.

Why Spark Endeavor?

A Spark is a beginning. It may begin as curiosity, a question, a problem, an idea, or the belief that something could be done differently. A Spark has potential, but it must be explored, developed, tested, challenged, and nurtured.

An Endeavor is what happens when you choose to pursue that Spark. It is the experience of working through uncertainty, difficulty, progress, failure, discovery, and change. It asks you to stay with the work long enough to learn from what happens and decide where to go next.

You begin with a Spark. Then you endeavor to see where it can lead.

Becoming a Spark Endeavor Engineer

Throughout the project, Lead Engineers are challenged in their knowledge, perseverance, curiosity, and creativity as they develop and pursue their Spark.

Students may work toward recognition as a Spark Endeavor Engineer by completing the program and meeting its established recognition standard. Earning that title is a meaningful accomplishment and reflects the work, growth, and commitment demonstrated throughout the project.

Recognition as a Spark Endeavor Engineer is meaningful, but it is not the purpose of the project. The larger reward is the opportunity to explore something rooted in your own curiosity, work through difficulty, test ideas, learn from failure, and see how far your Spark can be taken.

The Lead Engineer

The project is designed for juniors and seniors. An accepted participant becomes the Lead Engineer of their Spark.

An engineer is more than someone who builds machines. Engineers recognize problems, ask questions, and use knowledge, curiosity, creativity, evidence, ingenuity, and perseverance to develop solutions and explore possibilities.

The Lead Engineer owns the direction of the investigation. Other people may teach, advise, question, encourage, or help the Engineer learn, but the Spark remains the Engineer's work.

What Will You Do?

Every Spark will be different, but every Lead Engineer is expected to develop something, research, test, accumulate evidence, learn, document the journey, and ultimately present the work.

The investigation is not chronological. Research may lead to building; testing may send the Engineer back to research; a failed design may produce a new question; an unexpected discovery may change the entire direction.

| Observe -> Investigate -> Create -> Test -> Adapt -> Discover -> Finish

These are not rigid steps. They are habits the Engineer returns to throughout the Spark. The path is flexible, but meaningful research and learning, creation and development, testing and evidence, documentation, and final presentation are expected.

Failure Is Part of the Investigation

A Spark does not have to work as the Engineer originally intended. A prototype may break, a prediction may be wrong, data may show no improvement, or a design may prove impractical.

Failure becomes valuable when it is investigated: what happened, what did the evidence show, what was learned, and what should change? An unsuccessful final Spark can still represent an excellent investigation when it is supported by meaningful research, testing, data, development, and understanding.

Independence Without Isolation

The Spark is an independent investigation, but independent does not mean alone. Lead Engineers are encouraged to learn from books, technical publications, teachers, scientists, engineers, professionals, interviews, consultations, and other appropriate resources.

Outside knowledge should expand the Lead Engineer, not replace the Lead Engineer. Meaningful assistance should be acknowledged.

Research Assistants

Freshmen and sophomores may later apply as Research Assistants, including siblings of Lead Engineers in grades 9 or 10. Research Assistants are helpers and learners, not partners or co-Lead Engineers.

Research Assistants are assigned according to program needs and availability, not friendship or student preference. A Lead Engineer is not guaranteed an Assistant, may decline an assignment, and may request removal if the arrangement becomes unproductive or inappropriate. The Spark remains the responsibility of the Lead Engineer.

The Competitive Project Limit

The competitive project limit is \$150. Its purpose is not to limit ambition, but to keep financial resources from becoming the main advantage in the project.

A legitimate investigation may be permitted to continue beyond the competitive limit, but doing so may make the Spark ineligible for ranked awards. The Engineer may still complete the Spark, participate in the Expo, and earn program recognition.

Chapter 2 - Application to Participate

The application is a starting point, not a promise of an ending. Applicants are not expected to have everything figured out. The purpose is to understand why the student wants to participate, what the initial Spark is, and whether there is a reasonable starting point for an independent investigation.

1. Desire to Participate

Why do you want to participate in the Spark Endeavor Project? Explain why the opportunity interests you and why you want to take on an independent Spark.

Response: _____

2. The Problem / Idea

What problem, question, opportunity, or idea do you want to investigate? Briefly explain what you have noticed and why it interests you.

Response: _____

3. Your Initial Thinking

What do you currently think is happening, and what are you initially considering doing about it? This is your starting theory and approach. You are not expected to be correct.

Response: _____

4. Predicted Science, Engineering & Important Unknowns

What areas of science, engineering, mathematics, technology, or specialized knowledge may become important? What important things do you already recognize that you may need to learn?

Response: _____

5. Feasibility & Resources

Based on what you know right now, can you reasonably attempt this Spark? Consider materials, equipment, workspace, time, access, and other practical needs. School resources and assistance are not guaranteed.

Response: _____

6. Materials, Equipment & Safety Considerations

Identify the materials, chemicals, tools, equipment, and procedures you currently expect to use. Unsafe materials, procedures, or activities are not permitted. If an activity involves risk, discuss it with your guardian first. Guardian approval does not guarantee school or program approval. If you are unsure whether something is appropriate, ask before proceeding. Materials or equipment brought onto school property remain subject to host-school approval.

Response: _____

7. Estimated Budget

Provide a reasonable initial estimate. Indicate whether you currently expect the Spark to remain within the \$150 competitive project limit.

Response: _____

8. Potential Impact

If your Spark develops successfully - or teaches you something meaningful - why might it matter? Impact does not need to be world-changing.

Response: _____

Application Review

The application is not part of the competitive score. It is reviewed to determine whether there is a reasonable, appropriate, and safe path to begin.

- Approved
- Approved with Conditions / Questions
- Revise & Resubmit
- Not Approved

Chapter 3 - Spark Endeavor Project Participation Agreement

The Spark Endeavor Project gives students considerable independence to investigate, create, test, and develop an idea of their own. With that independence comes responsibility. This agreement establishes the expectations accepted by the Lead Engineer and guardian as a condition of participation.

1. Ownership & Responsibility

I understand that I am the Lead Engineer of my Spark. The research, development, testing, data collection, documentation, decision-making, and completion of my investigation are ultimately my responsibility. Appropriate assistance should expand what I am capable of doing, not replace what I am responsible for doing. Meaningful assistance will be acknowledged.

2. Commitment to Completion

I understand that finishing the project does not mean my original idea must work. Failure, unexpected results, changes in direction, or an unfinished creation do not erase meaningful work. I will preserve what I completed and carry my investigation to the most meaningful conclusion reasonably possible.

3. School Assistance & Available Resources

The project is primarily an independent, outside-of-school project. Participation does not guarantee access to teachers, laboratories, classrooms, chemicals, equipment, tools, materials, transportation, funding, professional experts, Research Assistants, or other school resources. When access is unavailable or denied, the decision must be respected. I am responsible for adapting my investigation to the resources actually available.

4. Academic & Personal Responsibilities

Participation does not replace normal academic responsibilities. Schoolwork, attendance, assignments, and other academic expectations remain priorities. Athletics, employment, clubs, performances, family schedules, and other voluntary commitments do not automatically provide grounds for altered evaluation or competitive accommodations.

Extenuating Circumstances

Serious and unexpected circumstances may occasionally disrupt an otherwise active and developing Spark. If this occurs, speak privately with the Program Lead as soon as reasonably possible. Any consideration must be addressed and appropriately documented before final submission and evaluation.

5. Research Assistants & Other Students

Research Assistants are helpers and learners, not partners or co-Lead Engineers. I am not guaranteed an Assistant or a particular Assistant. I may decline an assigned Assistant or request removal when appropriate. I may discuss ideas and exchange feedback with other Lead Engineers, but another student's designs, research, testing, data, or findings may not be presented as my own.

6. Safety & Responsibility

Safety is a condition of participation.

Every material, chemical, tool, piece of equipment, procedure, test, and activity used in the development of a Spark must be approached safely and responsibly. An unsafe method is not an acceptable method for

this project. If an investigation cannot reasonably be performed safely, the Lead Engineer must change the material, procedure, design, test, or direction of the Spark.

Outside-of-School Work

Because much of the project occurs independently outside of school, activities involving risk must be discussed with the student's guardian before proceeding. The guardian must know what the student intends to do and approve the activity. Normal tools, household materials, heat sources, and equipment may involve manageable risks; those risks must still be recognized and handled responsibly.

Unsafe Materials or Procedures

Unsafe materials, equipment, chemicals, procedures, or activities are not permitted as part of the project. Guardian approval does not override this requirement. A host school may determine that a proposed material, procedure, activity, or piece of equipment is inappropriate for school participation even when a guardian has approved its use at home. Host-school policies and safety requirements have final authority for activities taking place at school or school events.

School Property

Nothing may be brought onto school property simply because it was used or permitted at home. Chemicals, specialized materials, equipment, prototypes, or other items intended to be brought into school may require prior approval. Outside chemicals may not be brought into school for project use. Chemicals used at school must come through approved school sources and be approved for the intended activity. School laboratories, equipment, tools, materials, and facilities may be used only with appropriate permission.

When in Doubt - Ask First

Students are not expected to be safety experts. Asking a safety question will never count against a Spark. When a safety concern requires additional review, a separate disclosure and approval process may be required before proceeding.

7. Competitive Limit & Evaluation

I understand the \$150 competitive project limit and that an approved decision to exceed it may remove my Spark from ranked award consideration without removing me from the project or Expo. I also understand that a functioning final creation alone does not determine the quality of my investigation.

8. Honesty & Integrity

All research, data, testing, development, documentation, and conclusions I present as my work will honestly represent what occurred during my investigation. I will acknowledge meaningful assistance and will not represent another person's work, ideas, testing, or results as my own.

Lead Engineer Agreement

I have read and understand the expectations above. I accept the independence and responsibilities of the project and agree to conduct my Spark honestly, safely, responsibly, and to the best of my ability.

Lead Engineer: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Guardian Agreement

I have reviewed these expectations with my student. I understand the independent, primarily outside-of-school nature of the project; my responsibility to remain aware of and approve activities involving risk performed outside school; and that my approval does not override school or program safety requirements or guarantee that an activity, material, or item will be permitted as part of the project or on school property.

Guardian: _____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Chapter 4 - The Spark Portfolio

The Spark Portfolio is the physical record of the investigation. It should bring the complete body of work together so that another person can follow the development of the Spark without searching through disconnected materials.

The Portfolio Is Physical

A traditional binder is perfectly acceptable, but another physical format may be used if it better represents the Spark. Required documentation should be written, printed, drawn, photographed, or otherwise physically included. Digital tools may support the work, but they do not replace the physical record. Video Logs are the required digital exception; the physical Portfolio should include a simple record of when they were completed. If something important genuinely cannot reasonably be made physical, discuss it with the Program Lead.

There is no required binder layout, tab order, or organizational system. Organize the Portfolio in a way that fits the Spark, but make sure another person can locate and use the information you have accumulated.

A. Development of My Spark

Preserve the development of the Spark from the beginning. Include an early concept sketch, rough plan, diagram, or other appropriate representation, along with meaningful revisions, prototypes, schematics, failed attempts, photographs, changes, and the final/current Spark. Earlier versions do not need to physically survive; when a Spark is continually modified, photographs or other documentation may preserve important stages of its evolution.

B. Engineer's Journal

The Engineer's Journal is the working brain of the project: scratch paper, notes, sketches, diagrams, rough calculations, questions, plans, observations, revisions, and developing ideas. It may be messy, crossed out, unfinished, or unconventional. Entries should be dated and used throughout the project, generally with at least one meaningful entry within each two-week period. This is a minimum, not a suggested schedule; the Journal should reflect the natural rhythm of the work.

C. Video Logs

Throughout the project, each Lead Engineer will record a small collection of Video Logs - about five total, with four to six acceptable. Each Log should be approximately 3-5 minutes and recorded spontaneously. Do not write a script or read from prepared notes. Turn on the camera and talk.

The Video Log is a personal reflection on where you are with your Spark. Talk naturally about your progress, experiences, reactions, feelings, and how you think things are going. Science, research, testing, or data may naturally come up, but you are not being asked to explain or report them. The focus is your experience with the work and your perspective on where it stands.

There are no required questions and no correct format. If you are unsure what to talk about, look back over your recent work for inspiration, then record naturally. The Logs should be spread across the project so they preserve different moments in the journey.

The Engineer's Journal is your working brain. The Video Log is your experience of the project.

D. Data & Testing

Keep organized evidence from testing throughout the investigation. This may include raw data, measurements, tables, graphs, test records, comparisons, calculations, and other evidence. Casual observations belong here when they are intentionally collected or presented as evidence.

E. Research & Learning

Record the new and advanced knowledge the Engineer acquires. This section answers: What did I learn? Research should help explain the science, engineering, mathematics, or specialized ideas that shaped the Spark.

F. Resources & Consultations

Record where important knowledge and assistance came from. Books, journals, technical resources, interviews, scientists, engineers, professionals, teachers, and other consultations may appear here. A useful entry identifies the resource/person, why the Engineer went there, and a brief summary of what was gained.

G. Final Project Materials

The Spark Defense and Critical Reflection are added to the Portfolio near the end of the investigation. Approved forms or other project records should also be retained when applicable.

Organization Is Part of the Evaluation

The Portfolio may be creative, but it must be usable. Failure to maintain a complete, accessible, physical, and organized Portfolio will be reflected in the Project Organization score.

Chapter 5 - The Spark Defense

The Spark Defense is completed near the end of the project. Students should know it exists from the beginning, but it is not intended to become a template that is filled out throughout the year.

The Defense is not a repeat of the entire Portfolio and it is not a full typed report. It should be concise, meaningful, and built from work the Engineer already understands. There is no required page count or word count.

1. Problem & Initial Approach

Where did you begin? State the problem, question, or opportunity and explain the approach you originally believed might work. Keep this focused on the starting point.

2. Research, Learning & Discovery

Explain the important new or advanced things you learned and where that knowledge came from. This is not formal citation, but the reader should understand what you learned, from whom or what, and why it mattered to the Spark.

3. Design & Prototype Development

Show how the Spark changed. Use important iterations (P1, P2, P3...), sketches, photographs, or designs as useful. Explain what changed and why. Detailed data do not need to be repeated here.

4. Testing & Results

Bring together meaningful testing and evidence from the beginning through the end of the investigation. Explain what was tested, how it was tested, what happened, and what the evidence supports.

5. Final Outcome & Conclusions

Explain where the Spark actually ended. What can the evidence support? What worked, failed, changed, or remains unresolved? A failed or redirected Spark can have an excellent conclusion.

Spark Defense Overall Score: ____ / 4

You are not required to defend your original idea. You are responsible for defending where your investigation ultimately took you.

Chapter 6 - Critical Reflection

The Critical Reflection is completed after the Spark Defense and becomes part of the final Portfolio. It is not a summary of the project and it is not a place to assign yourself a score.

Critique your own investigation. Be honest, specific, and willing to identify weaknesses, limitations, missed opportunities, questionable assumptions, weak testing, unreliable data, design problems, or conclusions that may go farther than the evidence allows.

These are examples, not a checklist. The purpose is to identify what you can see now that you could not see while you were in the middle of the work.

Be hard on the work, not on yourself.

A strong reflection does not say, "I did a terrible job." It says, "This portion of my investigation has a weakness. Here is what it is, why it matters, and what I understand about it now." Honest criticism does not hurt your evaluation; scientific maturity includes recognizing the limitations of your own work.

Critical Reflection Score: ____ / 2

Chapter 7 - The Spark Interview

The Spark Interview occurs near the end of the project. The Lead Engineer brings the final/current Spark and completed Spark Portfolio and meets with an evaluation panel.

This is not a memorized speech, presentation test, or interrogation. It is a conversation about something the Engineer has spent months living with. The panel may ask about development, research, testing, data, failures, decisions, limitations, prototypes, the Portfolio, the final Spark, or where the investigation might go next.

The Engineer may use the Spark, Portfolio, Journal, data, prototypes, and other project materials during the conversation. The goal is to see whether the Engineer can naturally and meaningfully discuss their own investigation.

Spark Interview Score: _____ / 3

The interview evaluates ownership and understanding, not speaking ability, confidence, or charisma. A quiet Engineer who deeply knows the work can earn the highest score.

Chapter 8 - Spark Endeavor Project Scoring

The Spark Endeavor Project is evaluated across seven areas for a maximum of 21 points. The points are used for program recognition and are not intended to function as a traditional classroom percentage or letter grade.

Scoring Area	Pts	Evaluator Guide
The Spark	4	+1 Early Concept - initial sketch, plan, diagram, or other appropriate concept representation +1 Development - revisions, attempts, failures, changes, or progress +1 Evolution Preserved - important stages preserved through photos, sketches, versions, parts, or other documentation +1 Final / Current Spark - represents where the work ultimately reached
Spark Defense	4	1 - Limited - incomplete, unclear, or weakly supported 2 - Meets Expectations - clear, relevant, adequately developed 3 - Strong - clear, complete, well-developed Conversion - 5/5 sections at 2-3 = 4 pts; 4/5 = 3; 3/5 = 2; 2/5 = 1; 0-1/5 = 0
Engineer's Journal	3	+1 Used Throughout - meaningful use across the project; generally at least one entry within each two-week period +1 Meaningful Working Content - notes, sketches, calculations, questions, plans, observations, revisions, or other active work +1 Dated Entries - entries consistently dated
Video Logs	3	+1 Completion - about five completed; four to six acceptable +1 Time & Format - generally 3-5 minutes; spontaneous, not scripted, read, or artificially stretched +1 Across the Endeavor - recorded at different points throughout the project
Spark Interview	3	3 - Can Explain and Connect - explains the work and connects important decisions, experiences, testing, failures, research, and outcomes 2 - Can Explain - answers questions and explains the work and major decisions 1 - Struggles to Explain - difficulty explaining important parts of the work or how it developed 0 - not completed
Project Organization	2	2 - Organized & Accessible - clear organization/navigation; materials can be located and are reasonably legible 1 - Partially Organized - materials are present but somewhat difficult to locate or use 0 - disorganized or inaccessible
Critical Reflection	2	2 - identifies genuine weaknesses or limitations and explains why they matter or how the work could improve 1 - identifies meaningful weaknesses, limitations, shortcomings, or opportunities for improvement 0 - insufficient or not completed

Recognition

16-21 points - Spark Endeavor Engineer

Meets the program's Engineer recognition standard.

7-15 points - Spark Endeavor Project Participant

Requires completion of every required component of the Spark Endeavor Project.

0-6 points, or incomplete required components - No Formal Completion Recognition

Five evaluators review each Spark. A Lead Engineer earns Spark Endeavor Engineer recognition when at least three of the five evaluators independently score the work at 16 points or higher.

Chapter 9 - Memories of Our Journey

The final Spark and Portfolio will show what happened. They may not fully capture the people, moments, and experiences surrounding the work. Preserve some of those moments through photographs, video, audio, or other media as the project develops.

There is no required number and this section is not graded. Some media may be candid; some may be intentional or professional-quality. Capture the human story as well as the work.

- You and a guardian working through a problem at the kitchen table or in the garage.
- You covered in paint, sawdust, grease, clay, or whatever your Spark has gotten you into.
- A sibling sitting beside you while you work - or the aftermath after they accidentally became part of the testing process.
- Your workspace when absolutely nothing is going according to plan.
- The first time a prototype actually does what you hoped.
- The face you make when a test produces a result you definitely did not expect.
- A conversation with someone who changes how you understand the problem.
- An early prototype beside what it eventually became.
- A quiet moment of simply working.
- A polished photograph, video, or recording that you are genuinely proud of.

Do not recreate the journey at the end. Capture it while you are living it.

Video Logs are required personal reflections recorded at different points throughout the project.

Memories of Our Journey is broader: it preserves the people, experiences, failures, discoveries, and moments surrounding the work through photographs, video, audio, and other media.

Chapter 10 - Spark Endeavor Project Expo

The Spark Endeavor Project Expo is the public culmination of the Spark. During the founding pilot at St. Clairsville High School, the Expo may operate in conjunction with the St. Clairsville Science Fair while remaining its own portion of the event with its own expectations for Lead Engineers.

This is where the Engineer takes months of creating, investigating, testing, changing, breaking, rebuilding, and discovering and shares it with the community.

Your Expo Booth

Every Lead Engineer will create and maintain a thoughtfully prepared booth representing the Spark. There is no required design or standard layout. Displays, prototypes, photographs, models, diagrams, signage, screens, demonstrations, and other elements may be used when appropriate.

The booth should be organized, inviting, clearly represent the Spark, and show a reasonable level of preparation that the Engineer, school, and community can be proud of. The final/current Spark should be present whenever appropriate and approved, and the physical Spark Portfolio should be available.

The Engineer's Journal should remain in or around the booth area, but it does not need to be openly displayed for visitors to handle. If someone requests to see it, the Engineer may choose to show it. The Journal is a personal record and should be treated with respect.

Be Present With Your Spark

Lead Engineers will spend designated time at their booths interacting with visitors. Talk with people who stop. Answer questions. Demonstrate the Spark when appropriate. Show an earlier prototype. Pull something from the Portfolio. Explain a failure or surprising result. This should feel like a conversation, not a repeated memorized speech.

Take the Stage

Every Lead Engineer will also take the stage and publicly present the Spark. There is no required presentation format. The stage presentation may use slides, video, music or audio, photographs, the Spark itself, earlier prototypes, demonstrations, props, physical materials, or another appropriate creative approach.

Research Assistants may help hold materials, assist with demonstrations, operate appropriate presentation elements, or otherwise support the presentation. Technology and spectacle should support the Spark, not replace it.

The audience should leave remembering your Spark, not merely your slideshow.

A failed Spark can make an extraordinary presentation. A changed direction can tell an extraordinary story. A working creation can be demonstrated. A surprising discovery can become the centerpiece. How the Engineer presents it is part of the Engineer's choice.

People's Choice

Visitors will have an opportunity to vote for a People's Choice Spark. The spirit is simple: which Spark left the greatest impression on you? Final voting mechanics will be established with event logistics.

Expo Safety & Materials Review

Before the Expo, Lead Engineers will identify what they intend to bring into the school and what they intend to demonstrate. Something used safely at home does not automatically become appropriate for a school event. Materials, equipment, prototypes, power needs, demonstrations, and other elements remain subject to host-school approval. If the actual Spark cannot safely or appropriately be present, the Engineer will develop an approved way to represent it.

Recognition

Formal awards and recognition are planned separately from the Expo so that the Expo can remain focused on sharing and celebrating the work. The final recognition format may include a separate ceremony or event and will be determined later.

Program Notes for Admin Review

This draft captures the current educational design of the Spark Endeavor Project. It intentionally leaves event logistics and certain host-school procedures flexible so they can be finalized with administrative input.

Items to Finalize With Administration

- Program calendar and application/approval dates.
- Exact accounting rules for the \$150 competitive limit.
- Any host-school required liability, permission, media, or participation language.
- Safety disclosure/approval process for unusual concerns when formal review is warranted.
- Final Spark / Expo materials review form and approval process.
- Expo venue logistics: booth space, electricity, setup, stage timing, supervision, and public access.
- People's Choice voting mechanics.
- Awards/categories and the format of a later professional recognition event or dinner.