

PSU Spark Award

Background and guidelines

Introduction

The **Portland State University Planning & Sustainability Office (PSO)** is excited to introduce the **PSU Spark Award**, a \$2,500 award providing the opportunity for students and/or faculty to shape our campus environment through small projects. Placemaking is about transforming public spaces into vibrant, people-centered places. Placemaking involves "creating places that foster connection, inspire creativity and reflect the unique identity of a community." Please see President Cudd's seven placemaking [goals](#) for more information and inspiration!

These awards aim to spark creative, community-led interventions that enhance our campus environment, foster a sense of belonging and engagement, while affording students with important project experience on the Portland State campus. These can be installations, artwork, events, or performances. If you aren't sure if your projects fits, ask us!

We're looking for innovative projects that enhance our campus community at Portland State. These awards are intended for small-scale projects that can be designed and executed efficiently.

Some examples of projects

Salmon Bake: The Indigenous Traditional Ecological and Cultural Knowledge (ITECK) Program hosts a Salmon bake at the PSU Oak Savanna to gather in community and honor the cultural importance of our finned relatives each year. Having the opportunity to bake Salmon traditionally over fire on campus sparks curiosity in many folks that pass by cultivating conversation about what it means to live in Salmon nation and how local tribes and our urban Native communities support Salmon advocacy today. Hosting community events that are grounded in culture is extremely vital to ensuring folks are connected to place, especially in an urban setting.

Winter Lights Festival: PSU has participated in the winter lights festival for the last several years. The festival is an annual event illuminating the city with light-based art installations, performances, and interactive experiences. Light displays have been installed on Montgomery Plaza for several weeks around the event. This is a great opportunity for PSU to increase our presence with the festival by highlighting student art and creating a more interactive experience on the plaza.

"Pie-in-the-Sky": Organized by now retired Urban Planning Professor Ellen Shoshkes, this was a "pop-up" event with free pie on the skybridge above Montgomery Plaza. The pop-up event increased foot traffic and attention to the sky bridges as an underutilized campus open space. It

also gave students valuable public engagement experience around placemaking and community building. Shoshkes' students incorporated furniture, elements of interior design and wayfinding, along with a survey for feedback around future use of the space.

Courts 1.0 Skatepark Murals: The Courts 1.0 was a pop-up skatepark at PSU from 2020 to 2024. A series of small murals were painted on the existing retaining walls around the skatepark. An event was organized to allow community members to help paint the murals.

Project Requirements

- **Who May Apply:**

The primary applicant must be a PSU student, faculty, or staff. However, partnerships with people/organizations not affiliated with PSU are highly encouraged.

- **Student Involvement:**

Demonstrate a clear plan for substantial student participation in your project's design, development, and execution. This could include workshops, collaborative creation, volunteer opportunities or educational components that actively engage students beyond the project leaders. We're looking for projects that empower PSU students and provide valuable hands-on experience.

- **Community Impact:**

Clearly articulate how your project will benefit the broader PSU campus community, not only those directly involved in the project. Consider how it fosters connection, improves accessibility, enhances aesthetics or addresses a community need for our students, faculty, staff and community members. How does this project draw the campus in? Evidence of campus community interest or support is a plus.

- **Partnerships/ Approvals:**

Highlight any collaborations with **Portland State University Departments**, student organizations, faculty and/ or external community groups. Strong partnerships can amplify your project's reach and impact, ensuring broader engagement and sustainability on campus. In most cases applicants will propose projects in spaces that need approval from the academic community or facilities or both. The Planning & Sustainability office will help applicants navigate this.

- **Budget & Funding:**

- Provide a detailed budget outlining all anticipated expenses (materials, services, rentals, etc.).
- PSO can only award \$2500. If your total project budget is over \$2500 applicants will need to demonstrate commitment of funds from other entities, i.e., **Senior Fiscal Officer approval is required for faculty/staff applicants.**
- Include bids, quotes, or estimates for significant materials, services, or rentals.

- If your project has additional funding sources, these must be identified and committed. These awards are not "seed" money; they are intended to support projects with a clear financial plan.
- Projects requesting up to **\$2,500** must be completed within 12 months of receiving the award.
- **Photodocumentation:**
 - As an award recipient you agree to share any kind of documentation of this event with the PSO so that we can share your event, and highlight it at our annual convening or through other means such as a newsletter or social media
- **Storytelling:**
 - As an award recipient you agree to provide a brief story/explanation of your project and why it is meaningful to your PSU community. This should fit on an 8.5x11 layout and will be displayed at your project site to inform people of your project.
- **Project Lifecycle & Maintenance:**
 - If your project involves a physical installation (e.g., mural, furniture), provide detail on maintenance requirements to ensure it can be maintained for up to 3 years. The **Facilities & Property Management (FPM)** team will coordinate maintenance for up to three years, so providing specifications like paint colors and material types is crucial.
 - Spark Awards are not intended for phased projects. Your project should be a complete unto itself.
 - **Community Building (for events):** If your project is an event, it should include a tangible, lasting contribution to the PSU campus in partnership with community members, beyond the event itself. This could be a physical installation, a publicly accessible resource, or documentation of the event.

Applications will be reviewed by the Spark Awards Committee chaired by the Director of Planning & Sustainability, with other members of the campus community. Awarded funds can be used for supplies, participation incentives, and services.

The Planning & Sustainability Office will ensure all appropriate parties are notified of proposals and all PSU standards, policies, and guidelines are being met.