Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is SPARK Learning Lab Montana?
SPARK Learning Lab Montana (SPARK) is a project led by Shine Early Learning to provide regulatory and quality technical assistance to child care programs and professionals across Montana. SPARK partners with two key organizations, the Montana Family Childcare Network (MFCN) and the Montana Association for the Education of Young Children (MTAEYC), to offer support and resources to Montana's early learning providers.

Q: What is Shine Early Learning?
Shine Early Learning partners with states and local communities to accelerate child and family outcomes by providing professional development and other supports to child care providers. Since its founding in 2011, Shine Early Learning has partnered with cities, states, and programs across the U.S., serving hundreds of thousands of students, families, and educators. Shine Early Learning's experts have decades of experience in early child care education, training, and technical assistance. Montana selected Shine Early Learning as the state's new regulatory and quality technical assistance services vendor. These services will be provided through SPARK Learning Lab Montana, a Montana-based entity, supported by Shine Early Learning.

Q: How does SPARK Learning Lab Montana deliver services?
We provide technical assistance and training to child care providers. Our approach follows best practices, guiding adult learners through a cycle of data review and goal-setting, practice and feedback, and evaluation. Our focus throughout is on building relationships and we utilize a practice-based model that includes self-directed, group, and one-on-one learning.

SPARK offers technical assistance in different formats and levels of intensity to meet a wide range of learner needs. Similar to the Pyramid Model, we use a three-tier system:

- **Tier 1:** Universal support and self directed learning. This includes a Knowledge Hub, an online resource with training, tools, and support; and a Help Desk.
- **Tier 2:** Group technical assistance and peer learning on key topics to enhance professionalism and everyday practices.
- **Tier 3:** Tailored, intensive one-on one technical assistance, either in-person or virtually, that includes coaching and addresses specific needs.

Q: Will technical assistance be provided in-person?
Yes. In-person technical assistance is important and will be available through SPARK. Information and support will also be available by phone, email, chat, and online.

Q: Who will be providing SPARK Learning Lab Montana services?
We are building a local, Montana-based team of technical assistance staff and specialists, who will be working all across the state to ensure continued regional and community knowledge and engagement. We are also working to secure locations for live scan fingerprinting across the state.

SPARK is seeking professionals who are eager to make a meaningful impact in the lives of young children. Current posted positions can be found here. If there is interest or questions about hiring or for more information, please contact Aisling Toby, Senior Talent Acquisition Partner, at aisling@shineearly.com.

Q: How will SPARK Learning Lab Montana engage with providers and the community?
We prioritize authentic engagement and collaboration to ensure that provider and community feedback shapes our services. Our approach includes:

1. **Building Relationships**: We will actively form strong connections with community leaders, educators, parents, and child care professionals to understand the specific needs and priorities of Montana's communities.
2. **Active Listening & Learning**: We will create ongoing opportunities for dialogue through community forums, surveys, local events, and Regional Advisory Committees to gather feedback and hear from stakeholders.
3. **Partnership & Collaboration**: We will work closely with existing organizations and initiatives in Montana, combining and leveraging efforts to increase our impact.
4. **Leveraging Local Expertise**: Dedicated staff members hired from and based in Montana will work directly with providers and communities, drawing on local knowledge and expertise.
5. **Ensuring Cultural Sensitivity**: We acknowledge and respect the rich cultural heritage and traditions of Montana's communities, and will strive to ensure that our work is always responsive and relevant to the needs and people of Montana.
6. **Being Adaptable & Flexible**: Recognizing that each community is unique, we will tailor our programs to fit the specific needs of different areas across the state.

We believe that by listening to and collaborating with local professionals and stakeholders, we can foster innovation and growth in Montana's early learning landscape.

Q: My program has been working with a program specialist from my local CCR&R office. What does the transition mean for me?
SPARK Learning Lab Montana is focused on making your transition as seamless as possible while maintaining high-quality services. As part of the transition, you may experience a change in your technical assistance provider or the timing of your services. We're still working out the details, and we're committed to keeping you informed and ensuring as smooth a process as possible.