



Spark a brighter world.

SPARK: A CENTRE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH INNOVATION

2022-2023 Annual Report



Spark:
a centre for social
research innovation

Spark: a centre for social research innovation connects researchers to the people, skills and tools needed to stand at the forefront of social research innovation.

Table of Contents

1 Centre Overview	2	5 Research Support & Activities.....	10
2 Priorities & Objectives	3	5.1 Research Conversations.....	10
2.1 Aligning goals with McMaster & FSS	4	5.2 Brighter Spark Applied Research	10
3 Staffing & Governance.....	5	5.3 Community Partners.....	11
3.1 Centre Leadership	5	5.4 Data Champions	11
3.2 Centre Governance	6	5.5 Co-Lab Working Space.....	12
3.3 Advisory Committee.....	6	5.6 Qualitative Suite	12
3.4 Centre Staff & Teams.....	6	5.7 Secure Empirical Analysis Lab (SEAL)	13
4 Educational Programming & Training.....	8	5.8 Open House	13
4.1 Research Data Practices	8	6 Communication.....	14
4.2 Short Course: NVivo	9	6.1 Spark Connections Newsletter.....	14
4.3 Spark Talks.....	9	6.2 New Website.....	14
		6.3 Social Media and Networking.....	14
		7 Looking Ahead	15

Through partnerships, training, and consultation, our mission is to engage with researchers and the community to expand methodological boundaries and harness the full power of social research to build a brighter world.



I. Centre Overview

Spark: a centre for social research innovation is excited to share a comprehensive overview of our achievements this year and highlight the key areas of growth (as well as acknowledging areas for improvement), as we continue to learn and grow our social enterprises.

In its fourth year of operation, *Spark a centre for social research innovation* made significant strides as a respected social methods hub for McMaster's Faculty and Graduate students, while continuing to be a valuable asset for the community through research, training and support.

2022-2023 was a year of refinement – our team carefully and intentionally analyzed our existing enterprises to identify areas of optimization to increase efficiency and effectiveness of our services for our members and networks. Our commitment to a responsive design has driven our programming and offerings to include workshops, training, and research to fill the gap of available resources for researchers.

In line with our goal of refinement, this year we restructured our team by strategically aligning skills and capabilities with specific needs to optimize efficiency and productivity. As of May 2023, our team is made up of 18 people (staff, students, and faculty). A strong team with defined roles was optimal for us to not only meet our needs but also to enable efficiency, creative initiative, and cohesion. We would like to give special acknowledgement to our amazing team for their invaluable contributions to our Centre which have been instrumental in driving our organization's success.

We invite you to learn more about spark through this report which sheds light on our ongoing journey, achievements, and plan for the future in hopes of building a brighter world.

This year, Spark:

- Officially opened our Co-Lab to the community in Sept 2023, launching with our Annual Open House.
- Hosted the Research Data Management series which aimed to advance awareness, understanding, development and adoption of research data management tools, best practices and resources in Canada. This included 4 sessions.
- Due to high demand, conducted another Short Course in Nvivo with Noelle Wyman-Roth of Duke University
- Held weekly virtual talks by researchers from around the world doing interesting work in interesting ways. These Spark Talks have generated tremendous interest both live and in the video archives.
- Continued offering Research Consultations, administering FSS Qualtrics licenses, and partnering with researchers on new initiatives.
- Launched the Data Champions Project funded through a SSHRC Connections RDM Grant .
- Deepened partnerships with 5 not-for-profits, helping them better measure and communicate their impact as part of our Brighter Spark Applied Research.
- Supported 17 active projects in accessing secure data through SEAL.

2. Priorities & Objectives

Spark has continued to develop/refine our understanding and approach to methodological research challenges and apply this knowledge within our programming and research support services. We continue to reinforce collaborative, interdisciplinary research through group programming, 1:1 consultations, support, and community projects.

In 2021-22 we officially introduced the idea of our Social Research Toolkits (listed below). This year, we continued to develop and add to the resource base through programming and our core services including Training, Support/Research Conversations and Research. We continued to learn and grow ourselves to be able to effectively assist researchers with all of their social research needs.

Social Research Toolkits:

1. Foundational qualitative and mixed methods
2. Empowerment, engagement, and community-based research methods
3. Foundational quantitative methods
4. Advanced computing and statistics
5. Addressing complexity and uncertainty
6. Supporting evidence-based decision making in policy and social service practices
7. Research quality including ethics, data and project management, and effective teams

We continue to value our existing classification process, whereby we specifically place our talks, research conversations, partnerships etc., by toolkit. This assists with building a knowledge base, expanding our range of services and ultimately help us to be as effective and responsive as possible through our services.

Our Work:

As the range of social research methods are the focus for what we support, the nature of our support falls in three categories: 1) Training; 2) Research Support; and 3) Catalyzing Innovation. This year's newest additional category (4) is Mentorship.

- 1) **Training:** Our goal is to bring the best of methodology to the challenge of understanding and responding to social dilemmas in ways that are innovative and transformative. Our training supports research-oriented students, faculty taking on new methods/approaches, and policymakers and practitioners wanting to integrate the collection and interpretation of evidence into how they do their work.
- 2) **Research support :** We seek to serve the needs of all social researchers with an ever-growing body of knowledge and services, both by curating, building, and maintaining excellent research tools and facilities, and by providing custom support and services.
- 3) **Catalyzing innovation:** We seek to be a place within the Faculty of Social Sciences and the university where those committed to harnessing the power of social research to help build a brighter world can come together, learn from each other, explore crazy ideas, and grow in community
- 4) **Mentorship:** After a successful year of the inaugural Brighter Spark Applied Research Apprenticeships, Spark has thoughtfully added Mentorship as a guiding pillar of our approach. Our team consisting of both full-time staff and students, offers opportunities for hands on experience within a social research centre, which can be extremely valuable for early researchers and students looking for more active involvement and mentorship by those conducting research.

Aligning Spark with the Strategic Priorities of McMaster and the Faculty of Social Science - A commitment to innovation and impact:

At Spark, our work advances the strategic priorities of both McMaster University and the Faculty of Social Sciences. **Our commitment to discovery, communication, and preservation of knowledge is reflected in the following key activities during 2022-23:**

- 1. Research excellence, including promotion of interdisciplinary approaches:** Spark's educational programming and training and research support activities all advance this University and Faculty priority. Our Spark Talks and related educational programming highlight methodological challenges or innovations that span the social sciences, and our Co-Lab Working Space offers opportunities for graduate students and faculty to informally connect and share insights. Spark's Qualitative Suite and Secure Empirical Analysis Lab (SEAL) also advance the University and Faculty's research excellence priorities.
- 2. Teaching and Learning, including Experiential Learning:** Providing extracurricular opportunities to learn and apply innovative research methods consistent with University and Faculty priorities is central to Spark's mission. We advance these priorities through our Spark Talks, including this year's series on Research Data Management; short courses on the use of research tools, like NVivo; invited presentations in graduate courses; and one-on-one research advice in our Research Conversation services. Some students also gain valuable experiential learning opportunities through our Brighter Spark Applied Research Apprenticeship for Students.
- 3. Inclusive Excellence and Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Indigenous Strategies (EDIIS):** Spark advances the University's and Faculty's EDIIS goals by recruiting and supporting a diverse workforce, including work experiences supported by the Student Success Centre, and by advancing research that highlights systemic barriers to equity and inclusion, through our Spark Talks and Brighter Spark Applied Research with community partners.
- 4. Engaging Local, National, Indigenous, and Global Communities:** Spark advances this strategic priority through its partnerships within McMaster, such as the University's Office of Community Engagement and the Faculty's Community Research Platform, and its Brighter Spark Applied Research collaborations with local and regional community organizations. Leading global experts also share their research insights with the McMaster community through our virtual Spark Talks.
- 5. Operational Excellence:** Spark advances the University's and Faculty's commitment to operational excellence by supporting the professional development of our staff as well as through our communication strategies. Spark is a first stop for researchers looking for access to research software, data, or extracurricular training opportunities. Our bi-weekly newsletter, Spark Connections, our website, and social media activities help connect researchers to new tools, methods, or opportunities.

3. Staffing & Governance

Centre Leadership

Allison A. Van (BS/BA, University of Washington & MPP, Harvard University), Executive Director, joined Spark (formerly CRESS) in July 2019. Allison specializes in mixed-methods complex systems analysis, community/academic partnerships, and the translation of research into social change. Her career has traversed sectors and disciplines, including extensive work in agricultural and rural development, poverty, child welfare and juvenile justice, social entrepreneurship, and medical innovation. In addition, she brings to McMaster significant research experience working with community organizations and in program evaluation.



Allison A. Van, Executive Director

This year, Allison has continued to play a pivotal role in the growth, development, and vision of Spark by setting goals, defining strategies, and making critical decisions that shape the direction of Spark. Allison has undertaken a strategic approach to navigate challenges and capitalize on opportunities through for example: research conversations, consultations, trainings, marketing, and student professional development/education through hands on involvement in Spark's communication, marketing and research activities. Allison has been the visionary, tester and implementer in all things spark – jumping head first into unique and enriching opportunities.

Michelle L. Dion (BA, University of Texas & MA/Ph.D., University of North Carolina), Professor of Political Science and Senator William McMaster Chair in Gender & Methodology, serves as Spark's Academic Director (2020-2025). She has a strong record of interdisciplinary research at McMaster, focusing on public policy, cross-national public opinion, and the sociology of social science and drawing upon a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence and methodologies to advance our understanding of political and social dynamics. In addition, she has over 20 years of experience teaching research design and quantitative methods in the social sciences, including as a visiting instructor in the University of Michigan Inter-University Consortium for Social and Political Research (ICPSR) Summer Program.



Michelle L. Dion, Academic Director

In January 2023, Michelle returned from research leave and swiftly resumed the role of Academic Director of Spark. Michelle has been a driving force in the creation and evolution of Spark, and we are thrilled to welcome her back.

Michelle continues to support Spark through creative expansion, contributing to the development and implementation of academic programming, educational offerings, and administrative duties. Michelle contributes to the design and implementation of research and research related activities and programs.

Risa (Lisa) Kaida (BA & PhD, University of Toronto, MA University of Tokyo), Associate Professor in Sociology Lisa is the Vice President of the Canadian Population Society (2022-2024) and specializes in the social and economic integration of immigrants and refugees.

Joined Spark as Acting Academic Director from July 2022-Dec 2022 while Dr. Dion was on research leave.



Lisa Kaida, Acting Academic Director

We would like to give a special thank you to Lisa for her contributions to Spark during the role as Acting Academic Director. During this appointment, Lisa took on the effort of initiating a Qualitative Data Analysis Software Pilot aimed at making qualitative data analysis software more readily available. Lisa also developed an inventory of a decade of datasets within SEAL (Spark's Secure Data Repository). Lisa assisted greatly in evaluating potential for data linkage and other expansions of value. It was a privilege to work with and learn from Lisa, and we look forward to future potential collaborations.

Centre Governance

As a Senate-approved Centre, Spark reports to its Governing Board, which is Chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, **Dr. Jeremiah Hurley**, who is also Professor and former Chair in Economics. Other Board Members include **Dr. James Dunn** (Professor and Chair of Health, Aging & Society and Senator William McMaster Chair in Urban Health Equity), **Dr. Tina Fetner** (Professor and Chair of Sociology), and the Associate Dean, Research in Social Sciences, currently **Dr. Tony**

Porter (Professor in Political Science and Acting Associate Dean Research, Social Sciences).

Drs. Hurley and Fetner chaired the original working group that developed the core vision for the Centre, and Dr. Dunn was a member.

Spark's Advisory Committee:

This year, we developed the inaugural Advisory Board for Spark which held its first meeting in November 2022. Board Members provided input regarding Spark's scholarly priorities and strategic directions for the 2022-23 academic year. The Committee includes: Bradley Ruffle (Economics), Cliff van der Linden (Political Science), Jay Brodeur (McMaster Library/Sherman Centre), Andrea Zeffiro (Communications/Sherman Centre), Melanie Heath (Sociology), Judy Fudge (Labour Studies), Adrienne Xavier (Indigenous Studies/Anthropology), Katherine Hesson-Bolton (Student Success Centre).

We are so excited to have a structured forum for members to collaboratively contribute to the development of Spark. We truly value their effort and input and look forward to our next meeting.

Centre Staff

Spark involves multiple arms of programming including: research, training and innovation, which requires lots of coordination and administration. We are extremely fortunate to have the continued expertise of **Lynn Holland** guiding our Administrative Team. Lynn brings a wealth of knowledge and a kind approach to everything. In addition, **Equity Burke**, who also works at the Gilbrea Centre, has been an enthusiastic addition to our team, including a key role in coordinating our communications with the McMaster community.

As of last year, **Lily Wang** has taken on the role of Lab Manager of SEAL. Lily has a background in Physics and Computer Science and is passionate about data security, fair use and Research Data Management. This year, Lily has grown SEAL strategically, contributing to the management of data sets from companies, governments, researchers, and community organizations. This year, Lily is working on a server improvement plan for better computers and a new policy to make it more widely available.

Spark is made up of a uniquely talented team. This academic year, Spark's team consisted of undergraduate and graduate students who worked alongside our staff to implement programming, training, research support, knowledge mobilization/communications and marketing. The students conducted work doing website development, accessibility, videography, event coordination, applied statistics, community engaged research and co-developing curricula. The Spark team included Ph.D. Students in Social Work, Sociology, and Engineering, and Undergraduates in Arts & Sciences, Economics, and Science Communications.

SEAL Lab Team



Lily Wang, Manager SEAL



Colin Parsons



Amelia Herman

**We would like to wish a bittersweet goodbye and thank you to the following students who have supported and contributed to the Centre's success during 2022-23 but are leaving us due to the completion of their academic journeys at McMaster and/or as a result of moving on to other opportunities.*

- Kaitlynn Battershill
- Nusrat Mir
- Parmida Soltani

We wish them all of the best in their future endeavors.

Brighter Spark Team



Moyo Sogaolu



Shannon Boss

Administration Team



Lynn Holland, Administrative Assistant



Novera Shenin



Mohamed Fathalla,



Evan Gravely

Communications Team



Celine Keomany
(Webmaster)



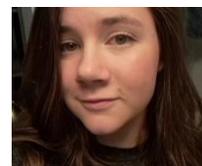
Lance Marwood
(Marketing & Events
Associate)



Maham Afaazi



Equity Burke



Amy Hutchinson



Rehan Khan



Iman Sadgehi

4. Educational Programming & Training

“Research Data Practices in the Social Sciences: A Collaborative Pilot Study for Developing Expertise and Research Support”



RESEARCH DATA PRACTICES IN THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES: A COLLABORATIVE
PILOT STUDY FOR DEVELOPING
EXPERTISE AND RESEARCH SUPPORT

Spark: a centre for social research innovation
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

Each year, Spark hosts a research series which provides valuable information and resources on a selected research theme. We then find exceptionally talented researchers to offer intensive workshops on a skill they have mastered related to our topic.

For 2022-2023, Spark launched the Research Data Management series which aimed to advance awareness, understanding, development and adoption of research data management tools, best practices and resources in Canada. A list of these sessions can be found on the right of this page.

The public lectures were intended for McMaster students, fellows, faculty, and research staff. The sessions were free to attend, recorded and archived on [Spark’s Macvideo page](#).

Rather than a half day workshop as done in the past, these sessions were held for one hour, and in an online format which based on previous success has amplified the reach and convenience of attending. This format also decreased the costs associated, allowing for more diverse and international speakers.

“Introduction to our series on Data Management in Research” by Spark’s Data Champion’s Team : This introductory talk posed the question “why do we care about research data management”? This session outlines the replication crisis in academia, some data management practices that people can implement, and the importance of RDM plans when conducting research (Oct 28th, 2022– 16 attendees)

“Platform for Experimental, Collaborative Ethnography: A Guided Tour”

By Kim Fortun (University of California, Irvine): This session walks participants through the Platform for Experimental, Collaborative Ethnography (PECE, pronounced “peace”), an open-source, freely accessible digital space designed by and for qualitative researchers. PECE supports qualitative data preservation, curation and annotation; collaborative data analysis; and creative forms of scholarly communication. (November 4th, 2022 – 9 attendees)

“Social Science Methods in Meta

Research” by Zacharias Maniadis: This talk explores meta-research, a new discipline that assesses the quality of research for society. A new area of interest is how reproducible social interventions translate to efficacious public policy. Social science tools such as game theory and controlled experiments can provide unique insights in this new scientific domain. (November 11th 2022 – 9 attendees).

“Reproducibility of 1,000 articles – lessons

learned” by Lars Vilhuber: This talk focused on lessons for young scholars on possible lessons. It discussed the kind of support that institutions (universities, data providers, compute services) should be providing to students, faculty, and researchers, for a robust, reproducible, and transparent science enterprise. (December 2nd 2022)

Short Course: Qualitative Data Analysis in NVivo

Social Research Short Courses



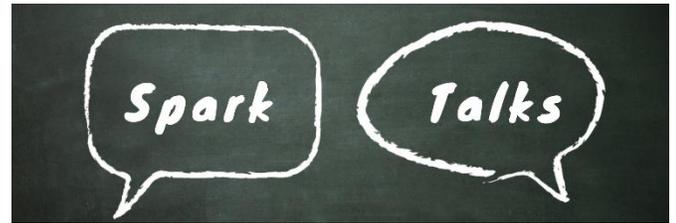
After a successful session last year, Dr. Noelle Wyman-Roth of Duke University's Social Science Research Institute joined us again this year for a 3-day workshop titled "Qualitative Data Analysis in NVivo" on April 14th, 21st and 28th 2022.

This short course was an intensive introduction to the use of NVivo for analyzing qualitative data. It began with foundational information about the nature of qualitative research including ethical issues, common designs/methodologies and approaches to data gathering, analysis and reporting. It then dove into the user experience including setting up a project, working with multiple data types, best practices and advanced features which best assist with asking complex questions of your data.

The workshop had a total of 10 participants. This year, we found recruitment a bit more challenging in the spring rather than the winter and if hosting in the future would try to implement earlier in the semester (Session in Jan 2021 had 30 participants), in hopes of better accommodating student schedules.

Thank you to Noelle for providing such a helpful resource to graduate researchers and those conducting Qualitative Research at McMaster.

Spark Talks



The series "Spark Talks" kicked off again in Fall 2022 with much excitement for the talks ahead. The weekly hybrid seminars by researchers across social research disciplines included topics involving innovative methods and findings. Each session was one hour and included a Q&A to give a chance for the speaker and attendees to learn from each other.

After consultation with a number of faculty and student, Spark has decided to experiment with a "Open Doors Friday" pilot where we "stayed open" for an hour after each Spark talk and had a research support team member available following the talk for anyone who wanted to drop in, ask a research question, sign up for the Co-lab or just hang out. We offered a light lunch for those who decided to participate.

In this year's series, some of the most popular Spark Talks included:

- Inclusive by Design: Translating Data Feminism for Policy with Priya Kumar
- Back to School: Tips and Tricks for Graduate Students with Allison Van
- Improving the Measurement of Sensitive Survey Questions with Double List Experiments with Gustavo Diaz

Over the last academic year, more than 20 scholars from around the globe presented their research. Recorded videos from each of the seminars are archived on Spark's [MacVideo Channel](#) for future access and viewing.

Spark is excited to re-launch Spark Talks in Fall of 2023. Planning is already in the works for another academic year full of informative sessions by talented researchers.

5. Research Support & Activities

Research Conversations

Spark is continually growing to help social researchers address common challenges in their research and have the support and training needed to take on exciting new work.

At Spark, we provide 4 hours of free Research Conversations each year for any social researcher including graduate students. During research conversations, we can help:

- Refine research question(s).
- Facilitate connections with other researchers and resources.
- Identify relevant research methods, tools and software.
- Advise on data management, assistance with creating a research data management plan, and data storage options.
- Overcome research barriers.
- Help with research ethics application materials.
- Suggest knowledge mobilization strategies, and more.

Support not only involves advisement for researchers on methods and tools but also, as appropriate, directing them to appropriate state-of-the-art facilities and equipment in the Faculty of Social Sciences and around the University.

Between May 2022 and April 2023 Spark held research conversations with 32 faculty members, graduate students, staff, and community researchers. Every Faculty at McMaster had researchers take advantage of Research Conversations.

Brighter Spark Applied Research

To fund our mission, Spark established a fee-for-service consultancy called Brighter Spark Applied Research (BSAR). BSAR offers game-changing, custom, applied research and evaluation services to community organizations, filling a much-needed gap in expert applied research support that marries academic rigor and practicality.

Last year, we launched the new Brighter Spark Applied Research Apprenticeship for Students, which allows students to become an active member of the Brighter Spark Team, engage in unique training opportunities, practical research experience, leadership, creativity and action orientated impact. This Apprenticeship allows students to work directly with and for clients and apply their research skills to pressing social problems.

While our primary focus is on service to the community, we have come to see the tremendous impact that being part of Brighter Spark has had on our student team members. Given this, we have added “mentorship” as a priority area, giving opportunities to early and future researchers. We are excited to continue providing direct experience to the next generation of applied researchers.

“Spark has had a profound impact on my professional growth, shaping the person I am today and the path that I wish to pursue. Your contributions have been invaluable, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to have worked with such inspiring individuals. Spark has a bright future ahead of it, and I’m honored I get to say I was a part of it”

– Parmida Soltani (Brighter Spark Student, Alumni)

2021-22 Community Partners:

Green Shield Canada is a large Canadian insurance provider with a foundation that provides grants that, amongst other priorities, strengthen and expand mental health services. Our work with them is in partnership with ARMS (Advanced Research on Mental Health and Society) led by Dr. Marisa Young and focuses on common measurement of the impact of the mental health grants they provide.

Grenfell Ministries offers harm reduction programs for those who have experiences with addiction or incarceration. It is an innovative, peer-to-peer program that supports people in a client-driven, non-judgmental way. We work with them on building the infrastructure to measure their impact and build an evidence-base for this approach.

On October 31st 2022, Rebecca Morris-Miller (Founder of Grenfell Ministries) sadly passed away. Rebecca was a true partner and friend to many of us at Spark. We have been honored to partner with the harm reduction program founded by Rebecca. We continue to keep Rebecca in our thoughts and hope to continue to support Rebecca's team in the work of saving lives devastated by substance use disorder, mental illness, homelessness and incarceration.

Banyan Community Services is a not-for-profit organization that serves three sectors: youth in conflict with the law, children and seniors/adults with disabilities. Brighter Spark works with them on building an evidence-base around the impact of the SURE program as an early intervention for adolescents and their families that are struggling.

YWCA-Hamilton and several other organizations that provide employment services in Hamilton have been engaged in a pilot program to embed Occupational Therapists in their programs to support participants in building skills and competencies that support sustainable employment. We have been working with them to assess the existing evidence and build a plan to do more intensive research.

Black Women's Visions is a project of The AIDS Network of Hamilton, Halton, Haldiman, Norfolk and Brant focused on providing information and community online for Black women living with HIV and AIDS in the region. This year, we helped launch their [official website](#) and online community.

Grant Funded Projects:

Digital Research Alliance of Canada, Data Championship Pilot Project (\$50,000) titled "Research Data Practices in the Social Sciences: A Collaborative Pilot Study for Developing Expertise and Research Support", April 2022 - March 2023.

The Brighter Spark team has taken a collaborative approach to bring together Research Data Management (RDM) specialists with disciplinary researchers in the social sciences to enhance knowledge translation and exchange around RDM practices. To date, the team has been built new RDM templates and case studies and conducted course-based presentations, and presentations in this year's Innovation in Research series – Data Management in Research.

This year, Spark is building on that work by creating a series of short, instructional videos that are going to serve as a fundamental resource for the research community around applying RDM practices in the social sciences and humanities. In partnership with the Library, we will do that by capturing researchers learning, implementing best practices, and sharing their experience working through research data management challenges in real time – these students and faculty members will receive the distinction of becoming our **Data Champions**. This year's Data Champions are funded through a SSHRC Connections RDM Grant received by Spark.

Successful applicants of the Data Champions Project will receive:

- Students: 20 hours of free hands-on training in RDM from McMaster experts at Spark and McMaster University Library.
- PIs: \$6000 to offset the salary of the student researcher, while the student Data Champion receives both a \$1000 honorarium and a Certificate of Attendance for RDM training upon completion.

The Co-Lab Working Space

This year, Spark re-opened our free coworking space (September 2022) designed for research teams to work, meet, engage with partners, and collaborate. We are excited by the energy that develops when people working on diverse and interdisciplinary projects connect - and so have built a co-working space where you can both focus, and engage with others across disciplines.

The CoLab is available to all research teams, faculty members and graduate students from across McMaster as well as community research partners. The CoLab offers open space with fifteen 2-4 person tables, a conversation area, two 2-person offices, two small conversations rooms and a meeting room that can seat 12.

Art that Represents

As a Centre committed to research innovation, we wanted the art in our space to speak to our aspirations. We are thrilled to feature beautiful collage art from two participants in art programs from our partner Salvation Army of Hamilton, Lawson Ministries (featured below). Danielle Navarro has programmed and made an open-source stunning image.



Accessibility Upgrade to our Co-Lab

As part of a broad commitment to elevate Spark's accessibility and universal design, we have started to conduct an assessment and upgrade process to ensure that the Co-Lab is comfortable for the whole research community. As part of the assessment, we invited those interested to tour and provide their thoughts on space/useability.

This is an ongoing process, and we hope continue to collect input, analyze and implement results from the assessment this year to make our space as accessible as it can be for our users.

New Co-Lab User Agreement

To streamline our processes, this year Spark simplified its booking process for the Co-Lab Space. We invite those interested to stop in for a brief 15-minute orientation on Tuesdays/Thursdays. Prospective members will sign a user agreement, arrange access to the space and get them setup on our online booking system to reserve private spaces in the Co-Lab. This process has been received with positive feedback, and we look forward to continuing to grow members of the Co-Lab.

If you are interested in joining – you can email us at talk.to.spark@mcmaster.ca to schedule a time to visit and get you set up on our booking system to reserve private spaces.

Qualitative Suite

The Qualitative Suite includes a large **focus group/observational room** and two **interview rooms** all with advanced audio/video capabilities that can be loaded directly into Qualitative Data Analysis Software. Spark is piloting use of the suite and building our capacity to organize catering, parking, and trained facilitators/ interviewers for clients. The Qualitative Suite is available for use by McMaster and external researchers on a fee-for-service basis.

SEAL Lab



SEAL is a high-security lab for secure storage of confidential data that is valuable for research.

This includes data sets from companies, governments, researchers, and community organizations which contain private information that cannot be made public. SEAL acts as a trusted intermediary between data holders and research users, using state-of-the-art technology to provide security while making authorized access from anywhere seamless.

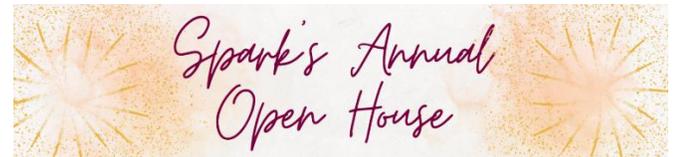
SEAL works with researchers to:

- establish data-sharing agreements,
- assist with cleaning and linking administrative datasets,
- manage ongoing access for team members,
- support analysis software integration, and more

SEAL can be accessed by authorized researchers anywhere in the world through our MobiKey access system. Those in the area can also choose to use the physical lab located in a restricted area of L.R Wilson Hall.

During 2022-23, SEAL held 17 active projects with research teams around the world, including: McMaster University, Ottawa University, Michigan Tech University (MTU), France (Toulouse School of Economics), Hamilton Food Share, and more.

Spark's Annual Open House 2022



Spark hosted its annual Open House Event on September 23rd, 2023. This was our first in-person open house possible due to the pandemic. After a year of design upgrades to Spark's Co-Lab Space, we were excited to officially "open" the doors and introduce the exciting support and resources we offer. It was such a fun and exciting event with a social component and informative sessions including: a tour of the Qualitative Suite, Applied



Research Certificate, Systems Modelling, Research and Datasets, and Better Surveys.

Pictured above and below – our Open House was well attended by Faculty, Students and Researchers. It was a great way to showcase our amazing space, and facilities and allow people to learn more about what we do (and how we can help them).



6. Communication

Spark Connections Newsletter



The bi-weekly newsletter “Spark Connections” has grown even bigger this year with broader topics publicized and a larger following. Spark has received positive feedback and appreciation for the content which is broadcasted in the newsletter, with many requesting inclusion of their own work and research. Spark currently has a distribution list of over 500 people and readership between 2000-3000 per newsletter.

Building a New Website

We’re still in the process of transitioning to our new MacSite which will expand the options for our content. This process is underway with goals to launch in early 2023. We can’t wait for it to be complete so that we can share it with everyone.

A goal for the year to come is to use our new platform to add content to our newly developed pages including: Certificates, providing more information about Brighter Spark Applied Research, and vastly expanding our Resources section. This section will serve as an introduction to the 7 social research toolkits and the huge array of social research methods. Each will feature a handful of recommended resources for learning more that incorporate both our vast stock of research talks, as well as well-made introductory material available online from around the world.

Photoshoot & Marketing

Now that we are more established in our Co-Lab, we want to showcase the great space and offerings. Some of the feedback that we have heard from Faculty, students and researchers is that they are so impressed with Spark’s space and the collaborative environment it provides, however were not aware of it and/or that it was

available for them to use. Given this, we wanted to make a push this year to promote the space to a wide audience, and knew that photos and videos would be a way to draw people in.

We recruited our team, and opened up the opportunity of our network, in hopes they would participate in a photoshoot which would share our space with new faces actively utilizing our Co-Lab. Some of the photos are featured below. Thanks to everyone who participated!



Social Media and Networking



With excitement for Spark Talks in the fall, Spark launched the weekly social media campaign #SparkResearchReplay again this summer to take a (virtual) walk down memory lane to reflect on some of the great SparkTalks from this year.

Spark continues to utilize our social media Twitter and LinkedIn pages to share updates about Spark and as a way to reach both internal and external researchers.

Our Spark Communications team works hard to keep all platforms updated with content, resources and information that are readily available for use by researchers.

A goal for the year ahead for our communications team is to track our social media analytics to truly understand what our audience cares about and needs from us. Within this process includes developing promotional material templates and formatting which unites our branding and social messaging.

7. Looking Ahead

In 2023-2024 Spark is excited to continue on our growth and learning journey by developing new, helpful and innovative programming, educational offerings and research services which meet the needs of our growing community. As researchers, we look forward to continuing to consult with students, faculty, and the community to develop needed and desired training opportunities and resources for researchers.

In 2023-24 we look forward to:

- Continue to offer a weekly seminar series which allows for in-depth conversations about research tools and methods. We aim to offer our “Spark Talk” series in a hybrid format again this year, as it appeals to our audience and allows both an in-person and virtual opportunities to participate.
- Data Champions Campaign – deployment of a series of short, instructional videos which will serve as a fundamental resource for the research community. Those students and faculty who participate will receive the distinction of becoming our Data Champions.
- Host the Impact Evaluation Short Course with instructor Paul Bakker (Credentialed Evaluator) on September 19th, 26th, October 3rd, 17th and 24th). This session was rescheduled from Spring 2023 to Fall 2023 to increase participation.
- Continue to listen to students, faculty and staff and build services and supports that address your research needs.