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Redesigning Oregon's QRIS (Spark)

The Promise of Authentic Partnership With Community



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The Ford Family Foundation | Portland State University | Spark



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Executive Summary

American democracy is historically rooted in the idea and practice of citizen participation, yet with the large, complex bureaucratic structures necessary for implementing policies and programs at scale, it is easy for that value to fall by the wayside or become superficial. Although aspects of program administration no doubt require and benefit from technical expertise, we lose the grounded insights and know-how of those closest to the issue when we over-rely on the bureaucracy. We also run the risk of undermining democracy itself as citizens become increasingly disconnected from and distrustful of government.

Increasingly, there are calls for the reinvigoration of meaningful public participation in government. Since 2023, Oregon's Department of Early Learning and Care (DELC) and The Research Institute (TRI) at Western Oregon University have been engaged in a robust citizen partnership to redesign the state QRIS (Quality Recognition and Improvement System) for early childhood education (ECE), called "Spark." To document this process, in-depth interviews were conducted in English and Spanish with 16 Redesign participants, including families, providers, state administrators and Spark staff. This brief describes the partnership, core elements of the Redesign, participant reflections on lessons learned, and recommendations for those looking to replicate this innovative approach.

Spark Redesign partners—community members and public administrators (DELC and TRI)—agree that the process itself was and continues to be transformative, fundamentally altering their expectations for what's possible when government authentically listens to and respects community expertise. Participants likewise highlighted the great power of diverse communities coming together to build mutual understanding and solve problems. Many spoke of a renewed hope for democratic processes and the potential to positively influence system change. Most of all, they are optimistic that the Redesign will facilitate a more inclusive, efficient and effective ECE quality support system in Oregon.

> Personally, a benefit of participating has been seeing the power of community voice in action and how important it is to persist in advocating for all of that for [children]. That's the main thing for me. It's like, "Wow! All these people, from diverse backgrounds and beliefs and routines. We are all here together for one main reason—to make this better." — Accountability Team member

> People are listening to us to hear our perspectives on what is going well, what is not going well. And it's very important that we continue that route like that. We are the ones doing the work, so we understand more. And this process is highlighting that. Right in the beginning, we might have thought, "Oh, people are coming to tell us the ideas." It's like the impostor syndrome, but we are the experts. — Accountability Team member



What is Spark? And why is it being redesigned?

Spark is a publicly funded program intended to support quality early childhood care and education in Oregon. Since 2013, Spark has assigned star ratings to participating child care programs using certain criteria. The original idea was to encourage program improvement and provide information to families looking for care.

Spark has struggled over time. Participation is required for publicly funded programs but voluntary for everyone else, and participation has always been low. While just under a third of licensed programs are enrolled in Spark, many fewer have actually gone through the rating process and been assigned a star rating.

From the beginning, many said that Spark was put in place too quickly, with too little input from the community. In particular, communities of color said that the rating system seemed to reflect the assumptions and values of mainstream culture and would exclude many deserving providers. An early validation study also suggested that the star ratings didn't actually do a good job of identifying differences across programs and raised some concerns about fairness.

While some providers did find the system useful and valued their participation, many others said that Spark was confusing or unfair. In 2021, the Legislature said that Spark needed to be redesigned in response to these concerns (HB 2059). HB 2059 directed the Early Learning Division (now DELC) to remove the tiered star ratings. In turn, DELC decided to partner with families and providers to design a more inclusive and supportive Spark.



An authentically community-driven process

To redesign the system, Spark engaged in a deep and wide listening process led by diverse community members across Oregon. From June to November 2023, these teams listened to thousands of families and child care providers about their experiences, needs and hopes.

They heard that lots of folks didn't even know about Spark. While some providers found the system useful and valued their participation, many also said that Spark could feel confusing or unfair. And families said the star ratings didn't always reflect what mattered most to them.

Everybody agreed that the new system needed to be truly open to everyone, offer real choice and provide useful information and support for both providers and families. They said Spark should recognize and value cultural, linguistic and geographic diversity both for providers and families, supporting welcoming and responsive early learning environments for everybody.



New Spark Evolves
through a series of pilots



Accountability Team leadership

Fourteen members of the community-based listening teams agreed to take on leadership roles in the Redesign process. You can read their individual biographies here: https://oregonspark.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Acct.-Team-Bios_English.pdf

In partnership with Spark and DELC staff, this group, called the Spark Accountability Team (AT), engaged in intensive co-design work centered around community priorities for the new system. The AT met a total of 29 times between November 2023 and May 2024 (roughly four meetings per month). Meetings were held in the evenings, by Zoom, in order to ensure maximum participation from busy families and providers. To support an inclusive process, interpretation was provided in Spanish for all meetings. Modest participation stipends were provided in recognition of the value of AT members' time and expertise.

Articulating a new vision and guiding principles

To ground the Redesign, the AT first articulated a new vision for Spark based on what they heard from families and providers across Oregon.

The vision of Spark is to be a welcoming and inclusive program that strives to connect all children and families in Oregon with great and responsive early education, development, and care, by supporting and celebrating providers.

As the work progressed, a series of recurring themes came into focus and were adopted as **guiding principles** for design decisions.

- ✓ Spark will offer support without judgment to all participants.
- ✓ Spark will support early educators in finding/creating a community where feelings of belonging are nurtured, and values are shared.
- ✓ Spark will support and empower families to find care that aligns with the needs, values and culture of their family.
- ✓ Spark will empower early educators to make choices about their Spark journey, offering options for goal-setting and achievement, accessing resources and measuring progress.
- ✓ Spark will validate that early educators and families will define "quality" differently.
- ✓ Spark will ensure that participating programs have met basic health and safety standards and will communicate this to families.



Seven foundational design concepts emerged from this process. These are the pillars of new Spark and represent a transition away from one-size-fits-all, compliance-oriented and evaluative approaches toward one that respects and empowers providers and families to make their own choices. The AT calls it "support without judgment." For more detailed information on the design concepts, see https://oregonspark.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Spark-High-Level-Design-Concept-Presentation.pdf.

Rather than being more "lenient," this shift is expected to facilitate greater participation in Spark and more robust quality improvement across the system. The AT believes that encouraging providers to showcase their program strengths and work toward their own program goals will be a much more effective strategy for activating internal motivation and pride. In turn, the children in their care are more likely to thrive, since the people caring for them feel respected and valued. (And it just so happens that the research literature strongly supports these hypotheses.)

Progressive implementation: Learning by doing

Public systems are complicated to unwind and rebuild. Spark is intertwined with parallel systems and processes, so when something changes in Spark, a series of other fixes are often required. Partnering with families and providers also takes more time than if state administrators just made all the decisions by themselves. Therefore, putting these new design concepts into practice is going to take some time.

Spark also understands that providers and families need support right now. Rather than waiting for every detail of the new system to be in place before launching, parts of new Spark are being rolled out, tried and tested over time, with lots of feedback from providers and families and room for adjustments. The idea is to make this kind of partnership and learning ongoing. New Spark is committed to becoming an adaptive system centered on the needs and realities of the real people using it.

The importance of truly listening and partnering

Most publicly funded programs are designed and run with little input from the community. The Spark Redesign is trying something different. AT members were asked to share why partnering with communities is so important.

They said that starting with listening grounded the work in the experiences of regular people. This was crucial to getting to real causes and solutions, rather than "just another band-aid." Being closest to the work gives providers and families deep insights into practical realities that state administrators may not see or understand at a distance. Too many rules and regulations are developed by those far removed; the most effective, practical and sustainable ideas will come from the people closest to the work.

> Policymakers need to understand that the top-down approach doesn't always work. When they partner with families and their providers, it leads to policies that are more effective and sustainable. Because sometimes we providers cannot just meet them up there; it's like, "Hey, in real life, it does not work like that some days." — Accountability Team member

The AT also pointed out that providers and families, not state administrators. are the backbone of the child care system. They are the ones actually spending time with and directly invested in children, and the ones who bear the brunt of bad policies or programs. As such, they deserve a real seat at decision-making tables.

I'm gonna start with the families. I want to put them first. They should know that their voice matters, and they are the expert in those children and they know their needs. — Accountability Team member

The providers, the early educators — they're the backbone of the system. There's no system without them, and they should feel supported more than just burnt out from all the regulations. — Accountability Team member

Last, the AT asks policymakers and public administrators to recognize that providers and families are the experts on their own needs, values and priorities, including legitimate differences in how child care quality is experienced and understood. There can be no single "right" way defined by the state.

So our lawmakers, they need to listen to the people on the ground, to the people that go out there and do all this work. It's not all about just saying yes to something or no to something, without even being part of it. You have to be part of something for you to say, "I don't like it." You cannot be up there and say, "I don't like this process," or "They don't need this much money. They don't need this. They don't need that." You have to come in and see what it is that people all around you are dealing with. — Accountability Team member

The promise of coming together to solve a shared problem

AT members shared heartfelt and sometimes profound reflections on what it meant to them to be engaged in the Redesign process.

Many spoke of a sense of connection and hopefulness that is rarely heard in these times. Participants said the Spark Redesign is an example of how our society can work when we listen to and respect each other. Numerous AT members talked about recognizing that we share more similarities than differences, and we all want very similar things for ourselves and our children.

We are listened to and we listen to all the different points of view. Even if we disagree, we get to an agreement. We get to a middle place where everybody is comfortable. It's like I hear you and you have your reason, and let's accommodate that. I never thought I could have a job and be in a group trying to improve the world for this next generation; that people actually listen, that we have to fight, but we have to fight together. We don't have to fight each other. — Accountability Team member

As people from different cultures and different backgrounds — the constraints that we all share — I never knew that we all had the same themes. That's one of the things that I would say to anybody that's going to be part of this process: "Just listen for the themes, you guys; we all share the same stories, from different backgrounds, different places, but they're the same." — Accountability Team member

Deep appreciation was expressed for being part of a community that is working together to make things better for everybody. Participants talked about the commitment demonstrated as everybody showed up time and time again to do the challenging work. Many said it was a testament to the strength of community and shared purpose that they created together. They likewise expressed a strong sense of accountability to the providers and families who shared their stories with the listening teams. These stories have served as a guiding light for the overall effort, and the AT is determined to see it through.

We're all coming together. The collectiveness of it — you know, that opportunity for us to sit there and talk, and just communicate with each other respectfully as well. With all of that, we've never had any issue. There's never been one time somebody's like, "Oh, I don't like the way this person said this to me or their opinion." We've all been listening to each other. We all collectively have one goal. We're all very much brave people from different walks of life, different backgrounds. It's a big deal. It's a great big deal. I think that that's something that should be celebrated: The fact that we're so diverse and include everybody, and everybody's voice is welcome, and everybody speaks, and everybody listens. — Accountability Team member

Every participant reflected on the fundamental importance of human relationships to the process. Participants talked about getting to know one another, developing trust, allowing themselves to be vulnerable and take risks, and doing the work to understand and respect differences in perspective. They got glimpses of each other's family

lives on Zoom, wished each other well through illness, and helped each other out with information, connections and support. It wasn't always easy, and required patience, but everyone agreed it was more important to take the time to do things right rather than "just racing to the finish line to get the work done."

> You know, I balance on saying we're all friends. No, it's not that, but we're comfortable sharing little pieces of our own lives. And that's been another thing: really sharing our story, and I mean being able to be vulnerable with colleagues that you've never met face to face. People have really opened up some big vulnerabilities. And I don't think that's typical in any kind of bureaucratic process. — Accountability Team member

> The group became more and more comfortable with each other, and I believe that that created a lot of empathy. We got, you know, to the point where recently many personal stories were shared. — Accountability Team member

Positive impacts for community participants

AT members also shared the personal benefits of participation. Across the board, they said their experiences were personally enriching; they gained confidence, broadened their perspectives, learned new things and made professional connections. Participating in the group was valuable practice in learning to tolerate uncomfortable feelings and finding courage to speak up. Many said they gained a profound sense that their own voice matters and can have an impact, and felt more hopeful about the future overall.

> Personally, a benefit of participating has been seeing the power of community voice in action and how important it is to persist in advocating for all of that—for them [children]. That's the main thing for me. It's like, "Wow! All these people, from diverse backgrounds and beliefs and routines. We are all here together for one main reason—to make this better." — Accountability Team member

> I will say for sure that I've learned a lot. I would tell anybody that's coming, come with an open mind, don't overthink it, and say what you want to say. Your opinion matters. Everybody matters—what you say matters. There's no right or wrong information, or there's no right or wrong conversation. Everything you say matters, and everything you do matters as well—as a provider and as a parent. — Accountability Team member

> I'm from [an area of the state] where there is some cultural diversity, but not a massive amount. So getting to be exposed to some different cultural ideas—that's been great. And having understanding with people I probably never would have even had conversations with—that's been really lovely. — Accountability Team member

> I hope everybody shares the same feeling as I do, that it just feels really good to be a part of it. It's like we are doing something that goes beyond just our family and our child care settings. You know, it's statewide. And who knows? Maybe we're gonna be an example for some other states that everybody can do a little better, little by little. — Accountability Team member

For some AT members, participation also proved to be a valuable professional development opportunity. They got an insider perspective on and understanding of the child care system in Oregon, along with a newfound understanding of the system's complexity and the many challenges involved in making improvements. With this new knowledge and experience, participants moved into new positions, took on leadership roles, started their own programs, organized playgroups in the community, etc.

A number of participants also observed that they learned a lot from how the Redesign process itself was facilitated and said they would take the model back to their communities.

Appreciation for system partners (DELC and TRI)

AT members were unanimous in their appreciation for system partners in the Redesign process. They said they consistently felt heard and respected and believed that system partners were genuinely listening and taking seriously what they shared. Several people mentioned feeling like the system partners were "on our side" and always doing their best to make sure the group's vision was realized.

Participation stipends were highlighted as another key indicator of respect for AT members' time and expertise, as well as the seriousness of the commitment. Most of all, participants said they actually believed their contributions were authentically driving the Redesign process and that they were treated as legitimate leaders, not token "voices."

> I'm currently in numerous sorts of work groups and redesign groups, and none of them feel like the Spark Redesign has felt. And I suppose what I mean by that is how many times the system leaders will come and present something, and basically, at the end of the 45-minute presentation, say, "Any questions?" And we wait for 30 seconds. And then the thing that just moves forward is what they brought to us without hearing from us first, or really hearing how we see the potential impact of what they've proposed. — Accountability Team member

> Other experiences I've had—basically, they already had an idea and an agenda, and then they manipulate and maneuver the meetings and such that comes out with what they want their outcome to be, anyhow. And in the end you're like, "That's not what we meant." This very much feels like it's genuine and real. — Accountability Team member

> It's amazing with you guys [system partners] as well. You all have been amazing. It's just the fact that you're open to hear us. Your ears are there. You hear us, we talk, you listen, and we all come together and make these decisions, which are not for ourselves but for our children—our children's children, you know. And so that's a good thing. It's a blessing for sure. — Accountability Team member

A transformative experience for system partners

Engaging in this kind of authentic community-based co-design process was also new for state and TRI partners. System partners shared a number of reflections and lessons that they hope might serve as an example and inspiration for others.

Take the time—it's worth it!

System partners repeatedly highlighted how crucial slowing down is to doing this kind of work. Time is needed to:

- ✓ Listen deeply.
- ✓ Build real relationships.
- ✓ Provide foundational information about complex state systems.
- ✓ Engage in repeated, nonlinear cycles of discussion and reflection.
- ✓ Engage in shared, inclusive decision-making.

Taking the time, they said, will actually save time in the long run. Rushing often leads to mistakes, including reverting back to imposing top-down decisions in the name of meeting deadlines. They said that meeting a deadline shouldn't become more important than the actual work and that deadlines are often more flexible than you might think.

> If you try to do something too quickly and too imposed from on top, you can actually cause a lot of harm. Because rushing people through conversations and decisions inevitably is going to make it feel like a shallow and token exercise rather than meaningful dialogue. Which was another important learning for me: It was like, "Well, I gotta let this take the time that it's gonna take." — System partner

System partners also noted that intentionally slowing down and pushing back on deadlines was sometimes experienced as stressful because it goes against the grain of mainstream expectations. There was some concern that it might be perceived negatively by system leaders and/or policymakers. Nonetheless, the team committed to taking the time needed.

You don't have to be the authority on the matter!

System partners explained that they intentionally positioned themselves as listeners and facilitators of a community-driven process, authentically led by the system users. Too often, they said, system leaders assume that they know best on behalf of families and providers. Not only did system participants say this is a more respectful approach, they also believe—much like the AT members—that it's more effective. In order for systems

to work well, they need to be built on and responsive to the real-world experiences of end users.

> What do policymakers and administrators need to understand? If they make decisions without partnering with people on the ground, their solutions probably won't work very well. — System partner

System partners reflected that this required a change in mindset and a more trusting orientation toward families and providers. Indeed, the Redesign recommendations themselves represent a shift away from compliance-oriented approaches to an embrace of "no one right way" thinking and a default assumption of good intention (with some basic built-in protections). We know that responsiveness to system users is stifled when systems become overly defensive in response to perceived risk. As one participant observed:

> It feels like it's asking providers to serve the system, rather than the other way around; [in the Spark Redesign] the system is listening to and being responsive to what the community needs. — System partner

Embrace the opportunity for new insights, ideas and energy

System partners were struck by how revealing and generative it had been to bring new faces to the table. As one partner observed:

> Professionals who have swum in these waters for many years sometimes can't see what's right in front of them: the complexity of the standards and processes, etc. It was really valuable to have that outside perspective. — System partner

System partners described the kind of complacency and/or resignation that can set in after multiple, failed change efforts. Innovative ideas may quickly be dismissed as impossible—or not surfaced at all—in the spirit of "that's just the way things are." On the other hand, new partners, not steeped in the system culture and history, often bring fresh eyes and energy for questioning the status quo.

> Their lack of system knowledge only served them well, because there was no point where somebody was like, "We can or can't do that because...," you know, or, "This is how it's always been." Or even things where somebody might say, "Oh, well, DELC would never allow that" or "The early learning system would never do that." One of the biggest surprises was how great it was to *not* have people who were experts on Spark. — System partner

Don't fret if community partners aren't expert on all the technical pieces

In turn, know that it's not necessary that community partners be familiar with the complex bureaucratic ins and outs of every relevant process—that's not their role. And even though it may feel more efficient, try to resist the temptation to jump to technical fixes; that typically results in tweaks to existing strategies and mechanisms rather than transformative change. Instead, systems partners advised being open to the opportunity to gain "outsider" insights that may prove transformative both to mindsets and to system structures and processes.

In this case, listening to communities across the state surfaced many big-picture issues well beyond the immediate scope of Spark. Spark itself might not be able to address all of the wide-ranging child care concerns shared by communities, but crucial themes emerged from the listening process that have served to ground and guide the Redesign process and recommendations.

> A big learning for me was understanding that it was not necessary to zoom in on the details at the beginning, but really to find out who shows up. Why are they showing up: for the group, or the listening session, or the survey, or whatever? And what do they care about? We got that. I didn't realize at the time the value of that, even though I was moved by what I heard, because we actually got exactly what we needed. — System partner

Build tolerance for uncertainty, flexibility and some risk-taking

Multiple system partners noted that the community-based co-design process required a more flexible mindset and greater than usual tolerance for ambiguity. Many spoke



Spark Accountability Team Members

of coming into the process with an expectation for a linear progression, only to realize this was something different. As a result, some initially experienced the process as disorienting or stressful, especially given the pressure they felt to deliver results. Ultimately, however, system partners said they realized playing it by ear was a natural and necessary part of the process:

> I recognize now the value of coming in without expectations for how it will go. There may be lots of apparent detours that turn out to actually be very important. We have to do that deep listening and be open to considering different perspectives and possibilities. — System partner

> It can be ambiguous, confusing. You need to be open to some risk-taking too; let's just try it out and see if it works. It requires confidence and a flexible mindset, as well as resilience. — System partner

> I realized that I have to let it be what it is, and just be present and be ready to catch it. — System partner

Leverage expertise and resources in the service of community

Of course, system partners said, technical expertise is also needed, but in the service of the priorities and strategies identified by the community. In other words, community leaders hold the vision and desired outcomes, while system partners use their technical know-how to figure out how to get it done. Multiple system partners shared some version of this orientation and approach:

> Then use your expertise to help make that happen. Making space for community doesn't mean that you're not needed or being dismissed or that your expertise doesn't count. — System partner

> It was on us to start taking their vision and principles and make them concrete. — System partner

> Everyone brought an orientation of "we are here to serve you, not to tell you what's best and what to do." That's what true "customer service" looks like. — System partner

Even for the more technical pieces, however, systems partners said it was important to include community partners in review and feedback on any new products and processes, as a basic check on the system and accountability measure.

Believe that transformative change is possible

System partners shared palpable excitement and hopes for new Spark, reflecting that there were many aspects of "old Spark" that never felt quite right to them either.

> What even is the point of doing the star ratings if people don't want to participate and have to be told to do it? — System partner

> Programs literally can't ask for help for fear of getting in trouble. It's totally wrong-headed. — System partner

They shared tremendous gratitude for the opportunity to right some wrongs and co-create a genuinely affirming and growth-oriented system of supports for providers moving forward.

> Did we really mean to encourage a sense of failure, of being misunderstood? To cause harm, to keep people out? To make people feel angry and resentful, like they don't want to be in our system? We once got feedback from a Spark participant after reviewing her portfolio: she said, "You people told me I was garbage." Certainly wasn't the intention—we all felt horrible. — System partner

> We're not talking about making widgets here, or whatever is the thing people say. It's all the more reason, I think, to treat this with tremendous care, and—for the people that come to us—to really let them know, "We want to know what's important to you, and now it's also important to me." — System partner

> This is more likely to keep kids safe than shaming, hiding. — System partner

> I think people feeling safe enough to engage and bring their ideas and beliefs to the table is what will pave the way for good things to happen. — System partner

> I think folks are going to come to far more insight and change—or openness to different perspectives—in that nonjudgmental, safe space where they're engaged with people. — System partner

> Safe relationships, safe engagement—that opens up all the possibilities in the world, and that's what's gonna help people do the transformative things with kids and families that they want to do. And also make people maybe like their work again. — System partner

> It's going to make their skills shine like never before. — System partner

"Refocusing Spark on engagement, self-reflection and support not only feels like the right thing to do … but the most effective way to facilitate great and responsive early education, development, and care."

— System partners

Hopes and fears for New Spark

Both community and system partners are optimistic about moving forward with the Redesign recommendations—and it's already happening! Old processes and structures are currently sunsetting while new ones are being initiated and piloted. Many community participants said that it feels like the system is "really listening for the first time," and that their efforts will have a real impact—maybe even serving as an example not just for Oregon, but also for other states.

Participants understand that implementation is likely to take some time and involve some bureaucratic complexities; there will likely need to be adjustments along the way, and some of the most aspirational recommendations may not be feasible—at least not right away. In particular, there may be some regulatory issues that prove especially tricky to navigate.

> [Though participating in the AT], I also gained insight on how systems are built and the challenges of policy changes. It takes time. The idea of system evolution makes sense; it resonates with me. Changes take time, especially a big change like that, where we are trying to welcome everybody and make sure everybody has all the qualifications and everything that they need, and that they are heard and understood. We know it's a long process. — Accountability Team member

The beauty of the iterative, pilot-driven approach to implementation is that the system can learn and grow over time. Most of all, both community and system partners expressed a deep sense of accountability to families and providers and the need to keep reaching out for feedback and any needed corrections or improvements.

> At the end of this process, it's always a human enterprise. We will continue to do better every day. We know in a year, we'll realize, "Oh, what we thought wasn't right on this." But we always can continue to perfect—make it perfect and more perfect. So I have hope; I have hope big time. I think we are on the right track on this. — Accountability Team member

> I would like people to understand that the Accountability Team is here to make sure that the Redesign stays true to its goal, which is equity, transparency, and community involvement. And I think that our job is to hold the process accountable to those voices, with priority to the families and the teachers, providers, and the members of the community—especially the ones that have been usually left out from the decision-making process. — Accountability Team member

On the flip side, participants expressed some concerns, knowing that transformative change is always challenging and vulnerable to changes in leadership and political climate. Concerns shared included:

- ✓ How much decision-making power does the AT really have?
- ✓ Do the highest levels of state leadership support the Redesign, or is there a chance the work could be shut down?
- ✓ What might the current political climate mean for the Redesign? Will it still be perceived as aligned with DELC's priorities?
- ✓ Will Spark be adequately funded and staffed to actually implement the Redesign?

Participants would also like policymakers and all Oregonians to recognize that New Spark itself can't address all the challenges facing early learning or families and providers. It's one relatively small part of a much larger child care system that is widely understood to be broken.

Still, community and system partners believe it's a big step in the right direction and hope it will serve as a model for other parts of the child care system in Oregon to become more inclusive and respectful of families and providers.

Words of wisdom from the Spark Accountability Team

For public agencies looking to partner with communities

- ✓ Build as diverse a team as possible across roles, cultural groups, language, geography, etc. We need everybody's perspectives at the table to do the best problem-solving.
- ✓ Create accessible and inclusive spaces to support participation.
- ✓ Treat everybody with respect and dignity; recognize their expertise and leadership.
- ✓ Take the time to build authentic relationships.
- ✓ Compensate people for their time and work.
- ✓ Provide baseline foundational training/information for participants. Don't assume folks know something just because they're not asking or speaking up—they may be embarrassed. People need to be able to ask honest questions and not worry about slowing down the process.
- ✓ Be transparent and share information throughout the process, including about constraints.
- ✓ Don't make assumptions you know what communities need; actually listen to and believe people's experiences.
- ✓ Expect the process to take longer than you think.
- ✓ Circle back with communities, and let them know what's going on/what's been decided. Don't be extractive about data collection.
- ✓ Use the example of the Spark Redesign to inform future community partnerships.

For other potential community participants in co-design processes

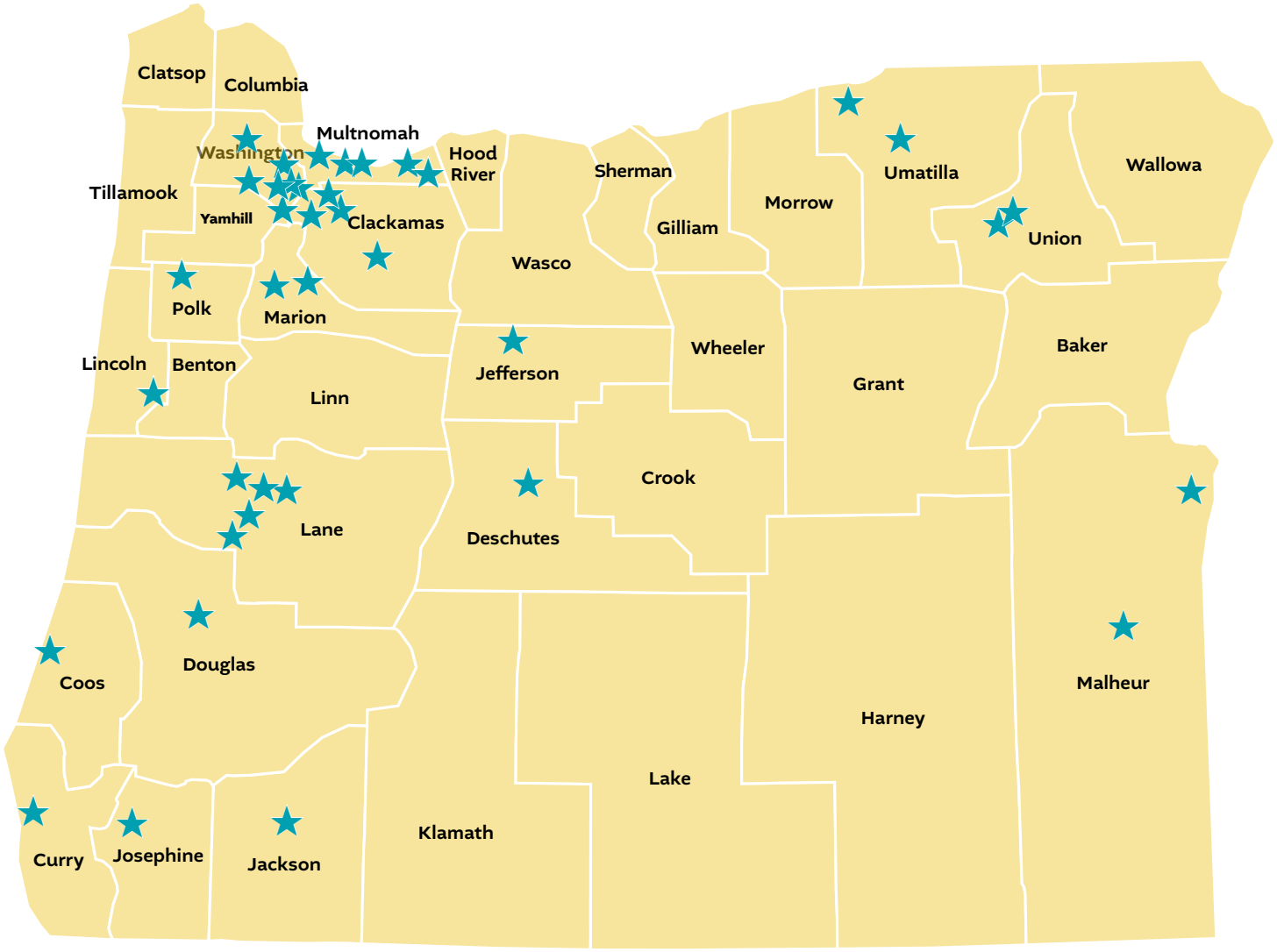
- ✓ All communities need to be represented and have a say in what happens.
- ✓ Meaningful change depends on people getting actively involved and committing to the process.
- ✓ Your own participation is really important. If you think you don't belong in the room, it's probably extra important that you be there.
- ✓ Make the time for this important life work. You won't regret it!
- ✓ Encourage your friends, family and colleagues to get involved too. The more voices, the better.

For all partners in community-driven processes

- ✓ You're going to have some uncomfortable feelings. You may experience fear, a sense of vulnerability. Try to embrace that.
- ✓ Recognize that the process will take time and that significant change doesn't happen quickly or easily; it requires patience.
- ✓ You will feel a sense of pride and fulfillment from being part of a process to improve the system for everybody and truly make a difference.
- ✓ Expect the journey to be personally meaningful as well, and to grow and change in the process.

Statewide Engagement

NOTE: Stars represent Listening and/or Accountability Team members. These teams conducted an extensive statewide engagement campaign seeking input from families, providers, DELC staff and system partners. Approximately 2,600 people were engaged in interviews, focus groups and surveys through these efforts.





What does the Spark Redesign mean for you—and what can you do?

- ✓ Learn more about Spark! https://oregonspark.org
- ✓ Meet the members of the Accountability team: https://oregonspark.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Acct.-Team-Bios__English.pdf
- ✓ Take a look at the Redesign recommendations here: https://oregonspark.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Spark-High-Level-Design-Concept-Presentation.pdf
- ✓ Or watch a presentation about the Recommendations here: https://wou-edu.zoom.us/rec/play/d__mowéTkTN6XJfK07B8gE1xTU3XIcr4cwt2dpvBoWTcQ1E-UyUEYe2KWDTMhNyN-W-822DZBwoUKRj9a.knFzgc__TVa-4mX8Y
- ✓ Reach out to Spark staff for a conversation about how this might affect you and opportunities to participate in Spark Redesign pilot projects: 877-768-8290.