

YES Spark Tank

Mentor handbook



YES Spark Tank

Kia ora and Welcome!

Thank you for joining us as a mentor for the YES Spark Tank event. Your time, expertise, and enthusiasm are what make events like this truly special. By sharing your insights, you are helping shape the next generation of entrepreneurs and leaders, empowering them to take their first steps into the world of business.

At the YES Spark Tank, you'll meet passionate, creative, and ambitious students who are eager to share their ideas and learn from your experience. Whether it's offering guidance, challenging assumptions, or simply listening and encouraging, your role as a mentor is pivotal in inspiring confidence and providing students with the tools, they need to grow their ideas into something extraordinary.

We also hope that this experience is as rewarding for you as it is for the students. It's a chance to connect with fresh talent, hear innovative perspectives, and make a meaningful impact in your community.

This guide is here to support you with everything you need to know for the event—what to expect, tips for mentoring, and how to make the most of your time with the students.

We're incredibly grateful for your support and can't wait to see the magic unfold as you connect with the next wave of changemakers.

**Ngā mihi nui,
Ian Musson
Head of YES**



Your role as a mentor

As a mentor you play a pivotal role in the YES Spark Tank by guiding and inspiring young entrepreneurs.

Your role is to...

- Listen: Provide a safe and supportive environment for students to share their ideas openly.
- Ask questions: Encourage students to think critically about their business ideas by asking them questions.
- Share expertise: Offer insights and advice based on their professional experience, helping students identify potential challenges and opportunities.
- Build Confidence: Celebrate their creativity and validate their efforts while encouraging them to consider ways to improve.
- Guide, Not Decide!

Tips & Tricks

Working with teenagers and young entrepreneurs can be a new experience for many of us. Below are some key tips to keep in mind as you prepare for the YES Spark Tank.

- Be Encouraging: Teenagers are at the start of their entrepreneurial journey. Highlight what they are doing well to build their confidence.
- Keep Feedback Actionable: Focus on specific, practical suggestions they can implement rather than overwhelming them with too much detail.
- Ask Open-Ended Questions: Encourage students to think deeper about their idea. For example, “who is your ideal customer?” or “What problem does your business solve?”
- Be Mindful of Tone: Deliver feedback in a way that’s constructive and positive. Avoid being overly critical or dismissive, as students are sharing ideas they care about deeply.
- Adapt to their level: Remember that these are teenagers exploring business for the first time. Avoid using jargon and keep your language accessible.
- Celebrate Their Effort: Acknowledge the bravery it takes to pitch an idea and emphasise how valuable the experience is.
- Keep the big picture in mind: While mentoring on specific challenges, help students to consider the broader context of their ideas, like market trends, customer needs, and long-term goals.

FAQ's

The Spark Tank event will be organised into small 'pods' or groups, with each pod consisting of a student business team. At each pod, there will be one or two spare seats reserved for mentors. To keep things moving smoothly, we ask that the students stay put in their groups while mentors rotate among the teams. This will allow you to meet a variety of students throughout the day and offer your expertise to different teams.

Timing

This is a speed mentoring event, so the clock will be ticking! The day will be structured into 10-minute mentoring sessions, followed by a brief change-over period.

It is not essential to prepare anything in advance. You will receive clear instructions and support on the day of the event. Students will come with a range of ideas, from those in the brainstorming phase to those with more developed concepts for you to guide, listen and share your insights.

Here's how it will work:

- The MC will invite mentors to find a student group.
- Once you're with your team, the timer starts!
- At the start of each round, we'll ask one student in each team to raise their hand if they're seeking input from a mentor.
- Around 8 minutes into the session, the MC will announce that there are 2 minutes remaining in the round.
- When the 10-minute session ends, students will be asked to thank the mentor, and you'll move on to another group.
- Over the course of the event, you'll have the chance to meet around 6 different teams.

Ongoing mentorship

A key part of the event allow students to find mentors who may be willing to support them throughout the year. If you enjoyed engaging with a particular team, and would like to offer them further mentorship, let the MC know. They will be happy to share your contact details with the team and facilitate a more formal introduction for continued support.

How to ask great questions and use supportive language

As a mentor, the way you frame your feedback and questions can have a significant impact on the students' confidence and creativity. By using encouraging, open-ended language, we can help students think critically about their ideas while feeling supported and motivated to take their next steps.

1) "I Love..."

Use this phrase to acknowledge what the student has done well. It helps build confidence and encourages positive reinforcement.

- *"I love how clear and passionate you are about your idea."*
- *"I love the creativity you've brought to this solution!"*

2) "I recommend..."

Use this when suggesting improvements or offering guidance. It's gentle and collaborative, positioning the mentor as a supportive advisor.

- *"I recommend thinking about how you can stream-line your business model to be more cost-effective"*
- *"I recommend testing your product with a small group to get feedback before you commit to this idea"*

3) "Have you considered..."

This is a great way to introduce new perspectives or challenges for the students to think about without being overbearing.

4) What if?

Use this to challenge assumptions or prompt critical thinking, encouraging students to consider alternative approaches.

5) "I wonder..."

A gentle way to provoke deeper thought and reflection, helping students think about gaps in their plan.

1) "What are your thoughts on..."

This open-ended question invites students to reflect on their own ideas and process, making them feel heard and respected

"What are your thoughts on making your pricing more competitive?"

7) "I'm curious..."

This phrase opens up a space for deeper exploration and allows students to expand on their ideas.

"I'm curious about how you plan to approach marketing."

8) "What are your thoughts on..."

This open-ended question invites students to reflect on their own ideas and process, making them feel heard and respected

"What are your thoughts on making your pricing more competitive?"

9) "It might help if..."

A soft, guiding suggestion for areas of improvement, phrased in a way that positions the mentor as a helpful advisor

"It might help if you clarify your value proposition."

10) "How might you..."

Encourage students to think about practical steps or solutions with a focus on actionable advice.

"How might you scale your idea to reach more customers?"

"How might you address challenges related to production and cost?"

