



INCLUSIVE PLAYSPACE DESIGN

PLANNING GUIDE



INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUNDS HELP BUILD COMMUNITIES.

Well-designed inclusive parks and playspaces welcome children of all abilities to play, learn and grow together. But did you know that their benefits extend even further?

UNIVERSAL DESIGN is a process that enables and empowers a diverse population by improving human performance, health and wellness, and social participation.

— *Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA Center), University of Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning*

WHY EMBRACE UNIVERSAL DESIGN? Because it benefits everyone regardless of condition. Applying Universal Design does not mean that all the fun and risk of a park and playground are eliminated. Instead, it helps to create a place where all can play, learn and grow together.

Inclusive playgrounds also allow adults of varying ages and abilities to actively engage with the children in their care. The playground thus becomes a truly multigenerational gathering space for community enjoyment, socialization, healthy bodies and imaginative fun.

This guide can help you create an inclusive playground unique to your community, from concept through installation and beyond.

OUR DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Landscape Structures creates inclusive playgrounds featuring activities that are age and developmentally appropriate, sensory stimulating and universally designed. Our design philosophy is influenced by the tenets of Universal Design, a theory of design that strives to make environments more usable, safer and healthier for all.

Our collaborative process engages your stakeholders, interprets community needs and ultimately results in a responsive design that reflects your vision. To this we apply our extensive experience with inclusive play, infused by our ongoing research into empirical evidence-based best practices.

This process creates a strong foundation for inclusive playground design, incorporating scientific findings into the play experiences themselves as well as the overall design.

PARTNER

Start by aligning yourself with like-minded community members.

1. BUILD A STRONG COMMITTEE.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS. Invite people associated with your neighborhood, school, park or city—to join. Be sure to include people with disabilities, as they will be able to contribute a great deal of valuable insight. A multigenerational committee will ensure that you are aware of everyone’s needs: kids, parents, grandparents, etc.

2. FORM SPECIALIZED TEAMS WITHIN YOUR COMMITTEE.

BUDGET/FUNDRAISING. The most important considerations are to be both realistic and complete. Once your budget is complete, estimate the portions of that budget that will likely be funded by the following sources:

- ___ % parks and rec
- ___ % city government
- ___ % private donations/fundraising
- ___ % foundation grants

PUBLICITY. Distribute information about the inclusive playground development process to the community through the press, special events, mailings and a website.

RESEARCH. Gather information on inclusive playgrounds and your community needs that you can use to support your efforts.

DESIGN. Collaborate with community members and city authorities to design the best inclusive playground for your site and specific purposes.

CONSTRUCTION/INSTALLATION. Coordinate volunteers for construction and installation duties.

3. START FUNDRAISING.

This can vary somewhat depending on the size and geography of your community, but here is a short list of proven sources.

INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTIONS. Parents, neighbors, churches and local businesses.

LOCAL AND STATE FOUNDATIONS. Grants from corporate foundations and local non-profit groups are an excellent source of capital for causes that benefit kids. Your parks and recreation department will also be able to tell you if your state offers recreation grants. Landscape Structures offers a helpful grant guide that can get you started.

CIVIC ORGANIZATIONS. Check with the Kiwanis, Jaycees, Rotary, Lions and Optimist chapters in your city. They often make donations for causes such as yours, and may even host fundraising events of their own on behalf of your playground.

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS. You can reduce the need for financial donations by raising in-kind donations for materials, labor, equipment and supplies. Perhaps a local landscaping company will contribute trees, shrubs and labor, or a printer will donate the printing of your fundraising flyers.

ACTIVITIES. One of the best sources of funding will come from fundraising events that your committee will host. Try to find several people at local schools or churches who have fundraising event experience and ask for their help. Consider events such as door-to-door solicitations, silent auctions, car washes, raffles, gift bricks, etc. Get creative and have fun!

EDUCATE

You don’t have to become an expert. Consult with them, instead.

1. ASK LANDSCAPE STRUCTURES.

Leverage our deep knowledge of inclusive play. We will apply our evidenced-based best practices and extensive design expertise to create the best play experiences for the most people.

2. CONNECT WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES.

When you include people with disabilities as part of your committee and/or planning process, you will glean real-world perspectives on everyday issues that typically-abled people do not routinely consider.

3. USE THIS INSIGHT TO DEFINE AND REFINE YOUR PROJECT.

Pair expert recommendations with the wishes of your community, and you’ve got a winning solution.





DESIGN: THE PLAYGROUND

Our extensive experience with inclusive play, blended with the philosophy of Universal Design, has resulted in a process that builds a strong foundation for inclusive playground design.

1. PLAY EXPERIENCE. Playgrounds can offer many opportunities for children to further develop physical, cognitive, sensory and social skills. An inclusive design includes a balance of play experiences to build all these skills.

SENSORY STIMULATION. All children are attracted to sensory activities. A sensory-rich inclusive play environment can bring children together while providing each one with the sensory experiences they seek.

Tip: Make a wide range of materials and textures available for touch—rough and smooth, hard and soft, warm and cool.

Tip: Natural elements such as sand and water or flowers and plants provide ever-changing multisensory experiences.

Tip: Interactive play panels captivate kids of all abilities with displays of color, moving objects and visually stimulating surfaces.

Tip: Color can sometimes generate strong responses for visually sensitive children; consider simple color schemes in more muted color tones and/or earth tones.

Tip: Include elements that offer strong visual contrast for children with low vision, especially to highlight sudden elevation changes.

Tip: Many children like to discover sound and enjoy their own musical creations, so consider incorporating music panels and instruments.

SWINGING, SPINNING AND SLIDING.

Most kids enjoy sliding, spinning/rotating and swinging. Besides being fun, these activities sharpen our internal senses—vestibular (awareness of how our body moves through space and against gravity) and proprioception (awareness of body position and how much force is needed for an activity).

SOCIAL/IMAGINATIVE. As children challenge themselves physically, they also learn how to manage joy and frustration, friendship and conflict, while developing their imagination and dramatic play skills. Whether engaged in parallel play, quiet play or active social play, an inclusive playground provides plenty of social and imaginative play opportunities for children.

Tip: Include a variety of gathering spots, some that can accommodate several children as well as cozy, quiet spaces for just a few.

2. VARIABILITY. This design intention meets a child's curiosity with developmentally appropriate challenge, building comfortably on the skills they already possess to help them gain new skills. By striking this balance and achieving a “just right fit,” children are encouraged to challenge themselves in ways that they can control and manage.

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE COGNITIVE AND PHYSICAL PLAY.

Kids learn by doing. Cognitive play can happen individually, in an interactive group, and in teaching moments between adults and children. And all kids benefit from physical activities such as balance and coordination, muscle strength and endurance, cardiovascular exercise and motor planning.

Tip: A playground can reinforce learning and enhance problem-solving skills with games, mazes, maps of the world, tracing panel and more.

Tip: To meet as many needs and skill levels as possible, consider including graduated levels of challenge, complex alternative routes, elements that encourage cross-lateral movement and a variety of developmentally appropriate risks.

LEFT:
Wabun Picnic Area,
Minnehaha Regional Park
Minneapolis, Minn.

FLEXIBILITY/OPTIONS. While many children readily flock to large playstructures, some feel more comfortable in smaller, cozier spaces.

Tip: Add ground-level activities to allow small groups to explore different play experiences at their own pace.

Tip: Include overhead events at different heights or create combinations of stepping forms and balance beams.

SELF DIRECTED. Empowering children to choose the activities that capture their interest puts them in charge, building confidence in their abilities and contributing to their self-esteem.

Tip: Offer a variety of equitable yet diverse options to accommodate the needs of the widest range of users, for example, install Saddle Spinners at different heights.

3. SAFETY, COMFORT AND ACCESS.

Creating a welcoming, safe and accessible environment is just as important as the play equipment you put in it. A well-designed environment makes the space more comfortable and user-friendly for children and families of all ages and abilities.

FENCING. A fence can help define and contain the activity area, providing a sense of comfort to both children and their parents.

Tip: Fencing can be purely functional, or incorporate a playground’s theme.

SIGNAGE. All people feel more comfortable when they have a better understanding of their surroundings.

Tip: Include signage that identifies accessible facilities, meeting spots and play areas by age group as well as amenities such as water and restrooms.

SHADE. Children’s tolerance levels of sun and heat vary greatly.

Tip: Plenty of shade is recommended over the playstructure—incorporate natural shade whenever available.

SEATING. Benches with backs and arm rests, tables and game tables may be strategically located around the play area (preferably in shaded areas) for supervision, resting and to promote multigenerational socialization.

PATHWAYS. Accessible pathways that transition between activity areas should be short and direct. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires a minimum 60-inch width—wide enough for a wheelchair and someone walking next to them.

Tip: Universal Design would recommend that you try to improve upon width and slope requirements whenever possible.

Tip: Like fencing, pathways can be thematic as well as functional.

RAMPS AND TRANSFER POINTS. Wheelchair-accessible ramps and transfer modules to higher play events/overlooks offer more equitable access and encourage interactive play among kids and adults of all abilities.

PROTECTIVE SURFACING. A truly inclusive playground should incorporate a unitary surface such as poured-in-place surfacing or rubber mats/tiles on the accessible routes.

Tip: Continue a theme in your surfacing design.











DESIGN: THE ENVIRONMENT

Make sure everyone can access your inclusive playground! The ideas behind Universal Design can help you go beyond basic regulations and truly make your entire park inclusive.

1. Parking.

Whenever possible, exceed the ADA minimum required parking spaces. Ideally, accessible parking should be scattered throughout the park, located near the activity areas where inclusive play happens, creating different access points in the park that can be used by all visitors.

2. Pathways.

Whenever room permits, try to exceed ADA width guidelines of 60-inches. Wider pathways allow for easier group access for all visitors while accommodating multiple wheeled devices like wheelchairs and strollers. Where available, try to improve upon slope requirements as well.

3. Restrooms.

If individuals with disabilities cannot access the public restrooms in a comfortable way, they will not come and use your park. A well-designed park will include accessible restrooms in close proximity to ball fields, playgrounds and activity areas. These restrooms should include at least one family restroom that is large enough to include a full-size changing table. This enables adults with disabilities to stay longer at the park, since they have the restroom supports that they need.

4. Public buildings.

All the principles of Universal Design should be considered in these buildings, including incorporating wider doorways into locker rooms and roll-in showers to accommodate users of varying abilities.

5. Pools/spray pads and water play areas.

When designing or renovating a pool or spray pad, consideration should be given to creating inclusive access points. The ADA requires a transfer lift, but Universal Design expands options to zero-depth entry design that allows visitors to walk or roll into the pool. For natural water features like a public lake or beach access, consider a variety of roll-up access mats, accessible beach chairs that can be used to take an individual with a disability into the water, and access to fishing docks.

PAGES 8 & 9:
Cooke School
Northfield, Mich.

LEFT:
River Banks Orchard Park
Hutchinson, Kan.

INSTALL

Installing the playground is an exciting step for the entire community because they get to see the playground come to life.

1. Community build.

A community build is a great way to involve everyone and create a sense of pride and ownership in the play area. Landscape Structures has a comprehensive Community Build Guide to walk you through the process all the way to the grand opening.

ENJOY

Start having fun!

1. Get the word out.

Just because it's built doesn't always mean people will come. Use publicity—newspaper, television and social media—to promote your inclusive playground. Drop off flyers at homes and schools throughout your community. Continue to host special events at the playground even well after the grand opening.

2. Maintenance.

Your playground should last for many years to come; regular inspections and proper maintenance will ensure it is safe and compliant. Landscape Structures customizes maintenance kits for each playstructure purchase. The cost and frequency of inspections and maintenance varies depending on the equipment and products you choose. Consult your Landscape Structures playground consultant for assistance. Retrofitting and adding to your play area in phases are great ways to update and add equipment to your play area over time.







LANDSCAPE STRUCTURES IS THE LEADER IN INCLUSIVE AND SENSORY PLAY

Since the development of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we have been a leader in creating playground designs and events that go beyond minimum requirements. Our innovative and thoughtful playground equipment invites all children to play together. Today we remain steadfast in our ongoing commitment to create playgrounds that strive to attain a Higher Level of Inclusive Play™.

There are more than 75,000 Landscape Structures playgrounds throughout the world. Our founder, Steve King, played a pivotal role in adapting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for play areas. The resulting guidelines were adopted as best practices in 2000 and finally signed into law in 2010.

To learn more about our pioneering initiatives, please visit playlsi.com/inclusive-play.

PARTNERSHIPS

We work with the following partners because we believe in what they are doing to create equality through play.

- Shane's Inspiration
- The Miracle League®
- The Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD) Foundation and its sister organization, the STAR (Sensory Therapies and Research) Center
- Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access (IDeA Center), University of Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning Committed to Ongoing Research

COMMITTED TO ONGOING RESEARCH

Landscape Structures has always been committed to ongoing research around play. Recently this has been taken to a higher level with a collaboration with the STAR Center and the SPD Foundation, drawing on their unparalleled experience and progressive knowledge to truly understand the developmental benefits children gain while playing on inclusive playground equipment.

INCLUSIVE PLAY ADVISORY BOARD

We have gathered a team of experts in the fields of child development, adaptive recreation, sensory play and occupational therapy. Additionally, parents of children with disabilities are some of our most valuable advisory board members. Collectively their input ensures that we continue to advance the inclusive and sensory play movement by creating playgrounds that address accessibility, age and developmentally appropriate play activities, as well as sensory play.

CEU credits

We are pleased to offer our educational seminars to parks and recreation professionals and landscape architects. As an accredited provider of continuing education from the International Association for Continuous Education and Training (IACET) and the Landscape Architecture Continuing Education System™ (LACES), we're able to offer professionals continuing education credits.

Arrange to host one of our Learning Academy sessions at your local conferences, your office over lunch or during a PLAY Tour of our corporate headquarters in Delano, Minn.

www.playlsi.com/en/education



Landscape Architecture
Continuing Education System™







Since 1971, Landscape Structures Inc. has been the leading manufacturer of commercial playground equipment in the world. Our employee-owned company designs community and school playgrounds that encourage kids of all ages and abilities to learn persistence, leadership, competition, bravery, support and empathy through play. We push the limits—of design, inclusion, play—to help kids realize there is no limit to what they can do today and in the future. For a better tomorrow, we play today.

Landscape Structures is the leader in Inclusive and Sensory Play. Our innovative and thoughtful playground equipment invites all children to play together. To learn more about our pioneering initiatives, please visit playlsi.com/inclusive-play.

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