

# THE PLAY EVERYWHERE PLAYBOOK

Turning spaces into PLAYces



play matters for all kids



SQUAT  
30 TIMES



LEAP  
SIDE T  
30



*Keep going!*

LEAP

# WHY PLAY EVERYWHERE?

# 16 MILLION.

Did you know that there are 16 million kids living in poverty, who don't get the play they need to be healthy, stimulate their minds, or just have fun?

## **16 million.**

You know what else? They're not in some far-off country you only hear about in the news; they're right here in the United States. And, they need play. We've got the data to back it up, like the *Facts for Life* from the United Nations that concluded that playing "lays the foundation for a child's development of future learning and life skills." Every kid needs play to succeed, but today's kids—especially the ones who need it most—are playing less than ever.

With your help, we can right this wrong. How do we enable parents and caregivers to include more active and creative play in their kids' daily activities? The playground is a great start, and we need more opportunities for play. For so many families, the struggles of daily life make playing with kids an overwhelming challenge.

## **We've got to get creative and bring play to unexpected places.**

What would you do to make a sidewalk or the bare-brick side of a building more fun? What about the old phone booth on the corner, or the neighborhood bus stop kiosk? We call it **play everywhere**, and call upon everyone from individual citizens to community organizations to city leaders to bring play everywhere ideas to life.

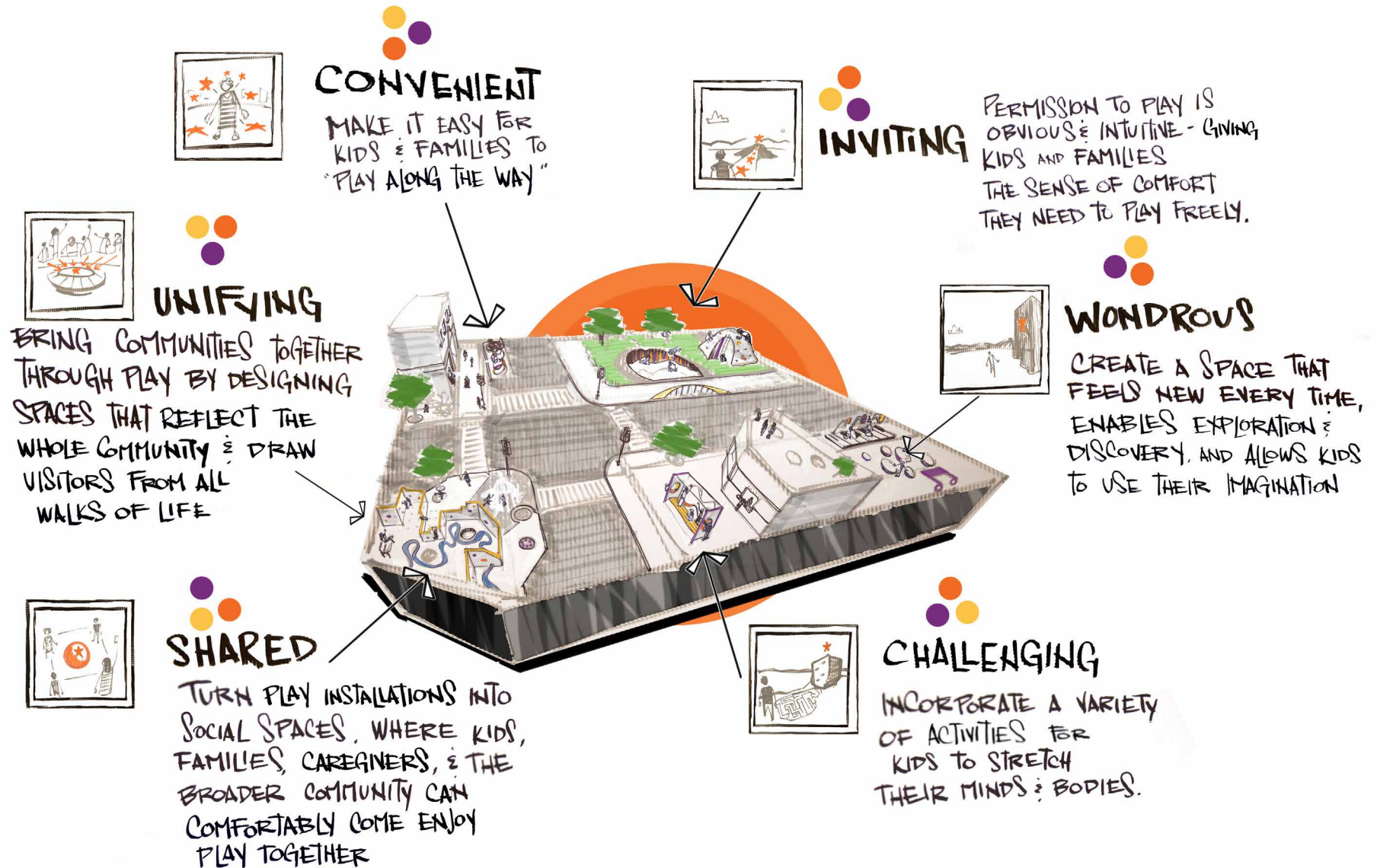
We brought together a team of city planners, designers, policymakers, kids, and kid-centric experts to develop **guiding principles for turning everyday spaces into PLAYces**, to ensure that they meet the needs of kids, communities, and the types of playspaces that work.

*The Play Everywhere Playbook reflects the insights and contributions of over 50 experts representing organizations across the country. For a complete list, see page 11.*

*So, are you ready to make your big play?*

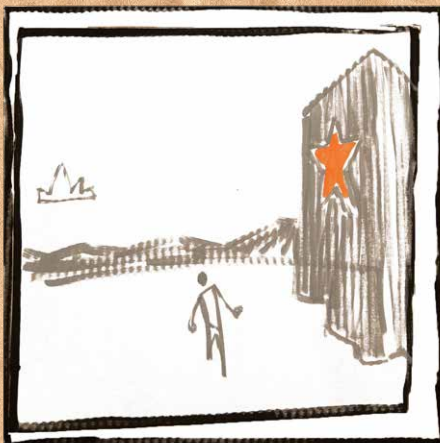


# Every day spaces become PLAYces when they are...





# WONDEROUS



*What about your space enables exploration and discovery, allows kids to use their imagination, and feels new every time?*

Kids find magic in ordinary places, and they're eager to unravel life's mysteries. That unique perspective is infectious, allowing families and caregivers to also see things with fresh eyes.

Play is an opportunity to nurture this curiosity.

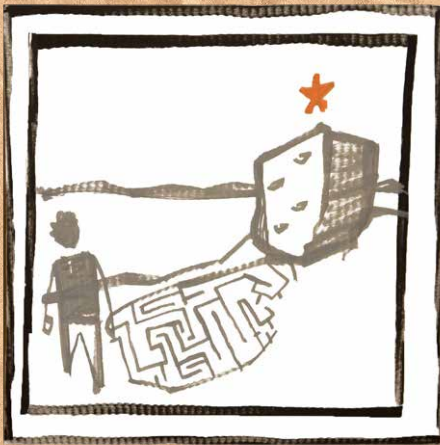
In your idea, aim to **surprise, delight, or intrigue**. Give kids the urge to explore. Think of ways to **engage multiple senses**—can you bring in a burst of color, or the crunch of autumn leaves? Remember that play has the potential to make people more aware of where they are in the world—so envision each visit as a chance to reveal something new about your space. Is there anything that you want people to see or re-play? Leave some prompts, but also let imaginations run wild. Some of the best stories are ones that kids and families dream up on their own.

?

- What are some everyday spaces that you would like people to see in a new light? How can play help do that?
- What is something you find surprising, awe-inspiring, or intriguing? What makes it that way? Can you recreate that experience?
- Which of the five senses does your play installation activate? How?
- How might a kid play differently with your play installation on his/her next visit? Or the visit after that?



# CHALLENGING



*How will your idea help kids of all ages and abilities exercise their bodies and their minds?*

## **Kids need challenges to grow and develop.**

By moving beyond their comfort zone, kids learn to overcome doubts, test their abilities, and evaluate risks. But these opportunities are often hard to find for kids.

**Loading a play installation with challenges** is a great break from the typical routine for kids. These challenges can come in many forms—physical, mental, or a combination of the two. Whether your space invites kids to jump higher or think harder, strive to create those “a-ha!” moments when kids take what feels like a risk and realize they’re capable of more than they’d believed.

When designing your space, leave enough flexibility so that kids of **different ages and abilities** can find their own challenges within it. Let kids set the bar for what they want to accomplish—so that their play stays fresh and exciting.

?

- What is a physical or mental feat you were proud of as a kid? Why was it exciting for you? How can you re-create that feeling for kids using your play installation?
- How are you balancing risk with safety? Can you create the feeling of risk while minimizing real danger?
- Would kids of varying ages and abilities find your play installation challenging?





# CONVENIENT



*What about your idea  
will make it easy for  
kids and families to  
“play along the way”?*

Kids and families lead hectic lives. Between work, errands, and long commutes, the list of to-do's can feel endless, making it **easy for families to lose sight of the need for play**. When they do consider play, even the idea of a dedicated trip to a play destination can seem stressful. Families might lack reliable transit options, or simply feel pressed for time.

What if these families could “play along the way”? What if people could have more chances to play as they went about their daily lives? To create this experience, think of how you can **integrate your play idea into a family's travel time, or down time** at the laundromat, or while shopping.

Think about how you could transform moments of stress or frustration into moments of play-filled joy. Be mindful of kids, but don't lose sight of those who actually take kids to play. Your choice of location will be key, but the design of your play activity is just as important. Consider the time, preparation, and supervision your play installation demands. Make it **easy for kids and families to engage—but also to disengage**—so that the decision to play feels truly effortless.



- *Where do kids and families spend their time? Where is a place they already go that's safe and inviting? Can you add play to it?*
- *What are kids and families doing before and after they engage with your play installation? How well does your play installation fit into this journey?*
- *How much time would someone need to engage with your play installation? Do they need to prepare or bring supplies?*
- *Is there something for a caregiver to do while the kids play? Will it be easy or convenient for the caregiver to let the kids play?*



# INVITING



*How does your idea make permission to play obvious, intuitive, safe, and comfortable for kids and their caregivers?*

When you think about it, most places in the world aren't intended for kids, so that's even more reason to create a space where the **invitation to play rings loud and clear**. Think about putting your play installation somewhere kids and families can let go, and be free of everyday worries. They need to feel welcome and safe, and know that they won't be interrupted, scowled at, or shooed away.

Signs can explicitly communicate this message, but also think of the **unwritten cues** you're leaving and how they'll be interpreted—kids often have an instinctual sense of what's meant for play or not. So consider how to invite through design, which can speak louder than signage. Is there a gate that needs to be unlocked? Are there other kids around, or is the space dominated by adults? Is the space protected from traffic and well-lit; does it feel safe and comfortable? Make design choices that inspire comfort and confidence for kids and families. Erase doubts.

Let people know **it's definitely okay to play**.

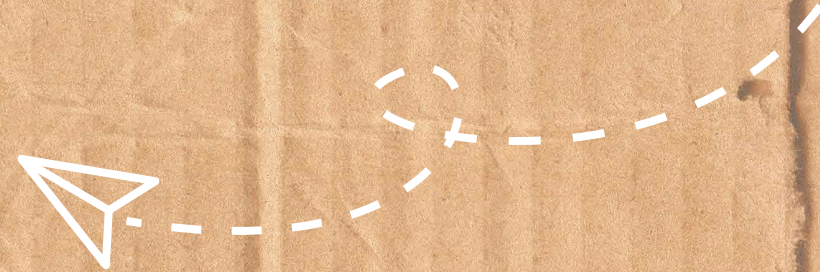


- *How have you designed your play installation to make it clear that it is intended for kids to play?*
- *Who visits or is likely to visit your play installation? What message does that give kids and families about whether this is a place to play?*
- *Are there physical barriers around your play installation? What about the design invites people to play?*
- *Have you selected an inviting location?*





# SHARED



*How can your play installation act as a social space where kids, families, caregivers, and the broader community can comfortably come enjoy play together?*

Think of your childhood best friend—how much of that bond came from moments of play? Consider that your personal proof that play has the extraordinary potential to **spark new friendships, strengthen existing ties, and build stronger communities**. Play installations can give kids the chance to come together and **foster shared experiences**.

Think of the ways your space brings kids together, and the impact that will have. Is this where they'll learn to collaborate and build empathy? Will they leave with memories that encourage connecting with others?

At the same time, parents and other caregivers are the gatekeepers of play. Will they be comfortable and engaged at your play installation? If yes, they'll be more eager to bring kids to play there. Consider ways you can accommodate caregivers, either in play or by giving them a chance to be social. Add features that can appeal to all ages and abilities. As a gathering place, the space will create a sense of community and safety—and keep families coming back for more.

?

- Does your play installation have an appropriate mix of independent and social play?
- What kinds of social interactions are you creating? What impact will these have on kids, families, caregivers, and the broader community?
- What would kids of varying ages and abilities do together at your play installation? What about adults?



# UNIFYING



*How does your space reflect the whole community and draw visitors from all walks of life?*

**Play has the power to bring people together**, but public spaces can unintentionally exclude in ways that disproportionately affect kids growing up in poverty. A family may arrive at a park and realize nobody looks like them. Moments like these make people feel like they don't belong, leaving spaces unvisited and unused.

Recognize this, and consider how your playspace can **encourage new connections across the community**. Create a play installation that **reflects your community in its entirety**—with its diversity, character, and history. Draw in visitors from all walks of life, and encourage them to engage with and learn from each other. When kids forge friendships across cultures or other divides, families and groups can grow closer as well. Facilitate this “coming together”. When your play installation has a shared sense of community, it feels safer and warmer as well.

It helps to choose a location that's out in the open and easily accessible—closed gates and unspoken rules can deter potential visitors. Reflect on the history of your chosen location and who visits and who doesn't.



- *Where are you situating your play installation? Are there any rules (formal or informal) about who is or isn't allowed there? How will that affect who visits it?*
- *Would all groups within your community find your play installation culturally relevant? Does your playspace evoke the history and character of the community?*
- *Does the space create opportunities for different age groups and cultures to socialize?*
- *Who is likely to come to your play installation? How do you want them to engage with each other?*



# PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

*How do you bring your idea to life?*

## Start with the community

The best projects often come from within. So, talk to kids and families in your community. Find out how they play, as well as how they move through their daily lives. What do they find convenient, inviting, or inclusive? Understand their needs, habits, and challenges, and identify a problem you want to solve. At this point, engage in conversations with community groups, nonprofits, and local government, too. They may have a perspective on the issue and ideas for potential solutions.



## Build on what exists

When possible, don't start from scratch. What does the community already have that can support your play idea? Is there an underused feature in the built environment? Or a community group with the time, resources, or connections to bring your idea to life? By keeping installations affordable and low-maintenance, you'll increase your odds of success—and enable replication by a range of communities, supporting our vision of inclusive play.

## Find early champions

Who within the community can help build or sustain your project? Find people who have access to the permissions, materials, funding, or other support you'll need, and get them on board early. A city government contact is often helpful; community organizations and businesses can also serve as your project's hosts, funders, or stewards. When building these relationships, communicate your project vision and focus on finding shared priorities.

## Co-create

Involve your community partners throughout the creative process. Test your ideas with kids and families early and often, and adapt your approach based on their feedback. Consider building a prototype or pilot to see how people react. Getting the right people to design with you will lead to ideas that are truly inclusive and reflective of the community.





## Embrace change and flexibility

What you end up building may not look like the idea you had on day one. That's normal—and often good! Plans will evolve based on feedback you get from the community. You may also need to change your approach when faced with barriers—perhaps to clear a liability concern, or to convince a new partner. Focus on what is essential to the impact you are trying to create for kids, families, and your community, and be flexible on the rest. Plus, there's always room for bigger and better next time.

## Think long-term

Anticipate issues you'll face down the line and factor them into your initial planning. Who will handle maintenance and how much will it cost? Will you want to replicate this installation someday? By confronting these questions early on, you'll start devising creative solutions that can strengthen the long-term viability of your project.



## Find owners

Encourage members of the community to take ownership of the installation. Try to secure this commitment prior to your build. Identifying a "host" who is responsible for maintenance can help ensure the space you've created remains as inviting and enlivening as you intended. Informal, collective efforts—such as a neighborhood watch or community policing—can also make a difference.

## Build community

Turn your installation into a community destination. Engage individuals and groups through events and community-led programming, which can unify the neighborhood and help people experience your play installation in new ways. But make sure the energy doesn't fade after the events are over. Aim to transform kids and families into loyalists who will keep returning and spread the word to others.

## Measure individual and collective impact

Play is both a personal and social experience. In your measurement, capture how individual kids and families are responding, as well as how the broader community is evolving. Are kids and families using your play installation in the way you envisioned? Are there changes in how different groups interact with each other? Has your work affected local businesses? Draw on these observations to identify future changes, and to communicate your installation's impact to relevant stakeholders.





## *Many thanks to those who provided their insight and expertise for this Playbook:*

Keith Benjamin, *Community Partnerships Manager, Safe Routes to School National Partnership*

Mark Benzel, *Senior Business Partner, Target*

Ray Boyle, *Co-Founder, Our City*

Raabia Budhwani, *Innovation Program Manager, Office of International and Philanthropic Innovation, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

Kevin Bush, *Resilience Team Lead, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

Bradley Calvert, *Community Development Program Manager, City of Bellevue, Washington*

Katryna Carter, *Design Consultant, National Endowment for the Arts*

Kris Carter, *Co-Chair, Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, City of Boston*

Wylie Chen, *Vice President, Programs and Grants, U.S. Soccer Foundation*

Martin Dubroff, *Community Planning & Development Specialist, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

Jason Ellis, *Director of Resident and Community Services, Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority*

Joanna Frank, *Executive Director, Center for Active Design*

Cynthia Gentry, *Founding Director, Play Atlanta*

Greg Harrison, *Chief Marketing Officer, Playworld*

Michael Laris, *Chief Product Officer, Playworld*

Jennifer Leonard, *INSPIRE Program Manager, City of Baltimore, Department of Planning*

Erin Lonoff, *Senior Analyst, HR&A Advisors*

Elizabeth Marley, *Senior Designer, MoreLab*

Danielle Marshall, *Executive Director, Playworks Maryland*

Tre Maxie, *Director of Youth & Engagement, Aspen Institute*

Marion McFadden, *Deputy Assistant Secretary for Grant Programs, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*

Beth Miller, *Executive Director, Community Design Collaborative*

Emily Munroe, *Executive Director, 8 80 Cities*

Michael Painter, *Senior Program Officer, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation*

Ian Proud, *Marketing Research & Inclusive Play Manager, Playworld*

Anil Rathi, *Chief Executive Officer & Founder, Skild*

DJ Saul, *Chief Marketing Officer & Managing Director, iStrategyLabs*

Jason Schupbach, *Director of Design Programs, National Endowment for the Arts*

Craig Seacotte, *Manager of Healthy Living Initiatives, Corporate Social Responsibility, Target*

Jennifer Silberman, *Vice President, Target*

Carolyn Sponza, *Studio Director / Senior Master Planner, Gensler*

Cori Strathmeyer, *Director of Healthy Living, YMCA of York and York County*

Ryan Swanson, *Executive Director, The Urban Conga*

Tracey Turner, *Program Associate, Living Cities*

Brad Wagner, *Manager of Healthy Living Initiatives, Corporate Social Responsibility, Target*

Tom Warshauer, *Assistant Director of Community Engagement, City of Charlotte, Neighborhood & Business Services*

Sarah Welch, *Senior Associate, ideas42*

Stacie West, *Director of Parks Projects, NoMa Parks Foundation*

Philip Winn, *Vice President, Project for Public Spaces*



*Funding support provided by*



*Strategic support provided by*







**play matters for all kids**

*KaBOOM! is the national non-profit dedicated to giving all kids—particularly those growing up in poverty in America—the childhood they deserve filled with balanced and active play, so they can thrive. Since 1996, KaBOOM! has collaborated with partners to build, open or improve nearly 16,300 playgrounds, engaged more than one million volunteers and served 8.1 million kids. KaBOOM! creates great places to play, inspires communities to promote and support play, and works to drive the national discussion about the importance of play in fostering healthy and productive lives. To learn why #playmatters and why cities are embracing #playability: visit [kaboom.org](http://kaboom.org) or join the conversation at [twitter.com/kaboom](https://twitter.com/kaboom) or [facebook.com/kaboom](https://facebook.com/kaboom).*





**[kaboom.org](http://kaboom.org)**