

# We all have a role to play — what's yours?

Depending on where you sit in the life cycle of play space or skatepark development, there are a range of lessons learned from this study that can inform your approach.



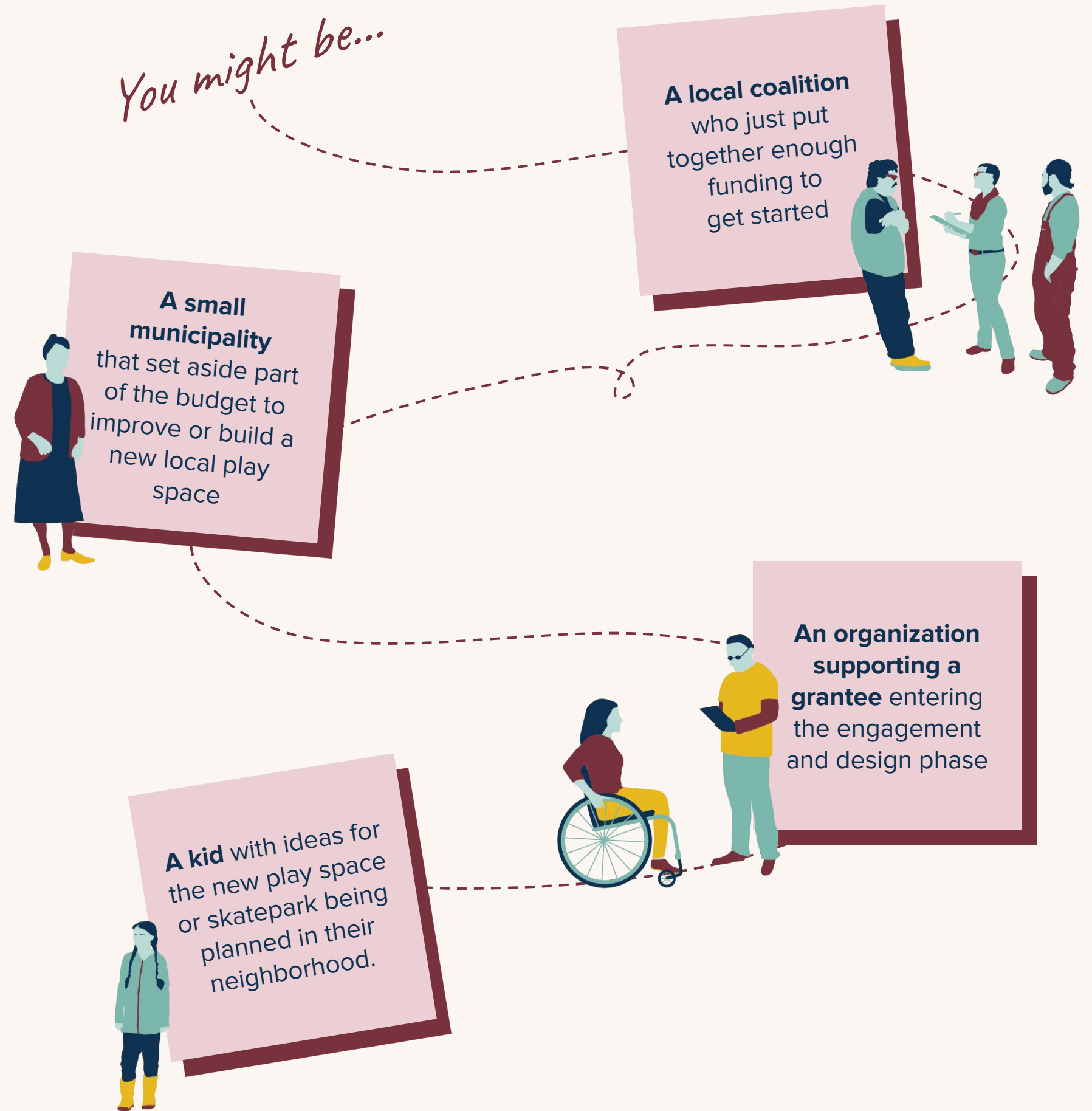
# Let's ... Design the Space

You have the community and financial support to create a new play space or skatepark. Now it's time to imagine what it will look like and how it will function.



←  
**You might relate to someone like Kate Litwin**, Howell Main Street Chief Operating Officer and Howell DDA Director, who had a back-of-the-napkin sketch for a whimsical play space and worked closely with landscape architects, KABOOM!, and community partners to bring Howell Summit Gardens to life.

*You might be...*



Design the Space | **Select a Site**

# Strategies for **site selection, engagement, and design**

The Fasset GreenSpace Project was built on a previously abandoned site in Wellsville, NY's Main Street to bring foot traffic to the area. Today, the Village cites it in applications for economic grant funding as an exemplar of communal gathering and play. →



PHOTO: COURTESY OF ART FOR RURAL AMERICA

## Locate play spaces near where residents already spend time, and with access in mind.

Spaces that are located within walking or biking distance of schools, senior centers, or residential areas encourage active mobility and maintain visitorship.

- ★ Built to Play projects were conveniently located to encourage active mobility: 34% of visitors reported walking and 12% reported biking to the sites, in areas where 75-90% of all travel is by car.
- ★ Howell Summit Gardens was sited in the main street's "Social District" so that adults could keep an eye on their kids with a drink in hand.

## Cluster spaces with different types of play for multiple ages and visitor groups.

Locating spaces that give kids of different ages opportunities to be physically active near each other allows families or groups with multiple age groups to all find something to keep them engaged.

- ★ Play spaces and skateparks play complementary roles in fostering diversity and social connection — siting them near each other can promote cross-pollination between the two.
- ★ Chandler Park Skatepark was located by a playground and sports fields, allowing for complementary physical activities — kids reported visiting the skatepark after sports games, or while their friends and siblings playing at these other spaces nearby.

## Improve existing community sites that need more love, instead of starting from scratch.

Spaces that build on or lend visibility to an existing asset in the neighborhood may get neighbors on board faster and tap into an existing visitor group.

- ★ At Springville Skatepark in Western New York, project leads rallied neighbors around a common concern for the state of the previous run-down skateplex. The site was a "flag in the ground" that helped people envision an improvement to the space that addressed not only noise and safety concerns, but provided a much-needed space for teens to spend time.

Design the Space | Engage Local Communities

# Strategies for site selection, engagement, and design

Community engagement events held with kids for Serpentine Nooks in Orleans County, NY were hosted by the design team at a local school. →



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LYNDONVILLE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## Tap into and compensate trusted local advocates.

Play space development efforts can reach more people and more regular visitors if they are done in partnership with well-networked, trusted community leaders that have built relationships over time.

- ★ Respondents who heard about the play space over social media tend to visit less frequently versus those who heard about it by word of mouth.

## Meet people where they are.

Engagement that takes place at existing community spaces where key end users already spend time are effective in building trust. This also helps overcome barriers to participating in typical engagement events.

- ★ Stein Park playground in Detroit, MI held engagement sessions with KABOOM! at the local high school adjacent to the site of the future play space. This allowed KABOOM! to provide technical expertise in a non-threatening environment for local kids and teens.

## Bring girls more intentionally into the engagement process.

Explicitly engage and create visible opportunities for girls to guide the design process – due to their history of exclusion in play and recreational spaces.

- ★ Teenage girls are underrepresented in play spaces and skateparks – with the latter experiencing a bigger gender gap across all age groups.
- ★ [Make Space for Girls](#) is a U.K. organization advocating for designing with teenage girls in mind; reference their collection of resources and tips for engaging this group.

## Continue engaging after opening — especially in marginalized communities.

When investing in communities that have experienced disinvestment, use ongoing activation to ensure their representation in the life of the space.

- ★ Chandler Park Skatepark offers skateboarding lessons and equipment to local kids from the surrounding, predominantly Black neighborhood – creating a pipeline of young Black skaters.
- ★ BIPOC and low-income respondents in Built to Play spaces were more likely to report making friends at the spaces than their counterparts – use social ties to drive visits to the space.

Design the Space | Design the Site

# Strategies for site selection, engagement, and design

The adventure course in Highland Avenue Park Playground in Salamanca, NY fosters informal competition and challenging play between teens. It also provides exercise opportunities for adults, such as a UPS worker who uses the equipment on break.→



## Invest more in designs that encourage innovative, challenging play.

Play spaces that allow kids to experience perceived risk are not only popular with kids, but are proven to contribute to healthy child development.

- ★ Of 13 play space project leads that reported which features were most popular with kids, the greatest number (5) cited challenging play elements (e.g., ziplines, climbing structures).
- ★ Previous studies show that challenging play improves socialization, problem-solving, focus, self-regulation, creativity and self-confidence, and reduces stress, boredom and injury.

## Design for diversity of users, including multiple ages, skill levels, and abilities.

Include play equipment that caters to beginners, people with disabilities, and those looking for general exercise into the design of play spaces.

- ★ MLK Jr. Park Playground set an example for the rest of the city of Buffalo when focusing on ensuring the playground had universal access. “Folks will comment just to say how much they appreciate (...) being able to bring children with special needs to the site when in the past they would have to drive,” says a staff member from the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy who oversees the site. “When we first did this I don’t think there was an inclusive playground, certainly not within the city of Buffalo (...) the nearest one was a 45-minute drive out to the suburbs.”

## Design (and/or future-proof) as a complete public space with amenities to make play spaces comfortable, safe and accessible.

If funding is limited, lay the foundation for longer-term public realm improvements around play spaces; put in place the right infrastructure that make it possible add amenities such as lights, bathrooms, and water fountains later on.

- ★ The Skatepark Project embeds conduits into design so that lighting can be added afterwards — consider expanding this to other kinds of play spaces and amenities.