

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 ... Operate the Space

The ribbon has finally been cut and neighbors are enjoying their new play space. How will you ensure that the space continues to serve the community in the months and years to come?



←
You might relate to someone like Kevyan Richardson, an avid skater from the Chandler Park neighborhood who helped shape the skatepark design process. Today, he is a near-daily visitor who teaches summer skating lessons and introduces newcomers to the sport.

You might be...



A small municipality that just cut the ribbon to a new play space in your municipality.



A local community organization looking to shape the everyday life of the play space.



A local business next to a new play space who wants to get involved.



A kid or avid visitor of the space who supports with maintenance and activation

Operate the Space

Maintaining for the long-term



Stein Park Playground in Detroit, Michigan hosts an annual clean up day for community volunteers to come together and maintain their shared space. Further, groups who frequent the space such as Little Leagues teams maintain it organically and informally. →

Consider a collaborative funding approach.

Generate buy-in for long-term maintenance by bringing multiple stakeholders to the table in project financing and operations.

★ Built to Play’s approach to bringing a mix of stakeholders to the table — from community organizers to community foundations — creates a sense of shared responsibility for the space’s long-term success.

Tap into community leadership of play spaces.

Projects that seed a sense of ownership in the space and cultivate a sense of organic stewardship help maintain the site beyond completion.

★ “It’s important to build that community support, so that hopefully you get that volunteer core that comes out and does an annual clean up there, [they] come out and decorate and activate the space. They’re donating their time to keep that [maintenance] budget down.” Kate Litwin, Howell Summit Gardens Project Lead

Achieve a “whole government” approach by breaking down silos in the design process.

Collaboration with multiple departments from the outset of the project engages those eventually charged with maintenance.

★ Maintenance for the JTNY Power House Skatepark in Jamestown, NY falls under the Public Works and Parks departments, which project leads describe as a good model for inter-departmental communication.

Think strategically about material and labor quality choices.

Maintenance expenses can be minimized through design & construction decisions like choosing high-quality materials and hiring qualified installers.

Amenities can build a sense of shared ownership.

Designing for a wide range of users, including those who do not play in the space but use its wrap-around amenities, generates more demand for a well-kept space.

★ Springville Skatepark sits within the larger Heritage park, complete with other amenities such as pavilions and restrooms, creating a sense of shared responsibility over the complete park space, not just the skatepark itself.

Operate the Space

Activating and boosting access

Pete Scheira, project lead for JTNY Power House Skatepark, has been providing skating lessons, classes, and events at the indoor skatepark he has owned for years before the official opening of the BTP funded skatepark. The effort has paid off, as one proud grandfather of a young skater girl at the new skatepark exclaimed: “The first thing that got her interested was the roller derby practices... once she saw that, she was in like Flynn!” →



Bring local businesses and organizations into the everyday life of the space to activate it on a regular basis.

Invite more activity in the space — without having to run formal programming — by inviting others to “own” and activate the space.

- ★ Consider a range of activation possibilities: What if a local skate shop set up a rental booth at the skatepark? What if an organization serving seniors held a fitness class using the new playground’s adventure course play space equipment? What if a local ice cream shop had a cart out by the playground on Saturday afternoons?

Encourage community-driven activation, tapping into existing systems when possible.

Invite local organizations with established ties in the community to use the space for events and classes that invite the community in.

- ★ Michigan’s Howell Summit Gardens is more than a playground that encourages imaginative play, it is also a vibrant community commons that invites community-led events such as food truck rallies, concerts, and holiday markets

Invite community members into the space early and actively — especially in niche recreational spaces like skateparks.

Activation is especially important for niche recreational activities like skating that community members may not already be involved in, and for underrepresented groups that may not feel automatically welcomed.

- ★ In Chandler Park Skatepark, skate classes run by the Chandler Park Conservancy, the organization managing the space, introduce local kids to skating and provided them with skateboards. In Stein Park, the community hosts its annual Family Fun Day by the playground.