



# Engaging Children and Community in Play Space Development

the practitioners' toolkit for planning and  
implementing effective participation process

## Author

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## About Playright

“Value Children. Value Play.” Playright Children’s Play Association established in Hong Kong in 1987, is a charity advocating children’s play for over 30 years. Our vision is building a Playful City that respects, protects and fulfils a Child’s Right to Play, where children can enjoy their childhood. Our mission is promoting the value of play and seeking societal commitment to meet children’s play needs at policy, planning and provision level.

[www.playright.org.hk](http://www.playright.org.hk)

## Editors

Anna Bradley, Hans Karssenber



## About Stipo

“STIPO offers an open window to a better city.”

STIPO is a multidisciplinary team for urban development, driven by both sustainable quality and human scale. STIPO works on areas to help users feel at home now, but also to still feel this sense of comfort in five, ten or fifty years. With this definition of sustainability, Stipo also seeks to learn from areas that have been functioning well for decades and bring these learnings further into their work on area development with diverse combinations of stakeholders. They delve into the soul of the place as a basis for new dynamics; work on the human dimension and quality of public space; and mixed areas that will be adaptable to the nuanced needs of the time. Stipo invests in long-lasting quality and participatory processes in order to ensure co-ownership and co-creation from users over their environment.

[www.stipo.nl](http://www.stipo.nl)

## Designer

Esther Sun

Publisher : Playright Children’s Play Association

Publishing Date : March 2022

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# Preface

Playright Children's Play Association (Playright) is a charity that advocates for the value of play in Hong Kong since 1987. Our vision is to build a society that respects, protects and fulfills a Child's Right to Play, where children can enjoy their childhood while interacting safely and creatively with the environment around them. Our mission is to seek societal commitment to meet the play needs of every child at the policy, planning and provision levels. On our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we envision Hong Kong as a Playful City that embraces a child's perspective and brings playfulness back to the lives of both children and for all. Play is vital to children's physical, social, and emotional well-being; accordingly, children's play must be supported at home, at school, in hospitals, in public spaces, and importantly, in the community.

In addition to upholding the Child's Right to Play, as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child — an agreement by countries who have promised to protect children's rights — we at Playright genuinely believe in children's "Right to be Heard" or "Right to Participation." Our professional teams in the Play Environment, Playwork, and Hospital Play departments have continuously learned to apply practices that bolster these rights throughout different projects and settings. Children think differently: positively and limitlessly. This is likely why children's participation is often easier to say than to do. We believe children are open, creative, curious, and have the power to become change agents with the proper support. By recognising a lack of motivational, discrete, and comprehensive guides to meet this demand, we have therefore avidly sought to compile and develop best practices in this Playright Toolkit.

The production of this Toolkit is part of our new initiative on Community Engagement and Empowerment for Play Space Transformation in response to Hong Kong Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address concerning the plan to modify more than 170 public play spaces within the city in five years. Too often, we see that engagement strategies are adult-led and not age-appropriate, nor are they inclusive and, more importantly, not very fun and engaging for children. We aim to promote child-friendly and adult-empowering public engagement strategies and practices.

Playright humbly wishes for the tips and guidance in this Toolkit to make planning and implementing children's and public's participation slightly easier for you as a practitioner, as well as for our municipal teams and organizational bodies. We are very grateful for all supporting organizations and individuals' inputs. Our heartfelt thanks must go to the Chen Yat-Sen Family Foundation and the Sino Group for their support on this new initiative. Appreciation is also extended to Plan International Hong Kong who reviewed and shared inputs to improve this Toolkit. Lastly, this initiative is also part of our advocacy route to achieve a greater impact and more cohesive Playful City both in Hong Kong and throughout the world.



# Recommendation Notes

Play is crucial to children's growth. Through play, children could stretch their physical and mental limits. Children participation in play space design is important not only because they are end-users, but also through this process they learn their power to improve the environment! This toolkit is highly recommended for design professionals.

Mr Benny Chan Chak-bun  
Vice President (Local Affairs)  
Hong Kong Institute of Urban Design

It is encouraging to witness Playright pushing the 'right-to-play' through a humanistic engagement. The initiative comes to maturation through the practice from both inside and outside, but it is just the beginning. From this solid ground, I am anticipating more 'right-to-play-grounds' to offer for our next generations.

Mr Wallace Chang P.H.  
Associate Professor  
Faculty of Architecture  
University of Hong Kong

HKIA shall strive to be inclusive and create shared value for all stakeholders. Children are one of the most important stakeholders. The Playright's toolkit would provide a good framework for design professionals to work with multi-disciplinary project teams to engage children and community in developing innovative play spaces, and this brings longer-term social benefits.

Mr Donald Choi Wun-hing  
President  
The Hong Kong Institute of Architects

Playright's toolkit laid out the foundation and framework for how different stakeholders could play different roles to cultivate and implement innovative thinking for playspaces. It is a much-needed, visionary, yet practical guide for all stakeholders to foster cross-disciplinary work for this important public space topic for Hong Kong and beyond.

Mr Eric Ho  
Co-founder & Director, Architecture Commons  
Founder, Neighbourhood Innovation Lab

The Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects agrees with Playright's message that playgrounds are built for the child and a child has the right to participate in its creation. The Tuen Mun Inclusive Playground is successful because of this approach and it was designed by landscape architects. May we have more of the same.

Ms Iris Hoi  
President  
The Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects

Every child knows what the most fun play-space is for them and the rest of us can only speculate. Appreciate the work that Playright has done by passing on their valuable knowledge and insights on child-friendly public engagement and empowerment strategy and practices. This inspirational toolkit contains useful tips and guidance presenting the ideas from known to unknown and from plain to profound on how to make a great play-space.

**Ms Sam Lam**  
Director, Business Development & Projects  
Hong Kong Design Centre

Children shuttle between imagination and reality. This toolkit bridges what children can dream and what adults can do by implementing child-inspired ideas into real-life designs. Through decades of research and practice, Playright connects the government and the community in transforming both outer physical space and inner space in children's mind.

**Dr Angelina Lo Kwok-yin**  
Founder  
CreativeKids

The Toolkit is the distillation of many years of practical experience, working with the stakeholders, to deliver inclusive and engaging playgrounds in Hong Kong. It is indispensable for anyone interested in the policy making, design and management of the public realm in our city.

**Mr Christopher Law, JP**  
Co-founder  
CollaborateHK

Children's and community's engagement in developing play spaces is not merely an initiative, but also a culture worth fostering. The Toolkit provides practitioners with practical information and examples in pursuit of the goal of socially responsive play spaces. Many thanks to Playright for sharing such invaluable experience in engaging children.

**Mr Luk Chi-kwong**  
Assistant Director (Leisure Services) 3  
Leisure and Cultural Services Department

A very holistic approach yet providing numerous practical tips and tools such as the Participation Spectrum and the Guiding Voice for Participation. Commonly neglected elements in planning of children's playgrounds such as involvement of the "play experts", children, and their caretakers are loudly advocated hence better ensuring a bottom-up approach.

**Ms Sabrina Lee**  
Founder & CEO  
Parks Supplies Company Limited

Under Article 20 of the Hong Kong Bill of Rights, we all have a duty to protect the rights of children, including their right to play (CRC Article 31). The knowledge shared here will help to transform our play spaces and lift up the lives of so many of our children. It is my honour to recommend this excellent toolkit.

**Mr Azan Marwah**  
Chairperson  
The Hong Kong Committee on Children's Rights

A must-have participation toolkit for playworkers of all sectors - not merely because TWPF's being interviewed thoroughly as an implementation case providing our onsite experience but because it's handy for whomever whether they're just beginning to involve children in playground design or have long worked with children in decision-making process.

**Ms Christine Lee Yuihaw**  
Taiwan Parks & Playgrounds for Children by Children

Children's participation is an essential albeit often overlooked element for successful play space design. UNICEF HK is delighted to support and witness a growing incidence of children's participation in Hong Kong. We are particularly impressed by Playright's tremendous efforts in propelling this initiative forward and would encourage more stakeholders to follow its footsteps.

**Ms Yolanda Ng Yuen-ting, MH**  
Director of Advocacy and Community Outreach  
Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF

In working with the Drainage Services Department to improve the landscaped deck of the Kwun Tong Sewage Pumping Station, Playright promoted the project with the full participation of local stakeholders in the engagement process, creating a public open space with diversified leisure facilities and winning wide recognition from the community.

**Mr Walter Leung Wing-yuen**  
Assistant Director/ Sewage Services  
Drainage Services Department

Public space is the stage for public life. As one key typology of public space, play-space is particularly important to the public life of children and families. Their participation is a must for a good play-space design and this book will guide you through such wonderful process!

**Mr William Sin Hua-leung**  
Research Director  
Hong Kong Public Space Initiative



More often than not, we forget to listen to children in community development, who have every right to be involved in matters of significant impact on their lives. Playright's toolkit provides practical guidance on how to engage children in play space development, and shows how children, with appropriate adult facilitation, can work wonders in co-creating a playful city!

**Dr Kanie Siu Mei-Kuen**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Plan International Hong Kong

As architects, we ideate for a play-friendly, play-enabling, play-propagating city. As designers, we seek true understanding on the needs of our children as well as their creative participation. As practitioners, we found this toolkit being the 101 guidebook for all of us to embark together in this participative realization journey for our better future.

**Mr Kevin Siu**  
Co-founder & Director  
AaM Architects

Children are key users of play space. Engaging them in the planning, design as well as the management of play space is critical and necessary for inclusiveness. This toolkit is an useful reference for governments, designers, researchers and community development representatives.

**Mr Michael Siu Kin-wai**  
Eric C. Yim Professor in Inclusive Design  
Chair Professor of Public Design Public Design Lab  
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

We felt honoured to join this project. It provided a real and an authentic child-oriented experience for our kids. Their own experiences and ideas of how park facilities should be created were treasured and heard. You (Playright) made kids' ideas and desires to design come true and you made them contributors to the local community at their age. That's amazing!

**Ms Siu Ting**  
Principal  
The Mission Covenant Church Holm Glad No.2 Primary School

Children's curiosity and creativity are far beyond our imagination. Ideating through collective wisdom by engaging children as well as the community in play space development is one of the keys to innovate play space in our city. This toolkit provides valuable reference for practical guidance in achieving this challenging task.

**Mr Victor Tai Sheung-shing**  
Project Director 3,  
Architectural Services Department

Playright's new Toolkit Engaging Children and Community in Play Space Development sets-out practical steps how a more child-friendly environment can be achieved in Hong Kong. With a series of insightful tips, it explains how participatory processes with children and the public can become more constructive, trustworthy, engaging, and effective.

**Professor Hendrik Tieben**  
Professor & Director  
School of Architecture The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Playright Toolkit presents unique approaches to designing play areas for children. The Toolkit also places a huge emphasis on children and public participation in the decision-making process to ensure end-user satisfaction. This is a great reference guide for decision makers and designers to create educational, quality and safe play spaces within this high-density city.

**Dr Ruffina Thilakaratne**  
Chairperson, RIBA (Hong Kong Chapter)  
Associate Professor & Programme Director, M.Arch Programme, Architecture Department  
Chu Hai College of Higher Education

During Covid, playground facilities were cordoned off. But that didn't prevent children to sneak in with agility and continued to play. What if we asked kids to co-design new play ideas suitable in the pandemic, wouldn't that be more fun and effective? We must respect the ideas of the little ones in play, and learn from Playright who has done this for years and has brought us enormous insights.

**Ms Ada Wong, JP**  
Executive Chair, The Good Lab  
Founder and Chair, Make A Difference Institute

Community actions for children play - We have been encouraged by the enthusiastic community responses to the initiatives launched in the Central and Western District with Playright. From school training, home-play set-up at community halls to integrating play into the design of WE Park, all this and much other successful experiences have been concluded into this toolkit to show children's play as a focus of district planning to bring joy to every neighbourhood!

**Mrs Susanne Wong**  
District Officer (Central & Western)  
Home Affairs Department (2016 - 2020)

With the success of the inclusive playground initiatives by PLAYRIGHT and their keen and dedicated work on the role of public stakeholder engagement and children's participation in the process of play space design, I offer my congratulations and appreciation to their collective work on building curious, innovative, thoughtful, safe and creative playgrounds for all walks of life to appreciate and for the growth of our community.

**Ms Marisa Yiu**  
Co-Founder, Lead Curator/ Executive Director  
DESIGN TRUST

Being a partnering school of the Junior Playground Commissioner (JPC) Incubation Programme Tuen Mun 2016-17, we experienced Playright to be a devoted, creative and reliable organization. We are also impressed by Playright in serving students with diverse special educational needs.

Playright could actualize 'Value Children, Value Play' professionally and effectively.

**Mr Yuen Hok-sum**  
Principal  
Hong Chi Morninghope School, Tuen Mun

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# The Demand: Why did the Toolkit come about?



...the children's playground [The Inclusive Playground] in Tuen Mun Park is very popular with parents and children. We plan to modify more than 170 public play spaces... To make the facilities more innovative and fun, while meeting the needs of residents, LCSD will encourage and promote community participation and public engagement in the process of modifying these facilities.

The Chief Executive's 2019 Policy Address, HKSAR

Since the Inclusive Playground in Tuen Mun Park was opened in 2018, it has been a popular play destination for children and parents. It has also been an inspiration for design professionals, park managers, and policymakers. Although the park functions quite inspirationally across target groups, the joint effort to achieve this success from adults alongside children is relatively unknown. Therefore, we feel it is now necessary to share this story and the efforts to reach this success, and further, to handover the process steps and tools for practitioners and civil servants to use in their future work.

As the organizer of Hong Kong's "The Better Playgrounds, Better Future — UNICEF Inclusive Play Space Design Ideas Competition", and the "Junior Playground Commissioner Incubation Programme @ Tuen Mun" (JPC), and subsequently, shown through the [The Play Environment Consultant of the Architectural Services Department Award](#), we at Playright exemplify an organisation fully engaged in a wholesome participatory process to bring public play space ideas to life. We facilitate public and children participation from inception until completion, as shown in the

exemplary case of The Inclusive Playground. These experiences and expertise allow us ample opportunity to share and reflect on the invaluable lessons learnt throughout our thirty years of work.

Playright has worked shoulder to shoulder with courageous and adventurous spirits from Hong Kong's Architectural Services Department (ArchSD) project team. Not only did we champion inclusive play together, but they also included children and the community in their decision making process. Although Tuen Mun Park Inclusive Playground is the first of its kind - victorious through our team's innovative, ardent and collaborative work - it will not and should not be the last.

Playright decided to develop this Toolkit to support and help fellow practitioners to create better play spaces with and for children, parents and the community. In our mission to meet this goal, we have gathered best practices and wisdom from successful and effective public participation and children's participatory processes. We also hope that this Toolkit will inspire and attract more practice sharing in order to make better public play spaces for children and all.



## Whom is this Toolkit for?

When it comes to play space design (or any matters affecting children), involving children in the process of decision making only comes natural to some people, but not so much to others. Notably, adults' perceptions of children (or the image of the child) dictates their behaviour towards them, and this in turn influences their childhood.

For example, if you see children as:

- an empty vessel, a piece of blank paper, or a sponge... then, you may believe they have many possibilities; you may also think they can be filled with knowledge and values that adults impart;
- vulnerable, powerless, incomplete... then, you may be concerned with their safety and committed in protecting them;
- competent, communicative, curious, thoughtful, and unique in their own way... then, you may believe they have much to offer and would respect their individuality.

**Playright believes children have a crucial role in creating a playful childhood, and the society has the responsibility to work closely with them to create fun and beloved play spaces.** Children are capable of working alongside other members of society, and involving them in your play space development project will make a difference. **If you also see the potential of children and appreciate their rights in the way we do, or even are involved in a play space project that champions for children participation, then you may find this Toolkit helpful for you to plan, design and implement an effective and genuine process.**

You should always use the Toolkit in conjunction with your organization's / Project Proponent's Child Protection Policy.



There are hundreds of different images of the child. Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, listen to the child, observe the child. It is very difficult for you to act contrary to this internal image.

Loris Malaguzzi



## Why Involve Children, Parents and the Community in Creating Public Play Space? (when so many are built without such involvement)

Government agencies and design professionals may know a lot about managing and creating a public play space, but they may not know a great deal about how children play, how parents and caregivers perceive risk, and how the underlying social and cultural needs may shape the use of a public play space. These information do not usually present themselves unless we invite the public to share.

**Effective public participation improves decisions by bringing all perspectives to the decision making process.** A good decision should be technically feasible, economically viable, environmentally compatible, and publicly acceptable. Public participation allows the public to provide meaningful input to public matters that are important to them and where they are experts of.

**Play is important to children, and they are the play experts.** Factually, we know that children are a part of the "public", but rarely ask for their opinions about public matters, and tend to make decisions for them without closely listening to them. How do we assess our presumptions? How do we know what is best for them? Listening to children and taking them seriously can help us learn how to make better decisions for children.

**In other words, let's make better play space for children with children.**

### Do you know ?

Hong Kong has been a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) since 1994. Article 12 of UNCRC affirms that Children have the right to freely express their views on all matters that affect them, and to have those views taken into account in the decision making process.





# What Makes a Good Play Space? Eight Inspirations

Playright encourages a holistic approach to create play space, it is not just about placing play equipment on the field! **Use this Toolkit to work with children and the community in order to imagine...**

## 1 A play space that is designed to fit its environment and enhance the local setting!

It is essential to bring out the genius loci - the spirit of the place — when designing a play space in order for it to fit its environment and enhance the local setting.



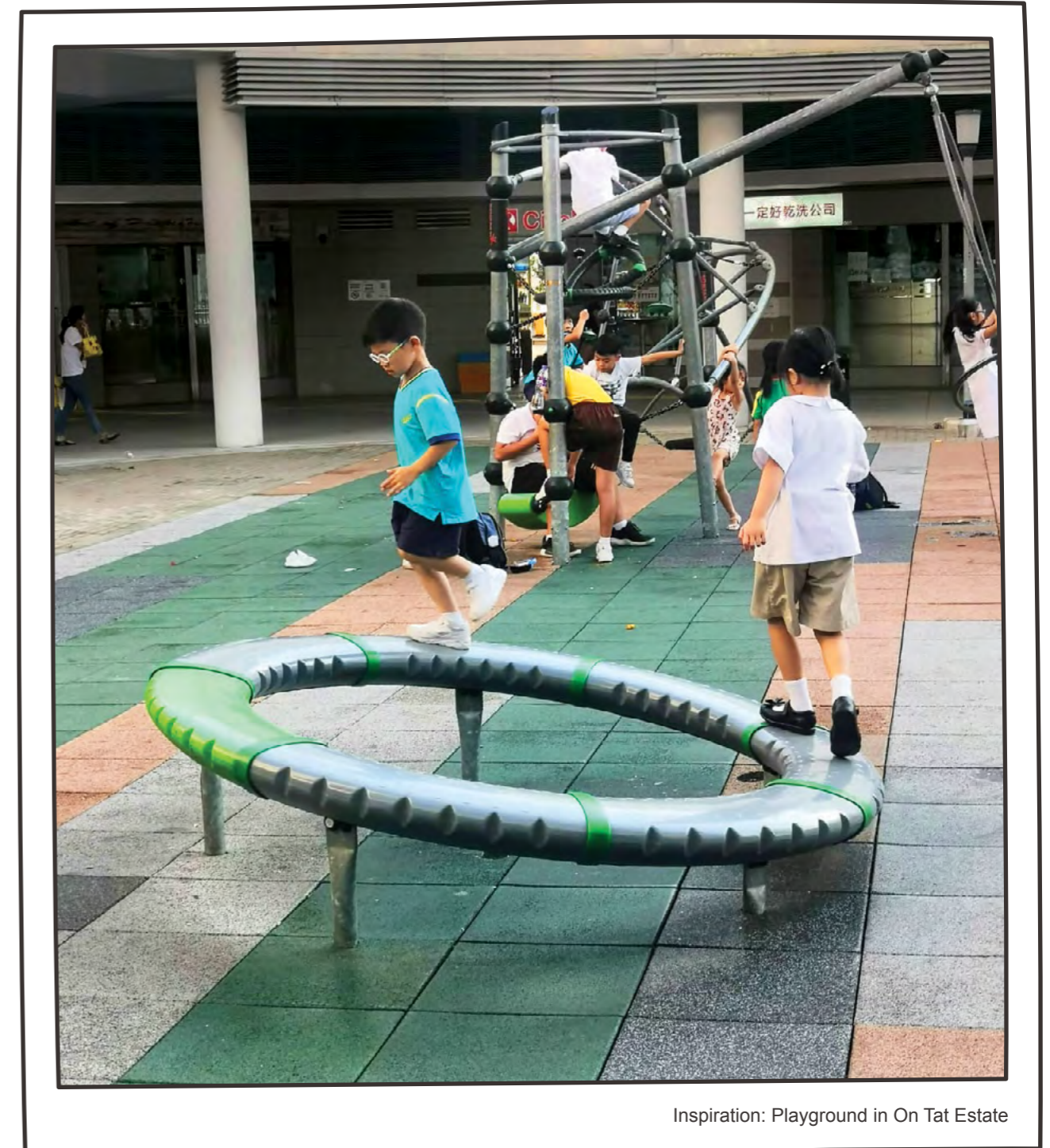
Inspiration: Concrete Pipe Playground at WE Park



It's gonna be so cool to climb up.

## 2 A play space that is located in the best possible place!

Choosing a play space location that is already within the stakeholders' daily lives conveniently allows the community to incorporate play through regular routines and rhythms — for example on the way to the convenience store, laundry place or home from school.



Inspiration: Playground in On Tat Estate



**3** A play space that is close to natural settings!

Play spaces with natural elements — such as branches, tree stumps, sand and different kinds of water features — consistently show great benefits for children! A natural playscape can also attract wildlife to bring the place alive.



Photo Credit: The Spring facebook page

Inspiration: The Spring, Tainan

**4** A play space that allows children to play in different ways!

A successful play space should be playable in different ways. Non-prescriptive playscapes encourage children to use their imagination, and creativity.



Inspiration: King's Park Children's Playground



I like the craters! I think I am going to sit down and enjoy the view.



**5** A play space that enables children of different abilities to play together!

It is important to recognise that there are a wide variety of different needs for children. In addition to being physically accessible, the space should also bring enjoyable experiences across the spectrum of social skills and cognitive abilities.



**6** A play space that is loved by the community!

Play space should meet the needs of children and the communities they live in, so think about the experience for all prospective users!



Inspiration: Tuen Mun Park Inclusive Playground



Inspiration: Rainbow Jungle at Kai Tak East Park

  
Ernest  
(Almost 3 years old)

I like the bouncy bouncer.



**7** A play space that enables children to stretch and challenge themselves in every possible way!

Never remove all the risk from play! Children need to take risks to learn about managing risk.



Inspiration: Shatin Park Children's Playground



We may play hide and seek between the rocks!

**8** A play space that evolves!

In between an under-designed play space and an over-design play space, lies an "unfinished" play space that allows potential for change and evolution! A good balance of permanent features and temporary features offers possibility for children to revisit and reinvent.



Photo Credit: Centennial Parklands facebook page

Inspiration: The Ian Potter Children's WILD PLAY Garden in Centennial Parklands, Sydney



# 2

## The Foundation: What is Public Participation (P2) and Children's Participation (CP)?



### Who is the Public?

In this Toolkit, **'the public'** refers to any individual or group of individuals other than the decision maker, who have an interest in the outcome of a decision. They are, or perceive that they are, affected directly or indirectly by the outcome of a decision.

Both internal stakeholders, such as individuals who work for or with the decision maker, and external stakeholders, such as individuals who do not have a direct tie with the decision maker but are affected by the decision, are both part of the public, and their needs should be reflected in the public participation process.

### Who are the Children?

**Children are any person under the age of 18.** According to the UNCRC, all children who are capable of forming his/her own view, have the right to be involved in all matters and decisions affecting them.



### Understanding Public Participation (P2) and Children's Participation (CP)

While some practitioners offer a precise definition for "public participation" and "children's participation", most use terms like "engagement", "participation" or "consultation" interchangeably and flexibly. The meaning of "participation" varies in different contexts and, therefore, may become problematic when such ambiguity creates unrealistic expectations and confusion.

In this Toolkit, Playright sees **Public Participation (P2) and Children's Participation (CP) as any process that involves the public or children in decision making and also uses their input to make better decisions in creating play spaces.** This interpretation encompasses various ways to engage the public and children, while making careful distinctions to the interpretations and usage in other contexts, as shown in page 14. Children's Participation (CP) falls under the umbrella of Public Participation (P2), although since all too often the decision making processes using public input so often misses children, we specifically indicate it as a distinct type of participation.

To share this Toolkit and our work, we use P2 and CP both on their own, or together depending on the process and step at hand. To indicate statements for either P2 or CP, "P2/CP" notation is used.



How “participation” is interpreted in other contexts:



Participation is about talking to the people and knowing what they want and believe.

It is about influencing public perception and persuading people to “buy-in”.

It is a bottom-up approach that empowers the public and drives collective actions to better address societal issues.

It is an innovative process to solve problems with the public.

How Playright interprets P2 and CP in this Toolkit:



P2/CP is more than just a research or a study. It involves a two-way communication process to ensure the concerns and priorities of the public are well considered when making decisions.

For example, a Human Library event, like many P2/CP activities, allows participants to learn the stories of others, yet it is not considered to be P2/CP in this Toolkit, as it does not produce a tangible outcome or anticipated decision.

P2/CP disseminates information to the public so they can participate in a meaningful way, not for the purpose of educating about a decision that has already been made for them.

When stakeholders are approached in a P2/CP process, they must be given an opportunity to take part in the decisionmaking process. The extent and how is contextually adapted in each process.

The name “bottom-up” may suggest that the decision making and process implementation originates from lower levels and proceeds upwards.

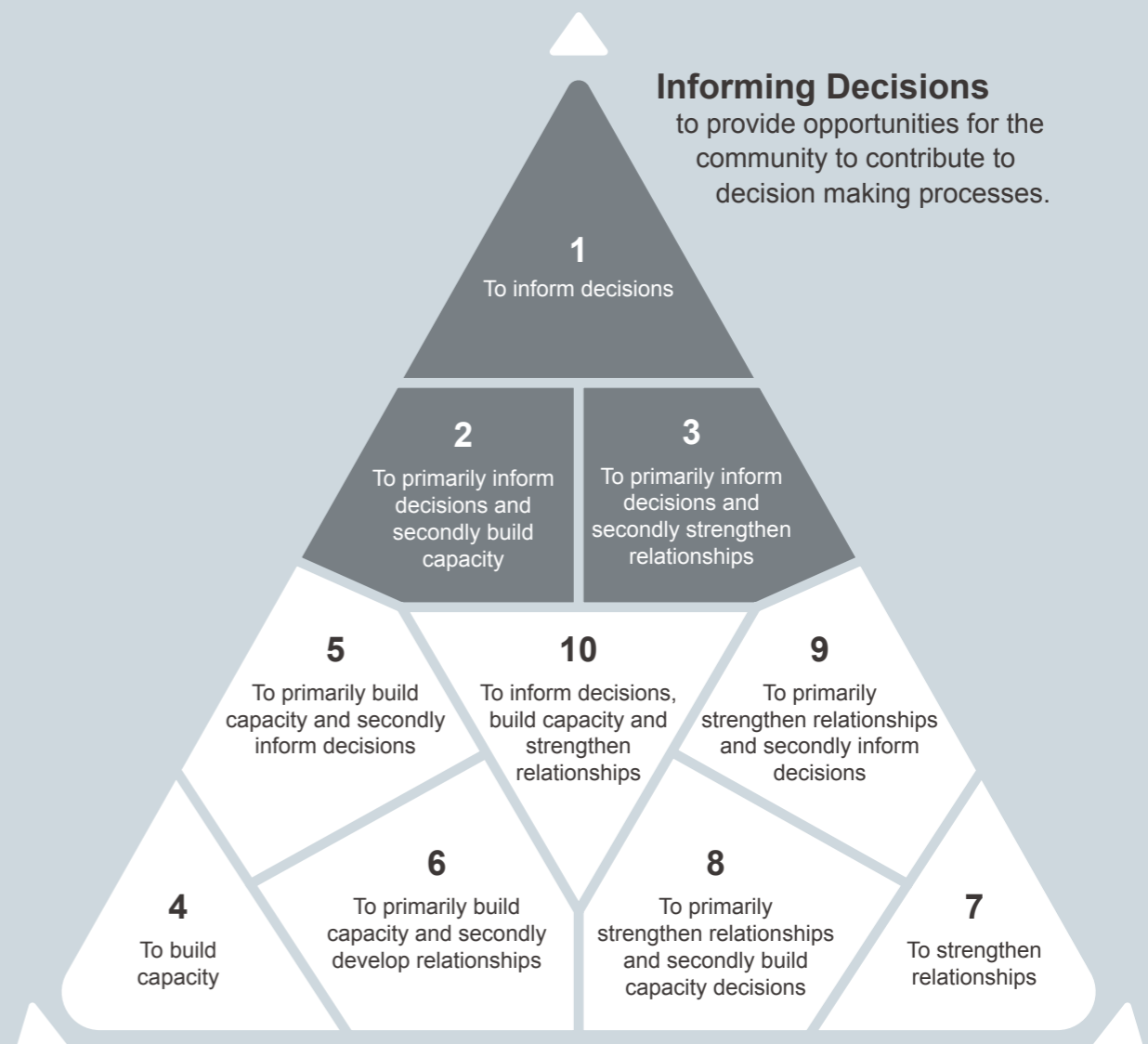
The P2/CP process described in this Toolkit is often initiated by the decision maker or the Project Proponent; it could be the government deciding where to build the next playground, or a student union deciding the theme of their graduation party. The decision maker always retains the responsibility to plan and implement the process, and therefore must find the appropriate levels of participation for the public or children.

What works best is always context-specific. While sticking post-it notes on the wall and organizing co-creation workshops do have their charms, “conventional” tools, such as surveys and interviews, are still useful. Decision makers and practitioners should strive for an effective and genuine P2/CP process. The notion of “innovation” or “creativity” is not very relevant.

## ⚠ Pitfalls to avoid

The language of participation can be confusing, and it is very risky to launch a participation process if the public misinterprets what you mean by participation and what you want to achieve.

Capire Consulting Group provides a framework to help decision makers and practitioners to clarify their desired outcomes of participation based on the overarching objectives of **informing decisions**, **building capacity** and **strengthening relationships**. Since Playright aims to address the opportunities for the community, and the children in particular, to contribute in the decision making process for play space development, this toolkit’s interpretation of P2/CP primarily falls into section 1, 2, and 3 of the triangle.



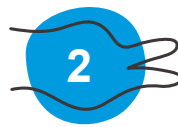
# The Guiding Voice for Participation: Let's Hear it from the Children

Based on our experience spanning 30 years working with children, the public, and the inspiration we find from local and overseas practitioners, Playright has developed five key statements, from the child's or public's point of view, that summarise the principles to reach effective and genuine participation in order to create better play space.



## Make sure you include me.

You are creating a play space that I, my family and friends, and people in my community may visit and use. Make a particular effort to include the people with fewer opportunities or those who are vulnerable to discrimination. Talk to us.



## Make sure my contribution matters.

I would like to contribute to creating a better play space, so make sure my participation in the process is meaningful. Let me know what my role and responsibilities are, and how much impact I may have on the decision making process. Make sure my views are communicated to someone who is responsible. Take my input seriously, or I may lose trust in you and the process if I feel manipulated.



## Help me help you.

Consider the challenges I may face. Create a safe environment and provide the information and the support that I need to participate in a meaningful way.



## Ask me how I want to participate.

My participation is voluntary. Be open to suggestions that encourage me to work closely with you, and respect my willingness of how far I want to join.



*At a "career briefing", children put their hands up to show they intend to commit to a two year play space planning process as "Junior Playground Planners." Representing Motto #4.*



## Tell me what you have learnt from me and what is considered.

Report back to me so I can tell you if you have understood me correctly. Give me clear feedback on how my input has affected the outcome. I am reasonable, don't be afraid to tell me what is not considered, tell me why not.

# Common Misconceptions about P2 and CP

"How is it possible to ask the public for their input when everyone has a different take?"

The public does not literally mean everybody. A public body will usually be made up of the people affected by an intervention and further, those with an interest in the related decisions. It can be a long list of stakeholders, or it can be a fairly small and defined group of interested individuals.

What if the public or children do not care? They do not seem to be responding...

There are many reasons why people may not be participating. Do participants have a possible impact on the decision? Are you asking the right questions to the right people? Are you bringing in experts at the proper moment? Have you provided the information that the public and children need to participate? People may not respond very well if the answers to these questions are "NO".

Wouldn't participation slow down the decision making process and be cost heavy?

An effective, well-planned and executed P2/CP process is cost-effective in the long run, as it helps to minimize post-decision objections. Poor understanding of the needs and perspectives of the stakeholders may end up wasting more time and resources on developing facilities or services they do not need.

Why bring in the public when we already have experts? And why ask children, aren't they too immature?

P2/CP does not undermine the importance of trained professionals and experts, but encourages to bring in more perspectives from different "experts". Rather, layering the input from such inclusive participation in combination with expert work brings the project to a new and more successful level. Landscape architects are involved in creating play space for their expertise in planning and designing beautiful outdoor space, not for their experience in parenting and caring for children; children are involved in the process for their "expertise" in play, not for their immaturity in understanding and executing complex ideas.

Doesn't participation only collect complaints and trigger conflicts?

Conflicts arise when different views emerge. P2/CP facilitates mutual understanding, creating an environment of shared values rather than positions that can quickly become polarized.



Can children's opinions be represented by their parents or caregivers?

We are often under the impression that young children are unable to express, or even form, their opinions and therefore, parents ought to represent their children's ideas. Children are able to form views from the youngest age, even though they may be unable to express them verbally. Parents and any adults should not assume that they know what children think, and should not represent their wishes and needs without their consent. A better role for parents is to facilitate the process of the child's participation in an age appropriate way, inform the child about the matters relevant to them, and enhance the child's capacity to express their own views. At times, this may extend beyond verbal communication into visual tools or movement games.

The public or children may choose the colour for the slide or cut the ribbons at the opening ceremony ... as long as they don't affect the rest of the project.

You must not see P2/CP as a check-the-box exercise — they must be considered conscientiously and respectfully throughout the whole play space project. On one hand, you should assess the needs of the decision maker behind the project to bring in the children or the public for participation. Additionally, you should also involve the public or children in matters of real relevance, interest, and impact. Settling for a tokenistic participation process, where the public or children are shallowly given a voice, but in fact have little to no opportunities to influence the decision making process, may lead to mistrust and controversy, even for children, as they are not as naive as some may assume.

Does P2/CP mean that the public or children are in charge, and thus forces the decision maker to implement the ideas gathered?

No. P2/CP is based on the belief that those who are affected by the decision have a right to have their perspectives and input taken into account in the decision making process. **It should not be wrongly understood as "do as I say"**. For children in particular, their views should be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity.



# 3

## Getting Ready: What Team Do We Need to Create Better Public Play Space Together?





# Five Essential Roles to Create Better Play Spaces

Building a play space is a collaborative process. Essentially, in any successful play space project — no matter how big or small — there are five distinct key roles to help create better play spaces. As a P2/CP Practitioner, you may find yourself working in a team without all five necessary roles. That is okay, because you can bring in, or hire if necessary, external stakeholders to fill any roles that are missing!



# The Project Proponent

The Project Proponent values how the project impacts the collective stakeholders, or the organization they represent. This person organizing and guiding the project is also usually the main decision maker, and therefore has the power to bring forth an enriching play space that children love and deserve. On behalf of their organization, this person understands why the play space project is important to the organization and how it fits into the greater scheme. They bear the ultimate responsibility for the project and seek to avoid mistakes that would damage the organization; additionally, as they are also often the owners of the space, they bear legal ownership as well. The Project Proponent is the key role to enable representative and inclusive participation — both P2 and CP — **and the only role that cannot be replaced by an external stakeholder.**

Who could fill this role and bear responsibility for the play space?

- Any government agent (LCSD, HA, ArchSD)
- Private developer
- Property manager
- School
- District Council

What are the barriers they may face? And how to overcome them?

- **Resistance from the inside:** Involving the public, especially children, in the creative and decision making process may be new for members of the project team or some internal stakeholders. It can be overcome with the Proponent demonstrating the transparency of vision and commitment to the process, not just focusing on the outcome.
- **Lack of knowledge:** Play, play space design, or P2 and CP may not be the Proponents' area of expertise. They can overcome this barrier by finding people with the appropriate knowledge (e.g. the "Gurus" mentioned later) for assistance and guidance. However, if the organization is dedicated to solving this challenge for the long term, the Proponent should become more equipped by receiving training.
- **Inflexible constraints or unwillingness of others to be flexible:** Limited resources and truncated timelines are not insurmountable barriers if the project has both a realistic participation goal and an appropriate level of participation itself. Proponents should plan with flexibility and buffers in case of necessary adjustments; otherwise constraints like lack of budget, time, or support from stakeholders may become roadblocks to others in the team.

What do they offer?

- **Provide** a well planned and clear project brief that outlines the desirable outcomes (both design and public participation)
- **Create** overall schedules and kick off meetings
- **Help** the team understand how the play space project aligns with the core values and the strategic plan of the Project Proponent
- **Secure** the resources and find the right people to implement their vision
- **Act** as mediator if there are conflicts and tensions within the team
- **Grant** approval of the Public Participation Plan

# The Creator



Naturally, the Creator values the creative process, and in this Toolkit, it is important that they seek to turn an idea to a tangible outcome, especially as they have a direct influence in creating quality play space. Usually, the Creator is considered a job for trained professionals, however, it is also possible to meet this role by partnering with members of the community, thereby co-creating play space shoulder to shoulder. No matter who they are, or what their titles are, the Creators are the ones leading the creative process.

## Who could fill this role?

- Creative minds from any government agent (LCSD, HA, ArchSD)
- Landscape architect recruited from a consultancy firm
- Designer working at a play equipment company
- Group of empowered children who will make creative decisions with the professionals
- Play consultant

## What do they offer?

- Develop and turn ideas into reality
- Offer knowledge and skills for placemaking
- Provide practical solutions to resolve technical issues
- Enhance play value while meeting regulations and standards; creatively meet aims within scope

## What are the barriers they may face? And how to overcome them?

### • Ineffective communication:

For Creators, their craft may be seen as the universal language of the hand — a language that needs no words — but for others, the Creator's work may not be easily understood at first glance. Creators may seek advice from P2/CP Practitioners and the Project Proponent, to make sure their design intent is well received by the public. Equally, as the Creator must communicate their ideas to the others, the P2/CP Practitioners are also responsible to translate the public's input in a way that the Creator can understand and use for the project's tangible outcome(s).

### • Unrealistic demands and expectations:

It can be frustrating to deal with unrealistic expectations. An open, honest and respectful conversation is what Creators need, whether it is a dialogue with the Proponent for some flexibility to complete the task, or an explanation to the public on how their input is considered, or alternatively, not considered, in the design process.

### • Lack of knowledge:

Play, play space design, P2 and CP may not be the Creators' area of expertise. Designing for play may seem imaginative and exciting at first, but Creators may struggle with realising ideas if they do not understand the safety requirements for their proposed design, or the implication on management and maintenance. This role can overcome the barrier by engaging play consultants and the management team in the early stages of the creative process.



A child proudly shows off her design alongside the final outcome. Check out **Tool #6 in Chapter 5** about model making as a method for children to creatively contribute their perspective.



# The Advocate



The Advocate values change for the better. They are enthusiastic to share their opinion and vision on the subject matter, whether it is nature play, children’s right to participate, active design or sustainable development. Advocates are self-motivated, ambitious and ready to take actions for innovation. The role of the Advocate may be confused with the Project Proponent — take care! The main difference between these two roles is that the Advocate does not have to come from within the organization that takes the responsibility over the play space, and the Advocate does not inherently act as the main organizer and decision maker. Their main priority is to bolster awareness and campaign for the cause.

## Who could fill this role?

- Pioneer from any government agent (LCSD, HA, ArchSD)
- Group of parents pursuing for better play space in their neighbourhood
- Dedicated NGO to promote children’s welfare
- Interest group that strives for better public space design
- Play consultant

## What do they offer?

- **Envision** the “big picture” or long term impact of the project, and communicate that vision with others
- **Campaign** for the cause and support new ideas, as they know what needs to happen for the better

## What are the barriers they may face? And how to overcome them?

- **Fail to identify resistance to change:**  
Some people tend to resist change more than others, and the reasons for resistance may be different from one person to another. Common causes include lack of leadership, lack of support, poor communication, and fear of uncertainty. Sometimes people may not be able to specify the reason why they resist. It is vital that the Advocate finds out the root cause of resistance through active and deep listening. The process to support participation to make changes is a mechanism to mitigate resistance, as the participants witness their representation and choices taken forward.
- **Cost of change:**  
It takes time, energy and resources to change, and if people feel that they are given too little to digest and adapt, they are more likely to resist. This can be overcome by picking battles wisely, and implementing change in several stages. By incrementally spreading out the implementation, perhaps the project will not have to pay concentrated out-of-pocket costs at once. The Advocate should ally with the Project Proponent to understand the most strategic project business plan weighing the cost of change: considering resources, time, and labour.
- **Ineffective communication:**  
Driving change through bullying or ridiculing the status-quo is never going to foster sustainable change. People will likely show more resistance when they feel coerced. Using a blend of formal and informal communication allows the Advocate to ensure that all stakeholders understand why change is important, where change is needed and how change will be implemented. It is also important to ensure all opinions are well considered through two-way communication.

# The Cautious



The Cautious cares about risk and to conserve the benefits that the team already possesses. They are risk-averse and therefore, usually not as excitable as the rest of the team. Although they are slow in adaptation and often uncomfortable to take actions when uncertainty remains, it is not impossible for them to adapt. The Cautious who does not prioritise change is likely to defend the status quo.

## Who could fill this role?

- Parent who is concerned about the risk derived from mix-age play behaviours
- Designer who is sensitive to the potential hazard associated with the play space design
- Communication officer addressing potential controversies and public outrage
- Park operator who deals with user complains
- Play space operator who performs routine safety check
- Play consultant

## What do they offer?

- **Identify** what could go wrong if the project is handled recklessly
- **Manage** risk and provide solutions to mitigate undesirable outcomes (contingency plans)
- **Balance** their more risk-taking teammates (The Advocate and The Creator)
- **Spot** the differences between the simple good intentions and disingenuous or malicious intentions from naysayers
- **Challenge** the benefits and necessity of new ideas in order to keep the team focused on what is needed instead of what is new

## What are the barriers they may face? And how to overcome them?

- **Ineffective or fearful communication:**  
The opinions of the Cautious are just as important as the others, but it is difficult to understand their concerns if they only project emotions such as fear, frustration, anger, disgust or annoyance. Negative emotions and personal dislike may filter what people hear, and thus distract them from engaging in a meaningful and constructive conversation. To overcome a Cautious Role that is communicating negative messages, it requires an experienced P2/CP Practitioner — perhaps the Project Proponent could fill this task, but it could also be one of the other essential roles or a team member to deconstruct words spoken with intense emotion and improve how the team listens.
- **Scared of conflict:**  
The Cautious may not want to engage in arguments, however, suppressing negative feelings, acting indifferent or passively resisting are not helpful either. Sometimes courage and trust are needed to say “no”, especially when the Cautious believes their participation is not worthwhile or being heard by the others. Only when people feel safe to be vulnerable, then they may begin the difficult conversations. Avoiding difficult conversation may momentarily seem like an easier option, but the better option is to address a difficult conversation head-on and get to the root cause with a solution-oriented mindset to minimise uncomfortable feelings for the long term and bring collaboration back together.
- **Being the “Bad Person”:**  
Nobody likes a negative cynic, and nobody enjoys being one. If the Cautious are capable of finding strength within their risk-averse nature, then they are no longer labeled as a problem but a contributor to solutions. They may drive change by assessing risk carefully or building a robust plan. Carrying out an appreciative inquiry is also a good way to formulate solutions based upon what is working.

# The Guru



The Guru, a term coined as someone who is a niche expert in their own unique field, values accuracy, consistency and authenticity. They are knowledgeable about the subject matter, and therefore, likely to be respected in their field. They are active in research and practice to keep themselves up to date. While Gurus are not as risk-averse as the Cautious, they are also not as ambitious as the Advocate. Additionally, they do not necessarily prioritise “new” or “creative” ideas, instead, they are more interested in ensuring the right solution for the right context. The Gurus are usually the ones giving advice rather than making decisions.

## Who could fill this role?

- Certified playground safety inspector who ensures consistency of compliance
- Physical therapist who upholds the standard of care and prevention of a wide range of injuries and ailments
- District Council member or a social worker who has an intricate understanding of the local communities
- Advisory committee comprised of representatives from all key stakeholders, who solicit information and provide advice to decision maker
- Play consultant

## What do they offer?

- **Advise**, guide and ensure the information presented to the team is accurate
- **Support** people to question assumptions and identify biases and stereotypes (e.g. all children like to run and climb; all public participation activities are destined to fail because there will always be someone who disagrees)
- **Define** issues clearly and easily (e.g. telling the team what is a good next step and what is not)
- **Perform** quality control checks

## What are the barriers they may face? And how to overcome them?

- **Having other priorities:**  
Gurus are usually not the official members of the project team, so the project team may not be able to get the help or immediate answers they desire. As such, sometimes Gurus have other priorities and may not respond as timely as the team wants them to be. This challenge occurs more frequently when clarity of roles, expectations and purpose of involvement are lacking. This can be overcome by careful planning and allocating specific time for their involvement — such as a milestones timeline with moments to receive advice or answers from the Guru.
- **Jumping to conclusions:**  
People have a tendency to over-simplify complicated issues, especially when there is a tight working timeline. Make sure Gurus are involved early, as it takes time to uncover and unlearn biases. Additionally, make sure the Guru has enough time to communicate with the Cautious and the Advocate to also make sure everyone is on the same page.
- **Ineffective communication:**  
Gurus are not necessarily the best communicators. The misrepresentation of their views may lead to bad decisions and outrage. It is always good to check your understanding with the Gurus by giving them a summary of what you have learnt from them, and take time to clarify ambiguity and confusion.

# Core Capabilities: What Does Good Teamwork Look Like?

Here is what every superhero movie taught us: even if you have gathered the most talented people in the world, the team cannot achieve greatness if they cannot work together. Disagreements may, and likely will, arise. It is important to foster an open and respectful environment for disagreements with a solution-oriented team ethos. In addition to meeting certain roles, inspired by Patrick Lencioni, writer and business consultant, as well as the awesome superhero movies, a healthy and effective team for any play space project should possess the following crucial core capabilities:

## 1 Build Trust

Trust and vulnerability are closely interlinked. Are team members open to each other? Can they tolerate mistakes? Can they admit the truth even when it is not convenient?

Without trust, a team cannot overcome the fear of conflicts.

## 2 Master Conflicts

It is natural to have conflicting opinions within a team. With trust, conflict becomes the source of passion for pursuing the best possible decisions. Team members can say everything that needs to be said, and leave no discussion behind closed doors. Conflict is not supposed to be comfortable. Are your team members having constructive discussion? Or are they trying to win an argument? If the team avoids heated conversation and makes concessions too easily, outcomes are likely to be mediocre.

If members refrain from speaking up, or opinions are not being discussed in an open and constructive manner, the team cannot truly commit to the decision they make.

## 3 Establish Commitment

Commitment is not consensus, it is about establishing common objectives and goals. Commitment occurs when all members buy-in to a decision with no ambiguity, and thus form a team goal with unity. After having open and constructive conversations, all perspectives are explored and options are evaluated, a team should arrive at a decision committed by everyone.

Without commitment, a team cannot hold members accountable and to feel the consequences — good or bad — of their collective decisions. This helps a team avoid the “blame game”, put too much pressure on one team member, and instead distributes the outcomes from the project to the whole team.



## 4 Embrace Team Accountability

Teams thrive when all members commit to the shared goal and work closely together — this helps with impact and efficiency. Members understand perfectly what is expected by the team and by themselves, and shortcomings are quickly identified and addressed.

Members minding their own business and not over-stepping into others' areas of expertise may seem mutual respect at first, but it may well be counterproductive. If members cannot hold themselves and other members accountable, they tend to shift their focus on individual achievements or agendas at the expense of collective results.

## 5 Focus on Shared Goal

If the team embraces accountability, members will push each other toward pursuing a shared goal, born from establishing commitment. Having a shared goal that is clearly visible to the team is a way to stay focused. This is why your team should create a Public Participation Plan; it aids you to prepare and endorse the play space project through building trust, identifying conflicting perspectives, and establishing both commitments and accountability.

In the next section, Section II, you will learn how to take concrete action and fuse Section I knowledge — all about the theory of participation — into practice. In **Chapter 4**, learn about how to make a Decision Statement and prepare a Public Participation Plan. In **Chapter 5**, learn about tools and case studies exemplify participation. We, of course, motivate you to bring this knowledge about how to build your team forward to achieve maximum success in the next steps!



*A cohesive team vs a dysfunctional team, from The Five Dysfunctions of a Team and Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team, written by Patrick Lencioni.*

# 4

## Planning Participation:

## What are the Practical Preparatory Steps to Support P2 & CP?



If you, as a practitioner, are asked how you would recommend engaging the public to develop a play space, what would be your response? Host and facilitate a co-creation workshop? Make the process fun and engaging? Invite children and parents to share about their favourite play experience?

Before you get too excited and dive in, we suggest that first you make a step-by-step plan.

Decision making for public play space used by many is challenging, and this becomes especially more difficult when many people are involved. To overcome the classic 'too many cooks in the kitchen' paradigm, a robust and clear Public Participation Plan is required to make smoother and more beneficial decisions with the public, and, of course, while including the children. The success of a public participation process is largely determined by how thoroughly and thoughtfully it is planned, and by the degree to which the decision maker — often times the Project Proponent Role — and the organization they represent, commits to and prepares for the entire process. That said, it is important to budget enough preparation time and resources before implementing the participation in the play space project.

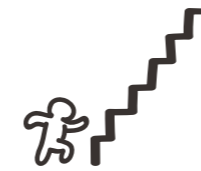
In Chapter 3, we shared how to build a spectacular team and the main capabilities that a team must possess to stay focused on a shared goal to successfully execute a **Public Participation Plan**. In this chapter, you will learn how to methodically produce one for practical applications!



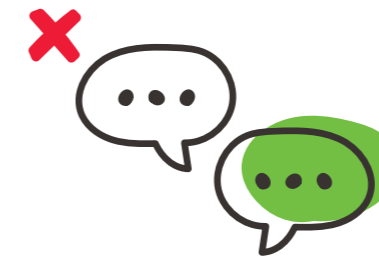
Step

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## Clarify Internal Commitment



The very first step in planning for participation is to ensure that the decision maker and the project team are genuinely seeking input from the public and the children. The following signs may imply that there is no room for participation:



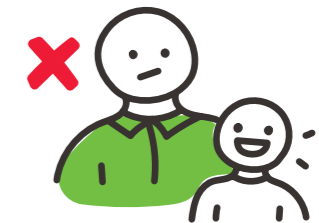
There is a predetermined option



The decision maker is more interested in influencing public opinion rather than having the public to influence the decision



It is assumed that ANY questions and opposition from the public are the result of mistrust or ignorance, and believe the public only needs more faith or knowledge to accept that everything is in good hands



Children are viewed as incompetent, immature, and cannot be reasoned with

It is essential to gain internal buy-in for a successful public participation process. However you do not need to have unconditional support from everyone, because there are always challenges and hesitations from within. A P2/CP Practitioner should proactively identify potential public participation barriers and opportunities by understanding the people that you are working with, and gather an appropriate level of support from within before reaching out to the public. Find out what a successful decision looks like to them and make a case for participation. Their unpleasant history with P2/CP or misconceptions may be the cause for reluctance.

**Check out Chapter 1 and 2 to read more about the benefits to involve the public and children for creating better play spaces, and what public participation and children's participation truly are.**

Step 1



## Clarify the Decision to be Made

What is the decision to be made? A **decision statement** that clearly describes the desired outcome is the building block for any Public Participation Plan. A lack of clarity risks creating conflict within the project team and with the public.

### Decision statement

A clear statement of the problem to be addressed, the opportunity to be explored or the decision to be made.

For example: Our team aims to achieve a play space design that hosts a variety of functions for many age groups — but importantly, to include teens (12 years old or above), as they have little play spaces in the area compared to younger children.

### Factors to consider

- What is the purpose of the project? What does success look like to our group?
- How does the sponsor organisation define the decision?
- What are the known constraints of the decision?
- What is negotiable within your team and with the public? What is not?

## ! Pitfalls to avoid

It is common for a P2/CP Practitioner to start designing possible participation activities at the very beginning of the planning process. It is easy to estimate the budget and visualise what can be done with the public, by recalling the memories of or making reference to previous successful participation activities. However, it can be dangerous to assume the success can be replicated without learning the context of the current project. It is not uncommon, that the Project Proponent and P2/CP Practitioners set the expectation too high for the public, or suggest far more potential influence that the public may have on the decision than is actually likely or possible.

If you may, consider to begin with a simple decision statement that leaves the public and the participation activities aside. Take some time to identify the stakeholders and learn their expectations, and define the scope of participation before you design the activities.

**See the back of the book for a template you can fill out to help you define your project's decision statement, as well as negotiable and non-negotiable terms.**

Step 2



## Identify Stakeholders

**There is no single public!** As a P2/CP Practitioner, you should identify potential issues, the stakeholders who surround the decision to be made, and recommend who should be involved in the process. You may discover gaps in the knowledge or the stakeholder representation, or misunderstandings on the potential risks early on so they can be addressed in the process.

To achieve Step 2, you may want to find out:





## Who are your key stakeholders? Who have you missed?

Sometimes it is easy to identify who your key stakeholders are. They are usually the people who are both most capable to impact the decision, and also those who are most impacted by the decision. That is why for play space projects, we usually include the play space management team and the District Council members at the top of the stakeholder list, but your list should not end here.



Playright's design team gathering the children's opinions via the parents. Booklets were distributed during the pandemic for parents to go through with their child(ren) at home, to gather design ideas and feedbacks.

## ⚠ Pitfalls to avoid

Beware! You should not hastily exclude individuals or groups of individuals from your stakeholder list! At this point of your project, some stakeholders may know very little of your project, may not be aware that they are potentially impacted by the decisions in the project, and perhaps then show little interest in the moment. You should also be mindful that there are people who are not impacted directly but may have a keen interest in the outcome. For example, a media or local newsletter published by residents, an interest group for pet-friendly public space.

**Check out Chapter 2 to refresh your understanding about who is the “public”.**

To create better play spaces, you need a standout team that includes a diversity of perspectives and roles. If certain gaps exist in the team, you should actively seek out the missing part(s) among the external stakeholders. This is also an opportunity to engage and bring in the public further.

**Check out Chapter 3 for the Five Essential Team Roles to create a better play space.**

## Where to begin?

You may start with the known stakeholders identified by The Project Proponent and those who have a history of involvement in the issue, and then ask them who you should talk to next. It is a good sign when you are not given any new names from recommendations; this represents that you have reached an exhaustive point of adding all the stakeholders surrounding the play space project.

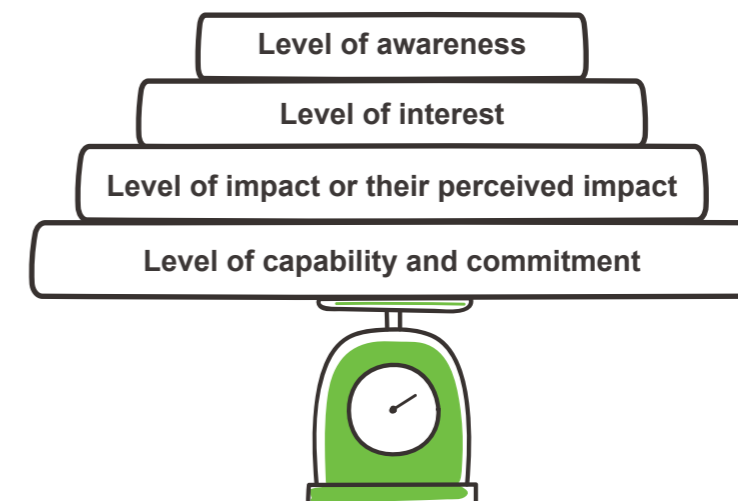
Some other good places to start include:

- Schools and parents' groups
- Resident groups
- Local play advocates
- Non-profit organisations that provide services for children and youth

## Stakeholder analysis

A stakeholder analysis is a process of identifying stakeholder groups for determining the best strategies to involve and communicate with each of these groups throughout the participation process.

Common factors to consider for each stakeholder group in question related to the play space project include their:



## Review the Decision Statement

Once you have a good picture of the situation, find out if the decision maker's understanding of the problem or opportunity to be addressed is mirrored or matched by the public. It is common for stakeholders to perceive the problem to be addressed, and therefore the project's decision statement, to be different than what the team presumed them to be. You may discuss the possibility and necessity to revise the decision statement with the decision maker — likely the Project Proponent — and remind them that it would be difficult and risky for the participation process if the project begins with a decision statement that the public cannot relate to.

There are multiple ways to conduct a stakeholder analysis, here we will cover two ways:

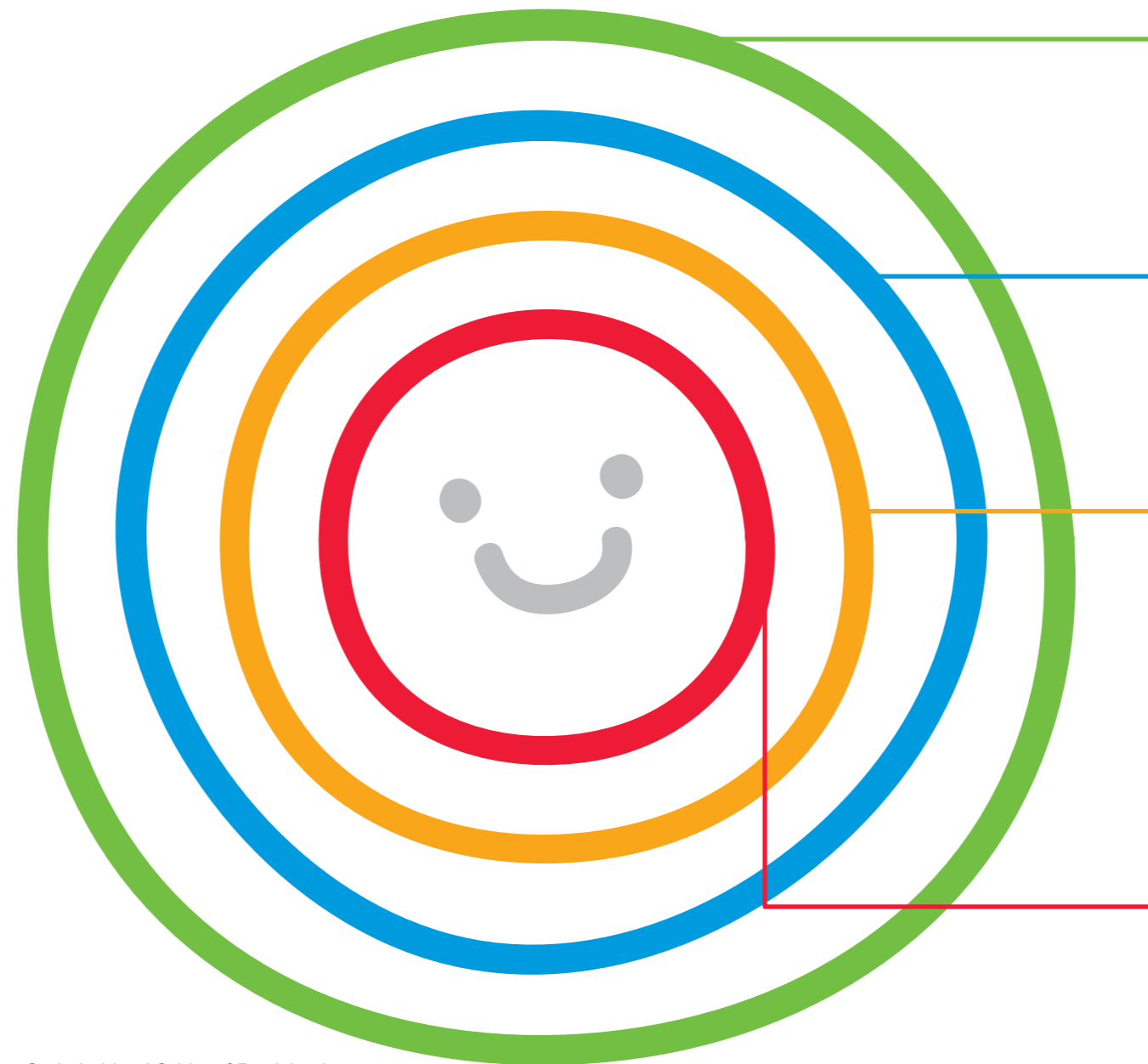
## 1 Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Stakeholder Analysis

This method categorises stakeholders in terms of impact. Primary stakeholders are directly impacted by the decision, or most capable to impact the decision. Secondary stakeholders are indirectly impacted by the decision, or likely to influence the decision. Tertiary stakeholders are not impacted by the decision but have a keen interest in the decision.

## 2 Orbit of Participation

Lorenz Aggen's Orbit of Participation offers another way of seeing stakeholders and their desired distance from the decision making process in the play space project. Stakeholders have different levels of ability and commitment; while some people are willing to work closely with the project team to develop a better play space, others may only expect to be informed on updates.

This model describes the main decision making as the nucleus, and it is surrounded by orbits of public participation activities. The closer an orbit of activity is to this decision making centre, the greater opportunity there is for stakeholders to exert influence, but it also requires greater amounts of energy, time, effort and commitment, from both the stakeholder and the project team. Stakeholders may move from one orbit to another as their interest, awareness, availability and priorities changes through time. The Public Participation Plan should provide for the needs of stakeholders in all orbits, and estimate how their needs change as the project progresses.



Stakeholders' Orbits of Participation

### Observers

People who are interested in the issue and like to be well informed. You may not hear from them until they grow very concerned or think the decision making process loses transparency.

### Commenters and Reviewers

People who are interested in the issue but have limited commitment. They may take a survey and react to proposals, but are unlikely to take up more responsibilities to influence the decision.

### Active Participants

People who care about the issue and are willing to work shoulder-to-shoulder with you to ensure that they have an influence on the decision. They may attend meetings, conduct investigations, participate in the advisory committee. If they feel left out in the participation process, they may make themselves heard in their own way, such as through self-initiated campaign activities, social media, and legal proceedings.

### Co-decision Makers

People who make the final decision or have the veto power over the decision.

### Unsurprised Apathetics

People who are not surprised by the existence of the issue and choose not to participate. Being apathetic however, does not necessarily mean they like what you propose and give you their permission to proceed.

Step

# 3

## Define the Scope of Participation



The purpose of defining the scope of participation is to clarify the amount or degree of desirable and meaningful involvement with the public throughout the decision making process.

A common feedback from many members of the public for any participation process, is that they wish they knew sooner or they felt they were given too little chance to be involved. *How soon is soon enough? How much involvement opportunity is enough?* This can be frustrating for both the public and the project team. It is important for the decision maker and the public to have an aligned understanding of how decisions are made and how the public's role evolves throughout the decision making process. Therefore the scope of participation should consist of a transparent and logical **participation process**, and an appropriate and achievable **level of participation**.

## The participation process

First, a P2/CP Practitioner should identify if there is an existing decision making process. If not, work out a logical decision making process with the decision maker or the Project Proponent. Once there is a decision making process, then you may begin to consider when to involve stakeholders. Establish the participation process by determining when participation begins and ends within the decision making process. Remember, the public does not have to participate in every stage, and every stage that they do or do not participate, is an opportunity to gain or lose trust.

### An example of decision making process

- Stage 1: Defining the problem/opportunity
- Stage 2: Gather relevant information
- Stage 3: Establishing decision criteria
- Stage 4: Developing options
- Stage 5: Evaluating options against criteria
- Stage 6: Making and Implementing decisions
- Stage 7: Reporting back

### Factors to consider when planning the participation process

- Where in the decision making process will public input help the decision maker or the project team the most?
- How will public input be obtained and used at each stage?
- Who would like to be actively involved throughout the entire project? What would happen if they are only invited to participate at one single engagement event?
- Who are interested in the outcome of the project but have limited time and energy to invest? When should they get involved?

## The level of participation

To establish and communicate clear expectations of participation among the project team and with the public, P2/CP Practitioners should refer to the Participation Spectrum below, and select the level of participation for the stakeholders involved in the specific stages of the participation process. There are four levels in the spectrum, ranging from no potential influence (ie. INFORM) to maximum influence (ie. DELEGATE). Each level gives a unique role to the public, and consequently, affects the duties of the project team and the relationships that the team has to build with the public.

### The Participation Spectrum

	INFORM*	CONSULT*	COLLABORATE*	DELEGATE**
<b>Project Team's Duties</b>	To provide information supporting public understanding.	To obtain public input on the options, drafts or solutions given to them, and consider how that input may influence the decision.	To partner with the public by sharing a degree of accountability and responsibility, and actively strive for consensus.	To enable the public to develop their own preferred solutions, and implement what they decide.
<b>Public's Role</b>	To be informed. The public has no influence.	The "user" who is asked for personal feedback, or observed while using or testing the given materials.	The "collaborator" who puts aside personal agendas and partners-up with the project team, and performs the duties assigned (e.g. co-designer, co-researcher).	The "protagonist" who drives the process.

\* Usually initiated by the project team.

\*\* Sometimes initiated by members of the public.

Playright's Participation Spectrum has been created using The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2)'s Public Participation Spectrum.



## ⚠ Pitfalls to avoid

When selecting the level of participation, the common practice is to check how much time and resources the project team could afford, but sometimes the team pays too little attention on how much effort the public is ready to invest. Use the following tool to assess internal and external expectation, and determine an appropriate and achievable level of participation for your project.

The Assessment for Expected Level of Participation	
Assessment for the Decision maker/ Project team	Assessment for the Public
1: very low; 2: low; 3: medium; 4: high; 5: very high	1: very low; 2: low; 3: medium; 4: high; 5: very high
Anticipated level of controversy and risk if public is not involved <input type="radio"/>	Level of perceived impact <input type="radio"/>
The potential for public to influence decision making <input type="radio"/>	Level of interest to the outcome <input type="radio"/>
The confidence and experience in P2/CP <input type="radio"/>	Level of potential disappointment and outrage if public is not involved <input type="radio"/>
Level of support for P2/CP from within (from upper management to front line staff) <input type="radio"/>	The capability and willingness to influence the decision <input type="radio"/>
Average score:	Average score:

### The Guidance for selecting the level of participation:

- Add up the scores and calculate the average for each column. The level of participation expected by each side would be INFORM if average score is 1~2; CONSULT if average score is 2~3; COLLABORATE if average score is 3~4; COLLABORATE and has the potential for DELEGATE if average score is 4~5.
- If the project team and the public have the same expected levels of participation, that is your overall level of participation that you should recommend.
- If the project team's expectation to participate exceeds the public's expectation, you may recommend the level that the public is ready to participate.
- If the public expectation exceeds the project team's expectation, find out if you may gain more support from the team, otherwise recommend a participation level that the sponsor organization is willing to accommodate.

## Step 4



## Select Participation Tools and Activities

Once the public's role(s) throughout the decision process is clarified, you may further select the participation tools and activities for each stage and the level of participation.

Check out Chapter 5 to identify the best participation tool/activities to help you achieve your objectives.

## Step 5



## Compile and Produce a Public Participation Plan

Compile the results from the previous steps, and now you should be able to produce a comprehensive Public Participation Plan that presents a clear picture of what the problem is, how decisions are made, what the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved, and how the public participation process influences decision making. Hence, a **Public Participation Plan** usually includes the following aspects:



**Project overview**  
project background, negotiables and non-negotiables, a clear decision statement



**Stakeholder analysis**  
identification and categorisation of stakeholders who might be interested/ affected by the decision, and their areas of concerns/interests



**Scope of participation**  
the decision making process and when and how stakeholders will be involved



**Means of reporting and communication with the public**



**Budget breakdown**

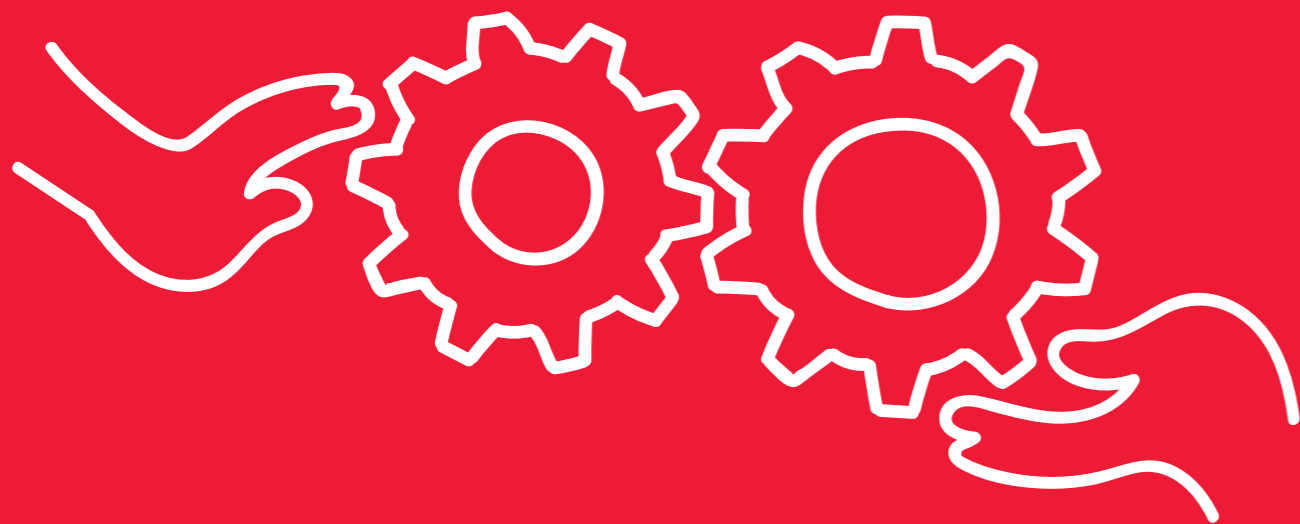
When the plan is approved and endorsed by the decision maker or the sponsor organization, the public participation process shall begin. You may kick off the process by sharing the plan with the public.



# 5

## Implementation Participation:

### What are Practical Tools to Apply Throughout the Project?



There are numerous ways to engage the public and children in developing play space, you should choose the ones that help you to meet your objectives established in your Public Participation Plan. **By now you should have prepared a comprehensive Public Participation Plan, if not, please read Chapter 4.**

In this chapter, you will find a list of commonly used participation tools which help you to implement your plan. Most tools that are designed to involve adults in decision making, can be used with children when given full consideration to ensure children's voices are heard and their rights are protected. This can be challenging given children have different styles of communication and different needs, but the general rules of thumb are:



#### Be honest

Lying to them will lose their trust.



#### Be sincere

Do not act as if you care, respond to children with genuine interest.



#### Be kind

Kindness (not creativeness) breeds awareness, empathy and compassion. Pay attention to children who are quiet and disengaged, and think for a moment to find out how they want to get involved and if they need any extra support. When you are not sure if you are doing the right way, ask yourself if you want to be treated as if you were a child.



#### Be encouraging

Give them time to finish their sentences. Help them to find their words and formulate their ideas, but not to criticise them for being incorrect and inconsistent. Some children like to take the lead and they learn best when they lead interactions.



#### Be sensitive

Communication is a two-way process. Think about whether you comment too much, tell too many jokes, ask too many questions, rush through too many tasks. Avoid abusing humour, as entertainers usually draw attention toward themselves but not towards children.



## Tool 1 Information Booth

Set up information booths at the project site and nearby neighbourhood to raise awareness about a play space project. Although it is used primarily to disseminate information, it can be also used in combination with other tools such as surveys and interviews to collect feedbacks.

### Level of Participation:

**INFORM** 

### Key Tips

- ✎ **Draw attention** to the booth in a motivating way for passersby to engage. This is key for a booth to be successful. Usually high-traffic pedestrian areas are preferable.
- ✎ **Make your booth unique from the competition.** The designated places to disseminate information — such as the pre-existing notice boards in parks, city halls and concourses — are highly competitive. Many information materials are displayed at the same time in the same place, consider improving the visibility of your material by making it unique from the rest.
- ✎ **Friendly faces help!** If you have a sufficient budget or manpower, consider staffing your information booth to meet and greet the community.
- ✎ **Be inclusive** for others to access the info. Pay attention to children's experiences and the way they learn and communicate. Present the material at their eye height and use sensorial experience to arouse their curiosity.

Coordinate with the site's management if the project team wishes to use non-designated places to set up an information booth.

- ✎ **Use flexible programming** at your booth. It can be challenging to measure the effectiveness for an unmanned booth. Provide information material for takeaway (e.g. brochures), or designs that allow public input (e.g. polls or comment boards), so that the project team can track how many participants the booth has reached. Plan for updating and restocking information material.



Photo Credit: AaaM Architect

## Tool 2 Survey

Survey is often used for gathering quantitative data, such as discrete measurements, from the public. It usually involves reaching out to a large number of people to understand public opinions on key issues or ideas.

### Level of Participation:

**CONSULT** 

when members of the public take the survey provided by the project team

**COLLABORATE** 

when members of the public partner up with the project team as “co-researcher”, to design the survey and analyse the data together

### Key Tips

- ✎ **Keep** the survey short and in a manageable size and focus on close-ended questions. Respondents are doing you a favour, so don't make it too hard for them.
- ✎ **Conduct** a pretest with a focus group before launch. Identify problematic questions or confusing options. Edit the survey as needed from the pretest feedback.
- ✎ **Think carefully** how the data will be analysed, and communicate with the people who will use the data. Does it help the play space designer understand the user better? Does it help the decision maker to make better decisions? Do not collect data for the sake of having data.
- ✎ **Beware** of potential biases. It is common to ask parents about children's matters as we believe parents know best about their children and what is best for them. However, adults' perspective on “play” can be very different from children's perspective. Bringing in a “Guru” of play may help you to avoid the biases when designing the survey.
- ✎ **Develop** a plan to share the survey. Conduct training if necessary.



# Tool 3

## Hangout, Play and Observe

Instead of observing as an outsider, anthropologists, sociologists and UX researchers often use **participatory observation**, where they join the research participants and experience events and activities the same way as the research participants do. It is an exceptionally useful tool to understand children's play behaviour, as children may not be able to verbally express how they play and why they would interact with the play space in a certain way, but they may show you if you play with them.

### Level of Participation:

#### CONSULT

when members of the public are invited to participate as "user/tester" and show the project team how they perceive and react to the play setting

#### COLLABORATE

when members of the public partner up with the project team as "co-researcher", to set the framework for observation, and discuss how the findings contribute to evidence about what children and the community wants

### Key Tips

- ✎ **Ensure consent** by the parents and children to interact with the children at the play space.
- ✎ **Build rapport** with children by hanging out with them in a casual manner. Once they identify you as a playmate, they may invite you to join them at their activities. It takes time for children to become familiar with the surroundings, to build rapport with adults and nurture relationships with peers.
- ✎ **Give** children the time to play and spend together, the space to run around, and loose parts to play with. The more support you give, the more varied behaviours you will be able to observe.
- ✎ **Observe** different groups of children to reveal whether certain behaviors and interactions are unique to a particular group or common across groups. Have multiple observers — such as parents, designers, child psychologists, park managers and even youth, to bring different perspectives to the interpretation of data and reduce the risk of having biases.
- ✎ **Provide training for observers.** When adults hang out and play with children, they may inadvertently influence how children behave. You may seek help from a playwork specialist to organize and facilitate a "Hangout, Play and Observe" session.
- ✎ **Determine** what to observe. during a "Hangout, Play and Observe" session. Understanding how play behaviours and non-play behaviours emerge in a play setting can improve play space design significantly. Provide a checklist to observers to help.

#### Do you know ?

Qualified playworkers support and facilitate the children's play process. They recognise their impact on children's play and the impact of children on the playworkers. As advocates for play, playworkers enable children to extend their play, while balancing risk and developmental benefits for children.

### Case Study

#### Play Leader in the Process of Children's Participation prior to Planning/ Designing Play Spaces

Taiwan Parks & Playgrounds for Children by Children (TWPfC), sees children's participation as a "co-learning process." In other words, this is a convergence of discoveries from all participants putting the 'play puzzle' together. Before the design process of a play space begins, TWPfC gathers and trains a group of play leaders to discover children's play needs through participatory observation. Play leaders are set to accompany children to hangout and play in an outdoor playscape with oodles of loose parts. Playing with children allows play leaders to summon their inner child and become more perceptive of children's intrinsic needs, motivation and rationales behind their play behaviours. Competent play leaders require fundamental knowledge of children's play behaviours and psychology, the ability to build co-learning partnership with children through play experience, and the capability to empathise children through mutually understanding conversations. Play leaders then translate what they observe and hear to design professionals to inform design decisions. This co-learning process has been adopted in the Huashan Prairie Playground Project at Central Culture Park, Taipei, in collaboration with Landvision Landscape Co., Eyes on Place and Weidays.



Photo Credit: Landvision Landscape Co.

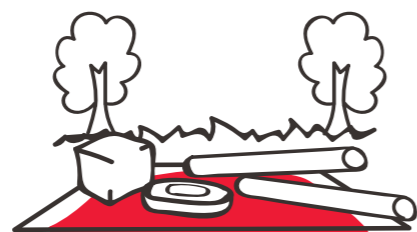


Who can become a play leader?



Designers, parents, government officials, community representatives, students and research academics, and/or even children themselves!

What are the roles of play leaders in the co-learning process?



Provide a playable environment



Support and facilitate children's play appropriately



Observe, document and report children's play behaviors and interactions with the environment



Understand rationales of opinions, ideas and inputs from children rather than the surface statements, and explain to design professionals

## Tool 4 Interview

Interviews aim to collect information directly from individuals, and gain valuable qualitative data. It is used to surface concerns and opinion on play issues, and also provides an opportunity to build rapport.

### Level of Participation:

#### CONSULT



when members of the public are the interviewee

#### COLLABORATE



when members of the public partner up with the project team as "co-researcher", to work out the questions and analyse the findings together

### Key Tips

- ✎ **Pair** an interviewer with a note-taking assistant. That way the interviewer can focus on the conversation and individual.
- ✎ **Provide** a comfortable setting for interview to allow in-depth conversation. Some people can find it difficult to openly speak in a group, such as a focus group or open house.
- ✎ **Make sure** you have enough trained staff and resources to conduct interviews. Interviews are labour intensive and time consuming.
- ✎ **Connect** with the public. While data gathered through a structured interview, such as a standardised sequence of questions, is more objective and easier to analyse, it lacks an intimate connection with the participant. Unstructured interviews or spontaneous inquiries allow for surprises to information that would not be easily revealed with robotic inquiry alone.
- ✎ **Summarise** what you heard at the end of the discussion to ensure all input is understood correctly. Never put words into the interviewee's mouth.
- ✎ **Always obtain permission** from a parent or a responsible adult before interviewing a child. Their presence during the interview is also recommended. Interviewers should also seek consent from parents or responsible adults when collecting sensitive information, such as health information, religious beliefs or affiliations, racial or ethnic background, political opinion and sexual orientation.
- ✎ **Always ask the child** for the words you do not understand. Do not judge or correct their answers, ask for clarification.
- ✎ **Use more "what" and "how"** questions with younger children, as they may not respond very well to "why" questions or excessively vague questions.

## Case Study

### Safe Conversation

Relationship experts Harville Hendris and Helen Lakelly Hunt commit to bring relational skills out of the clinic and provide the education that families, corporations and communities need to find common ground amidst differences. They acknowledge the fact that all people want to be seen and heard, and therefore develop a three-step conversation process that teaches people to talk and listen to each other without criticism and judgment:

#### Step 1: Mirroring

So you were saying...



Confirm what has been heard or received. The receiver must resist the temptation to justify, defend, or solve problems, mirror or reflect back what the sender said as simply and accurately as possible. This step gives the sender an opportunity to make sure they are heard correctly.



#### Step 2: Validation

I begin to see where you are coming from...



Validate what has been expressed. Let the sender know what they said makes sense to them. Validation does not prove who is right or wrong, it does not necessarily require an objective reality agreed by both sides.



#### Step 3: Empathy

It looks like you are feeling...and that makes me feel...



Acknowledge the emotions and the feelings.

## Tool 5 Tours

Take tours of the play space and the surrounding neighbourhood. This is essential to provide first-hand experiences and build an understanding of the community. Through observation, learning the stories behind different checkpoints and interacting with people in the neighbourhood, participants will be able to build a solid foundation of existing resources or problems in the community and then provide even more relevant and valuable input. Tasks within the tour can also stimulate the participants' thinking and facilitate their output to ultimately create innovative insights.

### Level of Participation:

#### INFORM



when members of the public are invited to visit a site

#### CONSULT



when members of the public are invited to visit a site, and given the opportunity to provide feedbacks to the problems identified by the project team

#### COLLABORATE



when members of the public are invited to visit a site, and given the opportunity to identify problems and develop solutions; or, when they are partner up with the project team as "tour guide", to prepare the itinerary and content of the tour together

### Key Tips

- Go through objectives and identify aims before setting up tasks and stops on the tour. Look to overlap goals, tasks, and stops.
- Curate a set of well planned routes and tasks to make sure the content of the tour fits with the objective set at the beginning.
- Ensure sufficient manpower for safety, moderation and documentation of the process. Intervene only when necessary.
- Be respectful. If the tasks planned will involve interactions with people in the neighbourhood, basic manners and social norms are necessary to ensure a smooth and respectful process between interviewers and interviewees.
- Consider the needs of children that require health and medical assistance, and limitations to their mobility. The tour should be able to provide all with an inclusive environment where they have access to each checkpoint of the tour and are able to interact with people and the surroundings.
- Share the right amount of power to children when organizing a tour by children. Children are given authority in deciding the content of the tour. Careful assessment of the feasibility and safety of the route and task set out by children is crucial.



# Tool 6

## Drawing and Model Making

Drawing and model making are useful tools to develop a visual database of people’s perspectives. They help people recall memories by visual cues and express ideas and information that are difficult to articulate clearly into words. Both through this creative process, and the visual outcome itself, this can provide insights about what is important to participants.

### Level of Participation:

#### CONSULT



when members of the public are the invited to express their ideas through creative means

#### COLLABORATE



when members of the public partner up with the project team as “co-designers”, to develop a play space design together; or, when they are “co-researchers” who formulate the design criteria and the creative process

### Key Tips

- Combine drawing and model making with other communication mechanisms. They usually complement other means of communication such as writing and talking, rather than replacing them.
- Plan a pre-model making trip to the play space and the surrounding environment. This helps participants to have an overview of the site they are working on and its existing status. Additional trips to other favourable or unfavourable play spaces can further inspire them. This could prevent the model or drawings becoming pure artwork without any grounds.
- Carefully choose the scale reference for drawing or model making. Pick something that could be related easily by children (e.g. the height of their parent projected or shown next to a chosen scaled human figure for imagination).
- Discuss and clarify with the participants throughout the creative process to understand their viewpoints. Be sensitive as you intervene. After the process, make sure you get their acknowledgement and verification before interpreting their intention.

- Ensure sufficient manpower to observe and document the creative process. Do not hand over the drawings and the models to designers without any notes, especially if they have not witnessed the creative process. You should never make them guess.
- Define the roles clearly when it is a co-creation process among parents and children. Whose input do you want? Are parents facilitating their children to express themselves through creative means? Or are they also contributing to the creation?
- Plan ahead for documentation and storage. Decide if the participants can keep the creations or not.

### Do you know ?

The Hanen Centre, a Canadian based NGO that commits to promote language, social and literacy skills in young children, identifies the most important role a parent can play is the “Tune-in Parent”. “Tuned in Parents” pay attention to children’s interest, needs and abilities, and let children know that their experiences and feelings are acknowledged, understood and will be responded to.

Refer to *It Takes Two to Talk: A Practical Guide for Parents of Children with Language Delays* to find out more.

### Case Study

#### Plan International Hong Kong, Voices of the Children

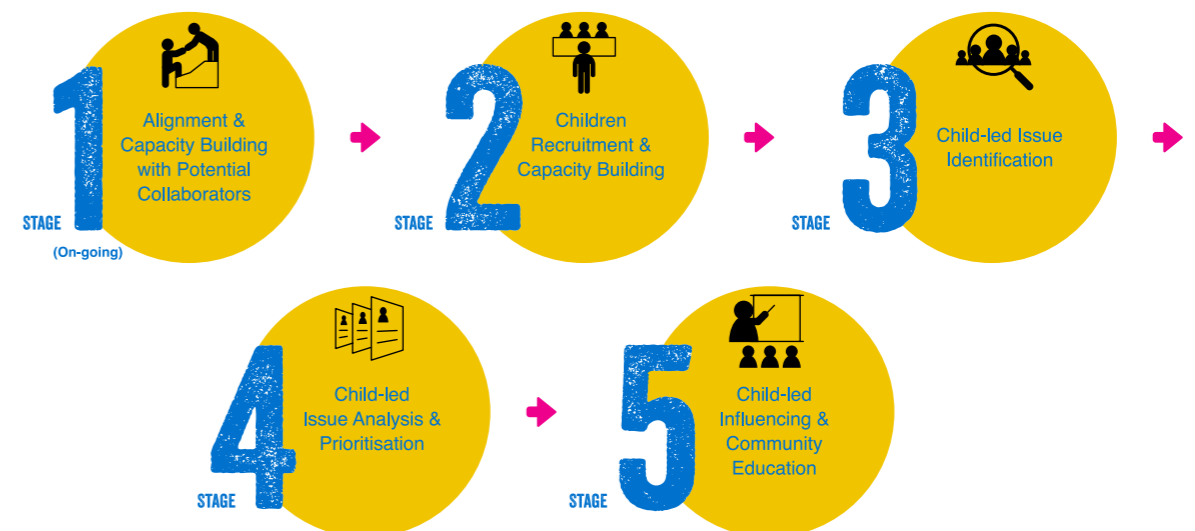
Voices of the Children is a participatory model and community development programme originated from Plan International Cambodia and contextualised by Plan International Hong Kong (PlanHK). It uses a five-stage model which follows five empowerment steps to help children raise awareness of their rights, identify community needs and problems, build consensus with peers and stakeholders, and advocate for the government and community stakeholders to take responsibility to make positive change in the community. The programme often uses “tours with or by children” alongside “drawing and model making” consecutively.

In 2020, Voices of the Children Phase II launched in four districts. Two of the them were conducted by PlanHK’s local partner, HKSKH Lady Macle hose Centre in Kwai Fong and Shek Lei and 23 children aged 7-12 in both districts were recruited as “Junior Community Officers” to explore the present conditions to improve the community facilities. In the tour, a trail journal with various tasks was given to each child (Junior Community Officer) to guide their community exploration. Junior Community officers toured the community, and eventually selected one site for intervention. The tour helped children to refresh their memory and experience of the play space and the neighbourhood, and also allowed the adults to understand the community context through the children’s perspectives (e.g. children living in the subdivided flats identified the pollution problems in alleys which they always passed by).

The tour was the building block for the follow-up creative activities. After the tour, the design workshop asked children to draw their desired improvements for one play facility, and then fabricate their ideas into models. Throughout the drawing and model making process, facilitators worked with children in terms of what had been discussed, achieved, learnt and agreed on previously. Both verbal (e.g. guided questions to converge the ideas developed by children during the drawing activity) and visual cues (e.g. a printed photo of the selected site served as a spatial contextual reminder for the model backdrop) were used to help children to stay focused on the shared goals.



### 5 STAGE MODEL - CHILD PARTICIPATORY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT





## Focus Group

A focus group is a facilitated meeting with a small group to discuss a particular issue. It may involve a selected group of individuals with a common interest or the representatives of each stakeholder group. While the former approach offers insights about the target group, the latter approach helps the project team to unearth conflicting viewpoints and disagreements among different stakeholders, and different attitudes towards the problem or opportunity to be addressed.

### Level of Participation:

#### CONSULT

when members of the public are the participants of the focus group, and provide feedbacks to the issues identified by the project team

#### COLLABORATE

when members of the public partner up with the project team as “co-researcher”, to identify the issues to be discuss, and analyse the findings together

- 📌 **Simple language** should be used throughout the focus group. Use more “what” and “how” questions with younger children, as they may not respond very well to “why” questions or vague questions.
- 📌 **Be sensitive.** Teenagers may be distracted, self-conscious or embarrassed to speak in front of the opposite gender. If the topic is sensitive, consider segmenting focus groups by gender.
- 📌 **Avoid being excessively excited** when acknowledging children’s input. Telling one child how great or cool his/her story may discourage others from sharing not so great/cool stories, especially for shy children.
- 📌 **Use familiarity** — organize the focus group in a location that is familiar to children and parents.
- 📌 **Summarise** what you heard at the end of the discussion to ensure all input is understood correctly. Inviting a participant to summarise to enhance the mutual understanding between participants.
- 📌 **Always include an alternative** for participants to express their views as some people may find it difficult to speak up openly in a group. Let the participants know they can write a note to the facilitator or an email to the project team if they have any additional information they want to share.
- 📌 **Incorporate a range of activities** throughout the focus group to keep children attentive, such as drawings and model making to help them to express ideas.

### Key Tips

- 📌 **Find a time and a venue** that works for everyone. It is essentially an interview with several individuals simultaneously, so the challenge lies in bringing people with different schedules and needs together. While evenings are good for full-time working parents, daytime is usually better for homemakers after they send their child to school; school time works for children but requires support from school.
- 📌 **Keep focus group size manageable.** With younger children up to 10 years old, groups of 4-6 would be ideal; with more mature children or youth, it is preferable to keep the group size under 10. When the group size is too big, you may find some participants easily dominate the discussion while others are quiet for most of the time.
- 📌 **Pair** a facilitator with a note-taking and time-keeping assistant, so that the facilitator can focus on the conversation.
- 📌 **Keep control of the conversation.** Time flies when a group of people chat happily, and time might run out if you realise the conversation has drifted away from the focus. Carefully plan what you want participants to contribute, and steer the conversation back to the right direction politely if it has gone off track.
- 📌 **Ensure everyone is heard.** Encourage the shy participants to speak and tactfully ask the dominant participant to refrain from interrupting others.
- 📌 **Be neutral.** The facilitator should refrain from agreeing/disagreeing with participants.
- 📌 **Allow surprises** from the focus group participants to discuss relevant but unanticipated topics — as you may surface information that would not be easily revealed through other techniques.



# Role Play

Role play allows participants to “play out” reality and learn about new perspectives. It is a great way to create a safe environment for mutual understanding and tolerance. The in-role negotiations and debate also provides the project team with a glimpse of how stakeholders are likely to respond, feel and interact in real life.

## Level of Participation:

### COLLABORATE



### Key Tips

- Ensure **authentic** roles and scenarios. Provide enough detail to the roles and the scenarios to make it feel real.
- Provide a briefing document** that outlines the scenarios and roles and their motivations for the participants. They are not professional actors and it may be difficult to assume the roles assigned, especially for the roles who are not well known by the public. This can be time and resources consuming.
- Start with a simple scenario** to make role playing less challenging and threatening. The complexity of the scenarios can increase gradually. For example, only try a more complicated scenario, such as an “angry mother” and a “frustrated park manager”, when the group feels more competent in role playing.
- Always discuss** what the group learns after the simulation. Can all participants agree what they learn from the simulation? Can they begin to understand how others think and feel? Would they act or perceive the scenario differently in a different role?
- Use props** or puppets as needed — children may find it easier to communicate through role-play, rather than a direct conversation, especially when the scenario involves sensitive issues.
- Provide training** to facilitators if necessary.

## Case Study

MaD School, Community Eco Design Lab

This study examines two types of similar looking birds, namely herons and egrets, in Tai Po, and subsequently develops creative responses for encouraging harmonic living among birds and mankind. To achieve this, MaD School used role play to help their lab participants learn how the issues can be viewed by different stakeholders. Role playing was not intended to find solutions, but to find out what matters are prioritised in different stakeholders - such as janitors, residents, ecologists and birdwatchers.

When people consider a complex issue, they are likely to jump to a solution and take a position. During role play, not only did MaD Lab participants make a stance for their roles, but they were also required to explain their underlying interests and values. Since participants were assigned a role different from their own identity and attitudes, they took aggressive languages less personally. Being calm helped participants to look past inflammatory content and listen to “what was truly being said”.

It is easier for people to find common grounds and open up to alternatives when they are not fixated to their positions.

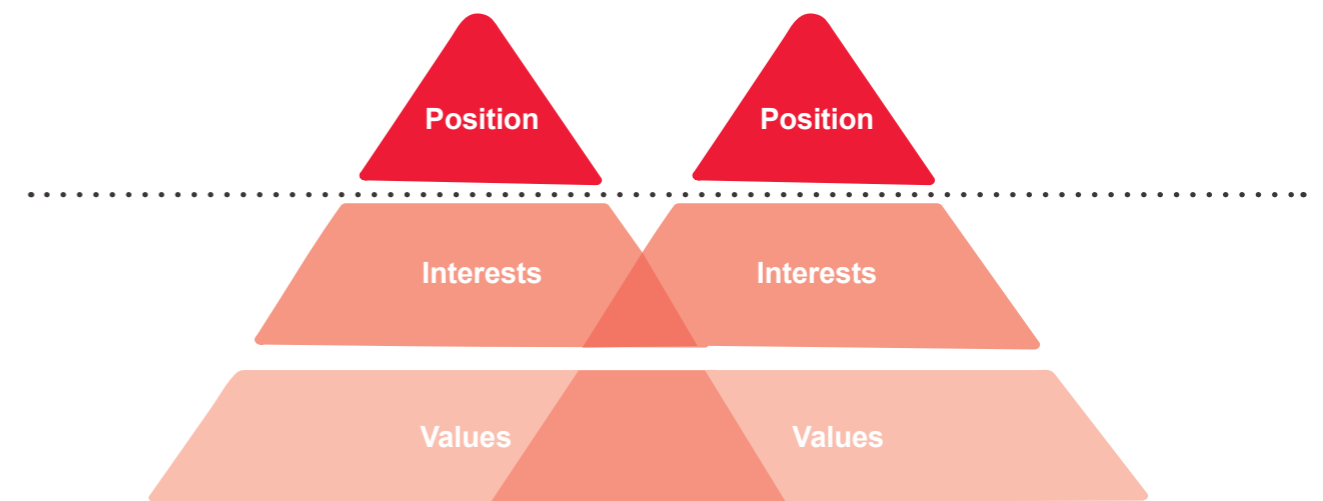


Photo Credit: MaD Institute

## Tool 9 Appreciative Inquiry

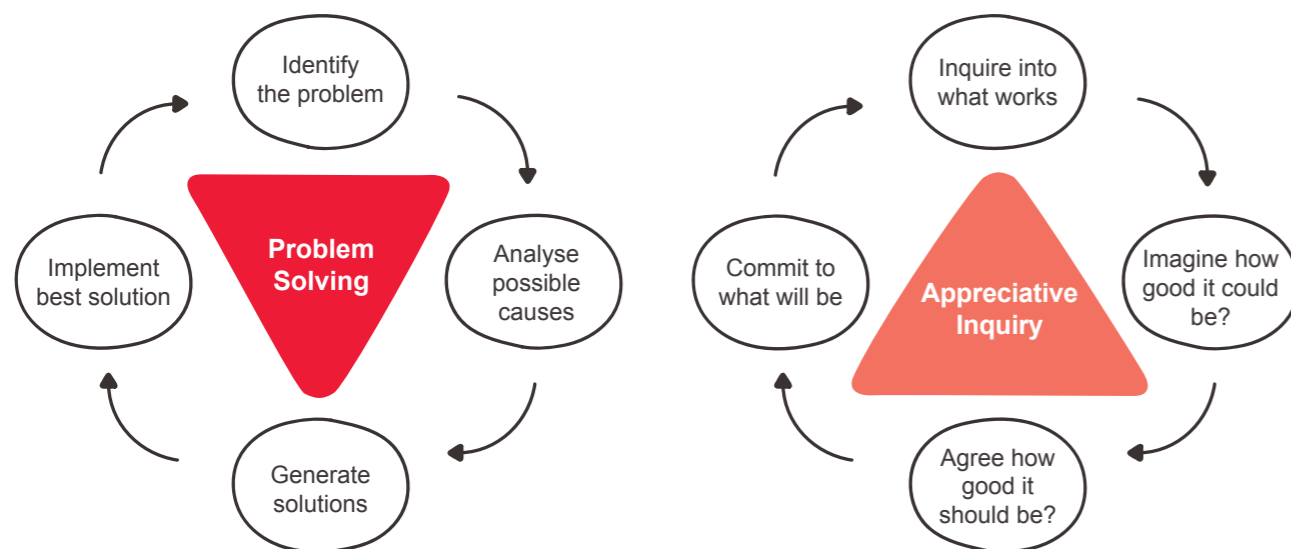
The Appreciative Inquiry Process is based on the belief that people perform better when they focus on strengths rather than weaknesses. Instead of seeing everything as a problem to be solved, the Appreciative Inquiry Process is a cooperative search for “the good, the better and the possible”. It allows people to be part of change by identifying what is working at the moment and what they want more of, envisioning an attractive image of what the future may look like, and committing to the actions needed for the change.

### Level of Participation:

**COLLABORATE** 

### Key Tips

- Do not dismiss problems. Appreciative Inquiry does not deny real life struggles and negative emotions, and replace them with a romantic picture. By exploring the wishes for better future, it implicitly raise and address problems.
- Help participants to understand that change is a process rather than the outcome of a one-time event. P2/CP Practitioners should also allow enough time for a fruitful inquiry.
- Ensure a safe and open atmosphere that encourages participation of all voices.



## Tool 10 Progress Report or Update

Content that keeps stakeholders informed of the progress of the project can be communicated in many forms, such as newsletters, FAQs, email blasts, social media posts or progress update meetings. In Tools #2 - #4 (Survey, Observe, and Interview), we recommend that you Take good notes or recordings of the information obtained from the focus groups, role play and other participation activities, the knowledge gained is useful for baseline studies and impact assessment.

### Level of Participation:

**INFORM** 

### Key Tips

- Identify your recipients. Even those who are not actively involved in activities such as workshops and meetings, may also want to be informed. Refer Chapter 4 for stakeholder assessment.
- Deliver relevant content. participants to understand that change is a process rather than the outcome of a one-time event. P2/CP Practitioners should also allow enough time for a fruitful inquiry.
- Keep the content short and precise. Use sub-headings to help recipients navigate the content easily. If the project has a lot of information to report, consider to provide a concise summary to ordinary readers, and compile the supplemental information in a website for those who seek for the details.
- Schedule out your updates. Content can be published regularly — like most newsletters — or irregularly — such as a Facebook post. Ensure sufficient manpower for project documentation, content curation and feedback monitoring, or seek help from marketing professionals.
- Call your readers to action. While delivering information is the key function of progress report publication, the project team may tell your recipients how they can participate in the design process using a call to action — such as filling up questionnaires, providing feedback at the comment section, or joining the next community meeting.
- Combine strategies with printed and digital platforms. It is very likely to miss out some stakeholders if the team only relies on one method to report project development.



## Case Study

### Playright, Junior Playground Commissioner Incubation Programme at Tuen Mun Park Inclusive Playground

During Tuen Mun Park Inclusive Playground's 14 month programme, the project team recruited 17 students from schools in Tuen Mun to act as Junior Commissioners to learn about inclusive play concepts, join experiential play in playgrounds and attend idea creation workshops. While most activities were conducted in a playful and relaxed manner — an environment where children could be themselves and give their natural response to questions the project team wanted to know from them (e.g. what attracts them most in the playground?) — there were also activities that were designed in a more adult-like and formal manner.

The Junior Commissioners visited the ArchSD office twice during the CP (children participation) process. During the first visit, the children took their models and presented their design ideas in the presence of government landscape architects. During their second visit, the landscape architects showed them which aspects of their ideas were going to be incorporated in the final design and which were not. Children were excited to find out how their ideas were adopted and built upon by the design professionals. It was also eye-opening for them to learn the design constraints they had not considered. The formal, yet child-friendly setting helped everyone to take the process and their roles seriously.



建築署 Architectural Services Department

Children as Junior Commissioners visit the ArchSD Office

# Afterword

We trust we have left you inspired and feeling confident with the know-how and tools to successfully achieve a great play space through children and public participation. We know children and our communities benefit from high quality play spaces, and even more so when these spaces are co-created through genuine participation and the resulting representation of their perspectives, needs, and designs: truly enacting the 'Child's Right to be Heard' and the 'Child's Right to Play.' Not only does this impact the children's and community's everyday life, it also brings about more sustainable and long-term solutions.

Through this Toolkit you can now build a robust team to work through a participation plan that informs, consults, collaborates, and delegates to your stakeholders associated with a unique decision statement while using a collection of tried and tested tools. Remember, engaging children in play space development is a process. It will take time and it is a unique journey specific to your space, but by following this Toolkit you will be closer to reaching success with your community.

While we at Playright are proud of our thirty plus years of expertise to engage children in play space development, we also humbly acknowledge other bodies of knowledge that we are not expert in, but certainly contribute to great play spaces and methods to engage children. For example, we recognise the benefit of evaluation methods to better understand the outcome from decisions within your project, comparing the before to the after. We ask our readers to also expand their pursuit on this topic to always continue learning. Having completed our Toolkit, filled with applied steps, methods, tools and templates specifically oriented to practitioners, we encourage you to go out and use this knowledge.



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# Templates and Other Useful Resources



## Template download links

Public Participation Plan

[https://playrightit-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/it\\_playright\\_org\\_hk/ER51fXVMDNpHqWcFUqz1r7EBYL6jgbKOYqUvdJLFBlnL8Q?e=hPxDXF](https://playrightit-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/it_playright_org_hk/ER51fXVMDNpHqWcFUqz1r7EBYL6jgbKOYqUvdJLFBlnL8Q?e=hPxDXF)



Assessment for Expected Level of Participation

[https://playrightit-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/it\\_playright\\_org\\_hk/EQTQ0kjs9gNPvSYqWcpnuvUB-TfEXT-LhP8fmJLQDQV7g?e=43Ows9](https://playrightit-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/it_playright_org_hk/EQTQ0kjs9gNPvSYqWcpnuvUB-TfEXT-LhP8fmJLQDQV7g?e=43Ows9)



## Resources that may help you to create better play space with the community

Everyone Can Play: A Guideline to Create Inclusive Playspaces by Department of Planning and Environment, NSW Government

<https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/-/media/Files/DPE/Guidelines/everyone-can-play-guideline-2019-02-20.pdf>



Community Toolkit: Developing and Managing Play Spaces by Play Wales

<https://www.playwales.org.uk/eng/publications/communitytoolkit>



Free to Play: A Guide to Create Accessible and Inclusive Public Play Spaces by Inspiring Scotland, Play Scotland

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Free-to-Play-Guide-to-Accessible-and-Inclusive-Play-Spaces-Casey-Harbottle-2018.pdf>



Playground Ideas for 0-3 years by Bernard van Leer Foundation

<https://bernardvanleer.org/publications-reports/playground-ideas-for-0-3-years/>







Designing Child-friendly High Density Neighbourhoods by Cities for Play  
[https://www.citiesforplay.com/\\_files/ugd/534edb\\_5e8553bb853d40228da3083a0ed1eede.pdf](https://www.citiesforplay.com/_files/ugd/534edb_5e8553bb853d40228da3083a0ed1eede.pdf)



The City at Eye Level for Kids by Stipo  
[https://thecityateyelevel.com/app/uploads/2019/06/eBook\\_CAEL\\_Kids\\_Book\\_Design\\_Kidsgecomprimeerd.pdf](https://thecityateyelevel.com/app/uploads/2019/06/eBook_CAEL_Kids_Book_Design_Kidsgecomprimeerd.pdf)

 **Resources that may help you to learn more about children participation**



Every Child's Right to be Heard by UNICEF  
<https://www.unicef.org/media/61941/file/Convention-rights-child-at-crossroads-2019.pdf>



Protecting and Safeguarding Children by UNICEF  
<https://www.unicef.org/supply/documents/policy-conduct-promoting-protection-and-safeguarding-children>



Easier to Say than to Do: Children's Participation in Events with Adults by Save the Children  
<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/2041.pdf/>



Decision-making: children and young people's participation by Scottish Government  
<https://www.gov.scot/publications/decision-making-children-and-young-peoples-participation/pages/overview/>



Involving Children in Decision Making: You Quick Practical Guide by Commissioner for Children Tasmania  
<https://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Guide-to-making-decisions-booklet.pdf>



Listen-Act-Change: Council of Europe Handbook on Children's Participation by Council of Europe  
<https://edoc.coe.int/en/children-s-rights/9288-listen-act-change-council-of-europe-handbook-on-childrens-participation.html>



**Resources that may help you to plan your participation process**

Equitable Access to High-Performance Parks: Community Engagement Resource Guide by National Recreation and Parks Association  
<https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/best-practice-resources/community-engagement-resource-guide/>



The Engagement Triangle by Capire Consulting Group  
<https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Resources/Tools/Capire%20Triangle%20Booklet.pdf>



Spectrum of Public Participation by International Association of Public Participation  
[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum\\_8.5x11\\_Print.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/pillars/Spectrum_8.5x11_Print.pdf)



**Resources that may enhance your technique for engaging children**

Training Manual for Child Participatory Community Development by Plan International Hong Kong  
[https://www.plan.org.hk/reports/Project\\_manual\\_19/index-h5.html#page=1](https://www.plan.org.hk/reports/Project_manual_19/index-h5.html#page=1)



Using FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS with Children and Adolescents: A Practical Guide for Maximising their Effectiveness — Terre des Hommes by Terre des Hommes  
[https://www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/tdh\\_pcm\\_series\\_guide\\_using\\_fgd\\_with\\_children.pdf](https://www.tdh.ch/sites/default/files/tdh_pcm_series_guide_using_fgd_with_children.pdf)



Interviewing Children: A Guide for Journalists and Others — Save the Children by Save the Children  
<https://www.savethechildren.org.uk/content/dam/global/reports/education-and-child-protection/INTERVIEWING%20CHILDREN.pdf>



Stan and The Four Fantastic Powers: The First Ever Appreciative Inquiry Book for Kids by Shira Levy and Marge Schiller  
<https://www.centerforappreciativeinquiry.net/product/stan-and-the-four-fantastic-powers-the-first-ever-appreciative-inquiry-book-for-kids/>





## Resources that may help you with virtual engagement



Digital Engagement by UNICEF UK

<https://www.unicef.org.uk/child-friendly-cities/home/coronavirus-response/coronavirus-response-digital-engagement/>



Child Participation Guidelines for Online Discussions with Children by Save the Children

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/child-participation-guidelines-on-online-discussions-with-children-crc-asia-2021.pdf/>



Digital Engagement, Social Media and Public Participation by International Association for Public Participation Canada

[https://www.iap2canada.ca/resources/Documents/Newsletter/2017\\_social\\_media\\_white\\_paper.pdf](https://www.iap2canada.ca/resources/Documents/Newsletter/2017_social_media_white_paper.pdf)



## Resources that may help you evaluate impact



Toolkit for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's participation by Save the Children

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/collection/toolkit-monitoring-and-evaluating-childrens-participation/>



Public Life Tools — Gehl Institute by Gehl Institute

<https://gehlpeople.com/tools/how-to-use-the-public-life-tools/>



Impact Assessment Tool by Placemaking Europe

[https://placemaking-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TOOL\\_Manual\\_The-impact-of-placemaking.pdf](https://placemaking-europe.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/TOOL_Manual_The-impact-of-placemaking.pdf)

# Glossary

## The Advocate

1 of the 5 essential team roles to create a better play space. The Advocate values change for the better with an ethical mindset and are ambitious to take actions for innovation. The role of the Advocate may be confused with the Project Proponent — take care! The main difference between these two roles is that the Advocate does not have to come from within the organization that takes the responsibility over the play space, and the Advocate does not inherently act as the main organizer and decision maker. Their main priority is to bolster awareness and campaign for the cause. See **Chapter 3**.

## The Cautious

1 of the 5 essential team roles to create a better play space. The Cautious team role practices risk-aversion and seeks to conserve benefits that the team already possesses. Although they are slow in adaptation and often oppose uncertainty to conserve the project, it should not be impossible for them to adapt. See **Chapter 3**.

## Children's Participation (CP)

Any process that involves children in decision making and also uses their input to make better decisions. This can overlap with Public Participation (P2). See **Chapter 2**.

## Collaborate Level

This participant acts as a “collaborator” who puts aside personal agendas to partner-up with the project team and perform the duties assigned (e.g. co-designer, co-researcher). A level within the Level of Participation Spectrum adapted by Playright and guided by IAP.

## Consult Level

The participant is asked for personal feedback, or observed while using or testing on given material. A level within the Level of Participation Spectrum adapted by Playright and guided by IAP.

## The Creator

1 of the 5 essential team roles to create a better play space. The Creator team role values the creative process, and seeks to turn an idea to a tangible outcome, especially as they have a direct influence in creating quality play space. Usually, the Creator is considered a job for trained professionals, however, it is also possible to meet this role by partnering with members of the community. See **Chapter 3**.



## Decision Statement

The desired outcome of the decision making process. For example: Our team aims to achieve a play space design that hosts a variety of functions for many age groups — but importantly, to include pre-teens (10 - 12 years old), as they have little play spaces in the area compared to younger children. See **Chapter 4**.

## Delegate Level

This participant acts as a “protagonist” who drives the process to develop their own preferred solutions, and implement what they decide. A level within the Level of Participation Spectrum adapted by Playright and guided by IAP.

## The Guru

1 of the 5 essential team roles to create a better play space. The Guru team role is a niche expert in their own unique field, values accuracy, consistency and authenticity; knowledgeable about the subject matter, and therefore, likely to be respected in their field; active in research and practice. See **Chapter 3**.

## Inform Level

The stakeholder is informed. This group or person in the public has no influence. A level within the Level of Participation Spectrum adapted by Playright and guided by IAP.

## Level of Participation

Our levels in the spectrum, ranging from no potential influence (ie. INFORM) to maximum influence (ie. DELEGATE). Each level gives a unique role to the public, and consequently, affects the duties of the project team and the relationships that the team has to build with the public.

## Orbit of Participation

A method that places stakeholders and their desired distance from the decision making process with the decision at the centre. This model describes the main decision making as the nucleus, and it is surrounded by orbits of public participation activities. The closer an orbit of activity is to this decision making centre, the greater opportunity there is for stakeholders to exert influence, but it also requires greater amounts of energy, time, effort and commitment, from both the stakeholder and the project team. See **Chapter 4**.

## Participatory Observation

A research method often used by anthropologists, sociologists and UX researchers, where they join the research participants and experience events and activities the same way as the research participants do rather than observing as an outsider. It is an exceptionally useful tool to understand from an insider’s experience. See **Chapter 5 case study examples**.

## Participation Process

A plan of action to consider how, when, and who to include for your play space co-creation. The generic process usually includes: planning and preparation, announcing the project to the public to gather information, establishing decision criteria, developing and evaluating options, and finally announcing and implementing decisions. This allows you and your team to better plan ahead and use your resources wisely to achieve the most advantageous results. See **Chapter 4**.

## Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Stakeholder Analysis

A method that categorises stakeholders in terms of impact. Primary stakeholders are directly impacted by the decision, or most capable to impact the decision. Secondary stakeholders are indirectly impacted by the decision, or likely to influence the decision. Tertiary stakeholders are not impacted by the decision but may have a keen interest in the decision. See **Chapter 4**.

## Project Proponent

1 of the 5 essential team roles to create a better play space. The Project Proponent is the person organizing and guiding the project, represents the organisation who has control (or ownership) over the play space, and acts as the main decision maker — thereby taking on the main responsibility for the project. The Project Proponent uses their leadership and power to bring forth changes to the project, and importantly values how the project impacts the collective stakeholders, or the organization they represent. The Project Proponent is the key role to enable representative and inclusive participation and the only role that cannot be replaced by an external stakeholder. See **Chapter 3**.

## Public Participation (P2)

Any process that involves the public in decision making and also uses their input to make better decisions. This can overlap with Children’s Participation (CP). See **Chapter 2**.

## Stakeholder

An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization. This can range anywhere from residents living nearby the play space, the parents and children that frequent the play space itself, nearby businesses, the leading organization behind the play space, or even the waste management workers.

## Stakeholder Analysis

A process of identifying stakeholder groups (primary, secondary, or tertiary) for determining the best strategies to involve and communicate with each of these groups throughout the participation process. Common factors to consider for the stakeholder group in question related to the play space project include their level of awareness, interest, impact, and capability. You can conduct this analysis either through Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Stakeholder Analysis or through the Orbit of Participation method. See **Chapter 4**.

# Acknowledgement

## Sponsors



### About The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation

Established in 2003, The Chen Yet-Sen Family Foundation is dedicated to enhancing access to learning and development opportunities for all with a strategic focus on education improvement. Its belief is that effective philanthropy is built on acquired knowledge and domain expertise across a number of diverse initiatives in key focus areas. As a hybrid organization, the Foundation supports grants programs as well as operating its own Special Projects.

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### About Sino Group

Sino Group strives to fulfil its vision of Creating Better Lifescapes with a focus on three interconnected pillars — Green Living, Community Spirit and Innovative Design — shaping the cities we call home where people live, work and play. Sustainability is central to what we do as we seek to create value for stakeholders and make business a driver of sustainability for better future.

[www.sino.com](http://www.sino.com)

## Partnering Organisation



### About Plan International Hong Kong

Established in 1937, Plan International is one of the world's leading development organisations specifically focusing on children. Plan International is working in 57 developing countries, concentrating on making lasting improvements to children's lives. To realise children's rights at all levels of society so as to prevent them from being treated with abuse and violence, Plan International has rolled out local programmes and influencing work through evidence-based research, partnership programmes, policy advocacy, and public education since 2017.

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## Supporting Organisations



## Special Thanks

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