

**Calgary**



# **Community Playground Workbook**





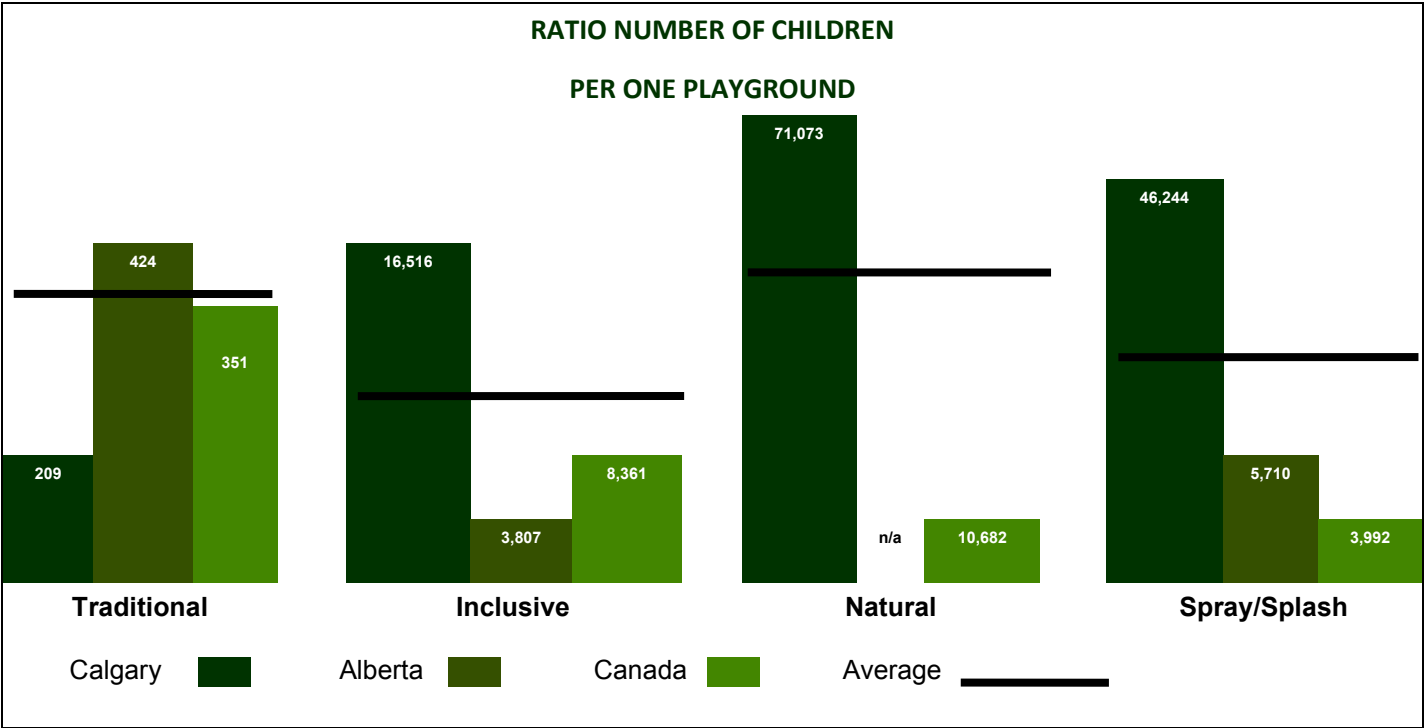


## Introduction

Calgary Parks stewards 1,107 playgrounds with more being added every year. The majority of the playgrounds in Calgary are traditional, consisting primarily of fixed structures and equipment, mostly swings, slides, see-saws, and climbing frames. However, traditional playgrounds only allow for one principal type of play – active play. Instead, all types of play should be encouraged including Social, Active, Imaginative, and Risky play. In addition, Inclusive playgrounds are encouraged which provide opportunities for all Calgarians, no matter their ability.

## The Challenge: Creating a More Diverse Play Landscape in Calgary

Calgary has an over-provision of traditional playgrounds. Calgary has one of the highest per capita rates in Canada at one playground for every 209 children between the ages of 0-14, compared to the national average of one playground for every 351 children. This does not include another 200 playgrounds owned and operated by the school boards. Meanwhile there is a significant shortage of specialized and inclusive playgrounds. A comparison between Calgary, the Province, and Canada as a whole, indicates Calgary is over-served with traditional playgrounds and has a deficit of other types of playgrounds.



## Playground Typology

Calgary Parks has developed a playground typology that represents the different elements of play, including Active, Social, Risk Taking, and Imaginative, and are summarized below, with example components:

### **Active**

Traditional playgrounds that promote fundamental movement skills (jumping, throwing, catching, kicking, hitting, running, climbing, hanging) and body awareness

- Multi Play Structures
- Climbing structures
- Slides, swings and spinners

### **Social**

These play spaces provide activities that encourage collaboration, cooperation, and sharing. They may include dramatic play, competitive play, rough and tumble, or even solitary play

- Natural elements such as leaves, wood chips
- Amphitheatre
- Domes, caves, tunnels
- Sound makers
- Loose parts

### **Risk Taking Skills**

This type of play provides challenges which allow a child to develop survival skills and conquer fear. These playgrounds typically involve challenging heights, loose parts, changing elements, speed element, and rough and tumble opportunities. These playgrounds do not contain any overt hazards, but allow children to develop risk taking skills in a controlled environment.

- Climbing structures
- Trees and nature elements
- Tools
- Moveable logs and sticks
- Ziplines
- Net walls
- Skate parks
- Obstacle Courses

### **Imaginative**

Imaginative play is the 'make believe' world and a physical object can represent anything. A stick becomes a sword, a large playground structure is a spaceship, and a grove of trees is a hiding place for elves. As such imaginative playgrounds will have items that encourage different meanings or different uses that can change based on a child's imagination.

- Concrete blocks
- Tunnels, parachutes, blankets
- Sticks, long grasses, grove of trees, and nature elements
- Water channels
- Splash pads
- Rain gardens
- Amphitheatres
- Loose parts





## Inclusive Playgrounds

These play spaces accommodate all users challenging them at their own development level on age appropriate equipment. Not just a focus on physical accessibility, these playgrounds may include amenities that benefits those with physical, mental, social or intellectual sensory impairments.

The term also includes adults accompanying children, in the capacity of a parent or care-giver, who have limited mobility and/or abilities.

As these sites are inclusive, they may features amenities for adults who want to play or grandparents or caregivers who may have a disability.

Inclusive playgrounds may include the following types of amenities:

- Accessible surfaces such as 'pour in place' rubber.
- Access ramps and transfer stations
- Swings equipped with harnesses
- Natural elements (water, bark, rocks, plants) to provide sensory benefits
- Shade areas with trees, gazebos and benches
- Patio swings for adults
- Outdoor fitness equipment



### ***Play Spaces for Children***

Playgrounds that are purpose-designed and built for children act as a venue to engage in physical and social activities, develop motor skills and problem solving skills, challenge themselves, learn social norms and explore their environment. Play can and should happen beyond the confines of a playground and extend into a variety of open spaces for children of all skills and abilities.

### ***Play Spaces for Adults***

Adult play can include leisure and recreation, hobbies and pastimes. Individuals with varying degrees of disability must also be accommodated wherever reasonably possible. In playgrounds, this can include outdoor fitness equipment, gaming tables (eg. chess), sports courts (eg. tennis), seating, and shelters.



## Upgrading Your Playground

Upgrading a playground in your community can be a highly rewarding experience. Recruit others from your community to brainstorm new playground ideas and what your community needs. Consider incorporating different play types, how you will engage the community, utilizing universal design, and your fundraising plan! At times the process may not be straight forward but the City of Calgary will help guide you through the process.

Community groups have the unique advantage of being able to apply for grants and funding often not available to developers and municipalities. Different grants are available at different times, but the following agencies are a good start to begin exploring project support services and potential funding opportunities:

- The Parks Foundation Calgary  
<http://www.parksfdn.com/>
- The Calgary Foundation  
<https://calgaryfoundation.org/>
- Community Facility Enhancement Program  
<https://www.culturetourism.alberta.ca/community/community-grants/community-facility-enhancement-program/>

Unique and innovative playgrounds may also be ideal opportunities for corporate sponsorship!



Community groups may want to consider play with loose parts which is an inexpensive way to include diverse play elements. Typically a box of loose parts is available at a playground site, either to access freely or on a sign-out basis. Ask Calgary Parks for more information on loose parts opportunities.

Community groups can also consider the 'Playground Optimization Program' which Calgary Parks started in 2012. This program encourages Community Associations to take stock of all of their community playgrounds and, in partnership with Calgary Parks, decide which playgrounds are suitable for lifecycle replacement and which sites would benefit from an upgrade. As playgrounds near the end of their lifespan it's important to evaluate the needs of the community to ensure an appropriate play replacement is chosen. It may not always make sense to replace them with a new play structure but with alternative social green spaces suitable for the surrounding community. Depending on the chosen features, this may result in a reduction in the number of playgrounds per community.



## Building a Playground

Playgrounds can be built by community groups, developers or by Calgary Parks. While each one will develop a playground using a slightly different process, the following basic steps will be useful.

### Vision and Assessment

Using demographics, community maps, engagement strategies and park master plans, that can be provided by Calgary Parks, consider the following:

- Is this playground needed or is there a better use of the space?
- Is there a specific age group to target?
- Are there opportunities or a need for a multi-generational space?
- Should specific cultural elements be included?
- What play elements are missing in the neighbourhood or region? Or What type of play is needed here?

**You can pick a piece of equipment out of a catalogue  
- or get *creative* and *invent*  
something that is *truly unique*.**

In regards to location, consider:

- What locations are available and large enough for the type of play you want to include? Is there room for expansion? Talk to Calgary Parks to see if this is possible.
- Is there a location which already has capacity for barrier free access (eg pathways in place and grades less than 5%), or an area with natural elements that can be incorporated?
- Can you expand or retrofit an existing site?
- Is there a location that already has people to provide 'natural surveillance' to avoid any criminal activity near the site?
- Is there parking or transit links nearby?

### Resourcing

Specialized, innovative, or inclusive playgrounds will require more time, money and expertise but there are many resources available to support these projects. Collaboration and partnerships are vital to building a variety of alternative playgrounds in Calgary. Developers will need to support new play types and offset these costs. Community groups can apply for grants and plan additional fundraising initiatives. Calgary Parks will prioritize and optimize lifecycle and capital dollars to best support Calgary communities.

To ensure success determine a realistic timeline and budget for your ideal play space. Consider planning and engagement needed, the budget and funding required, as well as the expertise to ensure success.

- Find partners and an enthusiastic team to help! Various funders or Calgary Parks may be willing to offer funds or expertise if the playground is a priority in existing work plans or goals. Parks Foundation Calgary is also a great source of information.
- Multi-year planning: Fundraising and grant applications take time and multi-year commitments;
- Design: Consider the location, onsite features, and playground footprint. Do you need a larger more detailed landscape plan?
- Space: Find the right space for your community needs and desired play types. Different spaces are likely for added natural or accessible elements.

### Design, Build, and Play!

There are a large number of different amenities that can be included in a play space. Take time to include elements that involve different play types and provide a physical, sensory and social experience. Also consider the fall surface, and layout of a playground to encourage full utilization and social interaction.

## How to Build a Playground

Calgary Parks can provide more information to the community in each step of playground development:

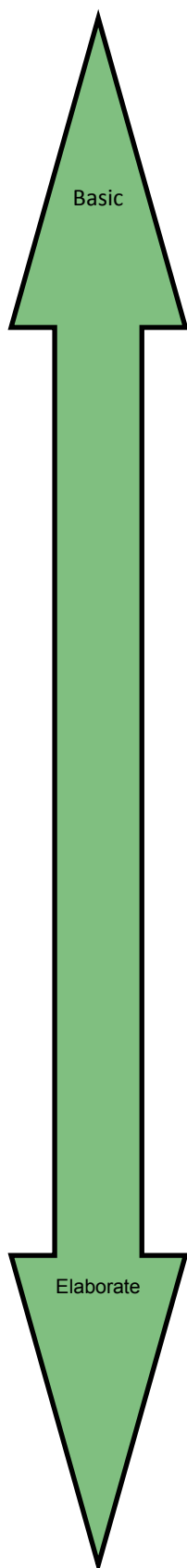
- ☑ Identify potential need for a playground and play elements that are most needed in the community
- ☑ Community forms a playground committee - suggest this is required earlier on; needed to determine playground vision and site selection.
- ☑ Through site visits, do an assessment of playgrounds in the area and identify potential sites. This may be done by a community group or there may be resources available through The City and others to assist.
- ☑ Obtain City approval for site location and desired upgrade (Urban Forestry, Pathways, Irrigation, Parks Planning, etc). Calgary Parks can help to obtain these approvals.
- ☑ Confirm community support with letter from community association
- ☑ If appropriate, initiate partnership with Parks Foundation Calgary for administration and project support.
- ☑ Further community engagement, especially for a specialized playground
- ☑ Determine if a larger footprint is required; Contact Calgary parks to locate utility lines to determine maximum footprint
- ☑ Choose desired type of playground and design choice. Discuss ideas with Calgary Parks to ensure approval of ongoing maintenance of playground
- ☑ Apply for grants and roll out fundraising plan.
- ☑ Once funding is confirmed, Calgary Parks (City built) , Developer (new community), or Parks Foundation (community driven) administers RFP to eligible playground installers, using Calgary Parks specifications
- ☑ Obtain Calgary Parks approval for final design choice **prior to ordering.**
- ☑ Finalize playground design, order equipment and scheduled installation in conjunction with Calgary Parks. Construct your playground.
- ☑ Opening celebration!





## Options Depending on Resources and Capacity

Developing a unique specialized playground is likely to take more time, money and expertise than a traditional playground. However there are still a range of options to include specialized play. Even a basic playground can include alternate elements. The following chart shows the types of elements that can be included from basic to more elaborate designs.



Even a simple or basic playground can include different types of play through alternate elements.

An easy way to include natural elements is to plant a garden nearby. Plant material, trees, and mulch can easily add imaginative and social elements, and a large boulder can provide space for risky play. Sometimes it may be as easy as designing the playground around existing gardens or trees.

Many traditional playground manufacturers will have products that are manufactured to mimic natural elements, but these will provide similar benefits of traditional playgrounds.



Some manufacturers will have more specialized equipment, such as net walls, tunnels or Ziplines. These may still be traditional and therefore not unique to the community, but can still support different types of play.

Some manufactures may also design play pieces made of natural materials. These provide for less prescriptive, or imaginative play, but not to the extent of a true natural area or playground.



You can also contract a playground designer to create something truly unique to your community, that provides exactly the types of play you want to achieve.

This may include a structure that has never been seen, or natural materials that have not been engineered to meet a specific function. Playgrounds should still be CSA approved

Note that due their unique nature, these types of playgrounds may have unique safety concerns, or higher than average maintenance costs which Calgary Parks may have difficulty supporting. Additional approvals may be required.





## Resources

### Assessment

- The City of Calgary produces detailed community demographics, based on census data, for each community. These are available at <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/CNS/Pages/Research-and-strategy/Community-profiles/Community-Profiles.aspx>
- Depending on the area, Calgary Parks may also be able to provide other studies, parks master plans, or assessment tools, that have been done in the area. Contact 311 and ask to be connected with the Parks Community Specialist for your community who may be able to provide you with any plans
- The Parks Foundation Calgary has plenty of knowledge, expertise and valuable tips for those developing a playground [www.parksfdn.com](http://www.parksfdn.com)

### Funding

- The Parks Foundation Calgary may be able to act as a fiscal agent for your project to provide administrative and fundraising support. Can also support project through their grant program. [www.parksfdn.com](http://www.parksfdn.com)
- The Community Facility Enhancement Program has traditionally been a well used grant for playground development <https://www.alberta.ca/community-facility-enhancement-program.aspx/#toc-1>

### Design

- An excellent resource is [www.outdoorplaybook.ca](http://www.outdoorplaybook.ca) which outlines numerous creative ideas and many more types of play
  - The Parks Foundation also has a Conceptual Design grant to support more diverse and innovative play designs
- \*Traditional playgrounds are not eligible for this grant. [www.parksfdn.com](http://www.parksfdn.com)



