



FREE PLANNING RESOURCE

The Inclusive Playground Fund Checklist

A practical checklist for councils planning inclusive playground projects under the Government's Playground Fund.

£18m

Government Playground Fund,
shared across 66 local
authorities

£270k

Available to each successful
local authority

11

Key planning areas covered in
this checklist

This checklist is intended as a practical resource and does not replace the Government's official Playground Fund guidance or any relevant professional, legal, safety or procurement advice.

INTRODUCTION

About this checklist

The Government's £18 million Playground Fund provides 66 local authorities across England with funding to create or improve three playgrounds in some of the country's most deprived areas. With £270,000 available to each successful local authority, councils have an important opportunity to improve local play provision and create spaces that work for more children and families.

But creating a successful playground involves more than selecting equipment. From understanding your community and choosing suitable sites, to considering accessibility, inclusion, procurement and long-term maintenance, there are many factors to consider before a project reaches the playground.

We've created this checklist to help councils and their partners consider some of the key questions throughout the process — from early engagement right through to long-term maintenance.

Please note: this checklist is intended as a practical resource and does not replace the Government's official Playground Fund guidance or any relevant professional, legal, safety or procurement advice.

Quick project checklist

BEFORE YOU PROGRESS

Before progressing your project, can you answer **yes** to the following?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ We understand the needs of our local community. | ☐ We have meaningfully engaged children and families. |
| ☐ Disabled children and families have been considered in our engagement. | ☐ We have assessed existing play provision. |
| ☐ Inclusion is being considered from the beginning of the project. | ☐ We have considered the whole playground, not just individual products. |
| ☐ We are providing a variety of play experiences. | ☐ We have considered different ages and abilities. |
| ☐ We are prioritising meaningful play value. | ☐ We have considered quality, durability and maintenance. |
| ☐ We understand our procurement requirements. | ☐ We have identified appropriate project partners. |
| ☐ We have considered how the playground will perform over the long term. | |

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Understand your community

An inclusive playground should respond to the people who will actually use it. Before making decisions about equipment or design, consider:

- ☐ Have you identified the children, families and communities who will use the playground?
- ☐ Have you engaged with parents, carers and families?
- ☐ Have you considered the needs of groups that may be underrepresented in existing consultation?
- ☐ Do you understand what your community feels is currently missing?
- ☐ Have you considered the needs of disabled children and young people?
- ☐ Have children and young people had meaningful opportunities to contribute?
- ☐ Have you reviewed feedback about existing local play provision?

Think beyond consultation. Community engagement can help councils understand not only what people want in a playground, but also what may currently prevent some children from participating.

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Assess the existing playground

If you are improving an existing site, start by understanding what is already there. Ask:

- ☐ What equipment is currently available?
- ☐ Are there opportunities for physical, sensory and social play?
- ☐ Are there barriers to accessing the playground?
- ☐ Is equipment suitable for different ages and abilities?
- ☐ Could existing equipment be retained or incorporated into the new design?
- ☐ Which types of play are currently supported?
- ☐ Can children with different abilities play alongside one another?
- ☐ Are there barriers to participating in play, such as surfacing type?
- ☐ What equipment needs replacing?
- ☐ Are there opportunities to improve the overall play experience without replacing everything?

A playground does not need to start from scratch to become more inclusive. Retrofitting and improving existing provision can be an effective way to introduce new play opportunities.

Think about inclusion, not just accessibility

Accessibility and inclusion are closely connected, but they are not the same thing. An accessible entrance may allow someone to enter a playground — inclusive play considers what happens once they are inside. Ask:

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| ☐ Can children with different abilities participate in play? | ☐ Can children play alongside friends and siblings? |
| ☐ Is there genuine choice in how children can play? | ☐ Are there different levels of physical challenge? |
| ☐ Are there opportunities for sensory exploration? | ☐ Are there opportunities for social and cooperative play? |
| ☐ Can children participate independently where appropriate? | ☐ Does the playground avoid separating disabled children from other children? |
| ☐ Does inclusion influence the overall design, rather than just one piece of equipment? | |

The goal should be a playground where **more children can find meaningful ways to play together**.

Consider a variety of play experiences

Different children will be attracted to different types of play. A well-rounded playground can provide a mixture of experiences, such as:

Spinning

Bouncing / jumping

Climbing

Sensory exploration

Imaginative play

Active physical play

Rocking

Swinging

Balancing

Musical play

Social and cooperative play

Quieter forms of play

Think about whether the proposed equipment creates **variety**, rather than simply adding multiple pieces of similar equipment.

Consider different ages and abilities

A playground may be used by children with very different needs. Consider:

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| ☐ Is there something for younger children? | ☐ Is there meaningful play for older children? |
| ☐ Can equipment accommodate different physical abilities? | ☐ Are there different levels of challenge? |
| ☐ Can children participate in different ways? | ☐ Can siblings of different ages play together? |
| ☐ Can parents and families of different abilities play together? | ☐ Have you considered how children may use equipment differently from its intended purpose? |

Inclusive design should not mean designing only for the youngest or least physically active users. **Children should be able to challenge themselves, develop skills and choose how they participate.**

Consider the whole playground

Inclusive play isn't just about individual pieces of equipment. Think about the complete experience:

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| ☐ Can people access the playground easily? | ☐ Are routes around the playground accessible? |
| ☐ Can children move between different areas? | ☐ Can parents and carers comfortably supervise? |
| ☐ Is there suitable seating? | ☐ Are there opportunities for quieter activities? |
| ☐ Is the layout clear and easy to navigate? | ☐ Have surfacing requirements been considered? |
| ☐ Have surrounding paths and entrances been considered? | ☐ Does the playground feel welcoming to the whole community? |

Choose equipment for play value

When considering equipment suppliers, don't only ask whether a product is accessible — ask what children can actually *do* with it. Consider:

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| ☐ What type of play does the equipment provide? | ☐ Can more than one child use it? |
| ☐ Can children with different abilities play together? | ☐ Does it encourage movement? |
| ☐ Does it encourage interaction? | ☐ Does it offer sensory experiences? |
| ☐ Does it develop physical or cognitive skills? | ☐ Is there an appropriate level of challenge? |
| ☐ Will children continue to find it engaging as they grow? | |

An inclusive product should provide **meaningful play value**, not simply meet an accessibility requirement.

Consider quality and longevity

Playgrounds are long-term community assets. Before selecting equipment, consider:

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| ☐ What materials are used? | ☐ How durable is the equipment? |
| ☐ What maintenance is required? | ☐ Are replacement parts available? |
| ☐ What after-sales support is provided? | ☐ What inspection requirements apply? |
| ☐ Does the supplier have relevant industry experience? | ☐ Can the supplier demonstrate a commitment to quality? |
| ☐ Is the equipment appropriate for the intended environment? | |

The cheapest option may not always represent the best long-term value. **Consider the whole life of the playground, not simply the initial purchase price.**

Consider your procurement approach

Procurement should be considered early, rather than once equipment has already been selected. Ask:

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| ☐ What procurement route will be used? | ☐ Are relevant frameworks available? |
| ☐ Have supplier requirements been clearly defined? | ☐ Have you considered suppliers' experience and expertise? |
| ☐ Can suppliers demonstrate relevant quality standards? | ☐ Have you considered appropriate trade body membership? |
| ☐ Are installation responsibilities clear? | ☐ Are maintenance and after-sales responsibilities clear? |
| ☐ Have you allowed sufficient time for procurement? | |

The Government's Playground Fund best practice guidance specifically references the Association of Play Industries, and notes that membership of recognised trade bodies may provide useful assurance during procurement due diligence. **Inclusive Play is proud to be an API member.**

Work with the right project partners

Many playground projects involve multiple organisations. You may be working with:

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| • Playground designers | • Landscape architects | • Playground manufacturers |
| • Equipment suppliers | • Installation contractors | • Groundworkers |
| • Surfacing specialists | • Consultants | • Community organisations |

Before the project progresses, consider:

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| ☐ Are responsibilities clearly defined? | ☐ Are equipment suppliers involved early enough? |
| ☐ Does your designer understand inclusive play? | ☐ Does your installer have the appropriate experience? |
| ☐ Can your equipment supplier work effectively with the wider project team? | |

Bringing specialist knowledge into the project early can help avoid costly changes later.

Opening day is only the beginning. Consider:

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| ☐ Who will inspect the playground? | ☐ Who will maintain the equipment? |
| ☐ What are the ongoing maintenance requirements? | ☐ Are replacement components available? |
| ☐ How will accessibility be maintained over time? | ☐ How will you evaluate the success of the project? |
| ☐ Will you continue to engage with the community after installation? | ☐ How could the playground be adapted or enhanced in the future? |

A successful playground should remain a valuable community asset for years to come.

Quick project checklist

RECAP

Before progressing your project, re-ask yourself — can you answer **yes** to the following?

- | | |
|---|---|
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LOOKING FOR INCLUSIVE PLAY EQUIPMENT?

How Inclusive Play can help

Once you have established what your community needs, the next step is choosing equipment that can help turn those requirements into meaningful play experiences. Inclusive Play manufactures and supplies **freestanding inclusive play equipment** for councils, schools, playground companies and other organisations across the UK and internationally.

AS AN API MEMBER WITH 20 YEARS OF INCLUSIVE PLAY EXPERTISE

We work alongside councils, playground designers, contractors and installers to identify equipment that fits the needs of individual projects, including:

Spinning & movement

Encouraging physical activity, balance, coordination and social interaction.

Rocking & dynamic play

Providing movement-based experiences for a range of users.

Sensory & musical play

Introducing sound, movement and sensory experiences into outdoor play.

Bouncing & active play

Creating opportunities for physical activity and different ways to participate.

Social & cooperative play

Encouraging children to interact and play alongside one another.

Further reading

Read our full guide to how Inclusive Play can support Playground Fund projects.

PLANNING YOUR PLAYGROUND FUND PROJECT?

Make inclusion part of the plan.

If your council has received funding through the Government's £18 million Playground Fund, we'd be happy to discuss your plans — whether you are still considering your options, developing a specification, or already working with a playground designer or installer.

[Contact Inclusive Play](#) →

Inclusive Play supplies freestanding play equipment and works alongside councils, playground companies, designers, contractors and other project partners. We do not provide complete playground design and installation services.