



Rhode Island Child Care Early Learning Facilities Fund *Fast Facts*

How to find a Playground Designer

Outdoor playspaces may be designed by professionals with varied backgrounds, but, typically those professionals will have backgrounds and licensure as; landscape architects, landscape designers, architects, contractors, or playground equipment sales representatives. The individuals and firms that you may secure to work with you on the assessment, design, and development of your outdoor playspace will typically fall into one of the following categories:

1. **Independent design professionals** who will work with you and your team to translate your vision for your outdoor space into a design that incorporates your programmatic goals and philosophies. This individual is most likely to be a landscape architect or architect and will most likely provide only design services, which may include cost estimating and construction oversight if that is included in the contract.
2. **Independent design:build firms** who will work similarly to category #1, but will also carry out the actual work on your space once the design is developed and agreed upon.
3. **Playground equipment sales representatives** whose primary objective is tied to the sale of their products. These individuals are often also design professionals and most are also certified playground inspectors. They will often do a “design” (layout) for you at no cost, but keep in mind that the design will be heavily focused towards laying out the items that they are working to eventually sell to you. This can be a very useful service but often has a very different focus and outcome than a designer who is working for you with no ultimate sales goal.

Note that categories 1 & 2 may often sub-contract with individuals from category #3 for components of your outdoor playspace, but individuals and firms in those categories have an allegiance that is solely to you, their client.

In deciding which category of professional is best suited for your project, ask yourself, “What is my ultimate goal and vision for the space? Do I want a very traditional playground that incorporates basic gross motor structures and surfacing or do I hope to develop an outdoor playscape that incorporates a wide variety of elements and opportunities? How can I best achieve this vision?”

Here are some additional steps to take to find the right designer for your outdoor project:

- Ask other programs who have undertaken playground projects for their recommendations
- Contact the RICCELFF for a list of professionals who have submitted their qualifications and demonstrated some appropriate knowledge and expertise

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- Check on all of the following:
 - Be sure they carry appropriate licensure and insurance.
 - Ask about projects they have done that are similar in size and scope to your project - check references!
 - Visit or ask to see photos of spaces they have designed to ensure that their vision for outdoor space matches your vision.
 - Ask if they or someone on their team is a Certified Playground Safety Inspector (CPSI) who can help you in assessing your current space and then incorporate any needed modifications in the overall planning.
 - Ask them about their philosophy in working with clients – how will they learn about your vision for your space?
 - Be sure that they understand the budget that you have for the project and that they are comfortable designing within any budgetary limitations.