



CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

# Designing at a distance: Coronavirus is changing how Philly architects work



By Starr Herr-Cardillo · April 14, 2020



Playground designer Meghan Talarowski took this picture of her post-pandemic workspace, shared with her husband and two children (Meghan Talarowski)

Meghan Talarowski didn't envision spending the spring inside, assembling thousands of packs of crayons, bubbles, activity sheets, and sidewalk chalk.

Not to mention the distraction of new coworkers sharing her space: her two young children and husband; all of them working from the family's Philadelphia home.

"This is a tough time, kids and parents are stressed," Talarowski, the founder and executive director of Studio Ludo, a nonprofit playground design studio and advocacy group. "People are trying to work while being full-time caretakers."

Talarowski had planned to begin, this summer, a national study of 50 playgrounds in major cities, funded by the National Institute of Health.

But, faced with a statewide stay-at-home order and the NIH project officially on hold, Talarowski pivoted. The landscape designer sensed a new collective need and shifted her focus from playgrounds to Play Packs, expanding the way her studio "delivers play" for the time being.



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the packs are supplied by donations from Treehouse Books, Staples, and through direct donations submitted through the nonprofit's [website](#). They are being distributed at community spaces like the [Village of Arts and Humanities](#), going to families along with boxes of food and other quarantine supplies.

Studio Ludo is donating staff time to coordinate, assemble, and distribute the packs across the city, with a goal to produce 1,200 packs per week until the end of the school year.

The next distribution date will be Friday, April 24, since the next two weeks are critical for social distancing, she said.

Flexibility and creative problem-solving are critical qualities of a good designer. But even for professionals trained in these skills, the coronavirus pandemic presents an unprecedented challenge. In Philadelphia, designers are responding with new ideas — and urgent questions about engaging with community while public life is on hold.



Play Packs were distributed along with boxes of food at the Village of Arts and Humanities in North Philadelphia. (Village of Arts and Humanities)

“The weird thing is that we’re still very busy,” says Sara Pevaroff Schuh, founder and principal of SALT design studio, a five-person landscape architecture firm dedicated to re-envisioning urban and community spaces.

While it’s possible to perform tasks from home, design is best when done collaboratively.

“Things happen when people are in the same room,” said Schuh. “Energy is generated from other people saying something, or you watching them doing



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