

Alex Gilliam's Bio

The Short Version

A cheerleader of possibility, Alex Gilliam is the founder of Public Workshop, an organization dedicated to helping individuals, schools, and communities achieve great things through design. Public Workshop creates projects, tools and events that help people positively change the places they live, work and play. Alex fundamentally believes that great design, empowerment, innovation, and having fun are not mutually exclusive. He has worked with such organizations as the Cooper Hewitt National Design Museum, the Rural Studio, the Chicago Architecture Foundation, and the University of Pennsylvania. Helping start the Charter High School For Architecture and Design in Philadelphia, he is a national expert on K-12 design education and engaging children in redesigning and rebuilding their schools and communities. Currently, he is advising an architecture firm and its community partners on the creation of a community innovation incubator; in the coming months will be working with Chicago teenagers to design-build food carts for community farms; and leading an incredible cast of characters in Austin to create 'A Week Of Waller Creek', a new model for engaging citizens in changing their underloved public spaces. When not working making great things with children, Alex is practically glued to his bicycle and coaches a small but inspiring collection of athletes. He is really interested in the creating places for micro-adventures and would love, love, love to transform some (at least marginally willing) community into a continuous landscape of play and adventure.

A Little More...

Can making a cake change a public space?

This perhaps odd question is actually rather typical of the way I think on a day to day basis. This sort of questioning arises not out of a need to be different or unusual but a deep and pragmatic desire to be more effective in working with people to accomplish great things. Why shouldn't the students of a physically and emotionally decrepit K-12 school in the middle of no-where rural Alabama be empowered to redesign, and rebuild the very building that communicates to them that no one on the state, federal or local level cares about them? Can a tiny, nascent non-profit in New York City be strengthened, grow exponentially and create better work by making teens from the neighborhood its most essential employees and idea generators? Will a smartly designed, open and intuitive building system allow students to tap into their own knowledge about space and architecture, enabling them to learn more effectively while create amazing structures? If a group of people in Austin, Texas publicly design-build a cake master plan of an under-loved park, can they generate a flurry of ideas, grow a non-existent advocacy group and help jump-start an ailing community planning process?

Heck yeah. Although, I'm trained as an architect and a friend once describe me as one's favorite swiss army knife, ultimately, as you may be able to tell from the questions above, I am a cheerleader of possibility and am loving every moment of it.