

Cities Reimagined

Cities Reimagined is a for-purpose company that helps leaders diagnose and solve urban problems. Our work addresses systemic challenges in mid-size cities that prevent economic growth, social mobility, and human connection.

We do this through citizen-centered design, an approach that centers the hopes, aspirations, and needs of residents. We walk a mile in their shoes and then design accessible, efficient, and user-friendly programs and services that improve their quality of life.

Where We Work

Detroit is our home city and our living laboratory where we investigate problems and design solutions for post-industrial places. Our team is headquartered at Newlab in Corktown. Cities Reimagined also works in the following cities:

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|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Charleston | Indianapolis | Nashville |
| Columbus | Lexington | Pittsburgh |
| Greenville | Memphis | Baltimore |
| Huntsville | Milwaukee | Cleveland |
| Chattanooga | Minneapolis | Richmond |

Our Team



ALEX JOHNSTON
FOUNDER + CEO

Alex has spent more than a decade helping civic leaders diagnose and solve urban problems. Alex's work is focused on addressing systemic challenges that prevent economic growth, social mobility, and human connection in cities.



JOSH MCMANUS
PARTNER

Josh brings the best of both for-profit and non-profit solutions to help businesses thrive while building a better world. He's worked with the C-suites of many of the country's most significant businesses and nonprofits, including Ford Motor Company, Quicken Loans, United Way, and the Knight Foundation.



MEG KEHOE
PROJECT MANAGER

Meg comes to Cities Reimagined after more than a decade in Institutional and Brand Marketing. She is a storyteller and problem-solver with a passion for people. Meg's expertise lies in implementing every last detail of systemic change.



VICTORIA GARNER
LEAD SERVICE DESIGNER

Victoria has a background in user experience design, strategic thinking, and human-centered design. She uses her analytical and creative skills to design user-centered solutions that address complex challenges.

Seek	1. Choose a problem.	2. Identify champions.	3. Determine strengths.
Think	4. Perform intensive research.	5. Set goals.	6. Brainstorm solutions.
Make	7. Build budget & timeline.	8. Prototype a solution.	9. Build coalition.
Do	10. Pilot.	11. Measure progress.	12. Document findings.



Partners

Projects



Developed a philanthropic strategy to produce income growth, asset growth through homeownership, and strengthened social infrastructure for low-income Detroiters.



Facilitated a convening of 100 entrepreneurs, policymakers, tech experts, and government leaders to build unified strategies for economic growth in Michigan.



Reimagined an underutilized public space on the Detroit Riverfront to better address the needs and aspirations of Detroit residents.



Operated a design studio to bring public and private sector transportation companies together to collaboratively solve road safety issues.



Created a guidebook to inclusive grantmaking giving guidance on how to incorporate the lived experience of beneficiaries into fund distribution.



Created a system that linked in-country initiatives to organization-wide goals to improve the lives of children in developing countries.



Overhauled the City business permitting and licensing process to eliminate unnecessary barriers for entrepreneurs and small businesses in Detroit.



Developed a new research agenda and data collection strategy to better meet the needs of midwestern member organizations.



Designed a program to increase the number of contractors ready to bid and successfully complete demolition, rehabilitation, and new construction projects in Detroit.

OUR TEAM

Alex Johnston

FOUNDER + CEO

Alex Johnston is the founder and CEO of Cities Reimagined, a social enterprise that helps civic leaders diagnose and solve urban problems. Alex's work is focused on addressing systemic challenges that prevent economic growth, social mobility, and human connection in cities.

Alex began her career as a social worker in Central Virginia working with teenage mothers living below the poverty line. After seeing firsthand how difficult it was for her clients to navigate the process of applying for food stamps, she began asking her local government leaders who was working on making these processes less complicated. The first city employee she asked said, "No one - that's not something we do", while the next said, "If they want it bad enough they will figure it out". The last answer she got was, "Someone should really fix that". Two weeks later, Alex quit her job as a social worker and started Cities Reimagined with the idea of placing the end user at the center of the design process. She believed that the person applying for food stamps should be the one designing the application.



Since founding Cities Reimagined in 2013, Alex has worked with corporate philanthropy, local government, and global NGOs to design citizen-centered systems that build trust and facilitate connection between people living in urban cities. Her background in business gives her a knack for developing solutions with a triple bottom line: systems that benefit people, planet, and profit. Alex's work in Detroit was awarded the HUD Secretary's Award for Public-Philanthropic Partnerships.

Alex holds a Masters in Cities with Honors from the London School of Economics, an MBA, and a certificate in Creative Cities from NYU. She is also a graduate of the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia. Alex is also a Senior Fellow for the Institute of Social Innovation at Babson College where she collaborates with social entrepreneurs to address social, economic, and environmental challenges in cities.

OUR TEAM

Josh McManus

PARTNER

Josh McManus is known for problem-solving and turning big ideas into pragmatic action. He brings the best of both for-profit and non-profit solutions to help businesses thrive while building a better world. His projects range from reorganizing a \$7 billion family of 150 companies to help stop the population loss in Detroit, to stimulating an entrepreneurial ecosystem that helped transform Chattanooga into one of the country's most innovative and fastest-growing cities.

He's worked with the C-suites of many of the country's most significant businesses and nonprofits, including Ford Motor Company, Quicken Loans, United Way, and the Knight Foundation. This year, he's helped Ford Motor Company through his partnership with Civic with strategies, content, and cultural interventions to navigate the transitions to autonomous, electric and connected vehicles. Last year, he helped Ford drive positive change with a transformative announcement of \$1 billion of real estate and strategic investment in their home city of Detroit.



Josh previously served as Quicken Loans and Cleveland Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert Chief Operating Officer to create a “for more-than-profit” approach to organizing and accelerating his portfolio of businesses, real estate, and sports holdings.

Prior to his work in Detroit, Josh co-founded CreateHere, an entrepreneurship and cultural change organization that sparked over 10,000 new enterprises worldwide, and championed the world's largest community visioning process, with over 26,000 surveys collected.

Josh began his career by problem-solving with private foundations and public institutions in post-industrial cities first in Atlanta and eventually in Chattanooga. Along the way, he earned business degrees from Georgia Tech and the University of Tennessee.

Josh's work and ideas have been featured in Forbes, Fast Company, The Economist, Entrepreneur, GOOD, The Huffington Post and even Garden and Gun. He's been recognized nationally as a Next American Vanguard and internationally as a Marshall Memorial Fellow.

Seek

DIAGNOSE A PROBLEM & DEVELOP A BRIEF

Using a mix of analytical tools and discussions with subject matter experts, we dive deep to diagnose the problem you are working to solve. Once we've identified the problem, we work closely with you to develop a concise brief that outlines practical steps forward.

Think

PERFORM INTENSIVE RESEARCH & BRAINSTORM SOLUTIONS

Research and insight gathering allows us to deeply understand the people we are designing for. During this phase, we conduct user interviews, observation sessions, and facilitate workshops to capture user ideas and feedback. This approach provides detailed insights into their needs and challenges, guiding the development of innovative and user-centered solutions.

Make

DEVELOP A PROTOTYPE & BUILD A COALITION

Prototyping turns innovative ideas into tangible models, allowing us to test and iterate on concepts in real time. Through sketches, digital models, or functional mock-ups, we rapidly refine concepts based on real user feedback. This approach ensures the final product is designed to meet user needs and exceed expectations.

Do

PILOT THE SOLUTION & DOCUMENT FINDINGS

Pilots allow us to test a solution on a small scale before full launch. We design and manage a pilot program, carefully selecting a representative group of end users to test the product. We gather data on performance, functionality, and user satisfaction. Using this data, we make adjustments to the solution to improve performance and better meet the needs of users.

Gather

HALF DAY & FULL DAY GROUP FACILITATION

Our team of certified facilitators run engaging workshops, planning meetings, and retreats, all tailored to your organization's unique needs. We work with you to set clear goals and make sure every activity moves you closer to achieving them. Whether you're looking to spark new ideas, strengthen your team, or set a clear direction, we're here to make it happen in a straightforward, supportive way.



The Challenge

Most commercial trucks operating on city streets have blind zones that can make pedestrians, cyclists, and children invisible to drivers. This creates dangerous road conditions, putting undue stress on both drivers and vulnerable road users. Trucking companies have the desire to purchase and operate safer trucks, but didn't have the tools to make the right buying decisions.

Design Process

GATHERING INSIGHTS

To better understand the impact of blind zones created by commercial trucks, Cities Reimagined researchers took a front row seat and rode along with five truck operators in New York and Boston. We picked up trash with a national collection company in the narrow streets of Boston's North End, and hauled asphalt through Queens with long tenured New York City fleet drivers. Seeing the problem from the perspective of a driver allowed us to build a solution that worked for them too - not just their managers. In tandem, we talked to more than 20 fleet operators across the country to understand the existing process for buying trucks and the pain points that could be alleviated by a better solution.

PROTOTYPING

After these ride alongs and research interviews, Cities Reimagined convened a group of 25 drivers, fleet managers, policy makers, and road safety experts to develop the first American direct vision rating system. Using the insights from the drivers and subject matter experts, we prototyped a system that would assign a star rating to a truck based on the size of the blind zones.

TESTING + ITERATING

In the following weeks, Cities Reimagined created a direct vision measurement kit that was mailed to 20 fleets across the country that included all of the tools to measure and rate the trucks in their fleets. A simple instruction manual was included, guiding the recipients through a 15 minute measurement exercise.

RESULTS

- Created the first American Direct Vision Rating System to measure and rate the size of blind zones
- New safety information available to fleet managers to inform buying decisions
- A simple star rating system to help companies make better choices about what type of vehicles to purchase
- A scalable methodology to measure and rate the safety of any municipal or commercial fleet in the U.S.