Many cities in the Great Lakes region experience frequent flooding, and area homeowners may face property damage, health problems, and other potential repercussions. Design for America, a Northwestern-founded student initiative that creates local and social impact through interdisciplinary design, is on the case. In August 40 DFA members from colleges around the country connected with the Center for Neighborhood Technology (1) and community members in Midlothian, Illinois (2), to learn more about urban flooding and conduct in-home research and interviews with flood victims (3, 4). After interviewing homeowners, activists, and experts from the American Red Cross (5), the students regrouped at McCormick's Ford Motor Company Engineering Design Center and brainstormed design solutions to help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from flooding (6, 7, 8). Ideas included a grassroots flood-alert system, a smoke alarm–like device for overflow drains, and a “Ziploc bag for your couch.”

“It was a powerful experience to meet directly with flood victims, and those from the community felt incredibly grateful that their stories were heard,” said Sami Nerenberg, DFA’s program administrator. “Design for America will continue to work with the CNT to help amplify the issues related to urban flooding.”