DESIGN for AMERICA, the Northwestern University student initiative that creates local and social impact through interdisciplinary design, has expanded to eight more universities and colleges across the country, including Barnard, Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Oregon, Stanford, and the University of California, Los Angeles.

More than 20 students from those colleges descended on Northwestern in August for the first-ever Design for America Leadership Studio, which launched the expansion. Students spent a weekend learning Design for America’s values and processes and ways to effect change in their own communities. They spent Friday on a one-day design project: how to improve the lives of people with asthma. The students interviewed a mother and her five-year-old son and tried to frame and reframe potential problems. They then used Play-Doh, foam core, markers, and Post-it notes to brainstorm possible solutions.

Students spent Saturday reflecting on their experiences with organizations and learning the core values of Design for America: to look locally, act fearlessly, and create fervently. They talked about working in teams and heard from coaches on how to best work with different types of communities. They heard from design sage Bruce Mau, designer and distinguished fellow of the Segal Design Institute at Northwestern, who shared his story and his design manifesto. Students then spent Sunday learning how to run a DFA studio and how to scope out projects: Are they daring, feasible, and applicable? Are they interdisciplinary? Do they make you excited?

Design for America was conceived at McCormick in 2008. DFA organizers aim to make the Leadership Studio an annual event and hope to expand the organization to more than 50 universities over the next five years.