People + Planet

Designing for Social Impact

How Steelcase and Design for America are shaping the next generation of social innovators

Read 2 minutes

Photo courtesy of Design for America, taken in 2017.

During the past two years Steelcase has partnered with Design for America (DFA) to support the career-readiness and professional development of social changemakers through projects such as the creation of the "Future of Work: Encouraging Social Intraprenuers" challenge for the DFA Challenge Library, a resource of well-scoped social impact projects, available for use by any team across the DFA network.

DFA is a nonprofit organization — an idea incubator who uses design thinking to shape the next generation of social innovators. DFA's model equips students with design thinking and innovation methods to tackle social challenges on campus and beyond. Their tools, model and coaching instill community, encourage creativity and build capacity to take on any challenge.

“At Steelcase, our vision for the future is one where communities are more equitable, quality education is more accessible and the environment is more sustainable,” says Kim Dabbs, global vice president of Social Innovation at Steelcase. “As a global company we have the extreme privilege to work with people and communities throughout the world. That privilege comes with the responsibility to lead with empathy, challenge the status quo and design sustainable systems that open the door to new opportunities. We are committed to thinking, learning and co-creating together with our community partners to achieve a more just and equitable world.”

This past semester, Steelcase employee volunteers from the industrial and interior design teams supported current DFA students with a virtual portfolio review, helping them become workforce-ready by refining the digital presentations of their work and process. Most recently, a group of Steelcase designers teamed up with DFA to lead an interactive workshop exploring the future of work, worker and workplace post-Covid.

“The Steelcase team provided the DFA network with a vivid presentation including an innovative employment of MURAL, a powerful design tool which DFAers use on their studio projects. It was incredibly impactful for the network of students to witness the tool’s ‘real world’ application while preparing them to enter a shifting post-pandemic workplace,” says DFA program coordinator Katie Shulman.

Over the last twelve years, DFA has grown into a national network with over 40 student-led studios all over the country, becoming a pipeline of innovators, changemakers and social entrepreneurs. From coast to coast, DFAers connect and impact their communities, working with partners like Steelcase to support students as they navigate careers in design and explore current issues impacting the future of work.

If you have an idea on how to support students with educational transitions and career readiness, sign up to be part of the next Steelcase Social Innovation Lab.