

UKRAINIAN DEFENDERS LEADERSHIP CENTER

REPORT 2024-2025



Team of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center



Yana Chapailo
Director of the Ukrainian
Defenders Leadership Center



Liudmyla Kryvoruchka
Academic Director of the Ukrainian
Defenders Leadership Center



Mariia Savrun
Head of Strategic Development
and Partnerships at the Ukrainian
Defenders Leadership Center



Sofiya Doig
Communications Manager and
Community Coordinator at the
Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center



Polina Fedorchenko
Specialist of the “Leadership and
Resilience” Executive Education
Program at the Ukrainian Defenders
Leadership Center



Polina Kyriienko
Specialist at the Ukrainian
Defenders Leadership Center

List of contents

List of contents	3
Introduction	4
Executive Summary	5
Key Achievements in the First Year	5
Plans for the Upcoming Academic Year	6
The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center	6
Mission	6
Our Target Audiences	7
Main Areas of Work	7
What Have We Achieved in the First Year?	7
“Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program	7
Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation Course	11
Working with Communities	12
Working with the Public Sector, Businesses and HR	12
International Advocacy and Networking	13
Community of Action	15
Our results so far	18

Introduction

Dear friends, partners, and community,

You are holding the first annual report of the **Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, the veteran-focused academic and educational center of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.**

The experience of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center represents a unique Ukrainian model of exploring the transformative potential of education – how education can not only teach, but also restore, inspire, and help find answers to complex questions.

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is a space of systemic collaboration, where education, leadership, and community come together to create real change. It is a place where veterans, servicemen and servicewomen, and Kyiv-Mohyla faculty generate new meanings in times of turbulence, challenges, and uncertainty.

Every day, we witness the power of education as a process of transformation. We see how shared learning becomes a space for growth – through knowledge, reflection, and changes in worldview. Each participant in our programs has their own map of reality, yet through collective learning, we find connection points that unite and strengthen us.

Our executive leadership programs and initiatives for veterans focus on building a community of like-minded individuals who share an essential part of the journey together. We aim to make education an instrument of progress – even when it requires us to question our own assumptions or challenge old beliefs.

Education is a dynamic path of change, one

that each person walks at their own pace. Some come to education after military service; others continue their learning journey with a renewed sense of purpose and responsibility. Our mission is to support both individual and collective transformation – to be a space for creating and realizing meaningful ideas in service of a strong and independent Ukraine.

We continue to expand the Kyiv-Mohyla community of those who create change. Thank you for joining our community, for empowering the strong, and for supporting those who defend Ukraine.

This report is not only about a year of work – it is a shared story of trust, action, courage, and belief in the power of education.

The launch and work of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, along with the implementation of two cohorts of the “Leadership and Resilience” program, became possible thanks to the generous support of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America and its community of donors in the United States. The launch of the “Community of Action” was made possible through the support of donors from Switzerland, the Gysel family.

We extend our sincere gratitude to all partners, colleagues, the team, and Kyiv-Mohyla Academy for their support. And to our defenders – for your protection, trust, openness, humor, and unwavering movement forward.

Yana Chapailo, Co-Founder of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

Mariia Savrun, Co-Founder of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

Executive Summary

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is a university initiative within the structure of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy (NaUKMA). It is the first center in Ukraine focused on strengthening the leadership potential of veterans through executive education and community. The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center was founded on August 29, 2024.

Key Achievements in the First Year

Launch of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

- Piloted a unique concept of educational programs for veterans
- Strengthened trust among key partners in the veteran support sector

“Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program

- Designed and **launched a flagship Program** for veterans – a tool for transition from military to civilian leadership (authors: Yana Chapailo, Mariia Savrun, Taras Tymochko, Oksana Syroid, Volodymyr Dehtyarov, Liudmyla Kryvoruchka)
- **Graduated two cohorts** – Fall 2024 and Spring 2025
- A total of 29 veterans became alumni: the first group of 9 participants graduated in January 2025, the second group of 20 participants in June 2025

Career Navigation Course for Veterans

- **Adapted and piloted the author’s Course** “Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation”, together with Sergiy Nozdrachov

- **38 participants successfully completed** the course across two groups (online and in-person)

Work with Communities, the State, and Ukrainian Businesses

- **Conducted focus groups** to assess needs in career counseling, guidance, and inclusive employment programs in **three pilot communities**: Lutsk, Opishnia (Poltava region), and Chernihiv. Respondents included local authorities, Employment Centers, and veteran associations
- **Designed** and delivered the training “**Trauma-Informed Communication in Working with Veterans**” for HR professionals of Agromat, Epicenter K, Unique Trade, SoftServe, Ukrenergo, and Ukrtelecom companies
- **Designed** and delivered the training “**Guiding war veterans through choosing a career path**” for specialists of the State Employment Centers (22 professionals from Kyiv, Kyiv region, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia, Lutsk, and Opishnia, Poltava region)

International Advocacy and Networking

- Yana Chapailo, Director of the Center, **presented the Leadership Center at the panel discussion** “Strengthening Ukraine’s Workforce and Human Capital” in **Washington, D.C.**, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)
- **Visited the Ukraine House in Washington, DC**, and met with Oksana Markarova, **Ambassador of Ukraine** to the United States (2021–2025), NaUKMA alumna in Ecology (1999), and member of the NaUKMA Supervisory Board (2018–present). Presented the Center’s achievements

- **Welcomed a distinguished guest at NaUKMA**
– TJ Ihor Kostecky, professor at **Bard College** and author of the Vision Training method. He conducted a series of meetings and workshops for students, veterans, and partner veteran organizations

Alumni Community “Community of Action”

- **Formed an alumni community** that already includes 67 veterans
- **The Community of Action unites** defenders, students, faculty, and NaUKMA administration to foster cooperation, knowledge exchange,

and joint initiatives.

- **Organized a meeting** with Tetyana Berezhna, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine (2022–2025), alumna of the NaUKMA Faculty of Law (2007–2013)
- Participated in the **charity fair “Podilskyi Shuk”**, presenting the Leadership Center’s programs, expanding our contact network, and strengthening ties with the Podil community

The launch of the “Community of Action” was made possible thanks to the support of philanthropists from Switzerland – the Gisel family.

Plans for the Upcoming Academic Year:



“Leadership and Resilience 2.0” Executive Education Program – an advanced expert-level program focused on analyzing critical points in the development of society

Development of three short-term courses on financial literacy, access to information, and public administration

Supporting and advancing Kyiv-Mohyla’s research on veteran-related issues.

Expanding international partnerships to showcase Ukraine’s unique experience and to learn from successful global practices

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is a university initiative within the structure of the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, focused on strengthening the leadership potential of veterans through education and community. The Center began its activities in June 2024 and was officially founded on August 29, 2024 – the Day of Remembrance of Fallen Defenders of Ukraine.

The Leadership Center operates on Kyiv-Mohyla’s values and is part of a community that unites Ukraine’s defenders, NaUKMA faculty

and researchers, as well as representatives of the public, private, and state sectors. It is a space for open dialogue, generating new ideas, and building partnerships between veterans, their families, and different sectors of society.

Mission

The mission of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is to support veterans in developing their leadership potential for active participation in building a responsible society,

recognizing the power of their experience and their contribution to the future of the state.

The Center combines an educational approach with leadership development, fostering the transformation of military experience into civic, professional, and social engagement.

The values and strategic goals of the Leadership Center continue NaUKMA's mission: to cultivate nationally responsible, honest, and responsible individuals who act according to the principles of fairness and justice, contribute to an open democratic society, and strengthen the resilience of Ukraine.

Our Target Audiences

- Veterans of the russo-Ukrainian war
- Active service members
- State/government sector
- Civil society organizations
- Ukrainian businesses
- Academic community

Main Areas of Work

Certificate Programs for Veterans

Development and implementation of dynamic academic programs and rich learning opportunities tailored to the needs of veterans and active service members. These programs focus on strengthening leadership capacities, managerial skills, and civic engagement.

Cross-Sector Cooperation

Building partnerships among state institutions, businesses, the civic sector, and the academic community to create an environment conducive to supporting and empowering veterans.

Implementation of the Trauma-Informed Approach

Integrating trauma-informed principles into the Leadership Center's academic programs, providing training for specialists working with veterans to foster a sensitive and safe environment.

Scaling & Disseminating Best Practices in Ukrainian Higher Education Institutions

Developing and disseminating effective models of veteran support for other Ukrainian universities, replicating the successful model of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center across higher education institutions in Ukraine.

Community of Action

Establishment and support of the Community of Action network for Leadership Center alumni that has already brought together 67 veterans, students, faculty, and NaUKMA administration. The community fosters cooperation, knowledge exchange, and joint initiatives, strengthening engagement within the university and with broader society.

What Have We Achieved in the First Year?

“Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program

In September 2024, the **Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center** launched its flagship project – the “**Leadership and Resilience**” Executive

Education Program.¹ The Program is designed to support and empower veterans who aspire to work in public policy, community development, and other leadership initiatives dedicated to Ukraine's recovery and resilience.

¹This program, along with all those that follow, is offered free of charge to veterans thanks to the generosity of donors and the support of partner organizations.



Hlib Stryzhko, veteran and graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

The Program provides an in-depth understanding of public governance, explores the historical and political contexts of Ukraine’s statehood, its development and current challenges, and examines Ukraine’s role in the international arena. It also highlights the importance of a leader’s reputation and how it is built. The program is credit-bearing within the ECTS system in the fields of Management and Political Science.

Participants are admitted through a nomination process: partner organizations nominate candidates, who are then interviewed by the selection committee. This model fosters intellectual exchange among highly motivated representatives of diverse veteran communities.

The “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program is offered free of charge to veterans, made possible through the support of the Kyiv-Mohyla community in Ukraine and abroad, along with our donors and partners.

The Program was developed between June and August 2024 by the Director of the Leadership Center, Yana Chapailo, the Head of Strategic Partnerships, Mariia Savrun, Advisor to the Center and active service member as well

as NaUKMA alumnus, Taras Tymochko, lecturer in public policy, governance, and law, officer of the 2nd Corps of the National Guard “Khartia”, Oksana Syroid, and business coach, co-founder of Newsfront Communications, and media relations officer of the 2nd Corps of the National Guard “Khartia”, Volodymyr Dehtyarov.

To ensure the program’s success, the Leadership Center held a focus group with NaUKMA student veterans who provided valuable ideas and recommendations for improvement. The NaUKMA Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Center offered training for the faculty on trauma-informed approaches to create a supportive and comfortable learning environment. The trauma-informed approach,

“Studying at the Leadership Center was one of the best things that ever happened to me. I was able to receive a high-quality education in a short period of time.”

*Kateryna Rotar,
graduate of the
“Leadership & Resilience” Course.*

an essential component of teaching during a full-scale war, incorporates theoretical knowledge, ethical principles, and teaching practices tailored to the unique, often traumatic, experiences of military personnel and veterans. This approach fosters a calmer and more supportive learning environment, aiding participants in their adaptation to civilian life.

Over the 2024–2025 academic year, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center **graduated two cohorts** of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

The first cohort included thirteen participants nominated by partner veteran organizations for their leadership potential. Nine completed the program successfully, while the others chose to continue their studies in Spring 2025.

The initial curriculum included modules such as:

- The Philosophy of Public Administration in Western and Eastern Civilizations
- The History of Ukraine in Phenomena.

The Nature of War and the Concept of Leadership. International Organizations after the Second World War

- The Phenomenon of Private Property. Challenges of Public Service. Virtues and Lifestyle of a Leader
- Organization of Public Administration in Ukraine. Decentralization
- Interaction with Nonprofit Organizations, Businesses, and Religious Organizations. Tools of Political Influence and Propaganda
- Public Communication. The Concept of Reputation and Information Hygiene
- Leadership. Examining the Strengths and Weaknesses of a Leader. Understanding the Followers' Needs and the Authenticity of the Leader
- Practicums: Project Management, Interaction with Authorities
- Preparation and Presentation of Final Group Projects with Supervision

Participants studied for two months. They met every Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, and spent more than 120 hours overall working together. At the end of the program, the participants collaborated on group projects to design educational programs. This format not only generated new ideas but also offered deeper insights into the challenges veterans face in various aspects of life. It emphasized the principle of “nothing for veterans without veterans”: policies, programs, and courses must be created with veterans in accordance with their real needs. The Leadership Center later applied these outcomes in practice when conducting training sessions for Human Resources specialists.

On January 17, 2025, the graduation ceremony of the first cohort took place. It marked not only the conclusion of a study period but also an important milestone in shaping the program's community. The event gathered representatives of civil society, academia, and

Ukrainian businesses, fostering networking and partnerships.



A photo from the graduation of the first cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

After the first cohort, the Leadership Center team reviewed participant feedback on content, structure, and format, and updated the curriculum for the second group. The revised version expanded the course to three months and added new modules. Participants studied russian colonialism with literary scholar and postcolonial studies expert Roman Veretelnyk and philosopher Vakhtang Kebuladze.

One of the main requests from the first cohort was for a deeper understanding of project management. To address this, **Yevheniia Kucherenko, Head of the Project and Process Management Office at Aurora Multimarket**, joined the teaching team and introduced practical tools for driving change in complex environments. This module also highlighted the Leadership Center's ongoing collaboration with Ukrainian businesses, which support veteran leadership development both as lecturers and as partners in educational initiatives.

In March 2025, the second cohort of twenty veterans began their studies. Several participants had already completed the Career Navigation Course at the Leadership Center, making this course a logical continuation of their leadership development journey. New candidates were nominated by graduates of the first cohort, a clear sign of growing institutional

trust and a sustainable support environment within the community.

On June 13, 2025, the graduation ceremony of the second cohort took place. After three months of intensive study, twenty veterans received certificates from the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and joined the growing alumni community of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center.

Our graduation ceremonies traditionally welcome representatives of academia, NaUKMA faculty and administration, as well as partners from Ukrainian businesses and civil society. Among them were Veteran Hub Charitable Foundation, NGO “Vilnyi Vybir” (Free Choice), NGO “Prostir Mozhlivostey” (Space of Opportunities), Invictus Games, NGO Lobby X, International Renaissance Foundation, NGO “Human Rights Center for Servicemen ‘Pryncyp’”, Aurora Multimarket, Amnesty International, the Public Health Center, the NaUKMA School for Policy Analysis, and the broader Kyiv-Mohyla community and friends of the Academy.



Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Partnerships at the Leadership Center, Yevheniia Kucherenko, Head of Project and Process Management Office at Avrora Multimarket chain, Yana Chapailo, Director of the Leadership Center, Serhiy Kvit, President of NaUKMA

The “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program combines Kyiv-Mohyla’s academic tradition with the practical experience of Ukraine’s defenders, along with modern approaches to leadership, public



Oleksandr Papirovyi, graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

governance, and resilience. Since its launch in September 2024, it has become a space for interaction, exchange, and growth – bringing together participants, lecturers, partners, and innovators. The next cohort begins in August 2025, with classes running from September to December 2025.



Maryna Lanivska, graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

Together, the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center are building a resilient veteran community – active, responsible, and united. This community contributes to shaping the content of education, transforming approaches to leadership, and rebuilding Ukraine.



A photo from the graduation from the “Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation” Course

Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation Course*²

In October 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center launched the Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Course. It was designed for veterans seeking to embark on a path toward professional fulfillment. The Course helps participants take their first steps toward securing a job that aligns with their expectations, talents, and acquired professional skills.

The Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Course was designed and delivered by Serhiy Nozdrachov, a certified Gallup expert in talent and strengths development, professor at Kyiv Mohyla Business School, and a partner of Oxford Leadership Consulting in the UK.



Serhiy Nozdrachov, lecturer at the Kyiv-Mohyla Business School and faculty member of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

The Course became a true space for transformation. By the end of the program, the veterans shared their experiences of change, reflected on what they had learned, and outlined ambitious plans for the future. A total of 38 veterans successfully completed the program, each taking an important step toward new opportunities and personal growth.



Anatolii Kostenko, graduate of “Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans Adaptation” Course

“Stepping into a new role takes more than just a change in title – it requires new habits and adaptive strategies. Education is perhaps the most powerful way to support that transition and help a person see themselves differently in the world.”

Serhiy Nozdrachov, lecturer of the Professional Navigation course and the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Course. Gallup-certified expert in talent and strengths development, faculty member at Kyiv-Mohyla Business School (kmbs), and partner at Oxford Leadership Consulting (UK).

The course was conducted in two formats: in-person sessions for veterans nominated by partner organizations and online sessions (via Zoom) for participants from communities in Lutsk (Volyn Oblast), Opishnia (Poltava Oblast), and Chernihiv (Chernihiv Oblast).



A photo from the graduation of the second cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program.

² *Note: all sections marked with an asterisk were implemented as part of the Good Governance Fund (GGF) project “Inclusive Economy,” funded by UK International Development from the UK Government.

Working with Communities*

Since the beginning of the full-scale war, the role of local communities in supporting veterans during their transition to civilian life has become especially significant. One of the priorities of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center is to strengthen the capacity of communities and social institutions to engage effectively with service members, veterans, and their families.

In September 2024, the Center launched its **first project in this direction** – an assessment of needs in professional orientation, counseling, and the development of inclusive employment programs in three pilot communities: Lutsk, Opishnia (Poltava region), and Chernihiv. Focus groups were conducted with representatives of local authorities, Employment Centers, and veteran organizations. These open conversations revealed both key challenges and pressing needs.

Among the challenges were difficulties in obtaining veteran status and processing related documentation, low awareness of employment opportunities, a lack of adapted workplaces, and the absence of psychological support. Communities identified needs for educational resources, mentoring, and the development of local support infrastructure.

Building on this initiative, on November 1, 2024, the Leadership Center organized a workshop titled **“Guiding war veterans through choosing a career path”** for specialists of State Employment Centers. The session brought together 22 specialists from Kyiv, Kyiv region, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia, Lutsk, and Opishnia (Poltava region).

Led by Olesia Pitsyk, HR consultant at the Leadership Center, and Pavlo Horbenko, psychotherapist at the NaUKMA Center for Mental Health, the participants gained practical

tools for career counseling, recruitment techniques, and a client-oriented approach to working with veterans.

Partnerships within the academic environment also played a crucial role. In particular, analytical agency NGO “Mohyla Strategic Agency” helped establish cooperation with the community in Opishnia (Poltava region), which became a pilot site for needs assessment and engagement in the Leadership Center’s educational activities.

Through community cooperation, the Leadership Center also built a partnership with the veteran community of Lutsk. Its representatives later participated in the roundtable “Made in Ukraine” dedicated to engaging veterans in the country’s economy.

These examples show how vital partnerships and lasting networks are for supporting veterans and helping them integrate into society and the labor market.

Working with the Public Sector, Businesses and HR*

At the transitional stage from military to civilian employment, HR professionals play a crucial role. On the professional path of veterans, well-trained HR specialists are needed not only to provide support but also to act as catalysts of change within a broader context. This includes the development of workplace policies aimed at human-centered practices and creating supportive environments for veterans in both business and state institutions.

In September 2024, the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center hosted a **roundtable with HR specialists** from the public sector, business, and professional NGOs titled “Human-2-Human: A People-Centered Approach and

The project was implemented by Abt Global in partnership with the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

Best Practices for Recruitment, Adaptation and Reintegration of War Veterans into the Workplace.” The event was important as it enabled the exchange of valuable practical experience – both from the ATO/JFO (Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation) period and since the beginning of the full-scale invasion. Participants discussed new human-centered Human Resources Management standards, best practices for supporting veterans’ career development, and gained a deeper understanding of their needs.

The insights from this roundtable soon formed the basis for the **“Trauma-Informed Communication in Working with Veterans” training**. On November 29, 2024, the Leadership Center delivered this training for HR professionals from large Ukrainian businesses: Agromat, Epicenter K, Unique Trade, SoftServe, Ukrenergo, and Ukrtelecom. The goal was to strengthen participants’ knowledge and practical communication skills by integrating trauma-informed approaches. The training focused on the role, impact, and best practices of HR in creating a safe and supportive environment for veterans in the workplace.



Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Development and Partnerships at the Leadership Center, Olesya Pitsyk, HR consultant at the Leadership Center

On December 3, 2024, **another roundtable was held on the theme of cross-sectoral support for veterans in civilian life**. The event brought together representatives of the Ministry of Economy of Ukraine, the Ministry of Veterans Affairs, the State Employment Service and its regional offices, HR specialists from Ukrainian businesses, and leaders of veteran NGOs and communities.

“ **Successful project management is impossible without leadership – and today, the highest concentration of leadership potential in Ukraine is found within the veteran community.** ”

*Hennadiy Zubko,
Chair of the Supervisory Board at NaUKMA
and former Deputy Prime Minister
of Ukraine and Minister for Regional
Development, Construction, and Housing
(2014–2019), lecturer at the “Leadership &
Resilience” Executive Education Course*

The purpose of the roundtable was to discuss initiatives and experiences of the private sector and civil society organizations in creating favorable conditions for the professional development of veterans and their proactive involvement in rebuilding the state.

As noted by StarlightMedia representative and graduate of the “Leadership & Resilience” Executive Education Program, Hlib Stryzhko: “Business does not hire social statuses. Veterans are not about statuses – they are about principles.”

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center team can only emphasize: when businesses hire a veteran, they gain an employee who brings responsibility, strong values, and often exceptional, unique skills. The collective responsibility of employers across all sectors – public, private, and non-governmental – is to create workplace conditions that empower veterans to enhance these qualities, along with their invaluable experience.

International Advocacy and Networking

The team at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center recognizes the vital importance of strengthening international support for Ukraine

and building partnerships with like-minded allies to advance initiatives for veteran support. In September 2024, the Leadership Center's director, Yana Chapailo, participated in a **panel discussion titled "Strengthening Ukraine's Workforce and Human Capital"** during the second "Doing Business in Ukraine" conference, organized by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, D.C., USA.



Panel discussion "Strengthening Ukraine's Workforce and Human Capital," Washington, D.C., USA

In February 2025, Yana Chapailo and the Center's Head of Strategic Partnerships, Mariia Savrun, **visited the Ukraine House in Washington, D.C.** During the visit, they met with Oksana Markarova, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States, NaUKMA alumna in Ecology



In the photo: Mariia Savrun, Head of Strategic Partnerships at the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center, Oksana Markarova, Ambassador of Ukraine to the United States (2021–2025), Yana Chapailo, Director of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center

(BA/MA, 1999), and member of the NaUKMA Supervisory Board since 2018. They presented the Center's achievements and discussed opportunities for future collaboration.

The visit also included a **meeting with Roman Ponos**, a senior leader in global consulting, which marked another step toward building an international partnership network to exchange ideas, support veteran initiatives, and strengthen Ukraine's voice globally. Roman Ponos recommended the book "Eyes Up!", which led to the Leadership Center's introduction to its author, TJ Ihor Kostecky³.

In early June of 2025, **TJ Ihor Kostecky** – professor at Bard College (USA), soccer coach, and educator with more than 40 years of experience teaching at six American universities – visited Kyiv. He is the author of the Vision Training method, which helps develop confidence, creativity, and leadership skills in professional life. Kostecky conducts leadership workshops for universities, organizations, and sports teams around the world and recently published the book "Eyes Up!", a practical guide to vision, perspective, and inner resilience.



TJ Kostecky, Bard College lecturer and soccer coach, creator of the Vision Training approach.

³ <https://www.tjkostecky.com/>

During his three-day visit to NaUKMA, **TJ Kostecky held a series of inspiring workshops:** one for students and administration, another for veteran participants of the Leadership Center, and a special workshop for the Center's partner organizations, including NGO "Human rights center for servicemen 'Pryncyp'", Dignitas Fund, Veteran Hub Charitable Foundation, Invictus Games (Team Ukraine), and NGO "Free People Employment Center".

He also met with Dmytro Mazin, Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, and Ruslan Chornyi, Head of the Department of Mathematics, to discuss the liberal arts model of education and possible avenues for collaboration with Bard College.

Beyond the professional program, TJ immersed himself in the Kyiv-Mohyla spirit. He joined a university-wide campus tour, visited the Omeljan Pritsak Museum⁴, and explored the Podilskyi Shuk fair, experiencing both the vibrant atmosphere of Kyiv and the Academy's community.

Community of Action

The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center believes that a strong veteran community is the foundation for lasting change in society and public governance. This is why the event held in May of 2025 was so special: for the first time, graduates of the first cohort, students of the second cohort, as well as veterans connected to the broader Kyiv-Mohyla community.

The event featured a **meeting with Tetyana Berezhna**, Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine (2022–2025), NaUKMA alumna, and currently Acting Minister of Culture and Strategic Communications. The conversation focused on:

- practical aspects of engaging with state institutions
- decision-making processes in government
- who shapes policies and how this process unfolds, and how to navigate the powers of officials and public agencies
- how to build effective and constructive communication with authorities

“Kyiv-Mohyla is a university shaped by its values. The atmosphere it creates – in the libraries and among alumni – offers veterans, a vital part of our society, the opportunity to grow, set new goals, and build meaningful connections.”

*Tetyana Berezhna,
Acting Minister of Culture and Strategic
Communications of Ukraine, alumna of the
Faculty of Law (2007–2013).*

Such meetings not only deepen veterans' understanding of how the state operates but also strengthen cross-cutting connections between them, contributing to the formation of a community capable of taking part in decision-making and driving societal change.

The summer of 2025 began with a number of active offline presentations. In early June, **NaUKMA hosted Podilskyi Shuk**, a charity fair organized by the local community. The Leadership Center was represented at this event, which became an important opportunity for direct interaction, networking, and presenting our programs to those interested in supporting veterans and developing joint initiatives. For the Leadership Center, participation in Podilskyi Shuk was especially significant, as we are an active part of the Podil⁵ community, based in its heart and contributing to its cultural and social life. We actively cultivate ties with local initiatives, building

⁴ Omeljan Pritsak was a Ukrainian-American historian, linguist, and the founding director of Harvard's Ukrainian Research Institute.

⁵ Podil is one of Kyiv's oldest and most historic districts, known for its rich cultural life and educational traditions along the banks of the Dnipro River.

dialogue between the veteran community and broader communities.



In the photo: Leadership Center specialist Polina Fedorchenko, President of NaUKMA Serhiy Kvit, Leadership Center Director Yana Chapailo, Communications and Community Coordinator Sofiya Doig, and Head of Strategic Partnerships Mariia Savrun. The team is at Podilskyi Shuk.

We believe that a systematic, professional approach to **protecting service members' rights is an essential part of supporting those who defend Ukraine.** That is why we partner with organizations that share these values.

On June 3, 2025, the **NGO Human Rights Center for Servicemen "Pryncyp"**, together with the Leadership Center and the **NaUKMA Alumni Association**, hosted an open meeting at the Academy. The event brought together students, alumni, and the wider Kyiv-Mohyla community committed to the legal protection of veterans and the defense of human rights during wartime.

The Pryncyp team includes several NaUKMA graduates, among them was co-founder and human rights advocate Liubov Halan. During the meeting, they presented their approach to promoting service members' rights – from research and drafting legislative initiatives to providing legal assistance for wounded soldiers and developing pro bono legal expertise.

The event **demonstrated how the Kyiv-Mohyla community can unite** academic, human rights, and veteran circles for meaningful dialogue that subsequently leads to **practical solutions.**

As an academic institution, we believe it is vital for NaUKMA to adopt modern approaches and methods that respond to today's realities. We welcome the Academy's initiative to **introduce training for faculty and staff** on trauma-informed teaching, titled **"Safe Space: Trauma-Focused Teaching."**

The program covers essential topics such as personal responses to grief, loss, and death, and introduces the dual process model of coping with grief, which emphasizes balancing emotional processing with everyday responsibilities. It also examines the dynamics of alternating between mourning and recovery, and helps distinguish between grief and depression. This training program is an **important step toward creating a sensitive educational environment** that acknowledges experiences of loss and trauma.

All products and initiatives of the Leadership Center are tested with the direct involvement of veterans before being launched. For example, prior to launching the "Leadership & Resilience" Executive Education Program, the

“When Kyiv-Mohyla creates high-quality modules and processes, it always shares them with other universities that wish to do something similar. We are ready to provide all our expertise to institutions that meet the standards of quality. This is about selection, education, giving veterans encouragement and support from Kyiv-Mohyla, and creating a role model for others.”

*Taras Lukachuk –
Chairman of the Board of the Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation, a member of the NaUKMA Supervisory Board, an investor, and a NaUKMA graduate (1997).
He previously served as Regional President of EEMEA at JDE and as Vice President at Mondelēz.*

team organized a **focus group** with student veterans at NaUKMA, who provided valuable insights and recommendations. **This format of expert consultation** is a standard practice of the Leadership Center, both **during the development** and refinement of **educational programs** and projects. In this context, service members and veterans are recognized as experts whose voices we listen to and learn from. The principle of “nothing for veterans without veterans” is fundamental and runs through all of the Center’s activities.

The Leadership Center understands the importance of building a community of like-minded people – an environment where veterans, educators, students, and partners come together for mutual support, growth, and collective action. This is why, on June 13, 2025, during the graduation ceremony of the second cohort of the “Leadership & Resilience” Program, the founding of the Leadership Center’s community, the **Community of Action**, and its concept were announced.

The Community of Action brings together

- Alumni of the Leadership Center
- NaUKMA students
- NaUKMA faculty
- NaUKMA administration

On July 26, 2025, the annual Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Alumni Reunion took place on campus. For the first time, graduates of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center also joined the event. As a result, the Academy’s community continues to grow, strengthen, and gain greater synergy.

This year was only the beginning. The Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center continues its mission of empowering veterans, the brave men and women who defended Ukraine’s independence and are now laying the foundation for the future of Ukrainian society and statehood. We are working tirelessly on new projects and initiatives to ensure that these people have all the tools they need to move forward.



Graduates and the team of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center at the KMA Alumni Reunion 2025, together with Ukraine’s Ambassador to the U.S. (2021–2025) Oksana Markarova and NaUKMA President Serhiy Kvit.

Our results so far

- **Launch** of the Ukrainian Defenders Leadership Center
- Development of visual identity and start of **public communications**
- Design of the **flagship “Leadership & Resilience”** Executive Education Program for veterans
- **Graduation of two cohorts** of the “Leadership & Resilience” Program: 9 participants in January 2025 and 20 participants in June 2025 (29 graduates in total)
- Implementation of the **“Career Guidance and Career Counselling for War Veterans”** course together with Sergiy Nozdrachov (Fall 2024, 38 graduates)
- Focus groups conducted to assess **needs in career guidance**, counseling, and **inclusive employment programs in three pilot communities**: Lutsk, Opishnia (Poltava region), and Chernihiv. Respondents included representatives of local authorities, Employment Centers, and veteran associations
- **Training “Guiding war veterans through choosing a career path”** (November 2024) for specialists of the **State Employment Centers**, with 22 professionals participating from Kyiv, Kyiv region, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia, Lutsk, and Opishnia (Poltava region)
- Two roundtables on **veteran support and reintegration into the workplace**, with representatives of the public sector, civil society, and business (September and December 2024)
- Training “Trauma-Informed Communication in Working with Veterans” (November 29, 2024) for HR professionals from **Agromat, Epicenter, Unic Trade, SoftServe, Ukrenergo, and Ukrtelecom**
- Presentation of the Leadership Center at the **panel discussion “Strengthening Ukraine’s Workforce and Human Capital” (Washington, D.C.)**, at the Ukrainian House in Washington, DC, and at the Podilskyi Shuk festival in Kyiv
- Organization at NaUKMA of a series of events with guest speaker **TJ Ihor Kostecky, Bard College professor** (USA), soccer coach, and educator with over 40 years of teaching experience at six American universities
- Two meetings with **Tetyana Berezhna** (Deputy Minister of Economy of Ukraine) for Leadership Center graduates
- Founding of the Leadership Center’s community, the **Community of Action**, bringing together students, graduates, lecturers, and NaUKMA administration
- **67 veterans – graduates** of the Leadership Center’s programs – have already joined the Leadership Center’s Community of Action

Strengthening the Strong!

**Standing with those who
Stand for Ukraine!**