

As Ukrainians Stop Work to Defend Their Country, Tech Professionals Volunteer to Pick Up Slack

The Ukraine Tech Collective connects companies that have lost talent to war effort with qualified professionals who donate time and skills to perform their battle-weary colleague's tasks to keep paychecks flowing.

BizTechReports

Silver Spring, Maryland Apr 13, 2022 ([IssueWire.com](https://www.IssueWire.com)) - At five o'clock in the morning on February 24, 2022, Emma Heap, a British tech entrepreneur and the very recent founder of the Ukraine Tech Collective (UTC), received two Slack messages. They were not business-as-usual notes.

"The first message was from one of my developers in Ukraine, and it simply said: 'We are at war!' The follow-up came an hour later from the same developer, asking: 'Can I take some vacation time?'"

She immediately realized that the message she received would be one of the countless requests for time off as tech talent in Ukraine paused work to fight...or seek safety. Both activities, in today's Ukraine, are a full-time commitment. For many, the day the war started also marked the day their regular paychecks stopped. It is also the day that Heap started the process of founding UTC.

"Speaking to peers in the tech space confirmed the suspicion that most companies did not plan to pay employees taking leave to flee or defend their country," says Heap. "I needed to find a way to support these individuals, including my team, in their time of need. Helping was important to me."

Heap joined many leaders in the tech sector searching for ways to help those affected by the tragedy by harnessing technology and their business savvy.

With almost 250,000 software engineers based in the country, Ukraine is a major contributor to the global tech community. These highly-skilled individuals are well known for their talent and commitment and are often involved in mission-critical projects. These initiatives are deemed so important to the organizations they serve that progress must continue, regardless of the geopolitical unfoldings in Ukraine.

The war thrust upon Ukraine created significant disruptions in the talent supply of today's technology-enabled economy. As a result, companies are scrambling to advance their digital initiatives as people they count on for execution are pushed out of the picture. For the tech workforce in Ukraine, it is a serious source of additional strain in an already stressful situation.

"These people," explains Heap, "cannot move forward on their day-to-day tasks, and they worry that they may not have a job to return to when the dust settles."

A few days into the war, UTC materialized with the highly focused objective of connecting companies that have lost talent to the war effort with qualified professionals around the world who have expressed a willingness to donate their time and skills to perform their battle-weary colleague's tasks.

"At its core, the process is not unlike measures taken to support maternity leave policies," says Heap. "In this case, companies that sign up with UTC to fill a talent gap pledge to continue paying their Ukrainian developers and commit to ensuring employees have jobs to return to when the war is resolved."

The objective is to keep funds to Ukrainian talent flowing so that people amid the conflict can determine how best to allocate incredibly scarce resources in this conflict zone.

"Whenever possible, it should be people on the ground who make [resource allocation] decisions rather than outside authorities," adds Heap. "We wanted to establish an arrangement where cash flows directly to the people of Ukraine. It's one of the most powerful ways for people like us [tech professionals] to support the war effort."

Organizing Helping Hands

UTC has an unusual dynamic for a nonprofit. Rather than cash, it only accepts donations of skills and time. It is a model that appears to be working.

"The outpouring of support has been overwhelming. Over 200 incredibly qualified individuals worldwide with skills covering all major tech stacks joined 25 organizations to support projects for affected companies. Our focus now is on pinpointing ways to support [the talent transfer] without overcomplicating the process," says Heap.

Indeed, the matching of talent with tasks could not be simpler. Companies that need to fill a talent gap fill out a form outlining the skill sets, experience, and roles that they require. Volunteers—technology professionals—fill out a form that provides details on their own backgrounds and specific areas of expertise to easily cross-match skill availability with demand. UTC acts as a facilitator, returning potential matches to the companies and professionals to make introductions and streamline the interviewing process.

The community UTC has built has embraced the philosophy of failing fast and falling forward to work through the myriad issues associated with the strategic, operational, financial, and technological variables that must be simultaneously addressed for this model of relief assistance to work. But it is working.

"Through trial and error—and networking with the tech community—we continue to search for the silver bullet that connects more companies with those ready and willing to help to keep our technology colleagues in Ukraine solvent."

To listen to the full interview with Emma Heap visit: <https://bit.ly/EmmaHeapUTC>

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