



DEFENSE ENTREPRENEURS FORUM (DEF), UK CHAPTER

We all believe that the military is a fantastic institution filled with many very talented people. But we also know that it can be slow to change and to reform itself. We believe that DEF can help.

DEF is an informal community of service personnel and civilians who believe in innovation. It is a platform for change agents. We want to co-create and import new ideas, developing a culture of entrepreneurship in the military. DEF seeks not to undermine but to empower the chain of command—with new ideas fomented and developed without the bureaucracy that can frustrate us all, whatever our rank. We believe in self-organisation, decentralisation and empowering our members. People who want to make a difference remove uniforms, forget rank and come together under the DEF banner to network and innovate. We encourage constructive dissent to catalyse innovation. We want to disrupt to make better.

We are an insurgency: loyal to the goals of Defence, supportive of our leadership, helping to highlight both opportunities for Defence to improve, and the barriers to such progress that might otherwise be obscured from senior leadership's view.

The DEF organisation. DEF is a non-profit organisation founded in the US. It has executives, and a board. It has a three-day-long annual conference, as well as regional day-long DEFx conferences and shorter, informal gatherings around the world called agoras. All these events are started organically by volunteers just like you. DEF UK was founded in 2015 to bring the DEF movement to the British military.

Call to action. You love the military, but you see its problems. You have some potential solutions, but you're not sure how to implement them. You're frustrated. And you are definitely not alone.

The DEF model is to encourage and support defence entrepreneurs on their innovation journey. The onus is on you. Get outside your day job and become an entrepreneur. Find a few fellow disruptive thinkers and start a DEF chapter.

Tips for getting started. Local chapters are popping up all over the world. Here's how to start yours:

- **Start with an agora.** An agora is nothing more than a small, local DEF meeting: it's a fancy way of saying you get some likeminded peers together in a slightly more formal way. Your chapter may eventually turn into a conference, a pitch competition, an innovation cell, or even a start-up—but start with an agora. In the lean start-up methodology, you start with a minimum viable product, and then iterate your way to success. Cheap and simple minimises risk.
- **No uniforms.** Rank can stifle discussion. Good ideas can come from anywhere. Drop the rank and open your mind.
- **Neutral venue.** Try to find a non-military environment to meet in. There's a reason Silicon Valley offices look very different from those of legacy companies.
- **Reach Out.** Enliven your discussion by reaching out to local and global businesses, academics, leaders and creative thinkers. The more diverse your speakers and members, the more creative, innovative and enjoyable your meetings are likely to be.
- **Pick a topic that matters.** Agoras have been used to discuss articles, help peers sharpen ideas for a manuscript, discussed relevant tactical or innovation challenges, or invite local leaders to share stories. It's critical to pick a topic that's important and relevant for the attendees.
- **Light structure & facilitation.** Overly programmed agendas can constrain creativity, but lack of structure makes progress difficult. Circulate some think-pieces in advance. Help the group to converge on a conclusion and some recommendations. Take a view—but one backed up by rigorous thought.



- **Get visual.** Making thoughts into tangible things is a very powerful way to collaborate. Encourage people to take notes, use whiteboards, sketchpads and electronic systems to make their thoughts more tangible. Post-Its are a great tool for visual collaboration ([link](#)). Collect everything, take photographs of the boards at the end, and give us a write up of your first meeting (if you want to).
- **Use the DEF brand.** People like to be part of something, so make use of the brand. Anyone who Googles DEF will be able to see what it stands for. Even in the UK, where it is relatively new, DEF's visibility is increasing.
- **Share the workload.** You'll be on your own to start, but the system is full of latent change agents. Even "the frozen middle" can be thawed with enough heat – from above, below or within. Get others to help move things forward as soon as you find committed people. Talk is cheap: when you find some kindred spirits, ask them what you could do together.

Support from DEF UK. We are here to support you. Here's how we can:

- **Give you recognition.** Let us know what you're doing; we'll register your chapter on our webpage, along with the chairperson or organiser if you have one, and recognise your members too.
- **Give you advice.** We can plug you into our UK network, or the US mothership. DEF has a network of agora leaders around the UK, US and the world, and so there's loads of experience to share.
- **Promote your event.** We can quietly pass the word within our UK network, or spread the word on Twitter and the web.
- **Get you published.** DEF maintains [its own blog](#), and you can send in your write-up for publication.
- **Give you spiritual support.** Entrepreneurship is hard, but with DEF it needn't be lonely.

Email us at def_uk@defenseentrepreneurs.org.

What you can do for us. Help us help you:

- **Share your best practice.** Tell us how to improve, starting with advice on how we improve this document. Tell us what works, and what doesn't, share your best speakers or subjects, and link up with up other chapters. Help us find sponsors and improve the website. Help us do better.

Key links

DEF – [web](#) | [@DEFConference](#)

DEF UK – [web](#) | [@uk_def](#)

[DEF on Facebook](#)

[DEF on LinkedIn](#)

The DEF bibliography.

"The Pentagon's Virtuous Insurgency" by Lt Gen David W. Barno, USA (Ret.) and Dr. Nora Bensahel on *War on the Rocks* ([link](#))

DEF executive director Jim Perkins on the Center for New American Security (CNAS) Startups Series podcast ([link](#))

"Why the Defense Entrepreneurs Forum Matters: Peripheral Networks & Innovation" by Maj Mark Jacobsen, Maj Nate Finney and Lt Ben Kohlmann ([link](#))

"The Military Needs More Disruptive Thinkers" by Lt Ben Kohlmann ([link](#))