

2020 TIBBETTS AWARD WINNER

# Thomas Wavering



**As the founding Executive Director of the Tom Love Innovation Hub at OU, Mr. Wavering created OK Catalyst – providing networking, training and mentoring to entrepreneurs and small businesses in OK. Since 2018, OK Catalyst has helped 13 companies win \$8.9 million in SBIR awards.**

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**LOCATION**

**OK**  
Norman

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**ORGANIZATION**

**Oklahoma Catalyst Programs**

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**SBIR/STTR Affiliation**

**SBA FAST Awardee  
for Oklahoma**



## Impact & Achievement

As the founding Executive Director of the Tom Love Innovation Hub at the University of Oklahoma, Thomas Wavering is responsible for creating the "Oklahoma Catalyst Programs" initiative (OK Catalyst), which provides networking, training, and mentoring to entrepreneurs and high tech small business owners in Oklahoma. In the two years since this program's inception, Mr. Wavering and his OK Catalyst team have already helped 13 companies win Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/STTR) awards totaling \$8.9 million.

Mr. Wavering started his SBIR/STTR career in 1997 as an early employee and Principal Investigator with Luna Innovations. He went on to spend 19 years with Luna Innovations and Intelligent Automation, Inc, all the while rising to executive positions and leading their SBIR/STTR, technology transition, and related activities. In 2016, Mr. Wavering joined the University of Oklahoma to launch a series of initiatives aimed at increasing innovation and entrepreneurship across not only the University, but the entire state of Oklahoma. In 2018, he founded OK Catalyst to leverage SBIR/STTR funding as an economic driver for startups and small businesses across the state.

OK Catalyst utilizes a holistic approach to inspire, guide, launch, and grow startups through the SBIR/STTR program. The program conducts all SBIR/STTR related outreach and support for Oklahoma, while leveraging a strong and diverse network of statewide partners. The organization also creates events, such as the annual Oklahoma Women Impacting STEM and Entrepreneurship Conference (OK-WISE), that have a purpose beyond SBIR, to educate about SBIR, and go directly into university classrooms to teach students and faculty about SBIR opportunities - just as they learn about angel, seed, and venture capital. OK Catalyst funds the next generation of Oklahoma startups and small businesses through structured SBIR Accelerator programs to guide companies through every step of submitting a successful proposal, while providing hands-on technical and business assistance and mentoring to companies on how to use SBIR funding to grow their business and launch new products - not just win a grant.

Mr. Wavering and the OK Catalyst team have had a transformative impact across Oklahoma in a very short time. Since 2018, they have not only helped 13 companies secure \$8.9 million in funding – but generated more than \$185 million in potential economic impact. OK Catalyst SBIR Accelerator participants have seen a 40% Phase I win rate, while the program's SBIRx companies have seen a 60% Phase II win rate – all of which were first time Phase I or II SBIR/STTR awardees.

Additionally, 76% of the companies who have received SBIR/STTR funding as a result of OK Catalyst Program support have founders who are female, veterans, and/or are socially or economically disadvantaged.

Since Mr. Wavering founded OK Catalyst – made possible by SBA Federal and State Technology (FAST) funding - the state has seen an immediate and dramatic turnaround in SBIR outreach and success. In a state that historically has not won many SBIR awards, the success that Mr. Wavering and OK Catalyst have had in such a short time in Oklahoma demonstrates the untapped potential in the state for high-tech small business innovation.