



SBTDC's Technology Commercialization Team  
(left to right) - Chris Veal, David Walker, Dr. Nicole Schwerbrock (Director), John Ujvari, Mike Carnes.

# Helping tech firms fly

SBTDC provides specialized technology commercialization services

Lucinda Camras comes from a long line of inventors. Her father, Carl Camras, discovered a new class of drugs (prostaglandin analogues) to treat glaucoma that remain the first-line treatment in the field. By the time she was 19, she and her father had created a new glaucoma device and surgical approach.

They worked together on the design and towards pursuing licensing agreements and funding. In 2009, Lucinda's father passed away, but she obtained a PhD and continued their work to make their idea into a viable product.

According to Lucinda, "Our first attempt at funding failed so we were looking for a funding strategy and a colleague of mine recommended the Small Business and Technology Development Center (SBTDC). They helped us tailor our Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) application for our firm Camras Vision to the granting agency and knew how to package it. We wouldn't have been able to get off the ground without the SBTDC."

Founded in 1984, the North Carolina SBTDC was the first Small Business Development Center in the nation to be officially

recognized as providing specialized technology commercialization services. The SBTDC is a business advisory service of The University of North Carolina System administered statewide by NC State University. Its 10 regional centers and 16 offices across the state are hosted by UNC System campuses and provide business counseling and educational services for thousands of small to midsize businesses each year.

The SBTDC's Technology Development and Commercialization Program's primary goals are providing counseling services to clients with technology-based businesses throughout North Carolina, and engaging with UNC System campuses to bring promising technologies to market. Counselors work closely with tech transfer offices, and sit on patent committees at several campuses.

Similar to Camras Vision, SBTDC technology commercialization clients typically have the following characteristics: (1) an innovative technology-based concept, product, service or process; (2) intellectual property that serves as a foundation for a competitive advantage; (3) high potential for growth; (4) a high level of uncertainty/risk; and (5) don't qualify for traditional

financing.

Many of the clients benefit from the Tech Team's expert counsel on the national SBIR/STTR Program, a non-dilutive federal funding mechanism to help small businesses develop and commercialize innovative solutions to existing problems that the federal government is interested in and have significant market potential. Federal agencies with research budgets over \$100 million are required to set-aside a certain percentage of their budget for SBIR awards.

SBIR is a three-phase program covering concept development (Phase I with awards from \$150-225K), prototype development (Phase II with awards from \$1.0 – 1.5 million), and commercialization (Phase III with no SBIR funding). The SBTDC's technology counselors help client companies effectively incorporate SBIR/STTR into their funding strategies, identify appropriate agencies and topics, and provide comprehensive proposal reviews.

The SBTDC also offers periodic SBIR/STTR workshops across the state, as well as online training. In 2001, the SBTDC created a statewide SBIR Specialist position, which helped to increase the state's award rate. From 2005-2015, North Carolina firms have received \$551 million in SBIR/STTR awards, and the Tech Team assisted with 76% of the winning proposals.

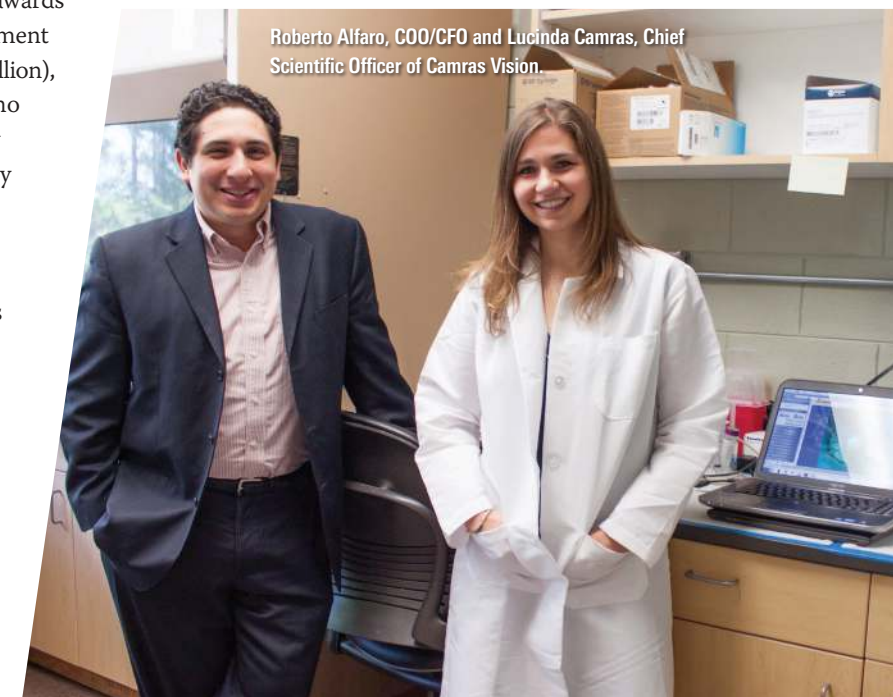
Access to capital, particularly equity capital, is often a challenge for technology-based firms. To address this issue, Tech Team counselors help clients better understand the equity investment landscape and options as they prepare to seek funding. The SBTDC also offers a well-regarded "Becoming an Investor-Ready Entrepreneur" workshop that is designed to educate and prepare growth-oriented entrepreneurs to successfully engage private equity investors.

Another highly valued Tech Team initiative is the Graduate Summer Internship Program that links both business and engineering graduate students with technology-based companies

to assist with a variety of business development projects, including customer analysis, primary and secondary market research and financial modeling. This summer over 20 companies are participating, many of which are SBIR/STTR awardees in the process of developing and executing on commercialization strategies. Since this competitive program began in 2002, the SBTDC's Graduate Summer Internship Program has placed 150 summer consultants with over 200 technology companies, and provided over 60,000 hours of service. Many of those companies have gone on to achieve significant success, like Camras Vision.

The SBTDC continues to assist Camras Vision with SBIR/STTR proposal reviews, research and commercialization plans, and investor pitch presentations. In November 2017, Camras won the Emerging Company Award at SEBIO's 19th Annual Investor and Partnering Forum. In early 2018, Camras closed on \$5.7 million in equity funding that it plans to use to support clinical trials, including a pilot study in the US.

Last year (2017), the Tech Team worked with 338 client companies, and helped them obtain \$30.9 million in funding, including SBIR/STTR funding, angel investment and venture capital. Given these results, the SBTDC's Technology Commercialization Team is recognized as an important part of North Carolina's innovation ecosystem for technology companies.



Roberto Alfaro, COO/CFO and Lucinda Camras, Chief Scientific Officer of Camras Vision.

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Small Business and Technology  
Development Center  
5 West Hargett Street, Suite 600  
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601  
919-715-7272 • sbtdc.org