

Strategic investment key to continued science, tech gains

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It is easy to lose sight of what's working for [Oklahoma](#) while dealing with a down economy. Perhaps now is a good time to reflect and refocus on our science and technology journey.

Oklahomans must have watched with wonder as [Sylvan Goldman](#) rolled out his innovative shopping cart in 1937. Similarly, [Carl Magee](#) unveiled the first parking meter in 1935 at Robinson and Park Avenue in [Oklahoma City](#). [Wiley Post](#), Oklahoma aviator and inventor, made headlines in 1934 when he went aloft in the world's first-ever pressurized suit. These examples are a prelude to the innovation climate that we continue to build today.

Today, Oklahoma researchers and firms are involved in developing robots to save lives and gather intelligence, unmanned aerial vehicles that keep our soldiers safe in [Afghanistan](#) and cutting-edge proton therapy that's making a difference in the lives of cancer patients. Research teams at the [Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation](#) have captured the attention of researchers and physicians around the world with their extensive catalog of autoimmune disorders and, most importantly, with innovative ways to treat these disorders.

In 1986, visionary state leaders established the [Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology](#). Since then, OCAST has supported Oklahoma's research community to develop and commercialize new technologies that result in high-paying jobs, new businesses and enterprises that put us on a sustainable growth trajectory to compete globally.

OCAST focuses on technology sectors that — when added to our staples of energy and agriculture — provide us with the best opportunities to grow and diversify our economy. At the core of our programs are applied and health research but our full suite includes small-business support mechanisms, research and development internships, advanced manufacturing, commercialization services and seed capital for startup businesses.

We leverage the state's investment in OCAST by increasing the flow of federal dollars to Oklahoma researchers. Our model is based on strong governance, stewardship, expert advisers and outside peer review to ensure project awards are based on merit and offer the best return on investment for Oklahoma taxpayers.

We're hitting our stride in advancing science and technology and promoting public/private collaborations to create value for the citizens of Oklahoma. Over the past 23 years, OCAST has awarded \$193 million to 2,230 Oklahoma research projects that have, in turn, attracted \$3.5 billion from the federal and private sectors in areas such as bioscience, aerospace, high-productivity agriculture, nanotechnology applications and renewable energy.

OCAST has received many national and international calls asking how Oklahoma put together its model for technology-based economic development and how it helped leverage the state's research capacity at its research institutions, foundations and small businesses. And therein lies the challenge — how to keep the momentum and position Oklahoma for continued growth and excellence. I believe we know how to continue to build the state's science and technology agenda and chronology — our real challenge is continued commitment to strategic investment.

Carolina is executive director of OCAST.

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