



# Investment firm to fuse startup culture with U.S. intelligence complex

BY [HEATHER SOMERVILLE](#) | July 26, 2016

A Silicon Valley venture capitalist, an ex-Navy SEAL and a former U.S. Central Intelligence Agency officer have banded together to form a company to fund and incubate startups that can break ground on cyber security and intelligence gathering.

The company, DataTribe, seeks to fuse aspects of a venture capital firm and startup incubator, with leaders who are well-connected to the nation's intelligence complex. It was launched on Tuesday, with offices in both Silicon Valley and Maryland, outside the nation's capital.

While DataTribe is as yet untested, it launches at a critical time. New and more sophisticated attacks continue to threaten businesses and government agencies, but funding for early-stage cyber startups from traditional venture capital sources is challenging.

Finding sufficient cyber security expertise - in both company investors and founders - in Silicon Valley has also been difficult.

DataTribe will license technology created by the national laboratories or government intelligence agencies and build new startups around that technology. It will also provide those startups with an operating team of executives and an initial investment of up to \$1.5 million.

According to DataTribe co-founder Robert Ackerman, the federal government has some of the most sophisticated cyber security and intelligence gathering technology, and Washington is home to some of the most skilled cyber experts.

But the startup culture, he said, can do a more efficient job of scaling that technology and selling it for commercial use.

"(Cyber security) is an arms race," Ackerman said in an interview. "And when you are in an arms race, you are looking for any kind of competitive advantage you can get."

Ackerman is founder and a managing director of Allegis Capital, a 20-year-old Silicon Valley venture firm that invests in cyber security startups. He cofounded DataTribe with Mike Janke, a former member of the Navy's SEAL Team Six and co-founder of mobile security company Silent Circle; and Steven Witt, who worked for the CIA and co-founded Onyara, a startup based on technology developed by the National Security Agency.

DataTribe aims to take advantage of technology already developed, tested and used by the government. It will use open-source technology or license it from the national labs, the NSA, law enforcement and even foreign intelligence agencies, Ackerman said.

Among the first to receive funding is Dragos, a cyber security startup comprised of former NSA intelligence officers that offers security solutions for the control systems of critical infrastructure, such as a power grid.

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