



2023 IMPACT REPORT



NEXT[®]

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NOTE

Reflecting on the past year, I am immensely proud of the strides we have taken together as a community.

Thanks to the **founders** who call Greenville home, who keep us on our toes with their unwavering commitment and boundless creativity. You're the heart and soul of NEXT, and your stories of overcoming challenges and achieving success inspire us daily.

To our **mentors, advisors, and contributors**, you are the unsung heroes of our organization, who play a pivotal role in shaping the future of countless startups. Your commitment to paying it forward embodies the spirit of collaboration that defines the NEXT network.

A massive thanks also goes out to our **financial supporters** - thank you for your steadfast belief in the power of entrepreneurship and innovation as an economic development strategy. Your investment in NEXT not only fuels the growth of individual ventures but more importantly, acts as a ripple effect on our local and global economies.

And of course - our **small, but mighty team!** You are the real MVPs. What we've accomplished together is nothing short of amazing and I'm beyond proud to lead this squad. We might be tiny, but we're bold and the best is yet to come!

As we dive into the future with relentless optimism, let's keep pushing boundaries, breaking molds, and having a damn good time doing it. Here's to celebrating our wins and embracing the wild ride ahead.

Cheers to us and the journey onward!

Eric



THE NEXT TEAM



Molly Inclàn
Program Manager



Eric Weissmann
Executive Director



Susan McShane
Operations Manager



Sydney Cooke
Startup Community
Engagement Manager

NEXT BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Frank Mobley, Chair
CEO (fmr.)
Immedion

Shannon Lavrin
City Manager
City of Greenville

Carlos Phillips
President & CEO
Greenville Chamber of
Commerce

Craig Brown
Owner
Greenville Drive

Cliff Holekamp
Managing Partner
Cultivation Capital

Nicole Johnson
CoFounder
BOYD Cycling

Shontavia Johnson
Associate Vice President
for Innovation &
Entrepreneurship
Clemson University

Paige McPheely
CEO
Base

Marty Osborn
President (fmr.)
Advoco

Derek Pedersen
CEO
Uncorked Chocolate

WHAT'S NEXT?

We're a startup catalyst organization at the center of the Greenville entrepreneur network.



MISSION

We help the entrepreneurial community grow.

VISION

Our vision is a robust ecosystem that provides entrepreneurs with the resources they need to launch and scale a business in a place they love to live.

VALUES

We believe in **knowledge**—that learning opens doors to opportunity.

We believe in **connection**—that nobody succeeds alone.

We believe in **innovation**—that entrepreneurship fosters prosperity.

WHAT'S OUR 'WHY'?

In economic development, fostering an entrepreneur ecosystem isn't a luxury—it's the key to rapid growth. It's about agility, thinking outside the box, and encouraging creativity to attract talent, investments, and game-changers.

Supporting startups and high-growth small businesses isn't just about creating jobs; it's about shaping the future.

Because building an entrepreneur ecosystem isn't just **part** of the plan; it **is** the plan for a future-ready, powerhouse community.

NEXT DOES THREE THINGS:

STEWARD

the broader entrepreneur ecosystem, which we call #StartupGVL - a rallying cry, a unifying umbrella brand that encompasses the entire landscape of startups and those that support them here in the Greenville region.

SUPPORT

the founders and teams of high-growth companies through a series of programs, services, and events all geared to move the network forward.

MEASURE

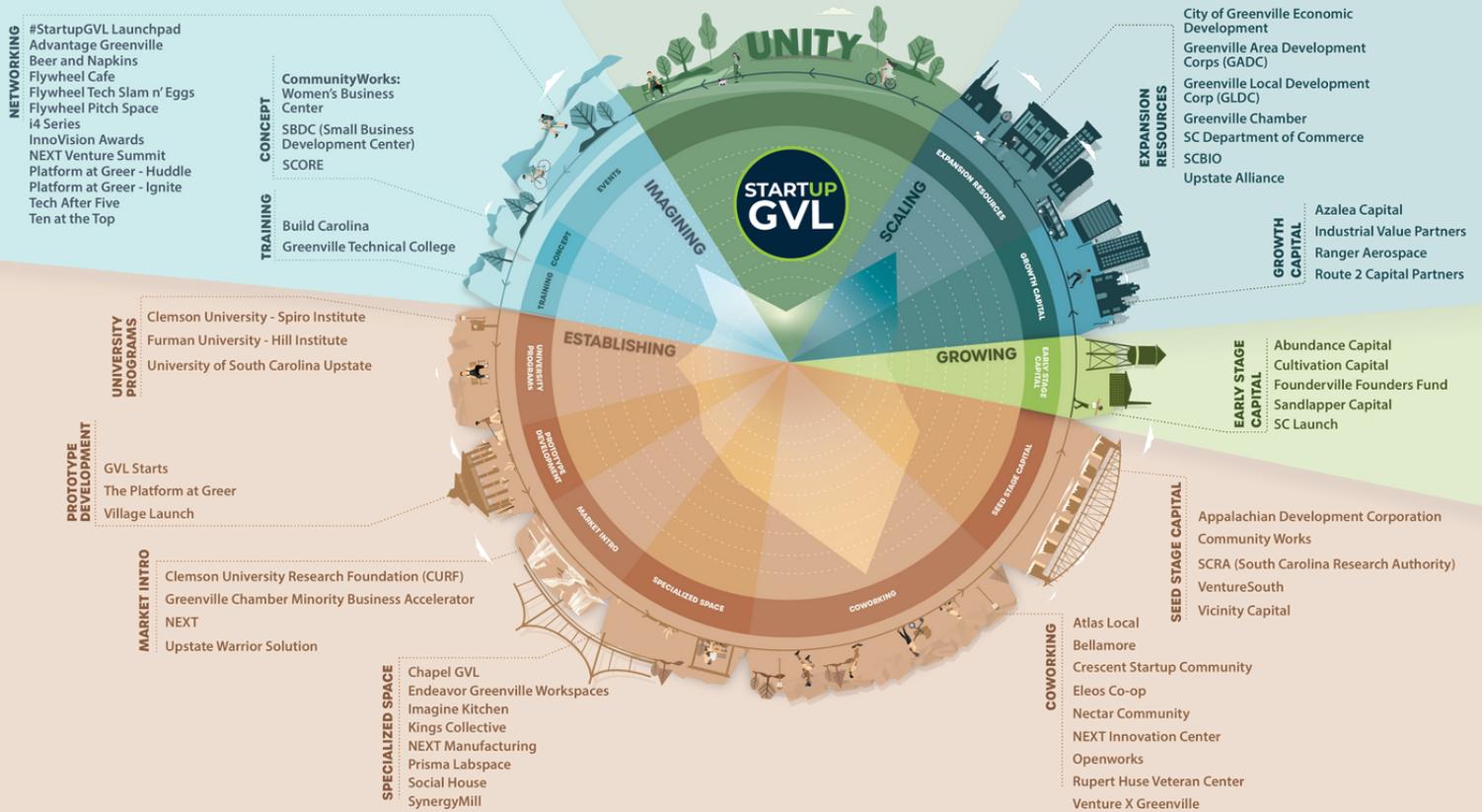
the impact of our collective efforts through the collection and analysis of structured and unstructured data. And not just the happy stories, but also where we need to improve in order to stay ahead of the game.

...all so that #StartupGVL continues to be the top ecosystem in South Carolina and one of the most attractive across the Southeast.

THANK YOU TO OUR FOUNDATIONAL SUPPORTERS:



#STARTUPGVL IS THE WRAPPER



WE STEWARD THE ECOSYSTEM.

In giving the ecosystem a name, we create a collective and collaborative tent under which we can all gather. This resource map (which is continuing to grow month over month!) was created to visualize the infrastructure dedicated to supporting and encouraging founders at every stage of their journey.

In our role as conveners, we gather this group around the same table every month and ensure we all stay connected to what's working and what's not. Where do people get stuck in our ecosystem and where do they thrive?

As the saying goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." We believe #StartupGVL is going places!

**66 RESOURCES
(AND GROWING!)
FOR ENTREPRENEURS
AT EVERY STAGE.**



#StartupGVL works in partnership with the City of Greenville communications team to help us tell the story.



[Explore StartupGVL](#)



[Join the StartupGVL Slack Community](#)



[Explore the StartupGVL Job Board](#)

WE SUPPORT FOUNDERS AND THEIR TEAMS.

NEXT PROGRAMS & SERVICES

ACCELERATOR

Our accelerator is an application-based, cohort-based, curriculum-based, time-bound program focused on moving high-growth companies ahead in their journey.

18 GRADUATES FROM 2 COHORTS
IN 2023

FOUNDERS FORUM

Founders Forum is our monthly cadence of events designed to be part networking, part content-driven, and an opportunity to get out of your bubble.

260+ ATTENDEES OVER 10 EVENTS
IN 2023

MENTORING

Modeled after the successful MIT program, our venture mentoring service (VMS) harnesses the wisdom of mentors across the region through structured meetings with our most promising founders.

43 MENTORS AND 27 MENTEE
COMPANIES IN 2023

NEXT SIGNATURE EVENTS

Our biannual events, Launchpad and Summit, are designed to showcase, highlight, and spur the growth of startups in our ecosystem.

#STARTUPGVL LAUNCHPAD

This event is geared towards earlier-stage startups where we gather a handful of service providers (law firms, agencies, accountants, etc.) who offer up their services at no charge and collectively select startups to work with. It's a great exercise for these companies to get closer to the campfire and provides deserving startups the opportunity to work with firms

7 PRIZES TOTALING \$95K IN VALUE
IN 2023

NEXT VENTURE SUMMIT

Our signature event - nine years running - brings dozens of investors from across the country to interact with (and hopefully invest in!) growth-stage startups from across the region. It's part match-making, part showcase, and all geared toward moving our founders forward.

186 CURATED MEETINGS BETWEEN
24 INVESTORS AND 47 VENTURES
IN 2023



WE MEASURE THE IMPACT.

OUR AUDIENCE

6,815

OVERALL DATABASE

24% GROWTH
from 2022

471

ENTREPRENEURS

43% GROWTH
from 2022

127

CLIENT
COMPANIES

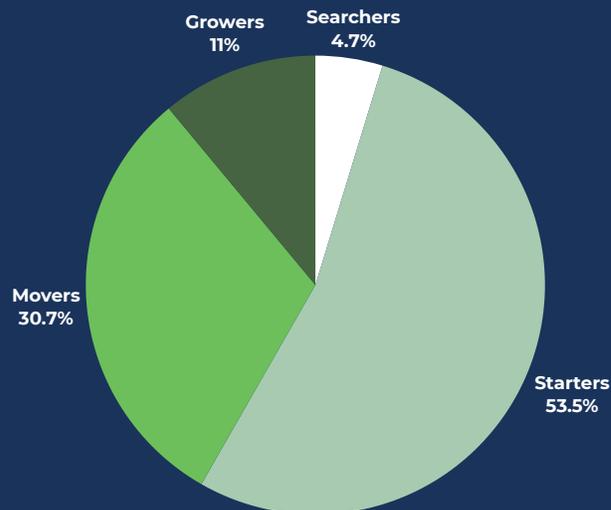
38% GROWTH
from 2022

\$97,965,862
in Annual Revenue*

\$40,959,500
Funding Raised in 2023*

ENTREPRENEUR PERSONA TYPES

Just as every founder is different, so is their journey. We developed personas to recognize the various stages or milestones of startup success. #StartupGVL is rife with resources that focus on ideation and business creation (SEARCHER) while most of our programming begins with the STARTER strata.



OUR CLIENTS

TOP INDUSTRY VERTICALS

21% Technology and Software

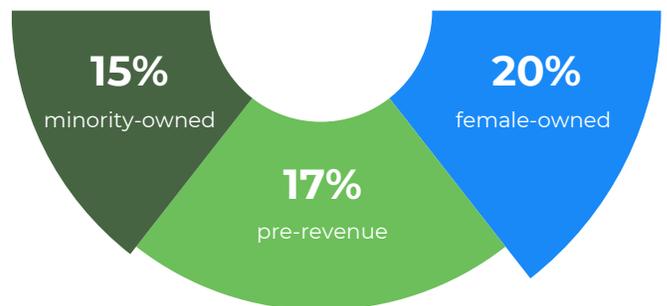
12% Healthcare and Medtech

9% Professional Services

8% Finance and FinTech

7% Manufacturing and Industrial

FURTHER CLIENT BREAKOUT



IT PAYS TO WORK FOR A STARTUP!

\$68,185
Average Wage*

17% HIGHER THAN
CVL county average wages

775
Headcount*

60% OF THESE
employees are local

SEARCHERS The very earliest stages of business creation. Not yet legally formed as an entity and may not have developed an MVP (minimum viable product). They're likely armed with a pitch deck and a dream.

STARTERS These are founders who've started their engines. They've got a legally formed entity, likely post-revenue and/or have produced a prototype or MVP. Could be experiencing 50% growth year-over-year.

MOVERS Now things are taking off and leaving the runway. It's a transient stage as their business is poised for growth, but hasn't hit certain markers yet (often a "growing pains" stage) as they try to scale.

GROWERS Growers are fully in flight. They're experiencing 100% growth year-over-year, they've got full-time, salaried employees (including themselves!) on the books and likely actively seeking/have received investments.

*These figures represent 60% reporting from client companies

WE HELP TELL THEIR STORIES.

To tell the story of NEXT is to tell the stories of the founders that have gone through our programs throughout the years. We have to talk about not only their successes, but also their challenges and how the #StartupGVL community has wrapped around them to provide guidance, support, and resources. It's important to not just talk about the NEXT generation of founders, but also to shine light on the founders who have been here from the start and are now giving back through their mentorship.

Boyd Cycling - Grower



Team/Headcount: 12, all local

Programs: VMS (mentee & mentor), CEO Lunch, 2023 10 Most Exciting Startup

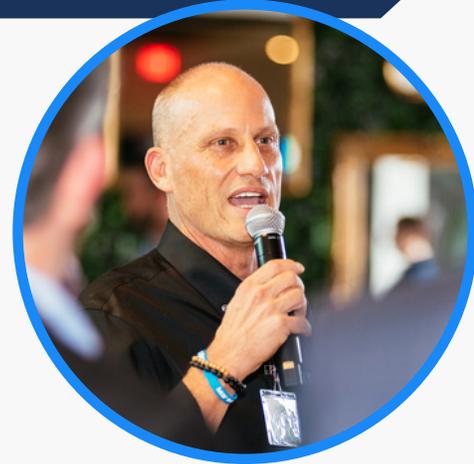
Boyd Cycling has come full circle, or should we say wheel, in the NEXT family. The Boyd Cycling team, **Nicole and Boyd Johnson**, joined NEXT in the early years and have been active in the VMS Mentor Program & CEO Lunches. Fifteen years later, co-founder Nicole is pouring back into the very same programs as a new mentor and NEXT board member while leading the second iteration of CEO lunches. Initially, there were doubts (gasp!) about whether Boyd aligned with NEXT's client profile focused mostly on tech. However, companies like Boyd Cycling, driving growth, scaling, and transforming their industry from within, have proven you don't have to be a tech company to scale OR to be a valuable asset to the NEXT programs.

Kopis - Grower

Team/Headcount: 66, 51 local

Programs: VMS (mentee & mentor), CEO Lunch

Kopis, an early player in the software development industry, showcased commitment by opening an office in the NEXT Innovation Center and engaging with the Venture Mentoring Service (VMS) Program. Founded by **Andy Kurtz**, Kopis is a significant resource in software development and actively gives back through mentorship in the VMS Program. This highlights the crucial role of successful founders in fostering growth in the startup community. The philosophy of contributing to emerging entrepreneurs underscores Kopis' dedication to collaboration, shared learning, and innovation, setting an example for other companies in the startup landscape.



Kanga Coolers - Grower



Team/Headcount: 43, 20 local

Programs: VMS

Kanga Coolers came to fame when featured on Shark Tank season 10 in 2019 and they've recently risen in notoriety after a featured ad on Mr. Beast's YouTube channel. Their signature product is the Kase Mate which wraps around a cold case of your favorite beverage but they've diversified their products with different sizes as well as a bookbag cooler. With a team of over 40, this college dream of founder **Logan LaMance** and his cofounders has turned itself into a multi-million dollar company with lots of hard work, great mentorship, and a little bit of luck never hurts!

WE HELP TELL THEIR STORIES.

Zylö Therapeutics - Mover

Team/Headcount: 10, 8 local
Programs: CEO Lunch, Match Day

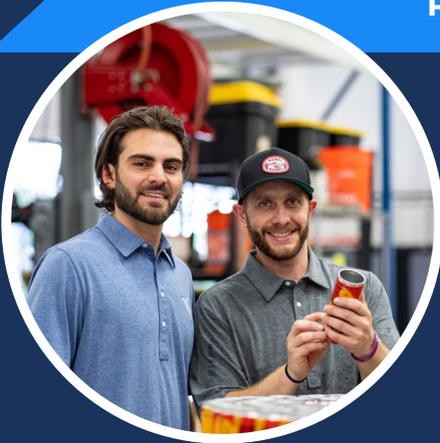
Zylö Therapeutics founder **Scott Pancoast** joined NEXT in 2018 so they're not new on the scene, but like many startups, they're seeing a real breakthrough years after they started. Whereas some startups achieve fast and early growth, for many founders, it takes years of grinding away to achieve some "success." Scott's journey has been one of ups and downs but his commitment is unwavering. He recently exemplified his grit by personally delivering their largest order to Minneapolis, MN - four barrels in a rented truck -an 18-hour drive! Scott continues to engage with and support the ecosystem, especially when it comes to deciphering SC Angel tax credits. Keep an eye on Zylö - we see big things in their future.



Rebel Rabbit - Mover

Team/Headcount: 9, 5 local
Programs: Accelerator, VMS

Rebel Rabbit's guiding principle is simple: "You do you." Cofounders **Pierce Wylie and Billy Goldsmith**'s rebellious, cannabis-infused seltzer is swiftly gaining popularity nationwide. Rebel Rabbit extracts the legal D9 THC compound from the cannabis plant and integrates it into an all-natural blend. Having recently acquired the old Brewery 85 space in Greenville as part of their second company, Upstate Beverage Consultants, LLC, Rebel Rabbit directly sells its products to consumers and also distributes widely. Achieving remarkable growth since its inception in 2021, the company is on track to earn its third million. Operating in a relatively new industry, the team faces unique challenges, but provides valuable insights to fellow founders in the adult beverage sector as well as through their NEXT Accelerator cohort.



skillsgapp - Mover

Team/Headcount: 8, 3 local
Programs: Accelerator, VMS, 2023 10 Most Exciting Startups

Tina Zwolinski, co-founder of skillsgapp, focused on economic development, workforce issues, and marketing to youth for years. Confronted with the challenges faced by her own son navigating the educational and career landscape, Tina knew there had to be a better way. skillsgapp, launched to address the shortcomings of traditional pathways, is more than just a platform; it's a gamified experience. The platform's virtual environment mirrors real-world jobs, providing an engaging space for students to explore industries, understand job requirements, and make informed career decisions. Navigating the complexities of the education and employment landscape isn't without its challenges. skillsgapp faces hurdles common to startups, including speed to market, talent acquisition, and shifting industry mindsets. Tina draws guidance from her VMS mentors and the Accelerator cohort. "The networks formed within these programs have become invaluable resources, offering diverse perspectives and expertise that contribute to skillsgapp's ongoing growth."



Performance Enhanced Delivery - Starter

Team/Headcount: 1 local
Programs: Accelerator, VMS

Rich Johnston, founder of GrowScripts & Performance Enhanced Delivery, created a unique slow-release coating for fertilizers, cutting field time/labor costs, and reducing environmental impact. While developing this, Rich and his wife researched the best places for business and family, choosing the Upstate over Raleigh for its entrepreneurial community. They moved to Greer in just 2 weeks! Now, as Rich navigates agriculture and product development, the NEXT Venture Mentoring Service (VMS) program provides essential mentorship and community support.



HERE'S TO THE NEXT GENERATION.



The NEXT journey has been full of trailblazing, resilience, and community spirit, but if we're not moving forward, we're not fulfilling our purpose. Imagine a future focused on growth, where connections spark creativity and where every entrepreneur finds their tribe.

Just as our mission has evolved, so too must we; to embody a fresh era of collaboration, empowerment and widening the aperture of who we serve.

Stay tuned as we weave in our past to pave the way for the next generation of the Greenville entrepreneur network.



Tell us your story and get connected to the Greenville entrepreneur network.

