FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VERGE HIRES INNOVATION STUDIO DIRECTOR

Roanoke, Virginia (March 21, 2023) – Verge is pleased to announce the hiring of Jess Edwards as Director of Innovation Studio for the new biotechnology incubator in Roanoke.

With robust experience in entrepreneurial ecosystem building, Edwards was previously the Principal of the Dan River Region Entrepreneur Ecosystem in Southern Virginia, where her work focused on implementing rural entrepreneurship and innovation primarily focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion with a hyper local lens.

“We are excited to announce the launch of a new innovation studio and programming for early-stage biotech companies. With support from the Commonwealth of Virginia and the City of Roanoke, we are positioning the region to be a hub for life science companies to grow and thrive here,” said Erin Burcham, President of Verge and Executive Director of RBTC.

In her role, Edwards will be responsible for helping to create and expand acceleration programming that incorporates wrap-around services for companies to help them grow in the region. She will serve as an “ecosystem navigator” to connect local entrepreneurs to highly customized resources and help facilitate introductions to national and global networks. She’s also the regional coordinator and point of contact for the Johnson & Johnson Quick Fire Challenge, the first virtual accelerator collaboration with JLABS.

Prior to working in Virginia, Edwards held the position of director of outreach and engagement for the Alaska Ocean Cluster Initiative, where her work focused on cultivating strategic partnerships, developing innovative programming and creating a statewide leadership summit to accelerate Alaska’s ocean (blue) economy development. Additionally, Edwards held positions to build and launch innovative coworking spaces for TRYP by Wyndham Dubai and Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus, Inc.

A graduate of the State University of New York at Buffalo, Edwards holds a bachelor’s degree in political science. She is a WNY BETA finalist for “Best Buffalo Community Tech Contribution of the Year,” a recipient of “Buffalo 30 Under 30” award, and a “10 Extraordinary Minds Award in Sales, Marketing &

Revenue Optimization" HSMAI Middle East awardee. She has served as a panelist or guest speaker at events all over the world, including the Nigeria Social Media Summit, the Dubai Lynx – International Festival of Creativity and MaRS Toronto.

Her work focuses on strategically implementing innovative concepts to advance entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Learn more about the Roanoke biotechnology incubator project: https://www.rbtc.tech/rbtc-news/regional-partners-collaborate-to-create-biotechnology-incubator-in-roanoke/