

From the Milwaukee Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/news/2018/09/12/execs-from-fortune-500-companies-are-signing-up.html>

Venture Capital

Execs from Fortune 500 companies are signing up for gener8tor's innovation network. Here's why

Sep 12, 2018, 5:00am CDT

Executives from some of the biggest companies in America that are based in the Midwest have been participating in an exclusive innovation network operated by gener8tor, the Wisconsin accelerator revealed Tuesday.

With offices in Milwaukee and Madison, gener8tor is Wisconsin's premier startup accelerator and is ranked a gold-level seed accelerator program in the U.S. by the Seed Accelerator Rankings Project. For the past three years, its founders, Troy Vosseller and Joe Kirgues, have built the innovation network, called Project North, into the largest consortium of venture capital, merger and acquisition and strategy executives in the Midwest, they say.



COURTESY OF GENER8TOR.

Troy Vosseller, co-founder of Gener8tor

The executives represent 37 corporations across the Midwest, which include Fortune 500 companies in Milwaukee's Northwestern Mutual, Rockwell Automation Inc. and Kohl's Corp., along with Harley-Davidson Inc. and A. O. Smith Corp. Other Wisconsin companies include Johnsonville Sausage, Kohler Co. and American Family Insurance.

The network has also pulled executives from Boston Scientific, Mutual of Omaha Insurance, Thrivent Financial and U.S. Cellular.

As members of the network, executives are given exclusive access to leading technologists, venture capitalists and startups while also exchanging best practices with executives from these other companies. The executives also meet for quarterly roundtables, which always includes a notable guest speaker (past speakers were representatives from companies like Microsoft and Samsung). There's also biannual plane trips to tech hubs across the country.

Here's what some executives are saying about Project North, per a news release from gener8tor:

“Project North has been an extremely effective platform for us to learn from peers and advance our innovation processes. Joining Project North has accelerated our involvement, communication and learnings within the start-up community on a global basis.” – Dan Counsell, director of mergers and acquisitions at Kohler Co.

“Working with the gener8tor team and Project North colleagues has been an invaluable part of our innovation journey. Learning from peers in multiple industries has helped us recognize shared challenges and consider new ideas.” – Sarah Van Slyke, director of strategic development at Thrivent Financial

“The gener8tor relationship has been incredibly valuable to our efforts at Allianz Life Ventures. Their concierge model carries over to the Project North program, where they not only do a great job of creating a community around corporate innovation but serve as a resource multiplier, adding value and helping with our specific needs.” – Brittany Clements, principal at Allianz Life Ventures, the venture capital arm of Allianz Life Insurance

Project North is sponsored by Madison's 4490 Ventures.

“In 2015 we started getting more and more inbound interest from local corporations looking to engage with startups,” Vosseller said. “Simultaneously, these corporations were at various stages of starting and growing their own corporate venture capital and innovation departments. We created Project North as a forum for peers to share best practices around these new activities.”

Nick Williams

Reporter

Milwaukee Business Journal