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Empower Wisconsin: Raises questions about Evers' grant to company owned by WEDC member

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Madison, WI – Empower Wisconsin today published a story raising concerns about a potential conflict of interest involving a nearly $1 million grant that Gov. Tony Evers recently announced. The grant is funding a partnership between the city of Kenosha and gener8tor, a business accelerator co-founded by Joe Kirgues. Kirgues is an Evers appointee to the Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. Board (WEDC). gener8tor will provide "coaching, mentorship and networking to start-up founders of color and women founders," according to press accounts. The grant program is funded through $100 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act and administered by WEDC.

"As businesses and regions of the state struggle through the pandemic, Gov. Evers and the agencies controlled by his appointees are picking winners and losers in handing out COVID relief funds. Unfortunately, they're choosing to help their friends first."

As Empower Wisconsin reports, the Workforce Innovation Grants program is available to nonprofit or governmental entities "to help implement collaborative, innovative plans to tackle a specific region's most pressing workforce challenge." While the city of Kenosha is a governmental entity, its partner in the grant project boasts that it is a nationally ranked player in the field of start-up acceleration. It is a very profitable company, deriving revenue off of equity in the businesses Gener8tor helps incubate.

"If this isn't a conflict of interest, it sure smells like one," Kittle added. "Taxpayer-funded grants should not have any appearance of benefitting government officials whose powerful boards oversee them. This $1 million grant raises serious questions about propriety and fairness."

Get the story here.