



The Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative

The purpose of the Minnesota Employment Policy Initiative (MEPI) is to develop leadership and dialogue facilitation around disability and employment policy that will result in the increased employment of Minnesotans with disabilities in the competitive labor force and promote Minnesota's value proposition: "We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper." Employment is fundamental to adulthood, quality of life issues and earning the means to exercise basic freedoms and choices as citizens.

The Initiative will work with numerous stakeholder partners to align policies, services and practices to increase competitive employment of people with disabilities and meet Minnesota's workforce needs. Stakeholder partners will include business, government, education, disability advocacy organizations, employment service providers, community support agencies, self-advocates and their families. MEPI will also work in close collaboration with the recently funded Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center (MNTAT) to maximize the impact of employment policy and practice across Minnesota. MEPI and MNTAT are initiatives of [Pathways to Employment](#), Minnesota's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

APSE, in conjunction with its state chapter Minnesota APSE, provides leadership for this initiative bringing more than 20 years of experience and knowledge in the area of employment policy through its proven record of advocacy and education on the value of integrated employment and improved employment practices. Among the activities planned by MEPI for the two year funding period are:

- Develop a joint website in conjunction with MNTAT
- Develop a policy component for an annual employment conference with MNTAT
- Develop policy briefs and issue papers based on 15 topical policy listening sessions (including five sessions in conjunction with MNTAT Development Sites) designed to gather input and build consensus from stakeholder groups on policy changes needed to shape improved employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities
- Support four mini-summits hosted by business leaders to champion increased integrated employment opportunities
- Develop and update a scorecard highlighting progress in advancing employment policies and practices in Minnesota
- Make recommendations toward the development of a uniform definition of employment and uniform data management practices across state agencies
- Collaborate with the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minnesota State Council on Disability (MSCOD) and other state agencies to provide information on developing employment policies and practices that increase opportunities and pathways into the workforce by all Minnesotans who want to work
- Strengthen and build new alliances to enlarge the circle of employment champions
- Integrate systems change policy initiatives across federal, state and local agencies

Carol Rydell, MEPI Project Manager, has over 30 years of experience working toward inclusion for individuals with disabilities and has managed innovative projects at Kaposia for over fourteen years. She has developed a student-run business with secondary education students with disabilities, a welfare to work service, a customized employment service for Latinos with disabilities and has worked with local government and community organizations to maximize employment opportunities for women, minorities and people with disabilities. She also has experience as a consultant, advocate and teacher and is a trained facilitator and strategic planner.

Contact information: Carol Rydell, Kaposia, Inc., 380 E. Lafayette Freeway South, St. Paul, MN 55107, 651-789-2815, crydell@kaposia.com.

Jon Alexander is Co-Director of MEPI and Chief Executive Officer of Kaposia where he has worked since 1998. He is a nationally recognized leader in the development and expansion of customized employment services. He has been on the national board of APSE since 2005 and is currently its treasurer. He is a founding member of the Minnesota Employment First Coalition.

Contact information: Jon Alexander, Kaposia, Inc., 380 E. Lafayette Freeway South, St. Paul, MN 55107, 651-789-2817, jalexander@kaposia.com.

Don Lavin is Co-Director of MEPI and Vice-President of Rise where he has worked since 1976. He supervises the planning, development, operations and evaluation of supported and customized employment programs for youth and adults with a wide range of disabilities and other barriers. He has a 34 year track record as a grant writer and strategist and is the author of eight books on competitive and supported employment practices. He is a national speaker, mentor, trainer and technical assistance advisor. He is also a founding member of the Minnesota Employment First Coalition.

Contact information: Don Lavin, Rise, Inc., 8406 Sunset Road Northeast, Spring Lake Park, MN 55432, 763-783-2815, dlavin@rise.org.

Laura Owens is the Executive Director of APSE, a national membership organization with a mission to lead in the advancement of equitable employment for people with disabilities. APSE provides advocacy and education on the value of integrated employment, improves practices to promote integrated employment and promotes national, local and state policy development to enhance the social and economic inclusion and empowerment of individuals with disabilities. She is also an Associate Professor at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee and Director/Founder of Creative Employment Opportunities, Inc., an employment agency for individuals with disabilities.

Contact Information: Laura Owens, APSE, 451 Hungerford Drive, #700, Rockville, MD 20850, 414-581-3032, lowens@apse.org.

MEPI is funded with support from a Competitive Employment Systems-Medicaid Infrastructure Grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to Minnesota's Department of Human Services (Grant #1QACMS030325). The funds for this grant were authorized through the Ticket to Work-Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170). Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance 93768.