



Iowa Department for the Blind

Strategic Plan

FY2025 – FY2027

Strides in Services for Every Age and Stage

The Iowa Department for the Blind is committed to advancing state agency and community programs to better serve Iowans at every stage of life. By leveraging all its initiatives, IDB ensures that individuals—ranging from our youngest clients to our seniors—can access vital resources, services, training, and programs centered on education, independence, and employment.

Mission Statement

Empowering blind Iowans to work, live independently, and pursue the lives they choose.

Vision Statement

A future where every blind Iowan can build a career, contribute their talents, and thrive in their communities.

Value Statements

- **Empowerment**—We believe in equipping blind Iowans with the tools, skills, and opportunities to succeed in the workforce and community.
- **Independence**—We believe that, with training and opportunity, blind people can do what they want to do and live the lives they choose.
- **Respect**—We treat all people with dignity, empathy, and professionalism, recognizing the inherent worth and potential of each client, colleague, partner, and community member.
- **Integrity**—We do what is right and we remain true to our mission and values.
- **Innovation**—We embrace creativity, technology, and new ideas to create opportunities, remove barriers, and enhance the effectiveness of our services.
- **Opportunities**—We expand access to employment, education, training, and community participation for all blind Iowans.
- **Informed Choice**—We respect each person's right to make well-informed decisions about their own rehabilitation and life.

Our Culture

We create a supportive environment where both staff and clients are valued, respected, and empowered to grow. When we care for each other, we make a more positive impact.

Iowa Commission for the Blind

The Iowa Commission for the Blind consists of three members appointed by the Governor for three-year terms. It determines the policies that will be carried out by the Iowa Department for the Blind (<https://blind.iowa.gov/iowa-commission-blind>).

Iowa Department for the Blind's Core Programs

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

- Determines eligibility, provides and arranges for the provision of VR services to all blind VR clients in the State of Iowa
- Provides itinerant adjustment to blindness training in communities, schools, and workplaces throughout the state, preparing blind VR clients for education and employment
- Provides services, training, and resources to employers and partner agencies
- Provides entrepreneurial opportunities to blind Iowans by equipping them with locations, equipment, starting inventory, training, and technical assistance to launch and operate their own sole proprietorship or LLC, while building the skills, capital, and confidence needed to grow beyond the program and create jobs

Orientation Center for the Blind

- Adjustment to blindness training through two tracks: Comprehensive Program and Specific Skills Track
- Intensive, deliberate practice in non-visual skills using structured discovery methodology
- Building self-confidence and a positive attitude toward blindness

Young Adult Pre-Employment Transition

- Provides intensive adjustment to blindness training in the areas of living, learning and working to help blind students meet IEP goals in an empowering and supportive environment

Independent Living

- The Younger Blind Program (54 years and younger) and the Older Blind Program (55 years and older) provide tools and training necessary for Iowans experiencing significant vision loss to remain independent and active in their homes and communities
- The programs work to build self-confidence and expand possibilities so that these individuals may reconsider joining the workforce

Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and Instructional Materials Center

- Serves as the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled regional library providing a library collection in alternative formats, accessible information, access services, and programs to blind and print disabled Iowans of all ages
- The Instructional Materials Center (IMC) provides centralized, cost-effective, and responsive access to educational materials in braille, large print, audio, and electronic formats to blind and low vision students, preK-12 and post-secondary, across the state of Iowa
- Provides information, resources, and trainings to educators, schools, and organizations in the use of accessible materials

Assessment

The Department completes several internal and external activities to assess its impact on Iowans and to determine whether the services provided meet the needs of blind Iowans.

- IDB reports vocational rehabilitation service measures quarterly and independent living measures annually to our federal funding agencies.
- IDB's VR program completes a comprehensive statewide needs assessment every three years. This assessment was completed in 2022 and will be completed again in 2025.
- Customer input is solicited continuously. Each year, representatives from the Iowa Department for the Blind meet with members of the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa and the Iowa Council of the United Blind at their annual state conventions.
- The Independent Living Program hosts a quarterly IL Forum to engage stakeholders and obtain feedback on programs and services.
- The library has an active Library Consumer Advisory Committee that provides feedback to the library on patrons' services and programs at a local and national level.
- Our agency participates quarterly in the Olmstead Consumer Taskforce. Their activities support the full inclusion of people with disabilities in housing, employment, transportation, healthcare, independent living and other areas.
- The Director serves on the State Workforce Development Board and is able to get direct input from business leaders regarding their needs.
- The Elected Committee of Blind Vendors advises the agency on major administrative decisions, BEP program policy, program development, and training for aspiring and new vendors.

Goals and Strategies

Supports Governor's Priorities: Expanding Educational Freedom

Goal 1: Education and Literacy

Strategy 1.1: Improving braille literacy among blind Youth

The Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled is creating programs to improve literacy among blind and low vision children.

Action Steps:

- Promote Instructional Materials Center (IMC) services to other state agencies and school districts to raise awareness of accessible educational material resources for students
- Promote and expand virtual and in person family programming focusing on literacy and STEM programming for youth
- Expand and continue to promote outreach programs to communities, public libraries, schools and other organizations in rural and urban areas across Iowa to raise awareness

Strategy 1.2: Provide innovative and proactive pre-employment transition services

Students receive job exploration counseling, counseling on secondary education opportunities, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. Rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation teachers also provide students with early work-based learning opportunities, such as job shadowing, part-time work, internships, and apprenticeships.

Action Steps:

- Increase participation in work-based learning opportunities, such as job shadowing, internships, and part-time jobs
- Increase engagement with parents, guardians, teachers, and other members of students' support networks to assist students as they pursue their post-secondary education and careers

Strategy 1.3: Ensure students receive timely and accurate educational materials in alternative formats

Ensuring students have accurate and timely textbooks, workbooks, charts, maps, diagrams, and other educational materials in alternative formats is a key component of a free and appropriate public education. Our Library's Instructional Materials Center is continually striving to make this process more effective for students and cost-effective for taxpayers.

Action Steps:

Continue to provide professional development to para-educators, special education teachers, and other educators in braille and accessible materials to increase the number of educators participating in trainings.

- Provide access to accessible educational materials to educators via online library systems and ordering platforms

- Increase awareness within state agencies, school districts and the public of accessibility and promote universal design and inclusion

Measures for Goal 1:

- Number of students who are blind participating in pre- employment transition services.
- Number of youth (0-18 years of age) attending library programs.
- Number of individuals attending outreach events and programs held by the library.
- Number of educators participating in braille and accessible educational material (AEM) education courses and trainings provided by the library.
- Number of accessible educational and vocational material transcription requests completed in alternative media and filled by the library's Instructional Materials Center.
- Percent of accessible educational materials completed on time for students.
- Number of materials produced in alternative formats and added to the library collection (audio, braille, large print and electronic text).

Goal 2: Education and Independent Living

Strategy 2.1: Ensure that older individuals who are losing vision have the skills and tools they need to remain independent in their homes

Our Rehabilitation Teachers teach older adults who have lost or are losing vision how to cook, clean, travel, access technology, and do other tasks of daily life to remain independent in their homes.

- Teachers connect these individuals with peer support, advocacy groups, and community resources to reduce isolation and maintain community involvement
- Teachers help their clients to use these skills to live full, happy, and independent lives

Action Steps:

- Continue to expand outreach efforts to raise awareness of older blind services throughout the state
- Increase participation in community-based trainings among clients to promote stronger community integration and support networks
- Continue to innovate by leveraging technology, the use of different communication methods and programming to increase patron access to information and opportunities for connection

Measures for Goal 2:

- Number of clients who receive services through the Independent Living division.
- Number of training objectives completed by Independent Living clients.
- Number of clients attending the statewide adult skills retreats.
- Number of clients exiting the Independent Living Program with completed plans.

Goal 3: Education and Workforce

Strategy 3.1: Bringing forward an underutilized pool of talented and motivated workers.

Blind and low vision Iowans are an underutilized talent pool. We connect employers looking for hard-working job candidates with our skilled and motivated clients who are seeking to advance their careers.

Action Steps:

- Increase employer awareness of the capabilities of blind workers through networking, presentations, community events, and other employer engagement activities
- Promote the capabilities of blind workers through State Workforce Development Board participation
- Develop opportunities for blind workers to enter registered apprenticeships and industry-recognized apprenticeship programs

Strategy 3.2: Working with WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) partners to improve accessibility to blind and low vision Iowans

Continue to work with partners to make America's Job Centers (AJCs) accessible and work at the state and regional levels to help ensure that everyone can benefit from all one-stop job center services.

Action Steps:

- Advocate for physical and systemic accessibility of AJCs to blind and low vision Iowans
- Participate in local workforce board activities including disability access committees to develop partnerships that both connect clients with high-quality jobs and help local businesses meet their staffing needs

Strategy 3.3: Provide blind jobseekers with the technology and training they need to succeed in today's workplace

IDB provides adaptive technology training to help job-seeking clients succeed in college and the workforce.

Action Steps:

- Provide jobseekers with the adaptive technology they require in order to succeed in post-secondary education, vocational training, and the workforce
- Provide jobseekers with the training to utilize this technology
- Empower students to develop transferrable skills to master emerging technology after they enter the workforce

Strategy 3.4: Increase number of clients participating in post-secondary education and training

Action Steps:

- Increase clients' knowledge of post-secondary education opportunities and the skills blind and low vision students need to be successful

Measures for Goal 2:

- Percentage ratio of the average VR wage to the average state wage.
- Percentage of clients exiting the VR program in employment (this includes only clients exiting after being determined eligible for services).
- Number of clients participating in adult skills retreats.
- Percentage of participants accessing disability skills training and achieving measurable skill gains.
- Number clients will participate in post-secondary education or training.
- Number of clients participating in the Business Enterprise Program (BEP)
- Average net income of Business Enterprise participants
- Number of clients receiving training in our Orientation Center for the Blind

Key Performance Indicators

1. VR client average hourly wage at exit.
2. The number of youth program participants in all programs expressed as a percentage of eligible students with disabilities.
3. The number of Independent Living Older Blind Clients reporting that they are able to maintain their living situation and independence within their homes and communities.