

Iowa Department for the Blind

Performance Report

FY2026

IOWA | Department for the Blind

Message from the Interim Director

As we look back on this year, we are proud of the many ways we came together to support blind Iowans in building skills, confidence, and independence. Every success in this plan reflects the belief we share in the strength and potential of the people we serve. Throughout the year, we focused on meaningful connections, responsive services, and creating environments where individuals feel supported and empowered.

We expanded the reach of our programs, strengthened partnerships across communities, and continued to refine the tools and training that help Iowans thrive at every age. Whether someone came to us for literacy and learning, independent living support, or pathways to employment, we worked to ensure they received not only high-quality services but also a sense of possibility. We are grateful for the dedication of our staff, the strength and determination of our clients, and the support of our partners who helped us move this mission forward. Together, we have built strong momentum, and we are excited for the opportunities ahead as we continue to empower blind Iowans to live the lives they want.

Sincerely,
Sarah Willeford
Interim Director

Executive Summary

This year we made strong, meaningful progress across our education, independent living, and workforce initiatives for blind and low-vision Iowans. Our youth programming continued to grow, with expanded family events, stronger partnerships with schools, and increased awareness of our accessible educational materials. The Instructional Materials Center produced 1,476 alternative-format materials, and 92 children and teens participated in our literacy and STEM programs.

Our Older Blind Program also saw important gains. Clients completed 1,789 training objectives, reflecting real progress in building daily living, mobility, and technology skills that help older Iowans stay independent and connected within their communities.

Workforce efforts continued to focus on expanding opportunities and removing barriers. We strengthened employer outreach, deepened our partnerships with WIOA agencies, and increased our capacity for technology training. More clients pursued post-secondary education and training, with 68 participating this year. The Business Enterprise Program also saw positive movement, with average participant income rising to $54,760.50.

Overall, these results reflect steady, intentional work toward increasing access to education, promoting independence, and expanding employment pathways for blind Iowans.

Strategic Progress made in FY2026

Goal 1: Education
Strengthening Literacy, Access, and Pre-Employment Skills for Youth

This year we made strong progress in expanding educational access and literacy support for blind and low-vision youth. The Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled increased outreach to families, schools, and state agencies, helping more people learn about our accessible materials and programs. Our family literacy and STEM offerings continued to grow, with 92 youth ages 0–18 taking part in library programs.

The Instructional Materials Center continued its work to provide timely, accurate alternative-format educational materials, producing 1,476 items in braille, large print, and other accessible formats. We also expanded training for para-educators and teachers, increasing the number of educators who understand and use braille standards in their classrooms.

Our Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers strengthened pre-employment transition services by boosting participation in weekend retreats and the LEAP summer program and adding more short-term skills trainings. These efforts helped students build confidence, literacy skills, orientation and mobility skills, technology skills, and overall workplace readiness.

Goal 2: Education
Supporting Older Iowans in Maintaining Independence

Rehabilitation Teachers continued to provide high-quality training to older adults experiencing vision loss, covering daily living, travel, technology, and other essential skills. Increased outreach helped more people learn about our services, supporting steady engagement across the state.

Independent Living clients completed 1,789 training objectives this year—strong evidence of their progress in building skills that support independence at home and in their communities. Continued connections to peer support and community resources also helped reduce isolation and improve quality of life.

Goal 3: Workforce
Expanding Employment, Skills, and Economic Opportunity for Blind Iowans

We continued to make meaningful progress toward increasing employment opportunities for blind Iowans. Employer outreach, community presentations, and ongoing involvement with workforce development boards helped raise awareness of the capabilities of blind workers and opened the door to more apprenticeship opportunities.

Our partnerships with our core partner agencies strengthened accessibility within America’s Job Centers, improving both technology access and collaboration at the state and local levels.

We also expanded our assistive technology training capacity ensuring clients receive support that prepares them for a rapidly changing workplace.

Participation in post-secondary education and training increased, with 68 clients enrolled this year. The Business Enterprise Program also saw growth, with average participant net income rising to $54,760.50.

Operational Highlights in FY2026

Throughout the year, the Iowa Department for the Blind advanced its mission to support Iowans of all ages in achieving independence, literacy, and employment. By strengthening education services, expanding independent living support, and further integrating workforce programs, the Department delivered broader access to resources and measurable improvements in client outcomes.

Vocational Rehabilitation efforts focused on increasing employer engagement, improving accessibility within workforce systems, enhancing client technology training, and supporting more blind Iowans in pursuing post-secondary education. Through presentations, networking, and board participation, the Department increased employer awareness of the capabilities of blind workers and supported businesses in understanding assistive technology. Collaborations with state partners continued to improve accessibility across America's Job Centers. Strategic assessments enabled more clients to pursue education and training aligned with employment goals. Over the year, clients achieved measurable skill gains, exited in employment, and 68 clients participated in post-secondary education and training.

Independent Living services for older adults experiencing vision loss also expanded. Increased outreach generated higher referral volume, and community-based training strengthened peer connection and practical skill use, reducing isolation and improving independence. Innovations in communication and technology helped more clients access resources and stay engaged. As a result, 323 individuals received independent living services and completed 1,789 training objectives.

The Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled and its Instructional Materials Center (IMC) expanded programs that promote braille literacy and early skill development among youth. Increased outreach to schools, libraries, and community partners raised awareness of the library and the Instructional Materials Center and boosted requests for accessible educational resources. Family programming, literacy activities, and STEM initiatives reached more children statewide, while participation in pre-employment transition service grew. These efforts enhanced students' confidence and readiness for post-secondary training and future employment. Educator training in braille and accessible educational materials courses supported more timely delivery of high-quality accessible materials. Over the year, the library served 5,931Iowans and checked out 221,211 items to individuals who need alternative formats.

Together, these accomplishments demonstrate progress in strengthening services and expanding opportunities for blind Iowans. The Department's continued commitment to innovation, accessibility, and empowerment positions it to deliver even greater impact in the year ahead.

Performance Results in FY2026

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Measure	Target	Actual Result
Percentage Ratio of Average VR Wage to Average State Wage	75%	66%
Percentage of Clients Exiting in Employment	25%	25%
Percentage of Participants - Disability Skills Training with Skills Gained	70%	100%
Number of clients That Participate in Post-Secondary Education and Training	30	68
Percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in high school participating in pre- employment transition services and programs	40%	90%

The VR wage ratio reached 66%, which fell short of the 75% target. Despite this, VR achieved its target for the percentage of clients exiting in employment, reaching 25%. Skill gains far exceeded expectations: 100% of participants demonstrated measurable disability-related skills gains compared to the 70% target, reflecting strong instruction and effective training design. Post-secondary participation also surpassed expectations, with 68 clients enrolled compared to the target of 30, indicating strengthened transition programming and greater collaboration with education partners.

Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

Measure	Target	Actual Result
Average Net Income of Business Enterprise Participants	$46,000.00	$54,760.50

The average net income for BEP participants reached $54,760.50, surpassing the target of $46,000. Strong performance signals effective support in navigating purchasing, inventory management, and equipment upgrades.

Independent Living Program

Measure	Target	Actual Result
Number of Clients Receiving Services Through Independent Living	190	323
Number of Training Objectives Completed by Independent Living Clients	550	1,789
Inservice training sessions will be conducted for community service providers	25	54
New referrals to Independent Living program	100	329

The Independent Living Program greatly exceeded expectations by serving 323 clients, well above the target of 190. This increase was due to successful statewide outreach efforts and improved referral pathways. Clients completed 1,789 training objectives, over triple the goal of 550, which indicates both high engagement and expanded training capacity. These results show

strong program performance and a growing awareness of IL services among older Iowans experiencing vision loss.

Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled

Measure	Target	Actual Result
Number of Iowans Registered as Library Patrons	6,000	5,931
Number of Items Checked Out to Library Patrons	250,000	221,211
Number of Youth (ages 0-18) that Attend Library Programs	30	92
Number of Educators Participating in Braille and AEM Courses	10	8
Number of Items downloaded from Braille and Audio Reading Download application	40,000	61,352

Library patron registration reached 5,931, narrowly missing the target of 6,000. Items checked out totaled 221,211, slightly below the target of 250,000. Youth program participation dramatically exceeded expectations, with 92 attendees compared to the target of 30. This increase was driven by expanded program offerings and stronger outreach partnerships. Educator participation in braille and accessible educational materials courses reached 8 educators, slightly below the target of 10, suggesting continued need for outreach to educators and schools.

Instructional Materials Center (IMC)

Measure	Target	Actual Result
Number of Transcription Requests Filled for Educational and Vocational Materials	1,200	875
Percentage of Accessible Educational Materials Completed on Time	98%	98%
Number of Materials Produced in Alternative Formats	1,500	1,476

The IMC filled 875 transcription requests this year, which fell short of the target of 1,200 and achieved its 98% on time completion target, demonstrating strong workflow efficiency and effective prioritization strategies. The number of materials produced in alternative formats reached 1,476, slightly below the target of 1,500, showing that capacity remained high even amid higher-detail production demands.