



# Iowa Department for the Blind

PERFORMANCE REPORT

PERFORMANCE RESULTS

FISCAL YEAR 2023

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## Introduction

I am pleased to present the performance report for the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) for fiscal year 2023. This report is provided in compliance with sections 7E.3, 8E.210, and 216B.7 of the Code of Iowa. It contains information about the results achieved during the past fiscal year due to the services provided by the Iowa Department for the Blind.

SFY23 brought new challenges and opportunities as we continued to forge a path forward in the post-pandemic era. While several of our perennial programs now use a hybrid model such as the braille Challenge and library youth STEM and literacy programming, there are certain services that we provide that are undeniably better provided face to face. Learning to use a long white cane, cook and clean without sight, learn braille, and other blindness skills can be mastered faster and more efficiently with the instructor in the same room.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) mandates that we devote 15% of our federal vocational rehabilitation funding to provide pre-employment transition services to youth ages 14-21. This mandate continues to propel us to seek out new and innovative ways to serve youth more effectively. We established new contracts with service providers to increase the number of pre-employment transition services we provide to students with disabilities. These trainings target improving workplace readiness, soft skills, and self-confidence as well as facilitating greater access to career exploration and work-based learning. We have continued to partner with Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI, formerly known as the Iowa Braille and Sight Saving School).

Vocational rehabilitation counselors and teachers participate in IEP meetings and meet with IESBVI staff to work to improve service provision to common clients. IDB's Vocational rehabilitation teachers serve youth and adult clients in their communities throughout the state providing essential blindness skills training including independent travel using the long white cane, and using computers, phones, and other technology with speech, magnification, and braille.

In August 2023, we began our fourth school year for our Young Adult Transition Program (YATP) with 5 students. This is a 4+ program that is designed for blind students who have completed all the academic requirements to graduate from high school, but still have Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals to achieve. Students work on achieving these goals and obtaining the alternative techniques and soft skills needed to obtain quality employment and live independently.

Our summer youth training program called LEAP was once again able to provide students with the opportunity to attend national conventions of blindness consumer organizations. At these conferences, students met employed blind adults from across the country, networked with other high school and college students, learned about a wide variety of access technology, and

improved their independent mobility skills by traveling in airports and large urban areas. We held six in person weekend retreats for high school age youth over the course of the 22-23 school year. We held four one-week long sessions of intensive training for adult vocational rehabilitation clients in Des Moines. These trainings, called "SELF Week" help to speed up disability related skills training for VR clients unable to attend the Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center due to family or work commitments.

We continue to work with our WIOA partners to improve access for our clients to Iowa Works employment services. In addition to the work that our administrators are doing on the state level, our vocational rehabilitation counselors continue to be active participants in local workforce Disability Access Committees and engage with our core and required partners. VR Teachers, technology specialists, counselors, and center instructors are working together to help clients to continuously move forward toward their vocational goals. They will help clients get excited about work and their earning potential as well as find ways around barriers to education and employment.

Our Independent Living Program continues to provide training and tools to individuals who are losing vision to help them to stay independent in their homes and communities. We remain firmly committed to making sure that all Iowans know that no one should ever enter a nursing home or restrictive congregate living situation just because they are losing vision, and we are here to help them retain their independence.

The Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center is continuing to partner with Independent Living staff to host week-long training for IL clients. This partnership allows teachers to stay in the field and serve other clients and gives students in the Center the opportunity to gain confidence by sharing their knowledge. We are planning to be able to provide three sessions in SFY24.

The library continued to provide summer reading programming to libraries across the state and partnered with the State Library to provide local librarians with webinars and training to help them better serve blind and low vision Iowans in their local communities. Our Instructional Materials Center provided a one-stop shop for accessible educational materials. Our collection saves local school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars every year.

While we are excited by the progress, we made this year and proud of the creativity and flexibility of our staff, we must continuously reevaluate all aspects of our performance to ensure that we provide outstanding service to all blind Iowans. As we move forward, IDB will continue to respond to changing technology, new opportunities, and the needs expressed by blind Iowans, and we will strive to develop innovative programs to empower them to secure gainful employment and live independently.

Emily Wharton, Director, Iowa Department for the Blind

**Department Overview**

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the state agency charged with providing vocational rehabilitation, independent living, library, and other essential services to Iowans who are blind so that they can live independently and work competitively. The policies and procedures of the Department are based on state and federal law, including chapters 216B, 216C, and 216D of the Code of Iowa, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Randolph-Sheppard Act.

**Mission, Vision, Values and Culture of the Iowa Department for the Blind****Mission Statement**

Empower blind Iowans to be gainfully employed and live independently.

**Vision Statement**

To be the world's leader in blind rehabilitation services.

**Value Statements****We value blind Iowans therefore:**

- We believe in each individual's ability to be independent
- We act with a sense of urgency and responsiveness in serving every individual
- We support each individual's right to informed choices
- We value engagement and independence for individuals of all ages
- We promote a positive attitude toward blindness
- We expect blind persons to achieve their full potential
- We provide opportunities for blind persons to be fully contributing members of their communities

**All staff are valued and expected to demonstrate:**

- Passion for what we do every day
- Commitment to make positive differences in the lives of blind Iowans
- Respect for the contributions of each staff member
- Ethical behavior, honesty, integrity and trustworthiness
- Innovative and proactive approaches in serving each client.
- Progressive and professional leadership
- Collaboration and teamwork that benefits each individual we serve
- Collaboration with community, local, state, and federal partners

**Our Culture**

We use a client-centric approach to empower clients to achieve successful outcomes.

## Core Functions

*The Department's three major service areas are vocational rehabilitation (VR), independent living (IL), and the library for the blind and print disabled.*

### 1. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The VR program prepares Iowans who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision to prepare for, obtain, retain or advance in competitive employment in the integrated labor market. Applicants are made eligible based upon their visual disability, their need for VR services, and their intent to work. The VR counselor and the eligible individual jointly identify an employment goal and the services needed to achieve it.

#### KEY SERVICES INCLUDE:

- Career exploration, interest testing and vocational planning.
- Training on alternative skills of blindness, self-advocacy and development of more positive attitudes about blindness.
- Training to help individuals achieve the vocational goals they have selected such as vocational training or post-secondary education. Assistance with tuition, books, technology and readers are also available to individuals pursuing training leading to their employment goal.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services. Students with disabilities ages 14-21 and youth with disabilities ages 14-24 are able to receive services which focus on job exploration, work readiness skills, postsecondary exploration, work-based learning experiences and self-advocacy skill development.
- Job placement services. VR counselors help job seekers develop job-search plans, write resumes, practice interviewing, and locate job and placement resources.
- Rehabilitation technology services. Through such services as job site assessment, procurement of assistive technology, and training in the use of adaptive equipment, blind employees can perform their jobs competitively and efficiently.
- Post-employment follow-up. After individuals have achieved their employment goals, VR counselors can continue to serve as a resource to both employees and employers.

VR staff members also participate in outreach activities, such as:

- Participation in job fairs, technology expos, and speakers' bureaus.

- Provision of information on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA); job site assessments and accommodations information, and referral to appropriate vendors.
- Partnership with other employment programs to facilitate the recruitment of qualified blind employees.
- Advice on assistive technology to public agencies and employers so that technology available to the general public is also accessible to blind persons.

#### DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES:

- The VR counselors travel statewide to provide guidance and counseling to blind Iowans to ensure they get the training and services they need to reach their employment goals. In addition to statewide travel, counselors have also provided remote services, as needed, by the clients being served.
- The Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center is a residential training program for clients of the VR program. Located in Des Moines, the Center provides in-depth blindness skills training to students so that they can return to their home communities to live independently and work competitively. Students receive training in four areas: 1) development of self-confidence; 2) blindness skills, including cane travel, home and personal management, industrial arts, Braille, and computer; 3) job readiness; and 4) public education.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers travel statewide to deliver training in alternative techniques of blindness which includes orientation and mobility training, home management training, training in the use of assistive technology, and training in braille and other communication methods.
- The Department's Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind clients of the VR program to manage their own vending and snack bar businesses located throughout Iowa in public and private buildings and at rest areas along interstate highways.
- Finally, VR staff work with a variety of suppliers of goods and services. The Department purchases direct services for our clients from educational and training institutions, community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), medical service providers, and others. The Department also works with assistive technology developers and vendors who produce equipment many of the Department's clients require to achieve their goals.



## 2. INDEPENDENT LIVING (IL)

### **Overview**

The Department's Independent Living (IL) program receives referrals from multiple external statewide referral sources including, but not limited to, state agencies, medical clinics and hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living homes, Area Agencies on Aging, Veteran's programs, Iowa Centers for Independent Living, the Statewide Independent Living Council, non-profit agencies, private and public network partners as well as persons who are blind or their family members or friends.

Serving the entire State of Iowa, the Department's IL program provides services to Iowans who are blind or deaf-blind, who have significant vision loss and are 55 or older or are blind or deaf-blind and have significant vision loss under the age of 55 years with multiple disabilities. This program is designed to help blind and deaf-blind residents of Iowa live more independent and productive lives in their respective homes and communities.

Eligibility criteria must be met to qualify for program services. Eligibility determination considerations include a review and evaluation of a current eye report, including information about the eye condition and prognosis, demonstration that there is a significant need for IL services, verification that Vocational Rehabilitation is not a priority at the time of application to the IL program, and that it is reasonable to expect that the IL program services would benefit the individual.

Once eligibility is determined, if eligible, the client and Independent Living Rehabilitation (ILR) Teacher will collaborate to outline a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Based (S.M.A.R.T.) plan. Within the planning process, there will also be a discussion about key products or other services that might be necessary to facilitate successful training to accomplish positive results and assist the individual to close their record as rehabilitated.

### **Program Service Outcomes**

The Department's IL program services are designed to accomplish these outcomes:

- Provide IL services to individuals who are blind or deaf-blind.
- Prevent the premature institutionalization of blind or deaf-blind Iowans.
- Conduct activities that will improve or expand services for those who are served, and
- Conduct activities to help improve public understanding of widely held misconceptions about blindness and deaf-blindness.

## **Core Services and Products**

Key program services:

- Outreach services.  
Clinical or functional vision assessment and services when not covered by another comparable source.
- The provision of IL teaching services to minimally include:
  - Adjustment to blindness counseling and guidance
  - Assistive Technology devices and services
  - Independent Living and Adjustment Training Services
  - Supportive Services
  - Community Awareness Activities
  - Information and Referral

## **Delivery Mechanisms for Providing Services:**

### **Group Training Models:**

The Department's IL program delivers services using the following models for both Independent Living Services for Older Blind and Independent Living Services for Younger Blind.

### **Small Group Training: Community-Based Trainings (CBTs):**

Our IL program generally offers small group training in or near our clients' home area. These groups typically have three to six participants. This model provides blind Iowans an opportunity to meet others who share similar circumstances, as well as give them an opportunity to learn basic skills that will allow them to remain independent.

The hands-on training frequently boosts a participant's self-confidence, often giving those who participate the desire to learn more by the end of the training. CBT content can be modified to meet the specific needs of several participants. The introductory training is approximately six hours in length and can be delivered in one day or over two days.

A sample session one- or two-day training might consist of some classes as listed below:

- Counseling and Related Services: A discussion about the importance of a positive attitude to promote a positive adjustment toward blindness and set the stage for a positive training experience.
- Mobility-Transportation: Introduction to the use of a long white cane including holding, moving, developing good usage, ascending and descending stairs, identifying curb cuts, and crossing controlled and uncontrolled intersections. This may also include a discussion of what public transportation systems are available and how to access them.
- Communication: Introduction to reading and writing Braille.

- Independent Living Training & Life Skills: Preparing a simple meal, cutting vegetables, pouring liquids, measuring, assembling food in preparation for lunch, laundry techniques, and threading a needle.
- Recreational services: Exploring newspaper reading programs, use of Iowa Library book player, various adaptive games using Braille, screen readers, etc.

The IL Integration is a weeklong training session that takes place at our state agency in Des Moines, Iowa. We typically offer two training modules annually for those under the age of 55 and one for those 55 and older.

This model includes:

- A full week of intensive training through our Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center.
- Iowa Empowerment and Independence Center student mentors are paired with IL Integration participants during the training week to work in tandem on multiple levels of training and peer role modeling.
- The opportunity to partner with two local blind consumer groups. One is the Iowa Council of the United Blind (ICUB) and the other is the National Federation of the Blind of Iowa (NFBI). Program participants may network with consumer group members, potentially connecting and gaining newfound friendships and support through these organizations.
- Participants attending scheduled classes daily at the Department from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with evening activities to add value to their training experience.

Learning objectives minimally will include:

- Non-visual techniques to teach everyday tasks and problem-solving that can be used both at home and in the participants' respective communities.
- Building more self-confidence; and a new, positive way to view blindness (i.e., determining how to overcome the misconceptions about blindness) before returning home.

### **Individualized Regional Cluster Service Training (RCST) Model:**

This past State Fiscal Year, the Department's IL program continued to utilize the RCST model to provide individualized or group skills training over a period of three to four consecutive weeks within each identified service area/region or regional cluster.

The purpose of and reason to continue this model:

- Clients served appear to demonstrate the ability to retain the information and skills learned between training or service visits.
- There is an increase in the number of client training objectives that are met over the course of client plans.
- Customer satisfaction rates are higher with this model.

What we have learned using this model over time, moreover with our Independent Younger Blind program, due primarily to the fact that we serve fewer individuals within this program,

our budget is much smaller and these individuals are less centralized is that we must look to a newer, more efficient way to serve these individuals yet retain high standard outcome rates.

### 3. LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND AND PRINT DISABLED

The library provides reading materials free of charge to Iowans who cannot use standard print because of blindness, physical disability, or reading disability.

**KEY SERVICES AND PRODUCTS:** The library circulates books and magazines in digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout Iowa. The library maintains a collection of over 200,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 150 different magazines. Because the library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped (NLS) of the Library of Congress, its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

**DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES:** The library:

- Transcribes print materials into Braille and audio formats. Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and upon request.
- Assists Iowa students with their textbooks, research, and career needs through the library's Instructional Material Center.
- Provides independent access to the library's collection through the web-based on-line public access catalog (OPAC). The OPAC allows borrowers to search the collection and select and reserve books.
- Maintains digital audio players, braille eReaders, and digital devices for borrowers to read in various formats.
- Provides programs and trainings for all ages to promote literacy, college and career exploration and continuing education.

#### Customers and Stakeholders

The Department's primary customers are blind and severely visually impaired Iowans who have very specialized needs that cannot be met elsewhere. Referrals of persons who need the Department's services come in many forms and from many sources, including from individuals themselves, relatives and friends, the library, doctors and other health and community service providers, schools, institutions, and other agencies.

In developing the Department's programs and policies, we actively seek input from advisory councils, consumer organizations of the blind, individual blind persons, and blind staff who also make up part of the customer base. Two of the three members of the policy-making

Commission for the Blind are blind. Knowledgeable and politically active, the Department's customers are highly interested in the agency's policies, procedures, and practices. They support the Department's culture and participate in strategic planning.

The library also serves individuals and institutions such as the physically disabled and reading disabled, blind residents of nursing homes, campus offices for disabled students, businesses, and others who need materials in alternative media. Through the VR program, the Department serves such customers as area education agencies and employers, and through the IL program, the Department provides in-service training to group homes, senior centers, and other community organizations.

### **Organizational Structure**

The Department is part of the executive branch of state government. It operates under the Iowa Commission for the Blind consisting of members appointed by the Governor. The Commission is 100% consumer controlled. Pursuant to chapter 216B of the *Code of Iowa*, the Commission has authority to set policy and review all major components of the Department's programs. The Commission hires the department director. The Director reports directly to the Commission and the Governor.

### **Location**

The Department is located in a six-story building at 524 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Des Moines. The building is accessible to people with disabilities.

### **Number of Staff**

On June 30, 2023, the Department had 66, permanent, full-time employees and 7 employees in temporary employment status to support our summer youth programming. Twelve of the permanent full-time staff are domiciled at various other locations. IDB is continuing to recruit for the 19 open positions. Employees work in the areas of administration, service provision, and support. Contract workers were covered by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) collective bargaining agreement through June 30, 2023. The Department also relies heavily on volunteers to satisfy staffing needs.

### **Budget**

Operations of the Department are financed primarily through general fund appropriations from the Iowa General Assembly and formula grants from the U.S. Department of Education. The budget relies heavily on federal matching funds.

## AGENCY PERFORMANCE PLAN RESULTS

### CORE FUNCTION: VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION & INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

**Description:** The VR program prepares lowans who are blind, deafblind, or have low vision to prepare for, obtain, retain or advance in competitive employment in the integrated labor market. The desired outcome for all vocational rehabilitation clients is that they will achieve competitive integrated employment that aligns with their individual strengths, interests, priorities and needs. Our team works to remove barriers that prevent a person from working, to guide and counsel clients to develop employment goals, and to network with employers on behalf of persons who are blind, deafblind or have low vision. Clients receive a wide variety of services including assessment, training, rehabilitation technology services, and job placement services. In addition, the Iowa Department for the Blind provides a number of services to employers and partner agencies to assist with not only creating opportunities for clients, but also to help meet Iowa's workforce needs.

**Why we are doing this:** To empower blind lowans to gain, maintain or advance in competitive integrated employment. Empowerment and complete integration into the broader society are the aspirational objectives for clients of the Department's VR services. The VR counselors, instructors and other staff strive to help each client achieve these objectives and reach their employment and life goals.

**What we're doing to achieve results:** Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs) provide training in disability related skills training to youth and adults across the state. Rehabilitation Technology Specialists provide advanced assistive technology instruction to clients and work with employers to make computer systems work with the assistive technology used by blind people. Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs), Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs), and Orientation Center Instructors work together to conduct community based trainings in various parts of the state to provide training to more clients as well as foster peer support. A VRT conducts braille learning and adjustment to blindness discussion groups throughout the state to improve braille literacy and encourage the creation of peer support networks. VRTs conduct weekend retreats throughout the school year to give youth the opportunity to work on social and other soft skills, build self-confidence, meaningful positive peer relationships and receive other workplace readiness training. These skills are worked upon through both interactive and engaging lessons as well as community outings which provide opportunities to practice and build upon these skills. Young Adult Transition Program staff conduct an annual 6-8 week summer camp called LEAP where teens receive intensive skills training, build self-confidence through challenging activities, and develop a positive attitude toward blindness. IDB provides a 4+

program for youth who have completed the academic requirements to graduate from high school but have IEP goals yet to complete. This Young Adult Transition Program allows IDB to gather data to set meaningful goals for program performance moving forward. The progress monitoring of these goals allows YATP to readily adapt to support the future growth and success of all students participating in the Young Adult Transition Program. The program continues to grow and make adjustments and improvements based on information learned.

Vocational rehabilitation staff have provided assessments, training, guidance and counseling, referrals, employer assistance, job placement, rehabilitation technology services, post-employment follow-up, and coordination of community services to eligible individuals. In addition, the Department staff has served on Regional Workforce Boards and committees, increased options for training services to students with disabilities and adult clients, provided a range of services to businesses and partner agencies, and participated in Employment First initiatives. The Iowa Department for the Blind counselors have been actively collaborating with partners and employers to connect clients to opportunities to achieve competitive, integrated employment.

#### Key Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Ratio of average VR wage to average state wage as a percentage.	75%	74.43%

**What Happened:** The Department sets an aggressive target for the ratio of average VR wage to state wage measure, as we believe in assisting blind lowans in obtaining employment that is on par with individuals who do not have disabilities. The wage ratio fell short of the 2023 target with clients closed in employment achieving wages less than average wages for all workers in Iowa. During SFY23, the average hourly earnings for a client of the Department was \$16.94 per hour and the individuals worked an average of 28 hours per week.

**Data source:** The Department's case management system.

**Resources:** The Iowa Department for the Blind is funded through a combination of 78.7% federal funds and is matched with 21.3% of non-federal funds that are required to generate the federal funding. State appropriation for FY23 was \$2,893,503.

## Services / Products / Activities of Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services Core Function

### Product: VR Services

**Description:** The Department seeks to achieve a quantity and quality of employment outcomes for blind Iowans consistent with the standards set by the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration. The Department achieves this through vocational rehabilitation services for blind and visually impaired adults and transition age youth.

### Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Percentage of closures with an employment outcome after receiving services.	60%	28.95%
Percentage of transition age youth who obtain work experience prior to graduation from high school	80%	100%

**What Happened:** The percentage of clients achieving their competitive employment goals was 28.95% percent. The average hourly earnings for a person who is blind placed into competitive and integrated employment by the Iowa Department for the Blind was \$16.94/hour. Individuals reaching employment goals were working an average of 28 hours per week. The average wage of clients exiting the program in full-time employment (35 hours or more) was \$21.68 and the average wage for clients exiting in part-time employment (less than 35 hours) was \$13.78. The percentage of VR case closures that result in an employment outcome depends on job availability and client skills and experience. During fiscal year 2023, the Iowa Department for the Blind has continued to develop new strategies and partners to best serve clients with the most significant disabilities to increase their skills and develop appropriate work experiences to be competitive. In order to reach employment goals, a majority of clients of the agency require training in the alternative techniques of blindness (travel with a long white cane, use of screen readers to access print and technology, braille and other nonvisual techniques) for living and working independently. IDB focuses on ensuring clients are trained in these skills in order to achieve employment success. Over the last year, IDB has continued to increase trainings in the field with clients in addition to continuing to offer virtual training options to meet the needs of clients. We have hired additional staff and are working with our partner programs to provide the nonvisual training services our clients need to participate successfully in educational and training



opportunities. We are developing and providing training to community rehabilitation partners and state partners to ensure that individuals who are blind receive quality services and are able to access opportunities that will allow them to meet their employment goals. During the past year, 100% of high school students who are blind and working with IDB had participated in work experiences in their communities prior to graduating from high school. Counselors are working closely with education teams, families and communities to ensure that high school students have opportunities to learn about a variety of careers, options and opportunities so that they can make informed decisions about their employment and post-secondary education or training goals. The Department continues to work on job development methods and continually seeks new techniques to improve employment outcomes, particularly for those clients who experienced difficulty in obtaining employment due to a weak work history, lack of skills, or additional barriers. The Department's aim is that through skillful counseling and motivation, we will continue to see an increase in individuals continuing toward and achieving successful employment.

**Service:** Business Enterprises Program

**Description:** The Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind vocational rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind to manage their own businesses -- operating vending machines, roadside vending sites, micro markets, or snack bar/catering services. These businesses are in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa.

**Results**

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Average net income to vendors	\$35,000	\$54,518.16

**What Happened:** Iowa's Business Enterprises Program (BEP) provides opportunities for legally blind Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) clients to manage their own businesses – operating vending machines, roadside vending sites, micro markets or snack bar/catering services. These businesses can be found in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa. As of June 30, 2023, 11 individuals operate their own businesses serving locations throughout the state.

In state fiscal year 2023, we saw the average net income to BEP vendors at \$54,518.16 and our median net vendor income was \$34,314.04. BEP managers are still seeing significant decreases

as many offices continue to have lower staffing with many employees working remotely and few buildings open to the public as they were before COVID-19. Suppliers of vending snacks, food, and beverages continue to experience shortages, limiting the variety of selections BEP managers can offer.

IDB challenges BEP managers to view their businesses as needing to compete with the private sector and renew focus on core practices that maximize sales and reduce costs. IDB has continued to replace a significant number of old machines which has reduced repair costs, facilitating the acceptance of multiple payment methods which has increased customer access to services, and providing training and resources for utilizing technology such as telemetry to help BEP managers make informed choices about their service. BEP managers are encouraged to develop their own supply chain alternatives to minimize expenses and have product available. BEP managers have also been more engaged with their location contacts to increase levels of customer service. The Business Enterprises Program continues to explore new opportunities for BEP managers through improving current sites, developing new locations, and investigating alternative business models.

The Elected Committee of Blind Vendors continues to provide a regular knowledge-sharing opportunity where BEP managers can meet and discuss best practices, speak directly with suppliers, and share observations or concerns they may have. The BEP team and the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors have worked together to provide equipment training and update practices. Continuing to work well together, the joint efforts moving into State FY 2024 include continued development of the BEP manager training curriculum, recruiting additional trainees to the program and encouraging more involvement in program groups and professional organizations.

**Activity:** Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center training.

**Description:** The Iowa Blindness Empowerment and Independence Center (IBEIC) is a residential blindness training program available to vocational rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind. Our training program provides in-depth, individualized blindness training to these VR clients, age 17 and older who either meet the definition of blindness or are functionally blind, so they can return to their home communities confidently equipped to work competitively and live independently.

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Results on skills and attitude assessments for students who have completed orientation center training.	90%	100%

**What Happened:** All students who entered the center completed a survey – 10 new students entered the center, 2 students returned to the center, and 7 students graduated. We are excited that our graduations are increasing and look forward to the continuation of this upward trend.

**Product:** Education and Outreach

**Description:** The Department engages in a variety of outreach activities to promote the Department's services, generate referrals, and to educate service providers and the public, including newly blind persons, about the capabilities of persons who are blind.

### Results:

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of in-service training sessions conducted for community service providers.	44	45

**Methodology:** The Department uses a variety of strategies to inform the public, including individuals who are blind, about the Department's services and to educate the public about the capabilities of blind Iowans. In addition to traditional outreach efforts, the Department conducts in-service training with in-home health providers, staff at community rehabilitation programs, human rights agencies, Centers for Independent Living, and staff at long-term care facilities, universities, eye clinics, and radio stations offering PSA spots - just to name a few. We also continue to offer virtual speaking engagements to agencies and other public entities who request this as a hybrid option. During this performance period, we increased our community outreach by 2.3% by holding one additional in-service training over the previous performance year. There were some providers who had cancelled in-service training due to unforeseen circumstances after booking sessions; however, indicated they planned to reschedule with our program staff for further training sessions.

Performance Measure		Target	Result	
Education and Outreach	Number of Independent Living Objectives Met	863	966	Using the structured-discovery approach to instruction, provide comprehensive residential training to blind adults in the skills of blindness to enable them to live independently in their communities.

**Methodology:** Clients and ILR Teachers collaborate to develop individualized IL service plans; either an IL Waiver plan or a formal ILR plan. An Independent Living plan is not a contract; therefore, nothing is legal nor binding. The plan must indicate the individual's independent living goal, services, training objectives to be achieved, and the anticipated plan completion date. As clients receive training and meet each training plan objective benchmark, the teacher records progress being met on the plan. Our method of training is to use the structured-discovery approach through teaching the skills of blindness, which helps clients meet their goal to live independently in their homes and communities.

In addition, we offer a value-added opportunity for clients to participate in group training if interested. Group training, while optional, helps to enhance and grow the client's Independent Living skills and build confidence. During this performance period, the result we achieved was approximately 11.9% over target for the previous performance period.

#### CORE FUNCTION: LIBRARY SERVICES

**Description:** The Iowa Library for the Blind and Print Disabled acquires, manages, and circulates information to eligible borrowers. Collections may include books (audio, braille, large print and print/braille), magazines, digital audio players and braille eReaders.

**Why we are doing this:** To provide access to information to blind and visually impaired Iowans in specialized alternative media so they can obtain or retain employment, pursue educational goals, and meet all other personal needs consistent with each individual's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

**What we're doing to achieve results:** The library produces and circulates books and magazines on digital media, in Braille, and in large print to eligible borrowers throughout Iowa.

#### Key Result

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of Iowans Using Services	6,500	5,635

**What Happened:** The number of Iowans using services in 2023 was 5,635. Iowans who cannot read standard print gathered and used information from books, magazines, newsletters, educational, job-related, and personal materials to pursue education from kindergarten through advanced post-graduate degrees, acquire and maintain a wide variety of jobs, manage personal affairs (including medical and financial), participate in community activities and in the democratic process, and read for leisure and personal enrichment. They also received information on other services available to them through a variety of sources. The number of Iowans using library services fluctuates each year and is dependent on public demand.

**Data sources:** The Department's automated circulation system.

**Resources:** Total spending for the library was \$1,941,911.

#### Services / Products / Activities of Library Services Core Function

**Service:** Circulation of library materials.

**Description:** The library maintains a collection of over 200,000 book titles and makes available to its borrowers over 150 different magazines. Because the library is a cooperating member of the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled (NLS), its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

#### Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items (books, magazines, and playback units) circulated.	280,000	352,745

**What Happened:** The library exceeded its circulation target by 72,745.

Iowa's patrons continued borrowing more magazines and more digital books than the previous year. The increase in the use of BARD (the National Library Service's download site) and its mobile application contributed to the most significant increase in Iowa patrons borrowing materials in all formats. Download and duplication on demand services contributed to increases in circulation. Locally produced materials; including magazines and books, continue to show increases in circulation. The availability of the braille eReader for circulation to patrons allowed for more access electronically to books in braille.

**Service:** Access to downloadable books online through BARD (Braille and Audio Recording Download)

**Description:** BARD, Braille and Audio Download, includes the National Library Service's download site and mobile application. It allows Iowa patrons to download materials in both electronic Braille and audio to their computers, tablets, mobile phones and other devices. Iowa's library contributes to the BARD collection by adding locally produced books and making them available to library patrons. BARD usage continues to increase and is another tool for patrons to access library materials. The availability of the braille eReader for circulation to patrons allowed for more access electronically to books in braille.

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items downloaded from BARD.	40,000	48,300

**What Happened:** The Library exceeded its target for number of items downloaded from BARD by 8,000 downloads.

**Service:** Production of materials in alternative media.

**Description:** Employment-related, educational, and leisure materials not already available in alternative media are transcribed for the collection and for patrons upon request.

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items produced in alternative media.	1,800	1,722

**What Happened:** Necessary documents were transcribed and produced in alternative formats and used by students from pre-school through postgraduate to continue their education; employed lowans were able to read work-related materials (e.g., handbooks, product brochures, memos, etc.) and thus remain competitively employed; reading-disabled lowans were able to manage personal, medical, and financial affairs independently.

The number of items produced in alternative media decreased due to a change in the method schools procure accessible educational materials for students.

**Service:** Instructional Materials Center (IMC)

**Description:** The IMC produces and locates textbooks and other educational materials in alternative formats for Iowa's Pre -K-12 and college students who cannot use standard print, and it locates job-related materials for employed lowans who cannot use print. Alternative formats include; audio, braille, electronic text and large print.

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of educational and vocational requests filled by instructional materials center.	1,600	1,283
Percentage of instructional materials center requests filled in a timely manner.	97%	97%

**What was achieved:** The number of items produced in alternative media decreased due to a change in the method schools procure accessible educational materials for students.

**CORE FUNCTION: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

## RE FUNCTION: RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

**Description:** Provides all vital infrastructure needs necessary to administer and support agency operations.

**Why we are doing this:** To ensure effective administration of the Department for the Blind.

**What we're doing to achieve results:** In addition to exercising stewardship over resources and other administrative functions the Department is working on the replacement of legacy servers and systems, upgrading outdated equipment in the Business Enterprise Program, and increasing transparency and communication with all stakeholders.

**Key Results**

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of reportable comments in the annual audit.	0	0

**What Happened:** The state's single audit report in Spring of 2023 for fiscal year 2022. The auditor was successfully completed with no comments. The audit for fiscal year 2023 is currently underway.

**Data Source:** Annual audit report issued by Iowa's Auditor of State.

**Services / Products / Activities of Resource Management Core Function**

**Service:** Department administrative services

**Results**

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of compliance issues raised by federal agency during monitoring visit.	0	0
Percent of compliance with Accountable Government Act.	100%	100%



**What Happened:** The report issued pursuant to the review did not cite any compliance issues. Required reports were submitted on time.

#### AGENCY CONTACTS

This report is available at [data.iowa.gov](https://data.iowa.gov) . Copies of the report can also be obtained by contacting Cheri Myers at [Cheri.Myers@blind.state.ia.us](mailto:Cheri.Myers@blind.state.ia.us) or 515-250-2936.