



# Iowa Department for the Blind

PERFORMANCE REPORT

PERFORMANCE RESULTS

FISCAL YEAR 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to present the performance report for the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) for fiscal year 2021. 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.

SFY21 was a uniquely challenging year for all of state government and IDB was certainly no exception. While a number of our perennial programs went to a virtual or hybrid model such as the braille Challenge and library youth STEM and literacy programming. However, 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. Our adult training center kept in person services going throughout the year with precautions to prevent a COVID outbreak. In January, the center held virtual classes until after Martin Luther King Jr. Day to reduce the possibility of COVID entering the program. The students then moved into apartments shortly after. Students moving from dorm style living to apartments with their own bathrooms and additional space made it possible for students to self-isolate, if necessary. After the pandemic, the apartments will continue to be an invaluable training tool for students to increase their cane travel and home and personal management skills by commuting by bus or walking to and from the training center. Students have reported a greater sense of independence and self-confidence since this move.

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 extended four 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 and governed by the Board of Regents).

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, using computers, phones, and other technology with speech, magnification, and braille.

In August 2020, we began the first year of our Young Adult Transition Program (YATP). 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. While the pandemic limited some of the work experience and confidence building activities that we would have liked to include, the students were able to fully participate in the workplace readiness and self-advocacy training so crucial to their successful completion of their IPE and preparation for adult life. We had intended to have no more than five students our first year to allow time for additional staff training and

curriculum development. We had four students and the effects of the pandemic have resulted in smaller enrollment for the 21-22 school year as well. We have already received requests from students to attend in 22-23. We were extremely grateful to the legislature and Governor Reynolds for the funding to continue this program.

Our summer youth training program called LEAP was able to proceed more normally in 2021 and we will resume in person weekend retreats for high school age youth in September 2021. We were able to resume the in person week-long group training for Independent Living clients in Des Moines in June and will continue these trainings in the fall.

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.

We are starting to see the changes that our agency has been making over the past five years result in more sustainable and higher quality outcomes, for our clients. While the number of successful VR closures decreased, the quality of those closures has improved. The average hourly wage for clients closing in employment increases to \$21.25 in SFY21 from \$15.49 in SFY20. The disruption caused by COVID-19 did also decrease case closures for SFY21 (federal program year 20.) In response to the labor market and service delivery changes brought on by the pandemic, SFY21 goals were refocused on assisting all clients to exit earning at least \$14.00 and-increasing client engagement. We want fewer clients exiting our program without achieving an employment outcome and fewer clients exiting because we are unable to contact them. 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.

Due to the generous appropriation of the Iowa Legislature and Governor Reynolds, we will be bringing on a seventh Independent Living Teacher in SFY22. This will reduce travel times and allow our IL clients to be seen more frequently and meet their goals more quickly. As anticipated, the availability of vaccines in the spring of 2021 led to a sharp increase in the number of referrals to our Independent Living Program. The COVID crisis made even more clear the necessity of providing tools and training to clients to allow them to remain independent in their homes. 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 Orientation Center is continuing to partner with Independent Living staff to host week-long trainings 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 hoping to be able to provide three sessions in SFY22.

We were greatly honored in May to learn that our library was chosen as the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled's Library of the Year. It was very good to see their innovations in audio book distribution and youth programming highlighted on the national stage. The library's STEM and Stories program provided opportunities for youth and their families to

participate in science learning and literacy enriching fun activities and check out library books. The library hired one AmeriCorps Vista volunteer who worked to provide summer reading programming virtually across the state via Zoom. The Governor's STEM Council again awarded our Instructional Materials Center a teacher extern to work on making math and science materials accessible to blind students. The library also received another Scale Up grant from the Governor's STEM Council to make these STEM resources accessible and available to blind and low vision students throughout the state.

While we are excited by the progress we made this year and proud of the creativity and flexibility of our staff in dealing with the unprecedented crisis, we must continuously reevaluate all aspects of our performance to ensure that we provide outstanding service to all blind Iowans. As we move forward, the 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 physically handicapped.*

### 1. VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The VR program assists lowans who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. 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 AND PRODUCTS:** Services may include:

- Training to help individuals achieve the vocational goals they have selected such as vocational training or post-secondary education.
- 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 adult orientation 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.

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 referral from multiple external statewide referral sources including, but not limited to, self-referrals, family, friends and neighbors, medical and mental health providers, senior centers, veteran's program, Iowa Department of Aging, Iowa Department of Human Services, Center's for Independent Living, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, Independent Living/Assisted Living and Nursing Home programs, and other many other private and public network partners.



The Department's IL program provides services to Iowans who are blind or deaf-blind or who have significant vision loss and are 55 or older or who are blind or deaf-blind or have significant vision loss under the age of 55 years with multiple disabilities. The program is designed to help blind or deaf-blind Iowans who reside in Iowa live a more independent and productive life in their respective home and community. This program serves all 99 counties in Iowa. 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 through the eligibility determination process and consultation that it is reasonable to expect that the IL program services would benefit the individual.

### **Program Service Outcomes**

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

- (a) provide Independent Living services to individuals who are blind or deaf-blind;
- (b) prevent the premature institutionalization of blind or deaf-blind Iowans;
- (c) conduct activities that will improve or expand services for those who are served, and
- (d) conduct activities to help improve public understanding regarding the widespread public misconceptions and misunderstandings about blindness and deaf-blindness.

### **CORE SERVICES AND PRODUCTS:**

Key program services:

- A. Outreach services;
- B. Visual screening when eye exams are unavailable;
- C. The provision of IL teaching services to minimally include:
  - a) Adjustment to blindness counseling and guidance
  - b) Peer counseling
  - c) Orientation and Mobility training (i.e. with long white cane)
  - d) Braille and communication instruction
  - e) Home-management
  - f) Daily living
  - g) Technology
  - h) Assistive Technology (AT)
  - i) Leisure skills
  - j) Transportation options/sources/use (i.e. public or private systems)
  - k) Self-care training
  - l) Self-direction training
  - m) Interpersonal skills training
  - n) Information & Referral
- D. Key products

- a) Planned aids, devices, and equipment as outlined within a Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-Bound (S.M.A.R.T.) IL plan that will assist with facilitating training and accomplishing training outcomes.

**DELIVERY MECHANISMS FOR PROVIDING SERVICES:** There are three basic service models to provide IL services.

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

The Department's IL program continues to utilize the first model, RCST, 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. Sessions within the region may be repeated if needed with the next service delivery cycle or cycles to ensure the individual(s) served are able to:

1. Retain the information between training or service visits;
2. Increased achievement in their training objectives in a shorter period of time; and
3. Increased satisfaction by use of this service delivery model.

This past year, our new regional cluster model assisted individuals with achieving 918 training objectives. Last performance period, we delivered 1056 training objectives under this model. The percentage decreased for training objectives met for this performance period over last so the percentage difference  $13.9818\%$  ( $=918-1056=138/987 \times 100$ ); while the percentage change was  $13.07\%$ .

As the year ended in 2020, the United States surpassed 20 million infections from SARS-CoV-2, and more than 346,000 deaths. Many individuals and facilities we served were in "lockdown" and individuals who were living in their home, apartments, or assisted living facilities were too concerned to invite IL teachers into their homes for service visits. We knew a vaccine was being planned for rollout the last month of the year (i.e. 2020); however, distribution challenges became evident and the United States fell short of its goal for the initial 20 million people by December 31, 2020, so again more delays and more individuals not wanting in-home service visits. However, early on in the pandemic, our IL teaching team worked very hard to rollout alternative strategies to reach individuals via conference or individual calls and/or virtual training for those who was willing to try this option in order to continue essential core service delivery training.

Once facilities started reopening across the state as well as individuals noted safer conditions, IL teachers were invited back to client homes to deliver direct training; although some individuals continued to request the virtual training out of safety so we respected that request and continued to deliver. During the COVID19 outbreak, our agency provided full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for those served and our staff. Unfortunately, due to the unpredicted pandemic event, our training efforts had fallen slight short of meeting our set goal this performance period as noted above; this beyond the control of agency and staff.

**Group Training Services Models:**

Community-Based Training (CBT): CBT is yet a second training model our IL program employs as a strategy to help meet the needs of those served. This model provides blind Iowans an opportunity to meet others in the same circumstances, giving them an opportunity to learn basic skills that will allow them to remain independent. The hands-on training not only boosts individual self-confidence but often gives the individual a desire to learn more. Although CBTs content can be modified to meet the specific needs of those who participate, and the introductory six-hour training at a minimum will typically engage three active participants, the training itself may include the following sessions by example:

- a) A discussion about the importance of a positive attitude to promote a positive adjustment to blindness and to set the stage for a positive training experience.
- b) Introduction to the use of a white cane for safe, independent travel within the community and beyond.
- c) Introduction to Braille.
- d) Home-management/daily living to include preparation of a simple meal, cutting vegetable, pouring liquids, measuring, assembling food in preparation for lunch, laundry techniques, threading a needle, etc.
- e) Leisure activities to include exploring newspaper reading programs, use of Iowa Library book player, various games in Braille.

IL Integration (i.e. under 55 years) and IL Senior Integration (i.e. 55+) The IL Integration and IL Senior Integration is our third model. This is a weeklong training session that takes place at our State agency in Des Moines, Iowa. The training includes:

- a. A full week of intensive training through our Adult Orientation & Adjustment Center.
- b. Orientation Center student mentors are paired with IL Integration or IL Senior Integration participants during the training week; to work in tandem on multiple levels but also as senior peer role model.
- c. Opportunity to partner with blind consumer organization groups where participants may network with these groups then potentially connect and gain new founded friendships and support through these organizations.
- d. Participants will attend scheduled classes daily at the Department from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. with a few evening activities to add-value to their training experience.
- e. Learning objectives minimally will include:
  - i. Non-visual techniques to teach everyday tasks and problem solving that can be used both at home and in their respective community;
  - ii. 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.

### 3. LIBRARY FOR THE BLIND AND PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED

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 150,000 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 textbook, 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 playback machines and digital devices for borrowers to listen to recorded media.
- 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, restaurants, 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, 2021, the Department had 78, permanent, full-time employees and 11 employees in temporary employment status to support our summer youth programming. Twelve of the permanent full-time staff are domiciled at various other locations. 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, 2021. 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 Department provides vocational rehabilitation services to assist Iowans who are blind in preparing for, obtaining, and retaining employment. 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 who is blind from working, to guide and counsel clients to develop employment goals, and to network with employers on behalf of persons who are blind. 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 Iowans to gain or maintain competitive Integrated employment.

**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, and receive other workplace readiness training. VRTs 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. In the fall of 2020, IDB began offering 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 allowed IDB to gather baseline data to set meaningful goals for program performance moving forward. The program will continue to grow in the fall of 2021, making changes and improvements based on the 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, began an Apprenticeship pilot project, 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%	93%

**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 Iowans in obtaining employment that is on par with individuals who do not have disabilities. The wage ratio fell short of the 2020 target with clients closed in employment achieving wages somewhat less than average wages for all workers in Iowa. During SFY21, the average hourly earnings for a client of the Department was \$21.25 per hour and the individuals worked an average of 34.80 hours per week. This was an increase in wages of \$5.84 per hour and an increase of 3.62 hours worked 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 FY20 was \$2,252,001.

### 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%	35.14%
Percentage of transition age youth who obtain work experience prior to graduation from high school	80%	82%

**What Happened:** The percentage of clients achieving their competitive employment goals (“status 26”) was 35.14% percent. The target for the percentage was not met for the state performance plan. The average hourly earnings for a person who is blind placed into competitive and integrated employment by the Iowa Department for the Blind was \$21.25/hour. Individuals reaching employment goals were working an average of 34.8 hours per week. The percentage of VR case closures that result in an employment outcome depends on job availability and client skills and experience. During fiscal year 2021, the Iowa Department for the Blind has continued to see an increase in the number of individuals with the most significant disabilities, requiring new strategies and partners to be developed so that clients are able to increase skills and develop appropriate work experience to be competitive. In order to reach employment goals, clients of the agency often 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 training in these skills in order to achieve employment success. Over the last year, IDB increased trainings in the field with clients and developed a number of virtual training options to meet the needs of clients. We are also in the process of hiring additional staff and 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 trainings 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, almost all high school students 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 secondary disabilities. IDB began working with core partners to develop an apprenticeship pilot project focused on informing IDB clients about apprenticeship opportunities and on assisting partners and employers in better understanding and providing the accommodations needed for individuals who are blind or have low vision. In addition, we have had a number of individuals over the past year exit services and choosing to continue supporting themselves through public benefits. As a result, the Department has one individual who is a certified benefits counselor and is able to provide benefits counseling to clients as needed. The additional knowledge of benefits has allowed staff to work with clients to ensure they understand the choices they are making with regard to their benefits and employment. 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.

**Activity:** Adult Orientation and Adjustment Training

**Description:** The orientation center is a residential blindness training program available to vocational rehabilitation clients of the Iowa Department for the Blind. It provides in-depth, individualized blindness training to those with significant vision loss aged 17 and older 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:** 15 surveys were completed – 8 new students entered the center, 1 student returned to the center, and 6 students graduated the center.

**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, road side vending sites, or snack bar/catering services. These businesses are in federal, state, county, municipal, and private locations throughout Iowa.

**Results**

Performance Measure	Target FY21	Result FY21
Average net income to vendors	\$35,000	\$27,974

**What Happened:** Nationally, 2020 brought COVID-19 pandemic which continues to affect workplace staffing, customer bases, and now supply chains. This was coupled in Iowa with a derecho on August 10, 2020 which had further impact. Two managers retired at the end of July 2020 and a provisional manager left the program in June 2021, so the BEP has a total of 15 managers as of June 30, 2021. Four managers earned net income that was more in 2020 than 2019. The remaining 11 managers experienced pandemic-related losses of varying degrees, a trend also seen nationwide. The federal **Randolph-Sheppard** Act Financial Relief and Restoration Payments Appropriation recognized this situation and after working closely with the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors to define “loss”, Iowa was awarded \$203,966. By September 30, 2021 will be able to reimburse approximately 80% of the losses of Iowa managers.

Calendar year 2021 has roadside vending rebounding close to 2019 levels, and though government buildings have picked up a minimal level, vendors are still significantly affected as many offices continue to be nearly empty with most employees working remotely and few buildings open to the public without appointment. Also, because of the trickle effect of Covid-19 on the economy, suppliers of vending snacks, food and beverages continue to experiencing shortages, limiting the variety of selections vendors can offer.

The credit card readers IDB purchased are now on over 100 machines. They have boosted sales and are available to managers whenever appropriate. Additionally, a Des Moines micro market opened in February and the site’s performance is pacing well ahead of 2019 when it was a traditional vending facility. Three more micro-markets are slated for the fiscal year starting July 1, 2021, one new and two replacing traditional vending machine areas—these should also bring more profits because customers enjoy touching and comparing products they buy.

In State FY 2021 and 2022, the BEP is challenging operators 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 helped by replaced about 100 old machines, reducing repair costs and creating fresher looks which allow vendors to operate more competitively. Managers have been invited to three training sessions presented by manufacturers to learn tips and tricks for optimum operation of equipment. For State FY 2022, \$359,000 is allocated to continue to replace the oldest of the 89 machines that have been fully depreciated, thereby reducing older-parts inventory and opening space for Micro Market and new machine training in the BEP warehouse. BEP is keeping a few new machines at-the-ready to double as training machines and as swap-outs in emergencies for broken or vandalized ones. Quick response time is an industry standard which IDB is now able to offer facility partners. Retail customers today also expect immediate gratification and a variety of choices, so QR codes for quick communications of needs are being piloted at a few vendor locations, and IDB is exploring new technologies that have a micro market feel in more public areas where micro markets by regulation are not allowed.

The need to find increased opportunities within existing and new locations and alternative ways of serving remote workers with the resurgence of COVID-19 is paramount to ensure facilities can once again support a livable salary. Six new locations were added July 1, 2020 - June 30, 2021 and three small sites are on the horizon for fall 2021. Reaching for larger opportunities and strategic planning will be part of State FY 2022.

BEP experienced the retirement of a 30-year BEP Counselor and the other BEP Counselor member on extended leave which led to the employee starting his own business. BEP welcomed two new BEP Counselors filling those vacancies who have jumped in with little peer training quite capably. Together Matt Nemmers and Roxy Huffaker bring business and mechanical experience which will help them effectively consult with managers to navigate operations with tighter margins for error in this retail environment. The BEP team and the Elected Committee of Blind Vendors have worked closely together this fiscal year to provide equipment training and update practices. Continuing to work well together, the joint efforts moving into State FY 2022 include revamping the training curriculum and inviting entrepreneurial blind individuals to get their foundational business training in BEP – innovative minds will serve successful trainees well as they start their business owner career as a BEP Licensed Operator.

**Product:** Education and Outreach

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

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of in-service training sessions conducted for community service providers.	23	18

**What Happened:** The Department uses a variety of strategies to inform the general 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 conducted in-service training to in-home health providers, staff at community rehabilitation programs, human rights agencies, Centers for Independent Living, and staff at long-term care facilities, just to name a few. We also offered virtual speaking engagement this performance period for other agencies or public entities who requested this option due concerns expressed related to exposure of COVID19.

Our progress this performance period had been slower than what we anticipated as communities continued to address the priority of the pandemic within their respective communities. Our targeted goal set for this State Performance Plan was 23 in-service training engagements. Our division met 18 of the 23 targets. In review of the data, it appears some of the engagements converted from an in-person venue to virtual and others requested cancellation, again as we can best determine due in part or full due to COVID19 or related priorities that had to be addressed.

Based on the rate of change, there was a 27.78% decrease change in the number of in-service training sessions conducted this performance plan period; that is, five fewer than what was predicted to be targeted during the cycle. When we scheduled the target for 23 in-services for this period, we remained optimistic for pandemic recovery not realizing a resurgent or prolonged pandemic event might occur during this same period; however, it did and this event affected our educational and outreach training efforts.

### CORE FUNCTION: LIBRARY SERVICES

**Description:** The Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped acquires, manages, and circulates information to eligible borrowers. Collections may include books, journals, data bases, videos, state and federal documents, and access to web sites.

**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	5,742

**What Happened:** The number of Iowans using services in 2021 was 5,742. 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 \$1,808,229.

#### 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 Physically Handicapped (NLS), its borrowers have access to all NLS services.

#### Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
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Number of items (books, magazines, and playback units) circulated.	280,000	405,952
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**What Happened:** The library exceeded its circulation target by 125,952.

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.

**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.

## Results

Performance Measure	Target	Result
Number of items downloaded from BARD.	39,000	53,629

**What Happened:** The Library exceeded its target for number of items downloaded from BARD by 14,629 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.	1,400	3,132

**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 increased and exceeded our target by 1,732 items.

**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.	1,100	2,725
Percentage of instructional materials center requests filled in a timely manner.	97%	97%

**What was achieved:** The number of educational and vocational requests filled exceeded our target by 1,625 items.

## CORE 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 2020 for fiscal year 2019. The auditor has not reported any issues. The audit for fiscal year 2020 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%	99%



**What Happened:** The report issued pursuant to the review did not cite any compliance issues. Due to changes in staff in the accounting office, one required report was submitted late.

#### AGENCY CONTACTS

This report is available at [www.IDBonline.org](http://www.IDBonline.org). 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.