



Iowa Department for the Blind

Performance Report

FY2025

Message from the Director

The Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) remains focused on expanding opportunities for employment, independence, and community participation for blind and low vision people across the state of Iowa. This year's performance report highlights both the progress we have achieved and the areas where continued innovation and attention are needed.

During FY2025, our team used performance indicators to guide improvements in service delivery, partnerships, and strategic planning. These measures allowed us to identify our strengths, including exceeding our goals for work experience and work-based learning opportunities for youth and strong performance in providing accessible educational materials to students in school districts and universities throughout Iowa.

At the same time, the data highlighted areas for continued focus. Wage outcomes for clients exiting the Vocational Rehabilitation program fell below target. Awareness of IDB programs across the state remains uneven, and transportation barriers continue to limit access to in-person training for many clients. To address these, our team updated policies at our adjustment-to-blindness center to ensure more Iowans receive the training they need to find employment and live independently. We are also now offering skills retreats in communities across the state, making it possible for clients to receive intensive training closer to home. Early results from these initiatives are promising, and we will continue refining our approach in the year ahead.

The accomplishments detailed in this report are the result of dedicated staff who genuinely care about the success of each client, student, or patron they work with. With continued evaluation of our performance indicators, we look forward to even stronger outcomes in years to come.

-Stacy Cervenka, Director, Iowa Department for the Blind

Executive Summary

This report outlines the Iowa Department for the Blind's progress toward its goals in fiscal year 2025 (FY2025).

During FY2025, the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) made substantial progress in its commitment to advancing agency programs to serve blind Iowans in achieving employment and independence. Through service delivery improvements, strategic partnerships and staff development, the department advanced its mission to empower clients through comprehensive, person-centered vocational rehabilitation services.

Key Highlights:

- **Performance Outcomes:** Achieved 65% of the department's goals; with notable success in the number of clients participating in post-secondary education and training, and the number of older blind individuals completing training objectives.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Streamlined accounting processes and procedures resulting in time and cost savings.
- **Employee Engagement:** Strengthened team performance through strategic planning initiatives and focus groups.
- **Client Impact:** Increased the number of clients served across all program areas and increased the number of youth program participants in all programs.

The Department tracked 20 performance measures and met the targets of 14 of them.



Challenges:

The department navigated several challenges in FY25:

- **Awareness of IDB Services and Programs:** Awareness of IDB's services and programs has not reached desired levels. To address this, IDB has established a dedicated communications team focused on outreach and increasing public understanding of available services and resources.
- **Transportation Barriers:** Many clients face transportation challenges that prevent them from attending in-person training opportunities. In response, a retreat and outreach team has been formed to deliver training across the state. Staff will also work directly with clients to find solutions to

transportation barriers and collaborate with statewide partners to improve transportation accessibility.

- **Inconsistent School District Procedures:**

Differences in school district processes and staffing have caused delays in providing the Library and Instructional Materials Center (IMC) with the necessary documentation for the transcription of accessible material orders. To improve efficiency, the Library and IMC will collaborate with school districts and agencies such as the Iowa Department of Education to share best practices with school districts for supporting students who require accessible educational materials.

- **Case Management System Delays:**

Implementation of the new case management software has been delayed. The project team continues to work with the vendor and IT staff to resolve technical issues and complete the rollout.

Outlook:

In the coming year, IDB will focus on expanding outreach to underserved populations, strengthening employer engagement strategies, improving staff engagement and retention, and leveraging technology to improve case management and client outcomes. Continued emphasis on data-driven decision-making and interagency collaboration will ensure sustained progress toward the department's mission of inclusion, empowerment, and employment for all.

The Department continues to strengthen its internal controls and financial management practices contracting with the accounting division of the Department of Administrative Services. IDB and DAS will work to standardize procedures and documentation requirements and increase internal review checkpoints. A focus will be decreasing the number of reportable comments in the annual audit (1 for FY25, target was 0), the number of compliance issues raised by federal agency (2 for FY25) and percent compliance with the Accountable Government Act (FY25 100% compliant).

Progress made in FY2025 on Overall Improvement Efforts

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

To support this strategy, the department focused on increasing the participation in youth weekend retreats and the pre-employment transition summer programs as well as introducing short-term trainings to improve client essential skills and self-confidence.

Performance Measures:

- 84% of pre-employment transition-age youth had work experience prior to graduation, meeting the established target of 80%. This reflects strong alignment with program goals and successful implementation of early work-based learning opportunities.

- A total of 33 pre-employment transition programs and trainings were provided, exceeding the target of 30.

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

To support this strategy, the department enhanced its online library and materials ordering platforms and increased outreach to school districts and educators to raise awareness of improved access to accessible educational materials through the Library and the Instructional Materials Center. The department also continued providing training to Iowa educators in braille and braille standards to expand the number of educators trained or certified in braille transcription.

Performance Measures:

- The Instructional Materials Center successfully fulfilled 98% of requests for materials in accessible formats in a timely manner, meeting the target of 98%. This reflects consistent performance in ensuring equitable access to educational resources.
- A total of 962 requests for educational and vocational accessible materials were fulfilled, falling short of the target of 1,200. While the number did not meet the goal, it still represents a significant effort to provide essential resources that support access and inclusion. Awareness and partnership efforts will continue with a focus on Iowa educators and schools.
- A total of 10 educators participated in braille transcription courses offered by the Library and Instructional Materials Center, successfully meeting the target. This reflects ongoing efforts to build capacity among educators and strengthen braille transcription across the state.

Major Accomplishments in FY2025

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

To advance this strategy, the department's rehabilitation teachers connected with older individuals through support groups, advocacy groups and outreach efforts to raise awareness of services and programs. By increasing participation in community-based training among clients, rehabilitation teachers were able to help clients learn and use skills to live full, happy, and independent lives.

Performance Measures:

- The Independent Living Program exceeded expectations across multiple key performance areas during the reporting period. A total of 243 clients were served, surpassing the target of 190 and reflecting the program's expanded reach and impact.
- New referrals also significantly outpaced projections, with 316 individuals referred compared to the target of 100, indicating growing awareness and demand for services.

- In the Older Blind Program, 1,775 individuals successfully completed their training objectives and exited the program—more than triple the target of 550—demonstrating exceptional outcomes in skill development and independence. Additionally, 44 in-service training sessions were conducted for community service providers, well above the goal of 25, supporting enhanced service delivery and collaboration across the state.

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

To facilitate this strategy, the department used surveys to identify current barriers to participating in post-secondary education and training. Through targeted assessments, the department identified areas where clients needed additional skill development and provided blindness training to strengthen those competencies.

Performance Measures:

- 85% of participants who accessed disability skills training achieved measurable skill gains, exceeding the target of 70%. This indicates effective training delivery and meaningful progress in participant development. Additionally, 76 clients participated in post-secondary education or training, more than doubling the target of 30, highlighting the program's success in promoting continued learning opportunities.

FY2025 Performance Indicators (Measures & Metrics)

Performance Indicators Focusing on Education

Strategy 1.1: Improving braille literacy among blind youth.

One strategy for FY25 was to improve braille literacy among blind youth. To support this initiative, the department developed and promoted the resources, services, and programs provided by the library and Instructional Materials Center. Including family and STEM programming and resources and outreach to school districts regarding accessible educational materials.

Performance Measures:

- The library and Instructional Materials Center produced 2,330 items in alternative media (braille, large print, audio, and electronic text) for lowans, significantly surpassing the target of 1,500. A total of 49,147 audio and braille items were downloaded from the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) service, surpassing the target of 40,000.
- During the reporting period, 5,807 lowans utilized library services, coming close to the target of 6,000, an increase from FY2024. While slightly below the goal for FY2025, this number still reflects strong engagement with accessible library resources. The library has planned ongoing initiatives and partnerships to increase awareness.

- Additionally, 258,808 items—including books, magazines, audio players, and braille e-readers—were circulated in alternative media an increase from FY2024. Although this fell short of the target for FY2025 of 350,000, it represents a substantial volume of accessible materials provided to individuals with print disabilities, supporting continued access to information, education, and leisure reading.

Performance Indicators Focusing on Workforce

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

This strategy focused on increasing employer awareness of the capabilities of blind workers, promoting these capabilities through State Workforce Development Board participation and developing opportunities for blind workers to enter registered apprenticeship and industry recognized apprenticeship programs.

Strategy 3.2: Working with WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) partners to make America’s Job Centers accessible to blind and otherwise disabled job seekers.

This strategy focused on continued work with partners to make American’s Job Center training stations accessible and to work at the state and regional levels to help ensure that everyone can benefit from all one-stop job center services.

Strategy 3.3: Improving blind lowans’ ability to adapt to technological change in the workplace.

This initiative focused on providing assistive technology training with a focus on developing client skills to deal with the ever-increasing rate of change that will define technology in the workplace of the future.

Performance Measures:

- The average hourly wage for individuals exiting the Vocational Rehabilitation program was 61.73% of the average state wage, falling short of the target ratio of 75%. This indicates a continued need to focus on strategies that improve wage outcomes and promote competitive, integrated employment opportunities for program participants.
- 25% of clients who exited the program after being determined eligible for services did so with employment, which is below the target of 40%. This outcome highlights the need for continued focus on employment readiness, job placement support, and strategies to improve successful employment outcomes for clients.
- 90% of students who participated in the adult orientation center blindness skills training demonstrated skill and attitude growth meeting the 90% target goal.
- 2 Independent Living Younger Blind clients were referred to the Vocational Rehabilitation program, falling significantly short of the target of 25. This result suggests a need to strengthen referral pathways and outreach efforts to ensure that young clients are connected to vocational services that support their long-term independence and employment goals.

- Participants in the Business Enterprise Program achieved an average net income of \$64,500.41, significantly exceeding the target of \$46,000. This strong performance reflects the program's effectiveness in supporting entrepreneurial success and financial independence for individuals who are blind or low vision.