



Iowa
**Vocational
Rehabilitation**
Services

Finding solutions. Generating success.

Disability Determination Services Bureau

Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022



December 2018

Iowa Disability Determination Services Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022

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IVRS Guiding Statements

Our Mission

We provide expert, individualized services to lowans with disabilities to achieve their independence through successful employment and economic support.

Our Motto

Finding Solutions. Generating Success.

DDS Vision

Best Decision, Every Claimant, Every Time.

Our Guiding Principles

We are responsive to the unique needs and goals identified by individuals with disabilities.

We demonstrate teamwork and cooperation among staff, customers and partners.

We operate with trust and integrity.

We demonstrate compassion and respect for all people.

We value continued improvement and learning.

We openly communicate with clarity and consideration.

We are results driven.



Assessment

The Disability Determination Services (DDS) Bureau exists to produce accurate and timely disability determinations for the citizens of Iowa, following Social Security Administration policy and procedures. The vision of our organization is a solid foundation, and the following description outlines our future orientation.

Description of Envisioned Future

What will it look like when we have achieved our vision?

- Iowa DDS is perceived as a top producer in disability adjudication services.
- Disability determinations made at the Iowa DDS lead in terms of accuracy, timeliness and stewardship.
- Staff feels empowered, and that the Iowa DDS is a great place to work.
- Staff know they make a difference.
- The organization is transparent and responsive to public and employee needs.
- The Iowa DDS is a model of excellence, diversity and integrity that attracts and retains the best employees.
- Iowa DDS has a dynamic portfolio of activities – including meetings, training, online services and collaborations – that meet the needs of staff.
- The Iowa DDS works in partnership with the Social Security Administration, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and many other organizations, and is viewed by its collaborators as open, welcoming and supportive.
- As an organization, the Iowa DDS is adaptive and flexible and continuously reinvents itself to remain nimble.

The Strategic Plan is the driving force behind activities at the DDS. In many ways, the DDS is already positioned as a top-performing state agency. This Strategic Plan will build on the successes of previous strategic plans that drove significant accomplishment in the areas of business process improvement, technology advancement, security, staff retention, program integrity, stewardship and workload capacity.














Strategic Planning

As a bureau within IVRS, DDS is aligning the strategic plan with the IVRS plan. The plan developed through collaborative work with staff focus groups led by three DDS staff psychologists experienced in planning.

DDS desires to be a high-performing organization with characteristics of modeling visionary leadership, valuing employees and partners, managing for innovation and by facts, and a focus on service, results and creating value.

The implementation of the Strategic Plan considers an analysis of the agency's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis.















Strengths

-  Highly trained professional staff with long tenure and high staff retention.
-  Historically meets or exceeds all operational goals set by Social Security Administration.
-  A high ratio of front line to total staffing.
-  Excellent working relationships exist with key partners in IVRS and SSA (local, regional, national.)
-  Focus on program integrity in application of policy and procedures in services to claimants, SSA and the citizens of Iowa.
-  Business process and emerging technology review and improvement is ongoing and ingrained in the culture.
-  Leadership and staff focus on employee health and well-being.
-  Managers have an open door policy and regularly scheduled meetings are held to discuss trends and emerging issues.
-  Excellent relationship with the medical community with a large and experienced consultative examiner panel.
-  Sound financial, workload and project planning and oversight exist with experienced staff dedicated to these tasks.
-  Sound security management with no recent SSA or State of Iowa audit recommendations.
-  Sound fiscal management principles with a record of no audit recommendations during the past four audit years.
-  Bureau Chief is the President of the National Council of Disability Determination Directors.

Weaknesses

- Staff can become content with status quo.
- Continued change is difficult, creating resistance.
- Fiscal uncertainty creates stress that can affect agency and individual performance.
- Authorized hiring by SSA is intermittent; it drains DDS resources and puts us at risk for improper or incomplete new employee development.
- Training progression delayed due to competing initiatives.
- HR needs are increasing as rules change.
- Not all technology applications utilized to their fullest.
- SSA prohibits electronic means of communicating with our claimants.
- SSA prevents our phone system linking to the SSA network with resulting service issues.
- Lack of sharing of promising practices when implementing problem-solving strategies.
- Difficulty recruiting and filling many positions, especially physicians and support staff.
- Telework options are limited due to lack of technology resources supplied by SSA.

Opportunities

-  Demand for services and results is continuous.
-  SSA is delivering technology via Agile methods.
-  Modern Flexible Video Service options will become more readily available.
-  Enhanced medical evidence delivery and analysis tools are under development by SSA.
-  SSA is investigating electronic means of communicating with claimants.
-  Iowa continues to be recognized as a national leader in the implementation of the new Disability Case Processing System.
-  Hires from other state DDS's have high positivity and engagement to leverage.
-  SSA is providing more national training, thus the DDS has more opportunity to utilize staff in new ways.
-  Self-directed learning opportunities are more readily available.
-  Project and Policy managers allow for increased administrative capacity.
-  Flexible Lead Worker and Shared Operations and Program Support positions allow opportunity to innovate.
-  Opportunities exist to advance learning and improve employee engagement and job satisfaction.
-  Career development and learning culture activities have commitment from senior leadership.
-  New methods are under consideration to ensure internal communication is increasingly transparent.

Threats

- 📌 Federal hiring limits and tight funding put staff and staffing at risk with increased stress and impact on retention.
- 📌 SSA performance integrity demands are high.
- 📌 Overtime offered as a solution, but stresses staff and considered a “band-aid.”
- 📌 SSA sets lofty goals for initial case clearances not always aligned with actual receipts – stretch goals are difficult to meet.
- 📌 SSA’s focus on fraud detection and prevention and Continuing Disability Review currency expected to continue with workflow impacts.
- 📌 Special, unexpected caseloads occur and create complexity and rework.
- 📌 Increasing number of Medicaid cases from the Department of Human Services.
- 📌 Ongoing challenge of balancing production standards with quality and program integrity.
- 📌 Loss of knowledge among staff due to turnover, retirement.
- 📌 Negative public opinion about the Social Security Disability program creates stress on claimants and employees.
- 📌 Increased oversight and responsibility placed on the DDS regarding security (physical and systems).
- 📌 Ongoing security risks and threats exist.
- 📌 Challenges for consistent delivery of service across units.
- 📌 Succession planning and knowledge transfer difficult to accomplish in the midst of constant policy, procedure and technology change.
- 📌 Need for continued adoption of ever-changing data reporting systems and the fine line between documentation and service delivery.

Goal 1: VISIONARY LEADERSHIP

Visionary Leadership: All DDS staff contribute to the mission and vision of the agency through their daily work and collaboration across work teams. All staff embrace the opportunity to contribute to the mission and vision and learn new skills and knowledge, adapting to an ever-changing environment that is focused on timely and accurate disability determinations.

Strategy 1-A

DDS implements a plan for seeking innovative solutions that are responsive and compassionate.

Actions

Leadership activities occur at all levels of staff engagement and demonstrated by the following action examples:

1. Convene employee engagement activities to engender leadership through the organization and promote participatory decision-making.
2. Supervisors develop workforce plans to enhance staff finding ways to work in areas of their passion.
3. Positive service stories captured in various ways to be shared through diverse channels.
4. Change, transition and resilience management training and tools shared.

Measures

1. SSA Performance Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Professional staff have aspirations and goals discussions that address accuracy and service and is reviewed on a consistent basis, fostering employee engagement and ownership of their professional goals. **ONGOING**
3. Identify and track positive service stories/feedback across communication systems. **DUE 2019**
4. Learning culture team project completed. **DUE 2020**

Strategy 1-B

Increase awareness among staff about DDS's full scope of activities and that DDS is more than clearing cases.

Actions

1. Communicate successes, results and "What's In It for Me" on a consistent and planned basis.
2. Data that is used is explained and available for all staff.

Measures

1. SSA Performance Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Data training and transparency plans are developed outlining impact on claimants. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Goal 2: VALUING EMPLOYEES AND PARTNERS

Collaborative partnerships increase service capacity, minimize duplication and maximize resources available. All staff strive to share information in an effort to create a seamless system for our customers.

Strategy 2-A

Collaborative partnerships occur across work teams to build capacity and improved services and transparency.

Actions

1. Reconsider and research optimal organizational design, role definitions and alignment.

Measures

1. Maintenance of excellent employee retention and high ratio of front line staffing.

DUE ANNUALLY

Strategy 2-B

Develop Agency work groups for purposes of sharing promising “best” practices; feedback from all levels received on policy/processes and service delivery.

Actions

1. Sponsor internal work groups - examples include Best Practices Strike Teams; Mentor Group; Tiger Teams; Learning Culture; Disability Examiner Specialist, Advanced (DESA) Team, Business Process Improvement teams; DCPS Core; DCPS Community of Practice, Vocational Analysis Team.

Measures

1. Staff IPPE outcomes reflect engagement as per goals.

DUE ANNUALLY

Strategy 2-C

Support and promote individual and organizational learning and development.

Actions

1. Build career development programs (career mobility, fast track programs, job rotation, and dual career ladders, mentoring)
2. Reduce skill gaps in targeted mission critical occupations to support talent development of employees.
3. Offer ongoing access to training and developmental resources to support continual learning.
4. Deploy staff resources and expertise to SSA upon request (National Policy, Quality, Training Cadres, RPC Cadre, DCPS initiatives – DUIT, User Interface, Community of Practice)

Measures

1. Test and implement programs with outcomes reported.
2. Maintenance of excellent employee retention.

DUE 10/2019
DUE ANNUALLY

3-4. Create tracking report of Learning Culture events, details, engagement activities, opportunities. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Strategy 2-D

Empower bureau and vendor staff to develop mutually beneficial customer relationships.

Actions

1. Collaborate and communicate regularly and with intention on shared concerns, including quality, timeliness and cost. (Consultative Examination and Medical Evidence providers)
2. Financial/Billing ensure alignment of services with core partners in areas of financial concerns – IVRS parent agency financial staff, budget analysts, and providers.

Measures

1. Medical Professional Relations actions tracked, outcomes achieved. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Lapsed funding measurements. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Strategy 2-E

Foster an inclusive culture that promotes employee well-being, innovation and engagement.

Actions

1. Sponsor and support employee-driven initiatives.
2. Promote work-life balance and employ available workplace flexibilities.

Measures

1. Maintain excellent employee retention rates. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Goal 3: MANAGING FOR INNOVATION

DDS staff remain rapidly flexible and adapt to changes and service needs quickly by integrating innovation into their work. All DDS staff have opportunities for discussion and planning for the future to help the agency achieve goals. Our goal is to achieve the most effective outcomes for our customers.

Strategy 3-A

Streamline policies and procedures.

Actions

1. Explore DDS policy and procedure areas where rules and practices need to be modernized or simplified.
2. Expand our use of electronically submitted medical evidence.

Measures

1. Tracking of Business Process workarounds and issues resolved through implementation of the Disability Case Processing System. **DUE 2020**
2. SSA Electronic Evidence goals exceeded. **ANNUALLY**

Strategy 3-B

Improve through Information Technology Modernization.

Actions

1. Assess and implement SSA technology resources that we can use to enhance adjudication, including Disability Case Processing System, Imagen, other intelligent tools, laptops for telework.
2. Implement process improvement team to review current case documentation protocols and standardize to ensure policy compliance and ease of common understanding and accountability – utilize new technology tool options.
3. Attend to our communication and knowledge repository on a planned and regular basis and provide resources to the task. (Iowa DDS Intranet Portal).

Measures

- 1-2. SSA Performance Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
3. Progress reports on Portal activity. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Goal 4: MANAGEMENT BY FACTS

All DDS staff use meaningful data to evaluate their individual and work unit performance. Data is used to adapt and to adjust actions to positively influence the results for our customers.

Strategy 4-A

Utilize data reports, Microstrategy Business Intelligence, and multiple SSA monitoring tools to assess agency performance.

Actions

1. Adapt to the new tools for management information and data analytics to draw conclusions and make business decisions to reduce inefficiencies, detect fraud, and assess program costs and to identify training needs.
2. Reassess quality measures in performance planning system, including training staff on service priorities and Mission/Vision.

Measurements

1. SSA Performance Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Outcome data for performance measures. **DUE 10/2019**

Strategy 4-B

Identify actions to integrate data into budget planning and personnel decision-making with finances accurately predicted, managed and reported.

Actions

1. Create and share budget-planning document and update Fiscal Business Process. Train and communicate with staff regarding key data indicators.

Measurements

1. Meet federal drawn-down maximums, remain audit comment-free, and allocate FTE positions based upon resources available. **DUE ANNUALLY**

Strategy 4-C

Refine program integrity/quality assurance program that reflects value and priorities for service delivery.

Actions

1. Development and communication of new QA desk guide and sharing of key data analysis findings via multiple modalities (roundtables, case staffing, RPC sharing)
2. Identify and communicate data that influence performance outcomes, revise sample with consideration of in-line review.

Measurements

1. New QA desk guide and information sharing protocols developed. **DUE 10/2019**
2. Sample and provide data that improves performance outcomes identified. **DUE 2020**

Goal 5: FOCUS ON SERVICE, RESULTS, AND CREATING VALUE

All DDS staff remain sensitive and adjust to ever-changing customer issues. Focus on creating better service and support for customers, the workforce and partners. Focus on results at event. Support a culture of “hope and opportunity” as opposed to fear and blame.

Strategy 5-A

Improve the accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of disability determinations.

Actions

1. Improve workforce performance and increase accountability through automation and staff engagement.
2. Invest in training and support for managers to effectively address performance and compliance challenges and to increase staff awareness of accountability standards.
3. Utilize existing and new tools to better identify training needs and areas for improvement.

Measurements

1. SSA Performance Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Training completed utilizing new resources/tools. **DUE 12/2019**
3. Training needs analysis and next actions. **DUE 12/2019**

Strategy 5-B

Staff prioritize quality engagement and service focus.

Actions

1. Educate staff on roles of program integrity, focused on qualitative analysis and service improvements.
2. Adopt SSA provided technology and communication tools for service delivery.

Measurements

1. Educational opportunities provided. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Incorporate technology options as provided. **ONGOING**

Strategy 5-C

Staff have ownership and accountability when service practices do not support the integrity of the DDS program and provide recommendations to resolve discrepancies.

Actions

1. Create work team to assess service contacts at every touch point with goal to recommend improvements after assessment of what is working well, what is not, and consideration of service contact with customers in every case.
2. All supervisors implement a comprehensive approach to reduce the number of delayed actions on cases.

Measurements

1. SSA Program Indicators exceeded. **DUE ANNUALLY**
2. Aged case pending reduction. **DUE 2020**