

Iowa Educational Services **for the Blind and Visually Impaired**

Communication & Social Media Strategic Plan

GSU Communication Consultants

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Executive Summary

Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI) engaged the GSU Consulting team to provide strategies to improve recruitment of itinerant teachers through both traditional recruitment avenues and social media marketing. The GSU Consulting team connected with IESBVI's communications department to establish a baseline for research and set expectations for a new strategic communications plan.

IESBVI's communications director expressed interest in learning about potential social media campaigns, ad services, and video/reel options for promoting open job positions. She emphasized the need for more engaging content and easier to follow instructions for how to apply for jobs. The job application process through the Department of Education is complex and presents a challenge in guiding potential applications through the process.

The GSU consulting team reviewed the company's website, social media platforms, superintendent prospectus, and conducted a follow-up interview to collect information on the current state of IESBVI's communications plan. They reached out to current teachers in Georgia, including special education and specialist teachers, to gain perspective into how teachers currently attending college courses access job opportunities and network.

Using this research, the GSU team conducted a needs assessment using the McKenzie problem solving method and fishbone diagrams to identify the problem and root causes. A SWOT analysis was used to identify existing strengths and opportunities and isolate weaknesses and threats that might make a communications strategy less effective. Using these methods, the team identified areas for improvement, focusing heavily on social media advertising as a force multiplier to leverage online resources to compensate for staffing shortages.

The plan is broken down into sections so that you can follow our problem-solving process as we identified key issues and provided actionable solutions to help your department move forward. Our plan takes into account both tactics and metrics, so that you can take action then measure success of each step along the way.

Our goal with this plan is to create more awareness around the IESBVI program and to expand social media presence to boost teacher recruiting. Step one

involves developing a monthly and consistent social media plan. Step two involves engaging in-person with stakeholders to gain support for recruiting. As you read, you will find that we have presented three strategies with specific tactics.

- Strategy 1: Expand social media use
- Strategy 2: Research upcoming college job fairs and graduations
- Strategy 3: Increase social media engagement

The team is excited to present a plan to launch two online campaigns “Grow Your Own” and “Our Students Love Our Teachers!” These campaigns will give IESBVI an opportunity to tailor content on unique career opportunities to prospective teachers that will translate to boosted applications. The plan includes recommendations with examples from existing IESBVI content to show how current campaigns can be used to refocus IESBVI’s social media strategy to spotlight teacher contributions fostering teacher appreciation and showing prospective teachers why IESBVI is a great place to work.

Finally, we have provided a timeline that lays out a plan with progress steps that will guide you through implementation. Implementation of the plan is set for June 1st and intended to be executed across a six-month timeline. By following the steps we suggest, you can expand your social media footprint carefully, focusing on creating tailored content to support teacher recruiting efforts. By the end of the plan, you will have a better picture of your social media analytics to meet target engagement levels on multiple platforms. Along the way, we’ve set goals for in-person engagement to build a network between local teachers, school administrators, and educational departments to increase your pool of potential recruits. This process is focused on getting stakeholders invested in the recruitment and hiring process to maximize success.

IESBVI is already set up for great things, rooted in a deeply compassionate mission. We hope that you find value in our product and success in future recruitment efforts. We look forward to working with you in the future and wish you the best of luck.

Research Summary

Consultants developed research objectives focused on recruiting outreach through digital communication channels, networking on-site during professional development conferences, and visiting high schools. Additionally, lifestyle benefits were a crucial part during analysis of Iowa's standard of living for potential recruits.

Organizations offering specialized curriculum to accommodate specific needs benefit greatly from spreading news of position vacancies across digital platforms. Job boards are largely digital and require applicants to apply online or employers use word of mouth to share organizational openings on-site at national conferences. Research was conducted to analyze the digital strategies academic organizations employ to advertise position vacancies. Also, consultants conducted an analysis of the benefits Iowa can offer relocators.

Research Objectives

The following were primary target areas developed by consultants:

- To better understand how other blind schools recruit on social media via campaigns/content
- To better understand what motivates teachers to teach and stay in rural areas
- To better understand how rural education systems market their vacancies
- To analyze what resources and benefits are provided for teachers to stay long term instructors.

Primary Research

Social media strategies were important to analyze and inform client of on how to approach engaging campaigns for the purpose of advertising vacant positions. Traditional campaigns were examined to advise on a tailored strategy for IESBVI's specialties.

Other Research

Consultants also wanted to understand what other barriers are affecting IESBVI's recruiting outreach efforts. Moreso, consultants were interested in investigating any internal dilemmas within their chain of command, human resources and communications/marketing departments, that are interfering with the productivity of acquiring new hires.

One interview was conducted with IESBVI's communications director, formally known as the organization's information specialist. The purpose of this interview was to further investigate previous successful social media campaigns, faculty's involvement in conferences (and engagement in word-of-mouth recruitment), colleague mentorship, and more specific benefits to potential new hires establishing a lifestyle in Iowa.

Consultants who conducted the interview with IESBVI's communications director found these barriers to successful recruitment:

- Exit interviews are not conducted to gather data on satisfactions and dissatisfactions with position responsibilities, organizational structure, or standard of living.
- Faculty engage in state mandated mentorship and self-motivated community building through senior and novice shadow pairing along with informal group messaging.
- Human resources and communications departments operate with one body each.
- Potential recruits and current teachers benefit from job security as their positions are funded by tax dollars, tuition reimbursement, paid holidays, sick time, health insurance, relocation assistance for superintendent position, short term rental apartments available, and unrestricted residency requirement within service area.
- Successful social media (Facebook) campaigns were centered around testimonies of job satisfaction, for example, "Why I like my job" face pictures and text information.
- Social media content requires an immense amount of detail to include maximum accessibility to accommodate skilled new hires.
- IESBVI is currently utilizing LinkedIn to market position vacancies and engage in Facebook recruitment groups.
- Can take 6 months or longer to advertise position description due to Department of Education regulations.

Situational Analysis

IESBVI specializes in providing academic support to infants, children, teens, and young adults with visual and auditory impairments. The national teacher shortage has extended into this specialized organization creating issues of recruitment. Restrictions due to Iowa's lack of teacher training for visually and auditory impaired students and the Department of Education's requirements for regulated job descriptions pose additional barriers in successful recruitment. IESBVI must rely on out-of-state hires already equipped with the training and skillset to meet position standards. Additionally, the Department of Education's requirements can misrepresent the responsibilities and skillset needed for IESBVI to provide support within service area schools.

IESBVI's organizational structure creates another challenge in recruitment outreach as there is not a physical space but a design to accommodate students within service area schools. Without independent instructional physical spaces this creates challenges of appeal for new hires and organizational size to accomplish recruitment goals.

IESBVI operates its human resources and communications departments with one person each. Daily tasks and unforeseen workplace issues can take priority over recruiting, leading to delays in filling positions as workload barriers present themselves.

Time is constrained to day-to-day operations whereas social media campaigns and word-of-mouth outreach in the form of traveling (to professional conferences and other schools) are severely limited to the extra time these two very small departments may incur.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths

- Great salaries and benefits
 - IESBVI offers a good salary and benefits package to teachers. The school system is working on setting entry level teacher salaries at \$50K a year starting. The national average for entry level teachers according to the National Education Association is currently at \$42,844. Teachers with 12+ years would not make less than \$60K. They have a step program for master's degrees and additional education. They are not worried about layoffs or restructuring.
- Grow Your Own Program
 - The Grow Your Own Program allows IESBVI to recruit teachers that do not have their certification programs, yet. Through this program, teachers are allowed to start teaching and get support to work on their certificates after hiring. This opens the recruiting pool to more candidates.
- Lack of competition in state
 - This is the only program available in-state to teach the blind or visually impaired within the school system. If someone is interested in this kind of career field, IESBVI would be the place to go.
- Mentorship
 - New teachers get extensive training. They are paired with more experienced teachers to make sure they have support through onboarding and getting started. They have opportunities for training and professional development. New teachers can reach out to anyone in the area for assistance because the mentorship and training program is standardized.
- Flexible services provided across the state
 - The position offers flexibility for teachers who enjoy working outside of a traditional school system. Frequent travel, engaging with multiple school systems, and meeting the students in their hometown can be an interesting challenge for those seeking itinerant positions.

Weaknesses

- Limited in Social Media Presence

- IESBVI has limited social media presence thus making it hard for those who might be interested in joining their program to see what the program has to offer. Related, they also do not have a delegation system set up to create more suitable content to display across their social media platforms.
- Lack of information distribution about teacher opportunities
 - Special education teachers and other staff members who might be interested in working with IESBVI's "Grow Your Own" program are unaware of the services and benefits, as they are not highlighted in detail.
- Understaffed HR Department
 - IESBVI lacks the manpower to manage recruiting campaign efforts and social media content in relation to finding more teachers to join their program. This lack in manpower leads to inconsistent posting schedules on social media and added stress on the existing HR department.
- Location
 - With Iowa being in a central location of the United States, there is not a lot to do in the area. The location is undesirable as it is far from most aspects that make moving to a specific area attractive. This can harm recruiting efforts drastically as most new teachers do not want to move far away with nothing exciting around them to do.

Opportunities

- Build recognition in local school systems
 - IESBVI promotes themselves as the "trusted resource for blind education in Iowa." They can develop this reputation even more through outreach programs to local schools on social media. Creating a Facebook group where local superintendents, principals, and special education teachers can interact with IESBVI and their itinerant teachers could create a closer bond and build their reputation for their services.
- Work with partner organizations to get the word out
 - They can connect with other educational services provided in Iowa on social media to get the word out about IESBVI. "Friending" or connecting with the Iowa Board of Education, Iowa AEAs, and other blind and TVI schools could build a better social media network to reach more potential recruits, both amongst special education

teachers and more specialized teachers with TVI and O&M certifications.

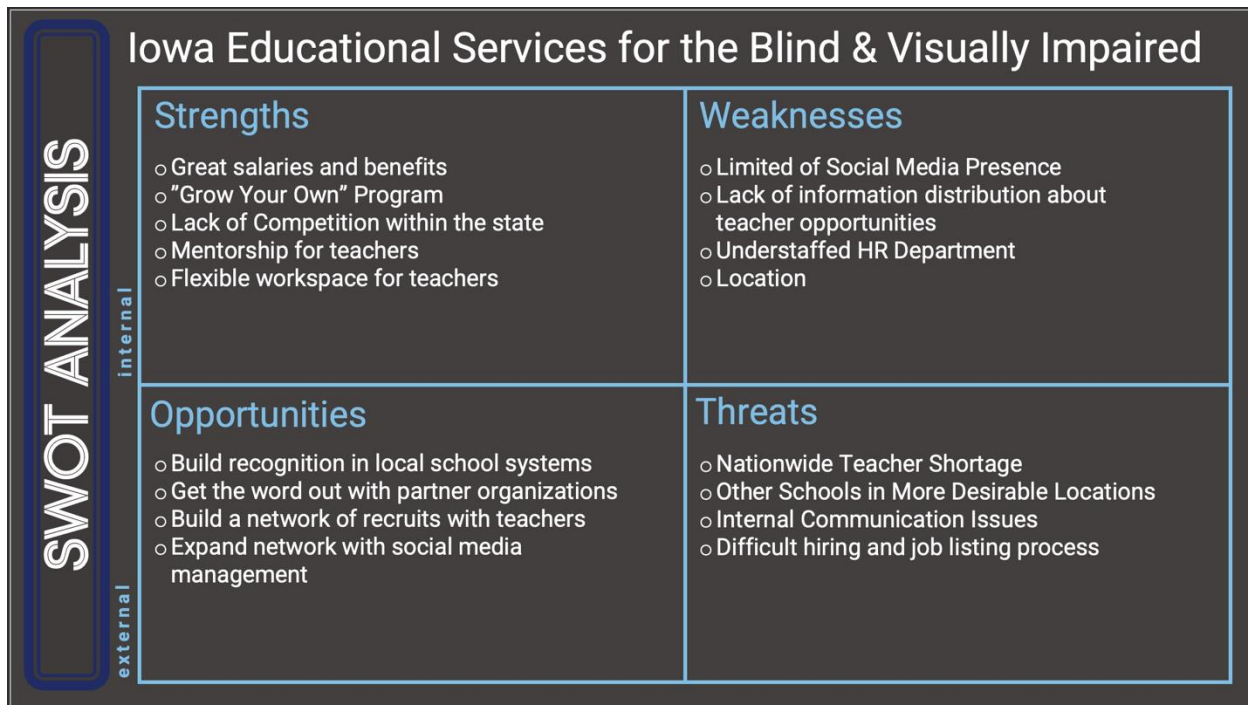
- Use teacher connections to build a network of potential recruits
 - Creating a social media group for teachers would let them share ideas and bring in potential recruits. IESBVI targets recruiting special education teachers from the schools that they service. Building a connection between their current teachers and these potential recruits could create opportunities to bring them over into the organization by showing them the kinds of teaching methods, mentoring, and friendships that are built between teachers in IESBVI. People apply to places where they would see themselves fit in easily. This could help potential recruits try out to see if they have a place at IESBVI by learning more about how it works.
- Use a social media management tool to expand network
 - Expanding their social media footprint is a low-cost way to improve advertising when there are limited personnel to attend conferences. Investing in a management tool like Sprout Social or using a free tool like Hootsuite would make it easier for one person to manage multiple social media accounts without adding significant burden. There are opportunities to recruit available via X and Instagram that are not available on Facebook or LinkedIn.

Threats

- Nationwide Teacher Shortage
 - Due to the 2020 pandemic, local economies saw a significant decrease in public education jobs. Currently there is a lack of teachers nationwide due to pay concerns and the positions available not matching upcoming teacher qualifications. The appeal to becoming a teacher has decreased as well with incoming college students.
- Other Schools in More Desirable Locations
 - With other schools in more desirable locations, IESBVI is less likely to appeal to a prospective recruit when other schools and programs offer the same benefits in much more attractive locations. New teachers want to live and work in places closer to family, friends, and fun activities.
- Internal Communication Issues
 - With most IESBVI teachers and staff not interacting daily, there is a lack of communication within the organization that can paint a picture of it

- being disorganized with no potential for engagement amongst colleagues. This does not appeal to the common recruit as they will want mentors and professional guidance when first starting vs. having to work independently.
- Difficult hiring and job listing process
 - Iowa's Board of Education makes it challenging to list job positions in a clear and transparent way that is easy for potential recruits to understand. The process of getting to the website from the IESBVI website or social media can be confusing and difficult to understand. The job position descriptions may make teachers feel like they are not qualified. This complicated process could cause teachers to give up, even if they are extremely interested in the position.

SWOT Diagram



Problem Statement

Context (Situation and Complications)

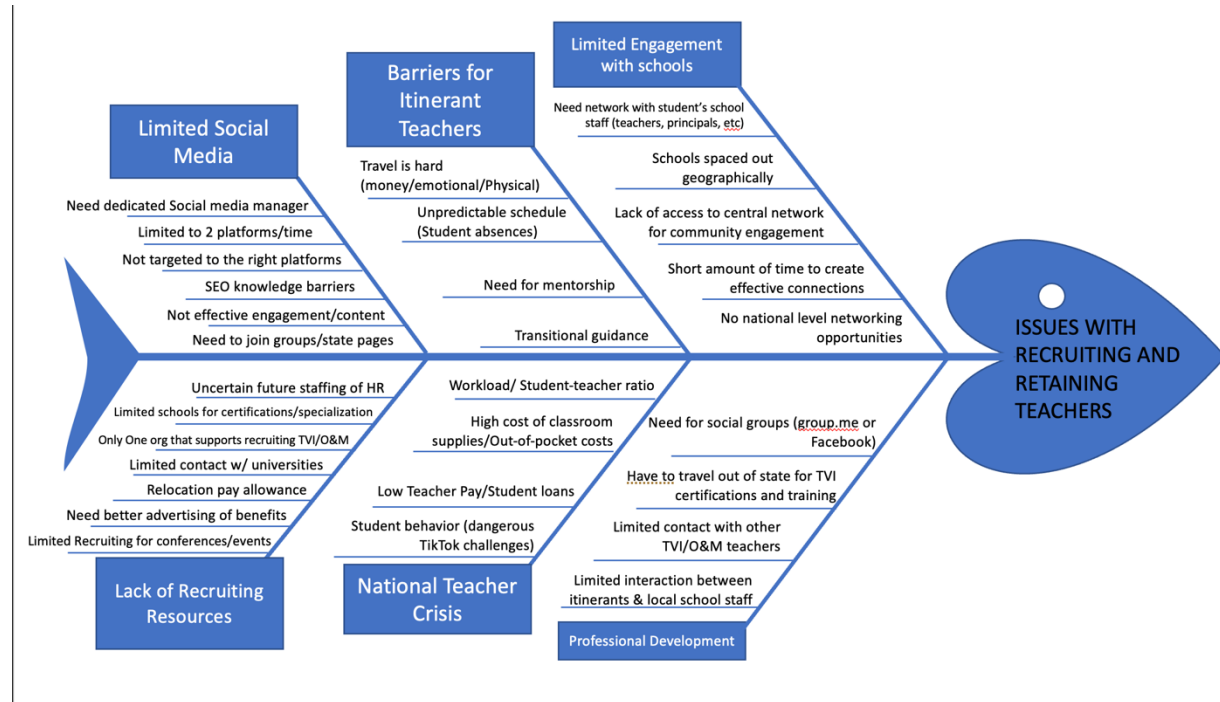
Iowa Educational Services for the Blind & Visually Impaired is experiencing difficulty recruiting staff. This has been a long-standing problem for IESBVI, even before the great resignation across the U.S., but the pandemic fallout (teacher shortage) has worsened the problem. Iowa does not have a teacher certification program for the visually impaired. Nor does it have a program for OMS staff. As a result, they are often trying to recruit out of state and are not very successful. They often focus on recruiting schools they service through their "Grow Your Own" program, where special education teachers may have interest in a more specialized position. When there is so much competition for these staff in the United States at other state schools for the blind, why would candidates come to IESBVI when they could go to a state with warmer weather, or something more attractive than "Iowa's boring heartland"? The other difficulty is that Iowa's teaching and licensing requirements are stringent; it is hard for someone who obtained their license or was educated in another state to get licensure in Iowa.

The Problem

IESBVI's digital presence doesn't reflect its work in the field. As a result, many potential teachers aren't aware of IESBVI and its impact relative to its mission. They also lack a prominent social media presence, and their work is not well displayed on their platforms, thus leading to unsuccessful recruitment efforts. There is a communications gap between IESBVI and its potential staff and teachers, which now likely leads to the decrease in the recruitment of teachers. Special education teachers and staff that could participate and benefit from the "Grow Your Own " program are unaware of IESBVI services and benefits such as great starting pay and low cost of living, and even paying for teachers TVI degree.

Fishbone Diagram

Our team analyzed a process called the Fishbone Diagram. It is a cause-and-effect exercise during which the group dove into IESBVI's brand visibility and recognition. Review the diagram below to follow our problem-solving process to identify root causes for issues with the recruiting and retention of teachers.



Goal Statement

Overview

Our goal is to increase IESBVI's visibility and recognition by implementing a social media plan for their accessible social media accounts. Through the development of a consistent social media plan, the program should expect to reach a wider audience by creating a digital presence. We hope to attract, recruit, and retain teachers by highlighting their program's incentives and differentiating their program from other programs in the country. Through the feedback received from exit interviews, the IESBVI program can also modify the necessary areas to improve employee satisfaction.

Overarching Goal

Create more awareness about the IESBVI program and social media presence

Strategy 1

Develop a monthly and consistent social media plan for social media accounts

- Create creative weekly content that highlights the program
 - Posts, videos, infographics, flyers, Lives, etc.

Strategy 2

Develop and send monthly newsletters to state educational board

- Include social media handles in email
- Think of material that might interest students

Criteria for Success

Phase 1 (2 months or >; Reoccurring)

- Plan out content for each platform
- Review content for grammatical errors
- Schedule content

Phase 2 (After 2nd month or >)

- Review analytics
 - See what is working well and what is not working well.
- Follow-up with local schools and universities about newsletters

Scope of Solution Space

Research

Recruiting research will review primary and secondary research regarding the national teacher crises with a focus on how this may affect the recruiting of itinerant teachers for the visually impaired. Additional research will be conducted to build context into understanding the qualifications and demands of teachers within this very specialized space, specifically with regards to challenges that may be exacerbated by hiring requirements of the Iowa Department of Education. This section will review the organization's website to the hiring process.

Social media analysis will include reviewing IESBVI's existing LinkedIn and Facebook pages to review content related to teacher recruiting. Analysis will include a review of likes, comments, and posts to determine post engagement. Follow-up questions with the communications department will focus on past campaigns, strategies, successes, and challenges in this space.

Development Activities

IESBVI can enhance its recruiting efforts by expanding their social media presence to include platforms more suited for teacher recruiting. They can also create content specifically geared toward teacher appreciation and recruiting efforts. Investing in a social media management software like Hootsuite or Sprout Social or outsourcing social media to a contract company could make efforts more effective.

Physical Space

Execution of IESBVI's strategic communications plan will occur within the company's communication department coordinating with the Human Resources department on recruitment efforts.

Constraints within the Solution Space

For IESBVI to have an effective social media recruiting campaign, they will need to expand their current social media space. This may require investment in additional manpower and digital tools.

Execution of recruitment efforts will be highly dependent on future funding and continued operation of the HR department. This is currently an unknown factor.

Recruitment efforts may also be affected by the continued operation of the Iowa Area Education Agencies, which are currently under review for future funding.

Stakeholders

- Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- IESBVI Communications Department
- IESBVI Human Relations Department
- IESBVI itinerant teachers
- Parents of IESBVI students
- Iowa Department of Education

Key Sources of Insight

- Researchers
- IESBVI Communications Department
- Teachers (e.g., special education, itinerant)
- Education Staff at partner schools (Principals, Superintendents)
- Other schools of the Blind and Visually Impaired
- Iowa Area Education Agencies

Social Media Strategy Recommendations

Theme

We suggest a theme “Our Kids Love Our Teachers!” This campaign would connect stories of student accomplishment with the teachers who set them up for success. By highlighting both teachers and students in a single post, IESBVI can boost engagement and give potential recruits a vision into how teachers of the visually blind and orientation and mobility specialists can impact student lives in a unique school setting. We also suggest a theme of “Grow Your Own” that shares information about teacher certification programs, reasons to work in Iowa, and employment perks like sign-on and relocation bonuses.

Activation Tactics

Social Media Audit

Social media audits are used to measure the success of social media campaigns and engagement. Our team interviewed the communication department to get an idea of how IESBVI uses social media to engage with potential recruits. Initial feedback indicated that Facebook is primarily used for parent/student engagement, while LinkedIn is used for job recruiting. This audit sought to determine the types of posts, levels of engagement, social campaigns, and networking connections that currently exist within IESBVI's social media. The audit also sought out to understand how social media is used to share information regarding teachers of the visually impaired, job opportunities for TVI and O&M teachers, and Iowa educational resources. We interviewed special education teachers in Georgia to determine how teachers outside of the state of Iowa look for job opportunities. This audit includes Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X.

IESBVI Website – <https://iesbvi.com>

As background for the audit, we reviewed IESBVI's website to find out what kind of resources are available for professional development and career opportunities for teachers of the visually impaired and orientation and mobility specialists. On the careers page, there is currently one job opening listed for the 2024-2025 school year for an orientation and mobility specialist in Ottumwa, IA. There are also three job openings for substitute teachers for a TVI, an Itinerant

TVI, and an O&M specialist. There is a section for Educator Resources. It includes pages for “supporting students with visual impairments” and a “summer program for educators.” This section also includes pages for low vision clinics and a vision resource center, which offer opportunities for teachers to acquire equipment for their students. There are some other pages with educational resources like braille resources, math apps, and tactile graphics. The website does not provide any information regarding the “Grow Your Own” program opportunities for teachers to earn certifications, or professional development opportunities that credit PDUs.

Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/IESBVI/>

IESBVI's Facebook profile currently has 684 followers and 504 likes. The page has been active since 2016 and is not currently running ads. We audited three months of posts going back to January 2024 and conducted targeted searches for specific themes. Post themes primarily focus on highlighting student accomplishments at school and competitions. There is a heavy focus on promoting events like the Spring Conference to parents.

Other post themes promote the 4Plus transition program. Posts that receive the most engagement share personal stories of success about students, like the 4-part series campaign “Meet the Hanrahans,” which received likes, loves, cares, shares, and comments. Posts routinely receive a handful of likes, but shares are less frequent unless a student is highlighted. In terms of content, IESBVI primarily shares text-based posts with attached photos. Photos do not include individual captions, so they cannot be searched separately from the timeline. There were 3 reels listed on the website, which were static images with animated text. The videos were primarily clips from the spring conference and other student events. There were two videos featuring static images with animated text that advertised teacher jobs, including incentives like a \$5,000 sign-on bonus and \$4,000 relocation reimbursement. These posts received 253 views and 133 views, but only 1-4 likes, and 6 shares. The post advertising bonuses received no shares. Facebook reports that the page posted 10+ posts in the last month, which is a good consistent posting schedule. The Facebook page is mentioned by the Iowa Department of Education and Innivee Strategies which appears to be a recruiting partner.

For the audit, we searched for the keywords “teacher,” “TVI,” “Grow Your Own,” and “job” to measure how the Facebook page is used for teacher recruiting.

IESBVI has 11 posts that mentioned specific teachers or itinerant life. There were no posts for the “Grow Your Own” program, which is a primary job recruiting incentive. Job posts focused on the superintendent role and other staff positions. In terms of recognition, we found posts celebrating retirements, promotions, and recent hires. Most posts have photos attached. Most posts featuring teacher recognition are a subtopic of a post on student recognition.

For instance, a student is recognized for a valentine craft. In that post, a teacher is recognized for assisting with unique braille skills. In terms of engagement, these posts bring in a moderate number of comments encouraging or congratulating teachers for their contributions. There were two posts recognizing teachers individually. One recognized Carrie Spellmeyer for being highlighted in a local news article. This post received 9 likes, 8 loves, 1 wow, and 3 comments, which is high engagement for this profile. One recognized Kaylyn Wright, O&M specialist, for a specific teaching technique. This post received very high engagement for the page with 27 likes, 17 loves, 1 comment, and 18 shares. This shows that posts specifically highlighting teachers for their accomplishments and contributions can receive high engagement from the target audience.

LinkedIn

(1) <https://www.linkedin.com/company/iowa-braille-and-sight-saving-school/>

(2) <https://www.linkedin.com/company/iowa-educational-services-for-the-blind-and-visually-impaired/>

IESBVI has two LinkedIn pages: (1) Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (IESBVI/IBSSS) and (2) Iowa Educational Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired. The first page has 91 followers. It links to <http://www.iowa-braille.k12.ia.us/> which redirects to the current IESBVI website. This is where most of the posts are located but this page has not been active for 8 months. The second page has 11 followers and links to the current IESBVI website. It has only two posts from 8 months ago. It appears that at some point 8 months ago, a new page was created and abandoned. Neither page have been active for 8 months.

When conducting pre-research about the social media strategy, LinkedIn was reported as being the primary platform for job recruiting. The audit focused primarily on reviewing that strategy. There are 0 job listings in the Jobs section of

the page, despite having multiple jobs listed on the website and the current campaign for a new Superintendent. Posts from 8 to 11 months ago primarily consist of job listings and a campaign to encourage people to move to Iowa. Job listings primarily consist of word documents attached to text announcements about the available position. There are also posts recognizing service awards, retirements, and a Deaf/Blind project grant. The single campaign regarding "Iowa Life" is only loosely connected with IESBVI.

Most posts do not mention a specific campaign or reference how it relates to the school or employment. Only one post out of 4 states that "There's always something to do when you are in Iowa" that lists specific job postings. Posts receive little to no engagement with an average of 0-2 likes per post. Posts receiving 4-5 likes focus on specific teacher or staff accomplishments. The second IESBVI page has two posts, which are both new staff welcome flyers with infographics and text with teacher quotes on why they are excited to work at IESBVI.

X (Twitter) - No Page

IESBVI does not have a Twitter page. Twitter is used by many other Iowa educational service pages to share job postings, school announcements, and Department of Iowa Education posts. IESBVI has been mentioned by @IowaDeafBlind in a post. When interviewing special education teachers in Georgia, we found that these teachers were encouraged in college to join Twitter (X) as the primary page for networking and job postings, rather than LinkedIn.

When searching for teachers of the visually impaired on X, we found interview-style videos from schools talking about teaching methods and programs. The following Iowa education organizations have pages on X, which presents an opportunity for networking, reposting, and engagement. These pages have significantly more visibility with educators than Facebook. Seeking out universities that have TVI and O&M programs could be an invaluable resource for posting and sharing job listings and educational training opportunities.

- Iowa Department of Education - @IADeptofEd – 21K followers
- Iowa's AeAs - @iowa_aea – 5,716 followers
- IowaASCD - @IowaASCD – 3,450 followers
- Iowa School Boards - @IASB_Iowa – 5,105 followers

- Grant Wood AEA - @grandwoodAEA – 3,434 followers
- ISEA - @iowaSEA – 8,370 followers
- Heartland AEA - @HeartlandAEA – 5,063 followers
- SAI – Iowa - @sai_iowa – 6,994 followers

Instagram – No Page

While Instagram does not seem to be a home for stakeholders like Iowa's Department of Education, it is a place for teachers to connect and share teaching tips and tricks. We searched "teachers of the visually impaired" and "teacher of the visually impaired." We recommend checking out the content for the following pages. These three pages have excellent content that could be used to model for other platforms, like Facebook or Twitter. The hashtag #teachersofthevisuallyimpaired returns 347 posts.

- @teacherofthevisuallyimpaired (2,197 followers) – tips and tricks
- @specialachievers (16,000 followers) – education techniques
- @sixtinydots (1,000 followers) – art projects and tactile learning

Social Media Content Recommendations

Social media offers great opportunities to highlight special programs and share job opportunities. IESBVI could leverage these platforms to better reach potential recruits, connecting with special education teachers in their local communities and reach out to universities across the country that offer TVI and O&M programs. Messaging apps, that offer direct social connection, can also be used to create valuable networks between teachers, school administrations, and educational organizations in the state. Below, we offer some recommendations for strategies to expand knowledge about IESBVI career opportunities and highlight the unique qualities of itinerant teachers.

1. Focus on engagement, not just likes but shares

Social media posts should be quick and eye-catching to encourage viewers to stop scrolling and pay attention to your content. While most of IESBVI's posts feature images, they are heavy text-based posts. Using more eye-catching posts with single images that are targeted at your audience may increase engagement and shares. Consumers interact most with very short Facebook posts that are less than 50 characters. Use embedded analytics tools in apps like Facebook and X to determine engagement

metrics to measure page visibility and determine whether you are getting the message out to your target audience.

2. Expand footprint with marketing tools or social media manager

IESBVI would benefit significantly from expanding their social media. Currently, the only active platform is Facebook. Using a social media or marketing management tool like Sprout Social or Constant Contact would allow IESBVI to cross-post across platforms. This would allow them to expand viewership of content without creating content individually aimed at separate social media platforms. Free platforms, like Buffer or Hootsuite, offer a starting point to see what kind of features are offered.

One benefit would be cross-platform analytics, that show post effectiveness. This shows which platform is getting the best engagement on job listings so that they can focus their campaigns, rather than just using traditional Facebook posts. IESBVI does not have a robust staff to manage multiple platforms, so a social media management tool provides an efficient means of reaching more platforms without significantly increasing workload. In the future, it is recommended that you consider hiring a social media manager on a part-time or full-time basis to help boost engagement.

Zapier created this post for the best Social Media Management Tools of 2024 that ranks tools with prices. Higher priced tools need to pack a punch with quality analytics, or it is not worth using a paid platform:

Tool	Best for	Standout Feature	Pricing
Buffer	Straightforward social media scheduling	"Link in Bio" service called Start Page	Free plan available; from \$6/mo. per channel
Hootsuite	Managing X with all the features you're used to	Intuitive analytics	Free plan available; from \$99/mo.
SocialPilot	Small teams to schedule posts	Robust features at an affordable price	From \$30/mo.
Loomly	Custom sites	Custom social network allows you to post to any channel via Zapier	From \$42/mo.

Iconosquare	Visual posts	Great Instagram integrations	From \$39/mo.
Sendible	An affordable all-in-one social media management app	Nails the basics	From \$29/mo.

3. Use organic ads to boost career posts

The goal for a good ad in 2024 is to craft organic posts that look no different than an unsponsored post. Paid ads guarantee that some people see your post, even if they don't follow you. Ads should include a specific "call to action" like "Apply now to join our faculty." There are many kinds of ads: static image ads, video ads, carousel ads, story ads, branded content ads, and more. We recommend that you start with static image ads and story ads. Story ads can feature video content or static images animated with text. The benefit of stories is that they can be posted to multiple platforms simultaneously. They also get your content to the top of the page, where users are most likely to see it.

Social media offers organic ad services for individual platforms. If you sign up for Meta ad services, you can set a timeline and budget for your ads and Meta will figure out a plan for using that budget to post ads over a set period of time. It will also help you define your audience, so you reach your target demographic.

Try to make your ads as personable as possible. Modern social users prefer ads that really connect instead of infographics. Recording a short reel of a teacher talking about why they love teaching at IESBVI or why they're drawn to the itinerant lifestyle would offer a genuine connection to other teachers looking for a new school home. It allows them to connect on a personal level. Think of it like creating a customer persona. If you want to hire a teacher, show teachers a good model of what life would be like for them to teach at IESBVI. Make sure that the ad includes information on specific job listings and how to apply for them. Include a call to action specific to the post like "Come teach with me." LinkedIn and X ads may offer the best return on your investment to boost job postings and get more reach. Make sure to keep reels very short, between 7-15 seconds.

4. Build connections with existing communities

We reviewed existing Facebook groups to determine where TVI teachers are already engaging. Using Facebook groups is an excellent way to target a specific community. There are several active groups that share opportunities for jobs for TVI and O&M specialists. IESBVI is already a member of some of these groups, but we listed all the top groups for reference. Reposting job advertisements in the groups below may boost viewership of jobs outside of Iowa.

- Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired (3.8k members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/128594603915553>
 - ii. Description: Created for teachers of the visually impaired to share their passion for teaching. Welcomes job announcements, teaching methods, etc. It is encouraged for teachers to share job announcements, but they discourage commercial advertising.
- Career Resources for the Blind and Visually Impaired (2.1K members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/jobinsightsgroup>
 - ii. Description: One stop shop for career resources for teachers of the blind and visually impaired. Connected to the Blind Abilities Podcast.
- Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired/O&M Specialists (6.1K members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/393880850642344>
 - ii. Description: A place to post TVI/O&M questions, ideas, etc!
- The Teacher's Lounge: For Educators of Blind and Visually Impaired Students (325 members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/408291681341325>
 - ii. Description: Designed for teachers of all experience levels to join the group and share with colleagues. Run by the National Braille Press in conjunction with TVI Braille Ignition Kits.
- Orientation and Mobility Instructors for the Blind and Visually Impaired (623 members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2267011859>
 - ii. Description: It's a small field! Let's see how many of us are out there. Share information and network.
- TVI/O&M (801 members)
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1872445109704725/>

- ii. A place for TVI and Mobility Specialists to connect and share information about the field.

5. Create networks with local teachers

IESBVI reported that their most successful recruiting strategy is to recruit special education teachers from service area schools where their itinerant teachers meet their students. To foster this connection and offer a formal channel for this recruiting strategy, IESBVI can create official groups to connect these teachers together. They can create a Facebook group for IESBVI teachers and potential recruits to join to discuss teaching experiences and strategies. They can also encourage teachers to start a group chat in a social chatting app like Group.me or Slack to make a direct method for teachers to share opportunities and ask questions.

*When talking to special education teachers in Georgia, teachers reported that Group.me is used heavily in schools to connect teachers together to share job listings and advice about careers. IESBVI could also create a private group for their school and encourage local superintendents, principals, and special education staff from students' schools in Iowa to join. This would foster engagement between these communities and offer a communication channel to schools that doesn't currently exist.

Multiple states have Facebook groups set up to connect their TVI and O&M specialists together. While these private groups are small, they can offer superior direct engagement. One of the best ways for new teachers to obtain a job is through a personal connection. Check out some of these groups for ideas on how to engage teachers in your community.

- o Texas Teachers of the Visually Impaired
 - i. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/111425204791>
- o Michigan Teachers of the Blind & Visually Impaired
 - ii. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/7700123436673437>
- o OTVI – Oklahoma Teachers of the Visually Impaired
 - iii. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/944352563399416>

6. Highlighting teacher contributions - “Our Students Love Our Teachers”

We recommend running a campaign called “Our students love our teachers.” Posts that highlight specific students have high engagement.

Convert that engagement to teacher positions by featuring single posts of students with teachers. For instance, in the “Hanrahan” series, you can use quotes from the family to recognize individual teachers. In one post, from 13 February, coach and OMS Melissa Schwab is mentioned. In that series regarding the cheerleading coach, you could make an individual post recognizing the coach for her hard work, with a quote saying how excited and proud she is of the team.

You can use animated text over images to show quotes from those teachers talking directly about their school activities and why they love them. This puts your posts in first-person and allows teachers to connect directly to teachers. These kinds of posts can be shared as stories and within the timeline, boosting viewership. Single-image posts are also easy and quick to like, share, or comment on. Most users don’t spend a lot of time reading long text-based posts.

For an example of a good campaign highlighting employee satisfaction, view the ad from 80 Acres Farm below. The organic farming company runs a campaign called “Farmer Features” that shares short quotes about why their employees love working there. It is about personal fulfillment, not bonuses. This kind of post could really capture a potential recruit.



7. Posting jobs – on Facebook, X, and LinkedIn

IESBVI already has great job ads, they just need to boost their engagement and get them out there more often. Job postings were listed infrequently and were rarely shared. Posts should be scheduled more frequently to keep them visible on the timeline. Use a combination of traditional flyer-style postings and reels to create different kinds of engagement. You can create reels with faculty promoting opportunities and fun reasons to work at IESBVI with sticker links to allow recruits to go straight to the job listing.

LinkedIn offers "jobs" section where open jobs can be listed with information to directly apply. This allows you to keep your current postings up to date for potential employees. Recruits don't have to scroll through dozens of posts to find opportunities, they can just go straight to this tab. All current job opportunities should be posted in this tab.

Ask your network to share job postings with status updates on the open role. You can engage with the Iowa Department of Education, AEAs, and local schools to share your job listings. Encourage current itinerant teachers to share current listings and ask them to engage with local special education teachers willing to share them, as well. This will build a larger network of potential candidates.

8. Launch a “Grow Your Own” campaign

“Grow your Own” offers a unique opportunity for TVI teachers to start while getting support to earn necessary certifications. This program should be posted on the website and all social media channels. IESBVI can make simple infographics and short reels to explain exactly what the program offers. Videos should include short explanations (1-4 sentences) and a link to learn more about the program.

Linking the “Grow Your Own” program to substitute teacher job postings would be a good opportunity to target a population already interested in joining the faculty. Substitute teaching can offer an opportunity for teachers to join the school temporarily, to find out what it’s like to teach there. Include “Grow Your Own” campaign information in advertisements for substitute teachers to create the mental connection that this could be a potential path to a new career.

Communication Strategy Recommendations

Gaining a stronger social media following to increase recruitment pool

Social Media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X (formerly known as Twitter) are widely used in numerous ways to attract and retain a following for a multitude of reasons. These platforms can be seen as beneficial in an efficient recruiting effort and with monitored and frequent engagement and content, a strong following can emerge sooner than later.

Statistics show that over 69% of teachers use social media for both professional and personal use and 87% of those teachers think social media promotes collaboration and exchange of ideas.

- Facebook, LinkedIn, and X are the leading platforms used by teaching and education professionals the most
- These platforms host over thousands of teachers nationwide who form groups and online communities to engage with one another and exchange ideas

We recommend these strategies below to increase social media followers and recruitment pool.

Create more informative and engaging content

The appeal that draws users in and turns them into followers is the display of content that is both informative and engaging. In order to increase recruitment pool numbers, you will want to create content that relates to those within the target audience of education professionals. Highlighting culture, values, and professional development opportunities will give content a personal appeal that is unique and sets one part from another. You will want to steer away from posting content that just displays events and bland information without any clear result or purpose. Posting content regularly will also prove beneficial in recruiting efforts as users are more likely to follow accounts that are more active than seen in previous months on IESBVI's platforms. Creating content that shows the fun aspects of working at IESBVI will draw users in to not only explore but be more receptive as well.

Engage with followers to show frequent activity

Followers do not fall out of thin air and to attract them, you need to gain their attention in some way that is relatable to the audience you want to attract. Responding to comments, messages, and other inquiries promptly will be the engagement needed to build an online community and improve the overall image of IESBVI. While IESBVI has been historically prompt at “liking” comments, responding with a short, personalized message to commenters will enrich engagement. Collaborating with other groups and organizations will also show frequent page activity and bring in new followers in. The use of relevant hashtags will display your page to new potential followers and making sure the whomever is taking over online content will need to make sure engagement is frequent and precise.

Strategy Activation

Recruiting efforts today require recruitment teams to be aggressive and innovative in their approaches. Making sure what is displayed is attractive and engaging to as many prospective recruits as possible demonstrates the common theme of recruitment. Recruitment efforts need dedication and attentiveness so no opportunity is missed, or conversation is wasted to ultimately bring forth all possible candidates that can solve the bigger issue at hand. We recommend strategic activation through social media engagement (building online reputation) and internal research of new opportunities (finding job fairs and online communities with similar purposes).

Strategy 1: Expand Social Media Use

Tactic 1: Create new social media accounts on X and Instagram to increase potential reach of audience that is further than the reach of just Facebook and LinkedIn.

Subtactic: Make new profiles and display platform tailored engaging content that will attract upcoming teachers and new educational professionals to want to learn more about IESBVI.

Strategy 2: Research Upcoming College Job Fairs and Graduations

Tactic 1: Contact schools and other job fair organizers to see about participating in their next job fairs to recruit from larger pools.

Subtactic: While researching schools that have programs tailored to educational services, contact them, and apply to be a part of their school career fairs to have more field engagement and one-on-one interactions.

Strategy 3: Increase Social Media Engagement

Tactic 1: Frequently post on social media and engage with users to bring more attention to your online presence.

Subtactic: Post content that is informative of the opportunities provided by IESBVI and relatable to new followers to display not only what they will be getting into but why they should join as well.

Timeline

Quarter 1: Expanding Social Media Presence and Setting Up Plan

Implementation of the Plan begins June 1, 2024.

- Create social media accounts for X and Instagram.
- Familiarize with social media management tool Hootsuite or Buffer.
- Plan out any upcoming events and prepare to identify key elements of these events that can be shared on all social media accounts.
- Connect with recommended Facebook communities such as Teachers of the Blind and Visually Impaired, Career Resources for the Blind and Visually Impaired.
- Develop content such as infographics, reels, and videos that can be cross shared on all IESBVI's social media accounts.
- Establish a posting schedule to maintain frequent activity on all social media platforms.
- Post job ads on Facebook, LinkedIn, and X and ask those within network to share postings for more visibility and reach.
- Research upcoming college job fairs and graduation ceremonies and plan out involvement for recruiting efforts.
- Network with special education teachers local to Iowa and develop relationships based on engagement online.
- Launch "Our Students Love Our Teachers" and "Grow Your Own" campaigns.
- Plan posting schedule for created content and limit to 2-3 posts each week on all social media platforms.
- Monitor and respond to all job inquiries, direct messages, likes, and comments to better understand the effectiveness of this process.

Quarter 2: Implementation of the Plan

- Analyze and record all social media analytic data one month after start of campaigns.
- Continue networking with key social media users within the special education community.
- Strategize with the online communities on how to create better recruiting methods and implement those strategies in the recruiting plan.
- Maintain relationships with potential recruits and plan visits and gatherings with current staff to foster better relationships.

- Identify and implement any trends seen within online communities to increase awareness engagement.
- Continue monitoring and responding to all job inquiries, direct messages, likes, and comments.

Quarter 3: Increasing Engagement and Reviewing Progress

- Analyze and review all social media analytics from beginning to end of campaigns.
- Attend any upcoming college job fairs or graduations to expand awareness, increase recruitment efforts, and network across the special education community.
- Continue creating content that can be shared and utilize the Hootsuite or Buffer functions to maintain posting schedule.
- Maintain engagement on all social media accounts to ensure frequent activity.

Quarter 4: Evaluation

- Analyze and review all social media analytics from beginning to end of campaigns.
- Continue engaging online with already developed groups.
- Maintain posting schedule and investigate developing a part-time role for an internal social media manager to further develop the plan.
- Adjust new social media plans according to results and outcomes reviewed from this one.