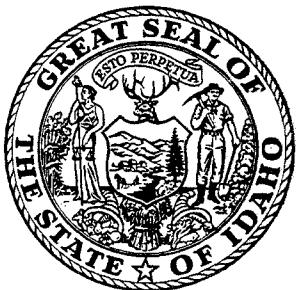


Management Review of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

October 1998

Office of Performance Evaluations
Idaho State Legislature



Report 98-04

This report is available in large print or on cassette. Please call (208) 334-3880 to request a copy of either format.

Created in 1994, the Legislative Office of Performance Evaluations operates under the authority of Idaho Code §§ 67-457 through 67-464. Its mission is to promote confidence and accountability in state government through professional and independent assessment of state agencies and activities, consistent with Legislative intent.

The eight-member, bipartisan Joint Legislative Oversight Committee approves evaluation topics and receives completed reports. Evaluations are conducted by Office of Performance Evaluations staff. The findings, conclusions, and recommendations in the reports do not necessarily reflect the views of the committee or its individual members.

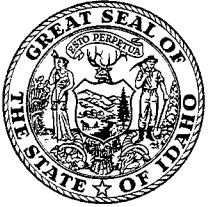
Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
(through date of publication)

Senate

Bruce L. Sweeney, *Co-chair*
Atwell J. Parry
Grant R. Ipsen
Lin Whitworth

House of Representatives

Bruce Newcomb, *Co-chair*
Robert C. Geddes
June E. Judd
Larry Watson



Office of Performance Evaluations

Idaho State Legislature

Joe R. Williams Building
Lower Level, Suite 10
P.O. Box 83720
Boise, Idaho 83720-0055
(208) 334-3880
FAX (208) 334-3871

Nancy Van Maren
Director

**Joint Legislative
Oversight Committee**

Senators

Bruce L. Sweeney, Co-chair
Atwell J. Parry
Grant R. Ipsen
Lin Whitworth

Representatives

Bruce Newcomb, Co-chair
Robert C. Geddes
June E. Judd
Larry C. Watson

September 30, 1998

Members

Joint Legislative Oversight Committee
Idaho State Legislature

In March 1998, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee directed the Office of Performance Evaluations to begin an evaluation of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Several concerns about the operations of the commission were brought to the committee, a number of which will be addressed in a subsequent evaluation. In this evaluation, we focused on issues related to the internal management of the commission and its leadership by a board.

I respectfully submit our completed evaluation for your review and consideration. We conclude that despite uniformly genuine concern for the clients served, the board has not provided sufficient direction and oversight to lead the commission. Also, recent commission management has lacked the leadership ability needed to provide direction for the agency. Further, the commission's organizational structure is unworkable, staff roles are not always clear, and efforts at internal communication have been insufficient, contributing to problems with staff morale.

We recommend several steps be taken to improve the board's ability to effectively govern the commission and ensure an able administrator is hired. We also recommend revisions to the organizational structure and clarification of staff roles and responsibilities, with close monitoring by the commission's leadership over the next 24 months to ensure improvements are implemented.

Throughout this evaluation we received the full cooperation of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. We met at length with the board to discuss means of improving operations and appreciate the interest members expressed in addressing the issues identified.

This report was written and researched by E. M. Akre, a management consultant, with assistance from Office of Performance Evaluations staff.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nancy Van Maren".
Nancy Van Maren

Table of Contents

		Page
Management Review for the Idaho Commission of the Blind and Visually Impaired	Summary of Findings and Recommendations	v
	Introduction	1
	Methods	1
	Background	2
	Summary of Conclusions	4
	Commission Board: Agency Governance	6
	Commission Administrator: Agency Management	9
	Commission Operation: Morale, Roles, and Communication	12
	Recommendations	16
Appendix	Appendix A	19
Responses to the Evaluation	Office of the Governor	25
	Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	27

Summary of Report Findings and Recommendations

1. The board has not provided sufficient direction and oversight to effectively lead the commission. *Page 6.*
2. Staff believe that recent administrators have failed to take the initiative to present the board with emerging issues and information needed to support board decisions. *Page 9.*
3. The commission's current organizational structure is unworkable. *Page 10.*
4. In the absence of effective leadership, issues have gone unresolved, at times impacting the efficiency of commission operations. *Page 11.*
5. Roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations are often unclear, resulting in confusion about who is doing what, who is responsible for directing the work of others, and whether responsibilities are fairly distributed. *Page 14.*
6. Efforts at communication within the agency are inadequate and inconsistent, contributing to staff confusion and mistrust. *Page 15.*
 - We recommend the board take steps to improve its ability to effectively govern the commission. *Page 16.*
 - We recommend the board strengthen the day to day leadership of the commission by hiring an experienced and able chief administrative officer. *Page 16.*
 - We recommend, once a new chief administrative officer has been selected, the board work with the administrator to revise the commission's organizational structure and define staff roles and responsibilities. *Page 17.*

- We recommend the board and administrator then work together to develop a systematic reporting process for tracking commission performance and progress toward completion of initiatives central to agency services outlined in the strategic plan. *Page 18.*

Management Review of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

In March 1998, the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee directed the Office of Performance Evaluations to begin an evaluation of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Specific concerns had been brought to the committee regarding certain client services, agency management and leadership, and potential duplication in responsibilities between the commission and the Idaho Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

This report addresses issues related to the internal management of the commission and its governance by a board. We did not examine client services or attempt to establish the impact the commission's leadership may have had on them. Several of the issues brought to the committee will be addressed in a subsequent report. We asked:

- How effective has the commission's board been in carrying out its responsibilities to guide the commission?
- How well has the commission been managed? Is there room for improvement?
- What impact has recent commission leadership had on commission employees?

We looked at the commission's leadership and its impact on internal operations.

Methods

To answer these questions, we contracted with a consultant with expertise in evaluating management practices, organizational design, and human resource management. As the primary researcher and author of this report, our consultant:

- Interviewed commission board members, program managers, regional counselors, instructors, and support staff and reviewed commission employee concerns received in response to an invitation to all employees to meet individually

with her and/or to submit written documentation of concerns relevant to the evaluation.

- Reviewed available documentation regarding the commission's management practices and performance as well as recent performance appraisal documentation for lead personnel.
- Analyzed data provided by the Office of the State Controller, Employee Information System, and the Idaho Personnel Commission, as well as recent legislative financial audits.
- Interviewed administrators of comparable agencies in other states and reviewed current literature concerning public and nonprofit governance, accountability, planning, communication, community and client relationships, and human resource management.
- Attended an orientation program designed to familiarize participants with the complexities of adjusting to blindness and visual impairments and provide an overview of the skills training available to clients of the commission.
- Reviewed Idaho Code, agency policies and practices, and applicable federal and state regulations.

A five-member board oversees the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Background

The Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired was created in 1967 and is currently found under the Executive Office of the Governor.¹ Idaho Code designates the commission as the agency solely responsible for the vocational and other rehabilitation of the blind. The commission is required to administer programs for the blind as provided in the federal Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1965, as amended.²

A five member commission appointed by the Governor and subject to ratification by the Senate governs an agency that carries out the mandates enumerated in Code. In the remainder of this report, we refer to the five members governing the commission as the "board" and the agency they govern as the "commission."

¹ Prior to 1967, services for the blind were provided through the Department of Public Assistance, now called the Department of Health and Welfare.

² Idaho Code § 67-5408 (1998).

According to Idaho Code, each board member is appointed for a term of three years.³ At least three of the five members must be blind or visually impaired and not more than three are to belong to the same political party. Idaho Code further specifies that the board is responsible for setting policy for commission programs and for hiring a full-time agency administrator.⁴

The 1992 Rehabilitation Act requires that states establish a State Rehabilitation Advisory Council to advise rehabilitation agencies on the performance of vocational rehabilitation responsibilities.⁵ By law the advisory council members must represent a cross-section of constituents. Until 1998, the commission's board acted as the state's advisory council for rehabilitation for the blind and visually impaired.⁶ In January 1998, at the board's request, the Governor expand the membership of the advisory council to include eight outside members, bringing total membership to thirteen.

A full-time administrator serves as secretary to the commission board and is the commission's chief administrative officer.

According to Idaho Code, the administrator is responsible for employing and setting compensation for all other commission employees.⁷

The commission has approval for 44 full-time staff and currently contracts with 3 additional staff. As Figure 1 shows, commission staff deliver client services from the state office and six regional offices. Each regional office has a full-time vocational rehabilitation counselor and clerical staff. Three regions have full-time home instructors, two have contract home instructors, and two regions share an instructor. Reader/drivers assist staff in four regions. The vocational rehabilitation counselors supervise the regional staff, directly provide a number of services, and

By law, the board sets policy for commission programs and hires an administrator.

The administrator acts as board secretary and the commission's chief administrative officer.

³ Idaho Code § 67-5403 (1998).

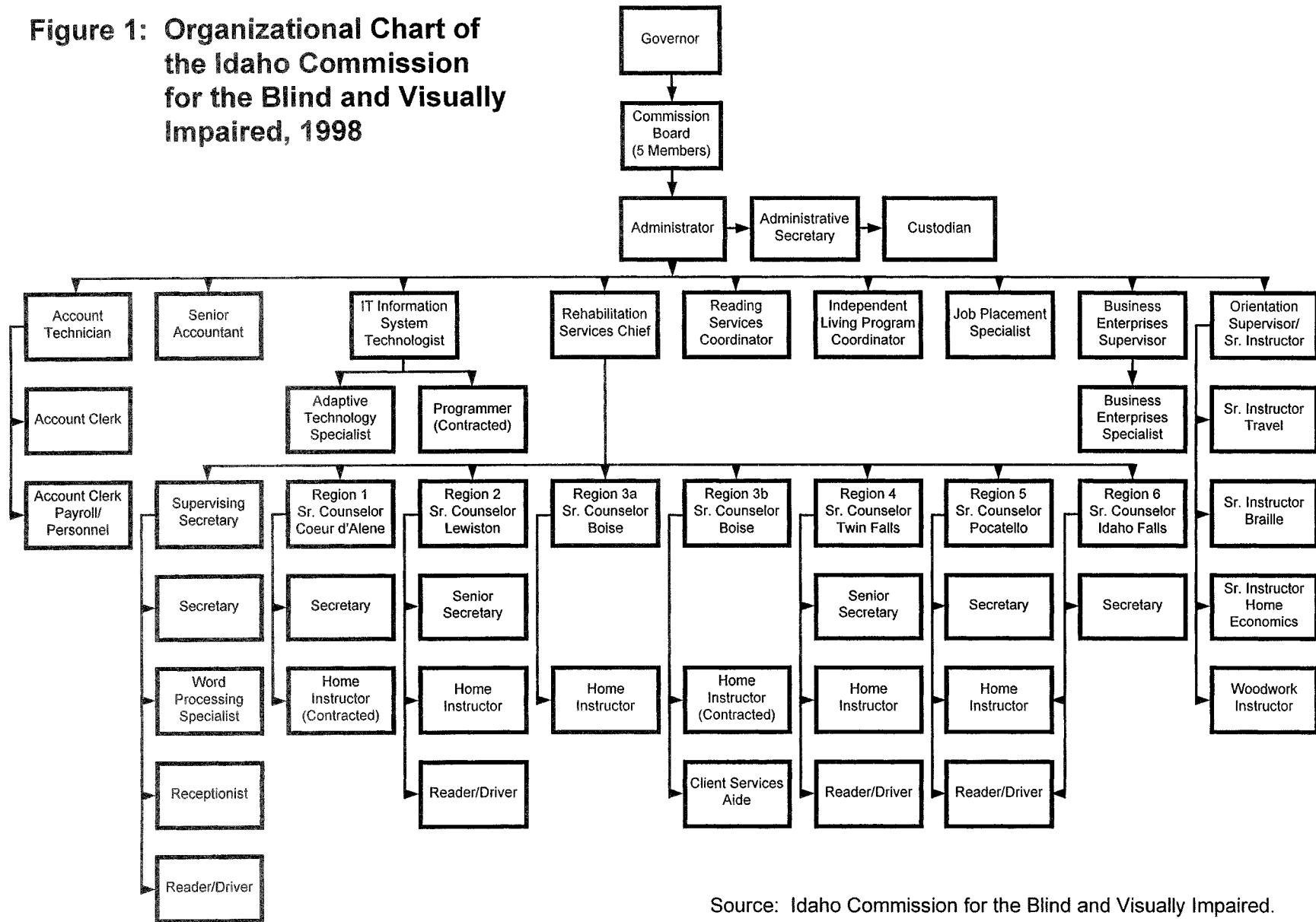
⁴ Idaho Code § 67-5405 (1998).

⁵ Under amendments to the act, this group is now known as the State Rehabilitation Council, effective August 1998.

⁶ Idaho's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has a separate advisory council that advises on the provision of its rehabilitation services.

⁷ Idaho Code § 67-5409 (1998). Idaho Code also requires the administrator to prepare a state plan for vocational rehabilitation of the blind (§ 67-5412) and maintain a statistical register of the blind in Idaho which describes the condition, cause of blindness, and capacity to benefit from agency services (§ 67-5415).

Figure 1: Organizational Chart of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1998



Source: Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

collect service data for submission to the state office. The home instructors teach eligible individuals independent living and vocational rehabilitation skills.

The commission focuses services in three general areas.

- **Vocational services**, including school-to-work transition planning, counseling and guidance, job training, job placement, supported employment, and post-employment services;
- **Independent living services** designed to teach skills to allow individuals to live independently;
- “**State only**” services, to provide financial assistance to defray the costs of sight restoration or blindness prevention for those experiencing hardship as a result of their visual impairment.

The commission also offers a number of other services, such as radio reading, volunteer taping, training in the alternative techniques of blindness (braille, cane travel, computer access technology, and home management). It administers for the state the Federal Randolph-Sheppard Vending Stand Act.⁸

Forty-four staff deliver services from the state office and six regional offices.

Summary of Conclusions

We conclude that despite uniformly genuine concern for the clients they serve, the board of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired has not provided sufficient direction and oversight to effectively lead the commission. Furthermore, commission management has lacked the leadership ability necessary to provide overall program direction and to motivate staff. Inadequate leadership from the board and recent administrators has contributed to problems with internal communication and unclear staff responsibilities and has aggravated an unworkable organizational structure. These problems, in turn, have curtailed the board and administrator in setting and implementing strategic direction for the agency.

We conclude the board has not provided sufficient direction and oversight to lead the commission.

⁸ Pub. Law 732, 49 stat. 1559 (as amended by § 4 of Pub. Law 565, 68 stat. 663; 20 U.S.C. § 107(6A)).

Inadequate leadership from recent administrators has contributed to problems with communication and organizational structure.

Given concerns about over-involvement, the board has not taken action, even when needed.

Although the commission has continued operations during periods of change, key program decisions have been delayed and chronic personnel and information system problems have not been addressed. We recommend several changes to strengthen the board and the commission administrator's ability to effectively manage the operation of the commission, to hire and retain qualified employees, and to develop a client-focused and strategic future for the commission.

Commission Board: Agency Governance

Agency boards are generally responsible for setting the overall direction of an agency, establishing policies, planning, and ensuring that all the functions within the agency are well-managed and effective in providing services.⁹ In our discussions with them, current board members appeared knowledgeable about the expectations of the blind community at large, the types of services clients prefer, and the political environment in which the commission operates. However, we found:

- **The board has not provided sufficient direction and oversight to effectively lead the commission.**

All of the current board members told us they perceived their roles as policy setting, community relations, and client advocacy. Each expressed concerns that a more direct involvement on their part would lead to the board micro-managing the commission. However, given their concern about over-involvement, the board has not taken action even when needed. For example:

- The board took no action to strengthen the leadership of the commission, such as appointing a deputy or interim administrator, when issues arose due to the deteriorating health of a former administrator.
- The board took no action when another former administrator was promoted to the position from within the organization but failed to relinquish his earlier job responsibilities in order to

⁹ Carver, John, *Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations* (San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1990); and Conners, Tracy Daniel, *The Nonprofit Management Handbook: Operating Policies and Procedures* (New York, N.Y., John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993)

focus his full attention on his new responsibilities, even though the board was aware of problems.

- The board did not seek to resolve critical and ongoing problems with agency data systems that created the potential for inaccuracies in reporting. According to board meeting minutes, in September 1997, the Associate Regional Commissioner for the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration expressed his concerns about delinquent accounting reports and problems with the case management system, and signaled the potential for a federal review. However, board members told us they felt problems due to changes in the internal case management system and its reconciliation with the statewide accounting system were inevitable and would resolve themselves over time.

The board has not satisfactorily fulfilled its responsibility to employ a full-time administrator to direct the commission. Since 1995, the commission has been under the direction of an acting administrator 50 percent of the time, due, in part, to insufficient board efforts in hiring appropriate candidates for the administrator position. For example, in 1997, the board hired an administrator for the commission without thoroughly checking the individual's background based on applicant and professional references. Five months after starting work with the commission, the individual selected by the board was placed on administrative leave and was eventually terminated. In two other instances, the board called upon existing commission employees to serve as acting administrators without providing them relief from their other responsibilities.

Furthermore, there is limited evidence the board has provided specific direction to administrators regarding their performance, even though members acknowledged that recent administrators have often lacked important management skills. In late 1995, the board made progress in defining administrator responsibilities: meeting minutes from November and December 1995 indicate the board determined five key areas of responsibility for the administrator and formed a board committee to develop an assessment form.¹⁰ However, we found no record of a form

The board's efforts to hire appropriate administrators in recent years have been insufficient.

Board guidance to administrators regarding performance has been lacking.

¹⁰ The key areas of responsibility were: program administration/coordination; staff management; advocacy; liaison responsibilities; and team facilitation.

having been developed. Further, board minutes from May 1996 indicate the board met in executive session to finalize an evaluation of the administrator. However, no record exists of this or other formal performance appraisal, communication of board expectations, or, when appropriate, plan for corrective action.

**Board review
of program
operations
has often
lacked
sufficient
depth to
determine
program
direction or
policy.**

In addition, although the board asks for information about the operations of the commission and its programs, its review has often been cursory and lacking enough depth to make decisions about program direction or to set policy. For example:

- Board members review portions of the commission's strategic plan and progress reports on the goals in the plan at quarterly board meetings. However, board meeting minutes for the last three years indicate the board has seldom challenged the current direction and mix of services provided by the commission. For example, concerns about the declining number of participants in the Assessment and Training Center were voiced at multiple board meetings in each year we reviewed. While staff and board members are currently looking at ways to increase client use and are implementing pilot programs to determine whether or not the center can draw additional clients, the board has not taken the initiative to evaluate the more fundamental decision: Is this the only way to provide these client services?
- At quarterly board meetings, members receive updates on the financial status of the commission, number of clients served, and ad hoc reports requested for specific programs. Yet these critical updates are given brief periods of time on board agendas.
- Even though, according to staff, the reports the board reviews may be inaccurate and insufficient to indicate the condition of commission operations, there is no record of the board reviewing alternative sources of information.

**Board follow-
through on
key
management
issues has
been lacking.**

Finally, it appears the board has not followed through on initiatives to assist the administrator in correcting key management issues. In 1996 the board reviewed the results of an employee survey that showed, among other things, problems with agency management. In response, they formed employee focus groups to help management address key issues. The focus groups recommended (1) developing a form for supervisor appraisal; (2) improving job descriptions; and (3) making performance

appraisals more accurate and meaningful. However, subsequent minutes do not reflect the board's having given direction regarding implementation of these recommendations.

Furthermore, the same appraisal form was being used in 1998 as in 1995.

As the secretary to the board, the administrator is responsible for ensuring that the commission's board receives the information it needs. However, we found:

- **Staff believe that recent administrators have failed to take the initiative to present the board with emerging issues and information needed to support board decisions.**

Current staff told us they thought recent administrators had failed to take the initiative to make the board aware of emerging issues and present the information the board needed to make decisions. For example, staff told us that the philosophy and policies related to the use of sleep shades and the length of training required at the commission's Assessment and Training Center have been debated for years, but not taken to the board for resolution. According to board minutes for the last three years, the board has not been presented with options or potential costs for providing these services in an alternative fashion or otherwise asked to make a decision that could be used to guide the program and staff.

**Staff
expressed
concern that
recent admin-
istrators have
lacked
initiative in
taking issues
to the board.**

Commission Administrator: Agency Management

In addition to the responsibilities to the board, the administrator is generally responsible for managing the performance of individuals and programs, communicating the board's expectations and policies to staff, gathering input from staff in developing plans, managing daily agency operations, and monitoring the implementation of operational plans and use of available resources to effectively further agency objectives.¹¹

As Figure 2 shows, the commission has experienced a number of changes in leadership in recent years. In 1995, the commission's

¹¹ Conners, Tracy Daniel, *The Nonprofit Management Handbook: Operating Policies and Procedures* (New York, N.Y., John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993).

**Since 1995,
the
commission
has been
under the
direction of
an acting
administrator
50 percent of
the time.**

**The
administrator
directly
supervises
more than
half of all staff
in the state
office.**

administrator retired after a tenure of six years.¹² His replacement, promoted from the Senior Accountant position within the commission, filled the position for seventeen and one-half months, two of which were in an acting capacity. The position was then vacant for five and one-half months, during which the vocational rehabilitation services chief served as acting administrator. A new administrator was hired in 1997 and served five months before being released from his responsibilities in January of this year. The rehabilitation services chief is again serving as acting administrator, directing the commission since that time. The commission is currently in the process of recruiting candidates to fill the administrator position.

We reviewed the commission's current organizational chart and information provided by the Idaho Personnel Commission. We found:

- **The commission's current organizational structure is unworkable.**

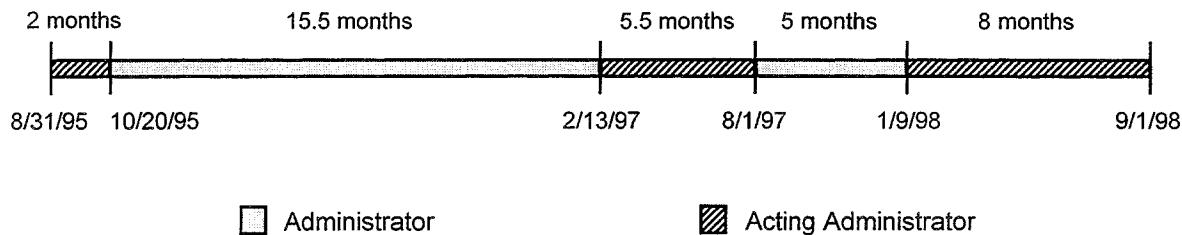
Under the commission's current organizational structure, all six key program managers report directly to the administrator as well as four administrative staff, including the IT Information System Technologist, Senior Accountant, Account Technician, and administrative secretary.¹³ As the commission's organizational chart (Figure 1) shows, only 9 of the 19 positions in the state office are not directly supervised by the administrator.

The current organizational structure has evolved to accommodate the inability of staff members to work effectively together. For example, due to on-going conflict, both the Senior Accountant and Account Technician have recently been reassigned to report directly to the administrator. In addition, the Senior Accountant now has no supervisory responsibility while the Account Technician has supervisory responsibility for one and one-half staff.

¹² During his last year of service, health issues prevented him from thoroughly fulfilling the job responsibilities of the position.

¹³ As the rehabilitation services chief, the commission's current acting administrator also manages a supervising secretary, six vocational rehabilitation counselors and, through them, a staff of home instructors, drivers, and secretaries. Review of organizational charts from neighboring states indicates that four to six positions typically report directly to the director.

Figure 2: Changes in Commission Leadership, August 1995 To September 1998



Source: Personnel records of the Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired; and EIS Position Vacancy reports, Office of the State Controller, Division of Statewide Payroll.

Turnover in commission administrators and the large number of positions that report directly to the administrator have made it difficult to effectively manage the commission, especially during times of transition. We found:

- **In the absence of effective leadership, issues have gone unresolved, at times impacting the efficiency of commission operations.**

According to board members and staff, recent administrators have not exhibited the skills necessary to lead the commission. Staff as well as an agency administrator from a neighboring state who is familiar with the commission told us the commission has historically lacked effective leadership, decision making ability, good communication, and leadership that provides a positive role model. For example, although the commission's philosophy supports the development and practice of personal independence (i.e., skills in cane travel, independent living skills), a recent administrator required personal assistance in navigating the halls of the commission's state offices. He also alienated staff due to poor public behavior and personal interactions. In addition, staff members told us they thought that various administrators have: lacked decision-making ability; had no clear plan to address problematic staff or ongoing program issues; avoided responsibilities and necessary confrontations; or were not effective in dealing with external parties.

**Board
members and
staff said
recent
administra-
tors have not
had the skills
needed to
lead the
commission.**

Employees identified several issues that they felt have gone unresolved due to the lack of leadership within the commission. For example:

In the absence of effective leadership, issues have gone unresolved.

- An ongoing debate about how to classify and record client services;
- The amount of in-house training on changes to the internal data system that should be available and the relative priority of providing technical support to staff;
- Certain equipment needs and efficient access to the statewide accounting system;
- Problems with computer systems on which staff rely for program and service information;
- Individual performance issues that affect other staff; and
- Overall consideration about the future of some key programs.

Commission Operations: Morale, Roles, and Communication

Concerns about staff morale have been identified in employee surveys since 1993.

In our interviews, commission staff reported they had access to sufficient in-service training as well as educational opportunities and were genuinely interested in serving the commission's clients. Despite this, however, staff indicated that unclear expectations about their performance and poor internal communication left them discouraged and demoralized.

Concerns about staff morale were brought to the Oversight Committee in March 1998. Similar concerns were identified in a series of employee surveys the commission conducted in 1993, 1996, and 1998. As shown in Table 1, morale at the commission in 1998 had declined in nearly all departments over morale in either 1996 or 1993. Overall morale at the commission dropped noticeably from 84.4 percent of respondents finding it satisfactory or better in 1996 to just over 44 percent in 1998. Summary survey results are included as Appendix A.¹⁴

¹⁴ The survey covered several generally accepted aspects of effective management: the quality of work, supervision, employee morale, and work productivity. Employees were asked to indicate their perception of their immediate manager, the commission as a whole, and the operations of their department and all other departments within the commission.

Table 1: Commission Employee Perceptions of Agency Morale, by Department, 1993, 1996, 1998

	Percent Rating Satisfactory, Above Average, or Excellent ^a		
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=33	N=34
Commission as a whole	78.4%	84.4%	44.1%
Accounting and data processing	78.4	72.7	47.1
Administration	75.7	68.8	41.2
Building maintenance	59.5	37.5	37.5
Business Enterprise Program	86.1	63.6	38.2 ^b
Home instruction	73.0	74.2	67.7
Orientation and adjustment ^c	43.2	66.7	58.8
Professional support	73.0	57.6	55.9 ^d
Reading services	73.0	57.6	54.5
Rehabilitation services	75.7	63.6	67.7

- ^a Possible responses were: poor, below average, satisfactory, above average, excellent, and do not know.
^b 32.4% of respondents answered do not know.
^c Now known as the Assessment and Training Center.
^d 20.6% of respondents answered do not know.

Source: Office of Performance Evaluations compilation of commission survey results.

In addition, since January 1995, the commission has experienced turnover in 18 of its 44 authorized positions.¹⁵ Some positions have been vacant more than once. In the last 12 months, two regional Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and a Business Enterprise Supervisor have been removed from their positions due to poor performance. Furthermore, as Figure 3 shows, some positions that are central to client service delivery have remained open for extended periods of time.

Some key positions have remained vacant for long periods.

¹⁵ Four of these were administrative support positions (secretary, receptionist, senior secretary and account clerk), two of which remained open approximately 5 to 6 months each.

Figure 3: Length of Vacancies in Key Staff Positions, January 1995 Through August 1998

<u>Position Title</u>	<u>Approximate Number of Months Open</u>
Business Enterprise Program Specialist	2.5 months
Business Enterprise Program Supervisor	4 months
Counselor for the Blind, Idaho Falls	9 months
Counselor for the Blind, Lewiston	3 months
Counselor for the Blind, Twin Falls	4 months, 5 months (currently open)
Home Instructor, Boise	2 months (currently open)
Home Instructor, Idaho Falls	6.5 months
Home Instructor, Twin Falls	3 months
Independent Living Older Blind Coordinator	8 months
IT Information System Technologist	3 months
Public Information Specialist	5 months, then position was deleted
Senior Accountant	5 months
Senior Instructor, Home Economics	7 months
Senior Instructor, Orientation	1 month

Source: End of month position vacancy reports, Division of Statewide Payroll, Office of the State Controller.

We found:

- **Roles, responsibilities, and performance expectations are often unclear, resulting in confusion about who is doing what, who is responsible for directing the work of others, and whether responsibilities are fairly distributed.**

At times, staff were confused about roles and responsibilities.

For example, staff reported not being clear who had responsibility for building and safety issues at the state offices, who could authorize services under the Older Blind program, who could formulate budgets and who should have input, and who could determine the priority for staff computer training. Regional staff indicated it was sometimes difficult to determine who to call in the state office to resolve client issues and that decisions often took longer than they perceived necessary. Further, some staff raised concerns about whether staff responsibilities are fairly and appropriately distributed. For example, the acting administrator indicated he knew of three positions that were potentially underutilized. Also, several individuals indicated they were not certain who should be responsible for needed increases in

referrals to the Assessment and Training Center, regional vocational rehabilitation counselors or orientation center staff.

Finally, we found:

- **Efforts at communication within the agency are inadequate and inconsistent, contributing to staff confusion and mistrust.**

Although attempts are made to keep the board, employees, and clients informed, communication is inadequate to ensure program areas interact. For example:

- With the concurrence of the administrator, a program manager asked regional staff for assistance in a program initiative for migrant outreach after having made initial contacts for them in the regions. However, the regional staff did not follow through on the request, resulting in lost opportunities and an embarrassment to the program manager.
- Administrative staff created an Internet web page using information drawn from existing pamphlets and brochures and launched without reviewing the content with program staff, resulting in errors in the program descriptions included.
- Staff in the Assessment and Training Center reported that, although they rely on regional staff for referrals, the information they receive from regional offices about client abilities and disabilities is often insufficient to determine how to serve them.
- Program management staff reported that it is difficult to generate a monthly report that accurately reflects available funding, due, in part, to poor communication between the staff with the needed information.

In addition, the amount of information shared is inconsistent across program areas. In their discussions with us, some staff members reported feeling well-informed, while others reported feeling frustrated because they were unaware of key issues and initiatives that impact the commission. For example, staff members in one key program area indicated they received thorough briefings on current issues from their supervisor, while staff in other programs stated that they often learned important information from employees in the hall.

**Internal
communi-
cation is
inadequate
and
inconsistent,
contributing
to staff
confusion
and mistrust.**

Recommendations

We conclude that the commission board has not provided effective oversight. Furthermore, commission management has lacked the leadership ability necessary to provide overall program direction and to motivate staff. Ineffective leadership, management and staff turnover, poor internal communication, and low morale have negatively impacted the ability of the commission board and management to effectively set and implement strategic direction for the commission. The commission operates under an unworkable organizational structure, and, according to staff, roles and responsibilities are unclear.

Therefore:

Training and other outside guidance could assist the board in providing needed leadership.

- *We recommend the board take steps to improve its ability to effectively govern the commission.*

The board should consider training in governance and board operations. In addition, the board should solicit guidance from management and business advisors who can provide support and consultation to them regarding the operation of the commission. For example, the board could obtain outside expertise in strategic planning, customer service, information systems, financial management, and performance management. This would provide the board and the administrator support and insight into techniques for managing key operations and exposure to alternative approaches for managing the programs under the commission's charge.

Also:

-
- Staff believe a new administrator should have a clear vision for the commission.**
-
- *We recommend the board strengthen the day to day leadership of the commission by hiring an experienced and able chief administrative officer.*

Commission staff shared with us the characteristics they thought most important for an effective administrator. As Figure 4 shows, staff believe the commission's new administrator must have a clear vision for the direction of the agency, be able to communicate that vision to staff, and collaborate with them to make it happen. They also said the administrator needs to be able to analyze problems objectively using available data, make decisions to address those problems, and then take action.

Figure 4: Desirable Administrator Skills and Objectives, As Identified by Commission Staff, 1998

Staff identified the skills they thought most necessary for an agency administrator. Staff said the agency needed someone who would (in order of importance):

1. Provide leadership.
2. Be a decision maker.
3. Have effective interpersonal communication skills.
4. Be a good role model.
5. Be knowledgeable about blind and visually impaired issues and program requirements.

Staff also outlined the objectives they thought it would be most important for a new administrator to take:

1. Initially focus on internal operations and structure.
2. Have a vision for the future and creative ideas.
3. Motivate staff and improve morale.
4. Hold people accountable, track program and individual performance.
5. Coordinate with other agencies and the Legislature.

Source: Interviews with Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired staff, August 1998.

To better ensure that an able administrator is hired to lead the commission, the board should avail itself of the services and expertise of the Idaho Personnel Commission throughout the hiring process. Specifically, the Personnel Commission could assist in recruiting and screening candidates for the position, assessing the skills and abilities of each candidate, conducting background and reference checks, and developing clearly defined job performance expectations. This would help ensure the board is presented with qualified candidates, receives ample feedback on the past performance of finalists, and establishes well-defined performance expectations. In addition, this would assist the commission in avoiding the recurring costs associated with frequent recruiting efforts and terminations due to poor performance.

**The
commission
leadership
should devise
a workable
organizational
structure.**

Furthermore:

- *We recommend, once a new chief administrative officer has been selected, the board work with the administrator to revise the commission's organizational structure and define staff roles and responsibilities.*

The performance of lead personnel should be evaluated quarterly over the next 24 months to ensure responsibilities are fulfilled.

The commission's board and administrator should develop a more appropriate organizational structure for the commission. Development of the structure should lead to clear reporting relationships, well-defined lines of accountability, and individual performance expectations that are thoroughly communicated and evaluated.

To ensure that key commission staff are fulfilling their defined roles and responsibilities, the performance of each manager and lead personnel responsible for the operation of the commission should be evaluated quarterly over the next 24 months. To accomplish this, the board and administrator should use the commission's current performance appraisal format to review progress against performance goals. Board members should receive copies of the reviews quarterly. Clear expectations and performance feedback will help staff and the board know when recognition is in order and when corrective action is required and, overall, allow them to maintain their focus on serving clients.

Finally:

- *We recommend the board and administrator then work together to develop a systematic reporting process for tracking commission performance and progress toward completion of initiatives central to agency services outlined in the strategic plan.*

A tracking and reporting process would provide the information needed for decision-making, planning, and accountability.

The process should provide for routine and ongoing reporting of agency services and accomplishments that can be compared to commission goals and timetables established to ensure efficient completion of projects supporting each initiative. In addition, the board should receive a quarterly performance update in advance of its quarterly board meeting. This will help ensure that the board has adequate information for decisions related to the operation of the commission by enabling members to track and verify completion of key projects, technology improvements, and the implementation of policy direction. Such a system would also enhance the board's ability to plan for the future of the commission.

Appendix A

Survey Results

Topic 1: Performance of Immediate Supervisor

Possible responses: <i>never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always</i>	Percent Responding <u>Often or Always</u>		
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=33	N=34
1. Attempts to keep subordinates well informed about their job responsibilities	64.9%	65.7%	72.7%
2. Supplies information subordinates need to do their job	62.2	64.5	69.7
3. Provides meaningful feedback on job performance	58.3	50.0	57.6
4. Is receptive to and asks for suggestions & opinions of others	73.0	63.6	69.7
5. Listens carefully when others speak	64.9	69.7	66.7
6. Is accessible when needed	62.2	60.6	63.6
7. Is sensitive to the feelings of others	56.8	62.5	71.9
8. Observes acceptable job etiquette	77.8	84.8	79.4
9. Supports subordinates' actions and decisions	73.0	71.9	63.6
10. Creates a positive work environment	67.6	64.5	66.7
11. Establishes clear goals and standards for subordinates	59.5	59.4	63.6
12. Works out a course of action rather than just reacting	62.2	56.3	64.7
13. Is decisive	64.9	45.2	51.5
14. Evaluates solutions after they have been implemented	56.8	43.8	59.4
15. Does long-range planning and prioritized work	48.6	53.1	70.6
16. Gives work instructions in a clear and complete manner	40.5	56.3	57.6
17. Defines subordinates' roles and responsibilities clearly	48.6	62.5	59.4
18. Conducts staff meetings on a timely basis	63.9	71.9	81.8
19. Accepts responsibility for decisions and problems	73.0	71.0	66.7
20. Is willing to admit a mistake or omission	62.2	50.0	66.7
21. Balances workload among subordinates	64.9	48.4	69.7
22. Recognizes and rewards good work	64.9	43.8	62.5
23. Treats you fairly	83.8	75.8	75.8
24. Follows through	59.5	48.4	60.6
25. Gives you input on important decisions	70.3	59.4	69.7
26. Encourages problem solving and new ideas	67.6	62.5	81.3
27. Gives you clear directions	45.9	50.0	56.3
28. Evaluates your performance fairly	75.7	59.4	78.8
29. Does your supervisor fulfill his/her job responsibilities as you see them	62.2	62.5	75.8

[Table continued on page 20]

*[Continued]***Topic 1: Performance of Immediate Supervisor**

	Percent Responding <u>Often or Always</u>		
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=33	N=34
30. Deals with poor performance	62.2	40.6	53.1
31. Gives you authority to carry out your responsibilities	81.1	84.4	84.8
32. Provides the training you need to advance	78.4	56.3	75.8
33. Encourages teamwork	70.3	74.2	81.3
34. Plans for the future	55.6	54.5	60.6
35. Maintains high productivity and efficiency	54.1	45.5	57.6
36. Promotes employee safety	83.3	61.3	75.0

Topic 2: Quality of Work Performed by Commission as a Whole and by Department

Possible responses: poor, below average, satisfactory, above average, excellent, and do not know

Percent Responding Satisfactory,
Above Average, or Excellent

	Percent Responding Satisfactory, <u>Above Average, or Excellent</u>		
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=33	N=34
1. Commission as a whole	91.9%	96.9%	85.3%
2. Rehabilitation Services	94.6	84.8	88.2
3. Home Instruction	78.4	83.3	82.4
4. Orientation and adjustment ^a	70.3	71.0	70.6
5. Administration	81.1	84.4	55.9
6. Accounting and data processing	86.5	81.8	63.6
7. Business Enterprise Program	83.8	75.8	69.7
8. Professional support	86.5	84.4	73.5
9. Reading services	75.7	66.7	61.8
10. Building maintenance	75.7	43.8	42.4

^a Now known as the Assessment and Training Center.

Topic 3: Quality of Management of Commission as a Whole and by Department

Possible responses: poor, below average, satisfactory, above average, excellent, and do not know

Percent Responding Satisfactory,
Above Average, or Excellent

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=32	N=34
1. Commission as a whole	75.7%	83.9%	61.8%
2. Rehabilitation Services	83.8	62.5	76.5
3. Home Instruction	70.3	64.5	73.5
4. Orientation and adjustment ^a	56.8	62.5	67.7
5. Administration	69.4	65.6	44.1
6. Accounting and data processing	70.3	64.5	55.9
7. Business Enterprises Program	83.8	75.0	64.7
8. Professional support	75.7	71.9	67.7
9. Reading services	81.1	56.3	45.5
10. Building maintenance	73.0	50.0	47.1

^a Now known as the Assessment and Training Center.

Topic 4: Morale of Commission as a Whole and by Department

Possible responses: poor, below average, satisfactory, above average, excellent, and do not know

Percent Responding Satisfactory,
Above Average, or Excellent

	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
	N=37	N=33	N=34
1. Commission as a whole	78.4%	84.4%	44.1%
2. Rehabilitation Services	75.7	63.6	67.7
3. Home Instruction	73.0	74.2	67.7
4. Orientation and adjustment ^a	43.2	66.7	58.8
5. Administration	75.7	68.8	41.2
6. Accounting and data processing	78.4	72.7	47.1
7. Business Enterprises Program	86.1	63.6	38.2 ^b
8. Professional support	73.0	57.6	55.9 ^c
9. Reading services	73.0	57.6	54.5
10. Building maintenance	59.5	37.5	37.5

^a Now known as the Assessment and Training Center.

^b 32.4% of respondents answered do not know.

^c 20.6% of respondents answered do not know.

Topic 5: Productivity and Efficiency of Commission as a Whole and by Department

<i>Possible responses: poor, below average, satisfactory, above average, excellent, and do not know</i>	Percent Responding Satisfactory, <u>Above Average, or Excellent</u>		
	<u>1993</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1998</u>
N=37	N=33	N=34	
1. Commission as a whole	89.2%	87.5%	82.4%
2. Rehabilitation Services	86.5	69.7	76.5
3. Home Instruction	72.2	68.8	67.7
4. Orientation and adjustment ^a	64.9	62.5	61.8
5. Administration	72.2	65.6	44.1
6. Accounting and data processing	86.5	81.8	72.7
7. Business Enterprise Program	81.1	65.6	67.7
8. Professional support	86.5	69.7	70.6
9. Reading services	86.5	51.5	47.1
10. Building maintenance	78.4	37.5	44.1

^a Now known as the Assessment and Training Center.

Responses to the Evaluation



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

P.O. BOX 83720

BOISE 83720-0034

PHILIP E. BATT
GOVERNOR

(208) 334-2100

September 30, 1998

Nancy Van Maren
Office of Performance Evaluations
Idaho State Legislature
Statehouse Mail

Dear Ms. Van Maren:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your study of the management of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired.

I understand that you and your consultant spent considerable time talking with ICBVI members about your findings and your recommendations. I believe this was a good learning opportunity for the commissioners, particularly since they are about to begin selecting a new administrator. Your recommendations should help the commissioners clarify their responsibilities to the administrator, the staff, their clients, and to the public.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Philip E. Batt".

Philip E. Batt
Governor

PEB:lh



PHILIP E. BATT
Governor

STATE OF IDAHO COMMISSION FOR THE BLIND & VISUALLY IMPAIRED

341 W. WASHINGTON ST.
P.O. BOX 83720
BOISE, IDAHO 83720-0012
(208) 334-3220
FAX (208) 334-2963



September 30, 1998

Nancy Van Maren
Office of Performance Evaluations
Joe R. Williams Office Building
Boise, ID 83720-0055

RE: ICBVI AGENCY RESPONSE

Dear Ms. Van Maren,

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners for the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired, I offer this agency response to the report from the Office of Performance Evaluations.

ICBVI Commission Board

This report clearly describes a much greater level of involvement on the part of ICBVI's Board of Commissioners. The Board traditionally does not involve itself in the day-to-day activities of the agency, however, the Board is examining its present mode of operation and considering an increased level of administrative oversight. There are several options the Board is presently considering including:

- increasing the frequency of Board meetings allowing Board members to specialize in one area of the Commission in terms of their expertise;
- appointing one member of the Board or an executive committee of the Board to meet frequently with the administrator;
- the principle means the Board could exercise this administrative oversight would be through a performance appraisal system for the Administrator that would clearly describe objectives and strategies. This basic tool of supervision could be monitored periodically (90 days) to communicate clearly the direction and outcomes expected by the Board.

Nancy Van Maren
September 30, 1998
Page 2

Organizational Structure

Many of the issues related to morale and communication come from the unworkable nature of ICBVI's organizational structure. We agree that the present reporting pattern places too much central control in the Administrator's office. Over the past two years this has been compounded by the Rehabilitation Services Chief filling also the Acting Administrator's role (17 individuals reporting to one acting administrator). The Board has also been in contact with the Attorney General's Office and the Idaho Personnel Commission to assist in the recruitment process for a new administrator. With the hiring of a new administrator it is hoped the organizational structure will be re-examined with the goal of re-establishing supervisory relationships and clear objectives and reporting responsibilities.

Administrative Issues

Information Technology. Our case management system is one we developed ourselves. As such, it went through a period of adolescence where the data was not always accurate. Recent indicators are that the data has greatly improved. Examples of this are the major federal report regarding client services (RSA-113) had 280 data errors in the 1996 report and 0 errors in the 1997 report. Data related to the 704 and 70B report (these are reports for our independent living programs) to the best of our knowledge, is accurate. The definition of the terms used in these reports, a clear definition of client and a clear definition of services, is the subject of national debate. We are working towards identifying consistent means of measuring these data elements for ICBVI.

The Assessment and Training Center. The Acting Administrator, at the direction of the Board has been exploring alternative ways to utilize the Orientation Center. At an in-service training conducted June 30 and July 1 we piloted several alternative ways to utilize the staff and resources of the orientation center. If, after a period of six months, these alternatives have not increased the number of clients served, other alternatives will be considered.

Issues Affected by Personnel Matters. Many of the antidotes described in the OPE report are being addressed through personnel and supervisory strategies and remedies. These issues were not discussed with the reviewer since they are of a confidential nature. It should not be construed that there is no clear plan to address these issues.

Nancy Van Maren

September 30, 1998

Page 3

Summary. Overall, we agree with the concerns described in the report. In many instances we have already initiated action which we believe will address these concerns. Although we may take issue with many of the specific examples sited we find that the overall recommendations in the final section of the report are recommendations we agree with. Many of the recommendations have already been acted upon. In the coming 12 months we will be reviewing this report to look at what further steps we can take to ensure the responsible operation of this agency to ensure the best services possible for the blind and visually impaired.

Sincerely,



Mike Blackaller
Acting Administrator

MB/mjs

Completed Performance Evaluations

<u>Publication Number</u>	<u>Report Title</u>	<u>Date Released</u>
95-01	State Travel Management	August 1995
95-02	Medicaid Services for Children With Disabilities	November 1995
96-01	Safety Busing in Idaho School Districts	February 1996
96-02	Oversight of Pupil Transportation Contracts	February 1996
96-03	Use of Bus Routing Software in Idaho School Districts	May 1996
96-04	Contracted Versus District-Operated Pupil Transportation Programs: An Analysis of Cost and Program Differences	May 1996
96-05	State-Owned Dwellings	October 1996
96-06	Estimating and Reducing the Tax Gap in Idaho	December 1996
97-01	License Plate Design Royalties Paid to the Idaho Heritage Trust	May 1997
97-02	The Bishop's House Historic Site	July 1997
97-03	Alternatives to Incarceration: Opportunities and Costs	December 1997
98-01	Public School Use of Tobacco Tax Funds	January 1998
98-02	Medicaid Reimbursement for Outpatient Occupational and Speech Therapy	June 1998
98-03	Management of State Agency Passenger Vehicles	October 1998
98-04	Management Review of the Idaho Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired	October 1998

Performance evaluations may be obtained free of charge from the
Office of Performance Evaluations • P.O. Box 83720 • Boise, ID 83720-0055
Phone: (208) 334-3880 • Fax: (208) 334-3871

Desktop Publishing by Margaret Campbell