

Strategic Issue:

Ensuring equitable access to information and services for all

Ensuring equitable access to information and library services for Idahoans with disabilities, those in rural communities, English–language learners, people living in poverty, and other underserved communities is crucial. Idaho has a several challenges.

- Nearly half (49%) of all K–12 students were eligible for free or reduced lunch in 2015.
- Idaho’s mountainous and vast area make communication, traveling, and increasing access to broadband connectivity a challenge.
- In 2016–2017, 10.5 percent of Idaho students were receiving special education services.

Idaho’s population is growing at a rapid pace. The state’s population increased by a million people in the past 50 years and continues to outpace the U.S. growth rate. A new forecasting model developed by the Idaho Department of Labor suggests Idaho’s population will grow at three times the national rate between now and 2025 – and nearly all the new residents will be retirees moving to the state. The forecasting model predicts that Idaho’s population will grow 15.3 percent from 2015 to 2025, reaching 1.9 million. The model also suggests an increasing urbanization trend in Idaho, with more than two–thirds of the population growth expected to occur in Ada, Canyon, and Kootenai Counties. By 2025, it shows the share of Idaho’s population living in urban counties increasing from 70.6 percent to 74.3 percent.

According to the 2017 [“Hispanic Profile Data Book for Idaho”](#) published by the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs, Idaho Hispanics make up 12 percent of Idaho’s population and 18 percent of K–12 public school students. Hispanics accounted for 30 percent of the state’s population growth between 2010 and 2015 and 42% of K–12 public school enrollment growth between the 2010–11 and 2015–16 school years. In terms of education, Idaho Hispanic students are less proficient in basic subjects and less prepared for college and career than non–

Hispanics, based on standardized test scores. Students in the English Learner program score the lowest on standardized tests. Compared to non-Hispanics, Hispanics in Idaho have higher unemployment and poverty rates. They also have lower average annual wages and household income.

If information becomes available only in certain areas or only to those who can afford it, our economy and the basic foundations of our democracy as well as each individual's quality of life is at risk. This plan helps address some of the barriers that are currently limiting access for all Idahoans.

(Sources for Goal 3: Idaho State Department of Education, Idaho Department of Labor via [Spokesman Review article](#), and Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs)

Action Steps for Trustees

1. Find out what your library is doing to reach underserved populations and support efforts for staff to get out of the library to do outreach and promote the library throughout your community or service area.
2. Learn more about the Talking Book Service and other underutilized programs that many in your community may be eligible for but may not be aware of. Idaho Commission for Libraries staff are often also available to present to trustees and others throughout the state. Share information with service clubs, church groups, or other groups you may belong to.
3. Identify the barriers to library service and brainstorm ways you can further remove those barriers to library service.
4. Identify local agencies and nonprofit organizations that serve underserved people in your community and consider potential partnerships to address common goals.

5. Research the demographics in your community and ensure those demographics are represented in your board make-up and that the needs of underserved communities are considered when working on policies and plans.



Idaho's Talking Book Service director is happy to share brochures and do presentations in your community. Contact Sue Walker at ICfL, 1-800-458-3271 for more information!