



Revitalized and Ready: Centering Cities in Iowa

Iowa League of Cities 2025 – 2027 Strategic Plan

Introduction

For over a century, the Iowa League of Cities has stood as the collective voice and resource for municipalities across Iowa. Our 2025-2027 Strategic Plan, *“Revitalized and Ready: Centering Cities in Iowa,”* builds upon this legacy, positioning us to address the evolving challenges and opportunities ahead. Cities are vital to the prosperity and wellbeing of Iowans and centering cities in policy will lead to a stronger Iowa. Through reimagined advocacy, empowering leadership, amplifying the value of city government, and investing in our mission, we are committed to shaping a brighter future for Iowa’s cities and towns.

Letter from the President



From its humble beginnings in 1898, the Iowa League of Cities has been the collective voice of cities and towns across our state, helping municipal officials navigate the ever-changing landscape of local government. As we enter 2025, it is time for the League to lead Iowa into the second quarter of the 21st Century.

The challenges ahead are many. They are complicated, simultaneously global and local, new and familiar. Thankfully, the Iowa League of Cities is uniquely positioned to meet this moment.

The strategic plan outlined in these pages will serve as the guide for the League and all member cities as we navigate the road ahead together. This plan has been shaped by the League's Executive Board and staff and is built around four key strategies:

- 1. Reimagine Advocacy:** Advocating for Iowa's cities has transformed in the face of shifting political winds. The League remains the trusted voice for cities, reinvigorating efforts to provide the strongest and most effective advocacy for city issues.
- 2. Empower Members:** The League is dedicated to equipping city leaders with the tools and knowledge necessary to excel, maintaining our gold standard of excellence as the go-to resource for training and education.
- 3. Amplify the Power of City Government:** Iowa's cities and towns are central to our state's success. The League will share the many positive stories of city government while supporting cities in communicating their value to residents and businesses.
- 4. Invest in Our Mission:** A strong foundation is essential to achieving our goals. The League will strengthen its Board of Directors and empower its staff, ensuring we remain a premier organization for years to come.

The work ahead will not be easy, but the opportunities are even greater. I extend my gratitude to the Iowa League of Cities Executive Board, League staff, and each member city and town for your unwavering commitment. Together, we will continue to build on the storied history of our League and create a successful future for all those we serve.

Brad Cavanagh
Mayor of Dubuque

Mission

The Iowa League of Cities serves as the unified voice of cities, providing advocacy, training and guidance to strengthen Iowa's communities.

We recognize the need for strong leadership in our missions and in each of our values. These values represent the shared principles that guide all of our efforts and decisions.



Where We Come From

The Iowa League of Cities has been serving as a key resource for municipalities since 1898 when a small group of city officials gathered in Marshalltown to exchange ideas on how to strengthen and improve local government in Iowa. Those officials had a vision. They recognized that by joining together as one voice, all cities would benefit – then and in the future. The League continues this tradition of creating a supportive network of cities across Iowa to share solutions, aid our neighbors, and speak on behalf of local governments to provide the best public service to all Iowans. More than 850 of the cities in Iowa, both large and small, are League members and the League empowers and supports them in making Iowa strong.

What We Do

Through membership services, research, publications, training, and collaboration, the League provides guidance and serves as the resource for Iowa's cities. We lead a grassroots advocacy effort for city governments by promoting excellent public policy and local self-governance among members and in collaboration with state and federal lawmakers.

What We Want to Achieve

With this plan, the League sets out its three-year plan to best pursue our mission and further strengthen Iowa's cities. This document outlines the strategies, goals, and outcomes our staff and board have identified as high priorities for the next few years while setting up Iowa's cities for a more successful future.

The Plan in Brief

The Iowa League of Cities is committing to this strategic plan to guide our work for the next three years. The four strategies below represent the top priorities as identified by the League’s Board of Directors, staff, and members. We believe in the future of Iowa’s cities and this plan will help the League empower its members and strengthen our communities.

STRATEGY:	Reimagine Advocacy: A Reinvigorated and Trusted Voice for All Cities
OUTCOMES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policies and positions that enhance effectiveness and adaptability to evolving legislative dynamics.• Recognition as a collective advocate and trusted expert on municipal issues.• Positive and productive relationships with the Governor’s Office and State Legislators.• Expanded and strengthened coalitions with city-affiliated and statewide advocacy groups.• City officials who are actively engaged and well-equipped to advocate effectively for municipal priorities.

STRATEGY:	Empower Members: Developing and Building Leaders in Iowa Cities
OUTCOMES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Established reputation as the trusted voice representing all cities in Iowa.• Visible presence in member cities through meetings in city halls, community centers, libraries, cafes, etc.• Continued recognition as the “gold standard” for excellence in training and education resources.• City officials equipped with the skills and knowledge to address trends and emerging issues successfully.

STRATEGY:	Amplify the Power of City Government: Sharing Our Positive Message
OUTCOMES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Positioning Iowa cities as premier employers offering meaningful career opportunities that positively impact communities.• A respected and strong reputation for city government statewide.• Consistent sharing of city success stories through publications, online platforms, social media, newsletters, and events.• Development of innovative tools to assist city officials in marketing, promotion, and recruitment efforts.• Enhanced public awareness of the importance and value of local government for citizens and businesses.

STRATEGY:	Invest in Our Mission: A Unified Board and Staff Team
OUTCOMES:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An engaged, empowered, and effective Board, providing strong leadership.• Board positions that are highly valued and sought after by city officials.• Recognition as an employer of choice with a robust and healthy organizational culture.• A strategic plan that is current, actionable, and effectively integrated into operations.

Strategies and Goals with Actions Steps



Reimagine Advocacy: A Reinvigorated and Trusted Voice for All Cities

GOALS:

- Refine the policy development process, lobbying strategies, and tactics to ensure alignment with desired outcomes.
- Create tools and initiatives that empower city officials to actively and effectively participate in advocacy efforts.
- Evaluate and enhance communication, outreach, and messaging strategies used during legislative sessions.
- Secure positive legislative outcomes on key issues that matter to cities.
- Lead efforts to build coalitions and partnerships with affiliates and stakeholder groups to strengthen advocacy initiatives.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **Policy Development Review:** After the 2025 Legislative Session, the Government Affairs team will assess the policy development process and collaborate with the Legislative Policy Committee to implement updates. This review will occur after the 2026 and 2027 sessions as well.
2. **Legislative Champions Network:** Establish a network of Legislative Champions, with representatives from each district, to spearhead advocacy initiatives.
3. **Communications Audit:** Conduct a legislative communications audit following each session to identify areas for improvement and successful strategies.
4. **Coalition Building:** Expand and strengthen partnerships with organizations such as statewide associations, industry groups, and governmental partners to amplify advocacy efforts.

Empower Members: Developing and Building Leaders in Iowa Cities

GOALS:

- Establish a sustainable plan to incorporate on-site city visits as a core element of the League's operations, engaging both board and staff.
- Evaluate and enhance communication methods, messaging strategies, and tactics to ensure relevance and effectiveness.
- Review and invest in the League's comprehensive training and education programs to address member needs and expand resources as required.
- Implement a system to track and analyze member interactions to assess service levels and prioritize efforts effectively.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **City Engagement Program Proposal:** Staff will create a proposal for a city engagement program to present to the Board, outlining the required resources and support from Board members.
2. **Member Survey on Communication:** In spring 2025, Communications and Membership Services will conduct a member survey to gather insights on communication strategies, preferred channels, and content needs.
3. **Training Program Audit:** Membership Services will review current training and education offerings, identifying resource gaps and opportunities for expansion to present to the Board.
4. **Metrics Tracking:** The League will track metrics for member services and interactions to evaluate and improve the League's support efforts.

Strategies and Goals with Actions Steps, *continued*

Amplify the Power of City Government: Sharing Our Positive Message

GOALS:

- Collaborate with city staff to enhance communication and storytelling strategies.
- Develop and provide marketing, promotional, and educational materials for cities to use.
- Establish and maintain a comprehensive database of city success stories.
- Create a toolkit for cities to use during election campaigns.
- Promote civil behavior, dialogue, and positive engagement in local government.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **Engagement and Education Work Session:** Convene a diverse group of city communication staff, city clerks, and elected officials for a collaborative session focused on citizen engagement and education strategies.
2. **City Storytelling Resources:** Develop new materials and resources to support city storytelling, including a City Social Media Toolkit and other promotional aids.
3. **Communications Audit:** Conduct an audit of existing communication strategies and tools to identify areas for improvement. Trim ineffective channels and prioritize effective ones, with a focus on enhancing the reputation of city government and highlighting its value to businesses and residents.
4. **City Candidates Guide:** Update the City Candidates Guide, working closely with cities and the Secretary of State and County Auditor's Offices to ensure its relevance and effectiveness.
5. **Advocacy for Local Government:** Encourage the Board and city officials to actively promote the value of city government and share positive stories about local projects and their impact on the community.

Invest in Our Mission: A Unified Board and Staff Team

GOALS:

- Redesign the board orientation process to ensure clarity, engagement, and alignment.
- Explore innovative ideas and best practices for enhancing Board roles and engagement.
- Embed the strategic plan into the daily operations and culture of the Board and staff.
- Evaluate staffing levels in membership services and government affairs to ensure adequate support.
- Assess and strengthen the organizational culture.

ACTION STEPS:

1. **Board Orientation Redesign:** League leadership, Communications, and the Executive Board will review the current board orientation process, creating updated materials and introducing new processes for incoming board members.
2. **Strategic Plan Integration:** Provide quarterly progress reports on the Strategic Plan to the Board, ensuring alignment and accountability.
3. **Board Work Session:** Host a dedicated work session to redefine and strengthen Board roles and engagement strategies for the future.
4. **Staffing Analysis:** Conduct a detailed evaluation of staffing levels in membership services and government affairs to determine if additional resources or adjustments are necessary.
5. **Compensation Review:** Perform an internal compensation assessment to ensure competitive and fair practices.
6. **Organizational Culture Improvements:** Implement ongoing improvements based on insights from the 2024 staff surveys, fostering a supportive and collaborative workplace environment.

Implementation and Communication



The League Board and staff commit to the following steps to ensure the success of this plan:

1. Publish and share the strategic plan on the website, in *Cityscape*, newsletters, etc.
2. Create a one-page summary to publish, distribute and share widely.
3. Conduct an all-staff meeting to present the plan and discuss the next steps.
4. Build implementation of the plan into staff work plans and individual goals.
5. Hold quarterly management team meetings to discuss work to date.
6. As appropriate, integrate discussions of the plan into current member engagements.
7. Consider the goals and action steps for funding in the budget process.
8. Every quarter, brief the Board on the status of the goals and action steps.
9. Annual formal review with the Board; update and change goals and action steps.
10. Celebrate achievements with thanks and recognition.

Closing Remarks

Together, with the support of our Board, staff, and members, the Iowa League of Cities is revitalized and ready to center cities in Iowa's future. This plan is not just a guide—it is a commitment to Iowa's cities, ensuring their strength and resilience for generations to come.