

The Edge Initiative for Public Libraries – Building a National Data Set

January 2014

What is the Edge Initiative?

Edge is a management and leadership tool that will help public libraries assess their current technology services and make improvements that will better serve their communities. The next phase of this exciting initiative will launch nationally in late January 2014. A select number of public libraries across the country have been invited to **participate at no cost and help build a national data set for the Edge Initiative.**

More About the Edge Initiative

The *Edge Initiative* was developed by a coalition of leading library and local government organizations with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and led by the Urban Libraries Council. Partners include, among others, the Public Library Association, the International City/County Managers Association, OCLC's WebJunction, ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy, the University of Maryland and the University of Washington. *Edge* was created with the vision that all people should have opportunities to enrich and improve their lives through open access to information, communication and technology services provided by public libraries.

How will public libraries benefit from participating in Edge?

There is value in using the *Edge* Benchmarks to assess and improve your library. Your *Edge* results will provide a snapshot of the library's current public technology services along with steps to make improvements. In addition, you will have the tools necessary to work more closely with your local leaders to address community issues. There are three key benefits for participating:

1. Assess the use of public access technology,
2. Identify specific ways to strengthen or enhance public access technology, and
3. Engage with key leaders about the role for the public library in improving communities.

The *Edge* team has received positive feedback from public libraries throughout the development process, and here are two recent comments received from participating library directors:

"Edge helps us convince the leaders on our Board and in our community that we need additional financial resources. It adds another nationally recognized, thoughtful assessment and Edge is proving what we've been saying all along, but didn't have the evidence to back up: public libraries play an important role in access to technology." Karen Danczak Lyons, Director, Evanston Public Library (IL)

"After working through the Edge Assessment and developing our action plan, I realized that Edge is where I want our library to go. This is a wonderful evaluation tool, and I wanted to tackle all of the recommendations at once, but my Board narrowed my focus and now I'm working on getting 100% of the Level 1 recommendations before moving on to higher levels." Dottie Davis, Library Director, Durant Public Library (OK)

Your Library's Important Role in the National Sample

To further enhance the value of *Edge* and help libraries understand their results, library leaders across the country who have tested *Edge* have asked for ways to compare themselves with peers. With your help, the *Edge* team is ready to deliver. Your results will be used (anonymously) to create peer comparison reports for all *Edge* libraries.

What is the Timetable?

The national launch for this phase of *Edge* will occur in late January 2014. The basic timeline is as follows:

- **Beginning January 22** - claim your library's *Edge* account at www.libraryedge.org. Simply, click the "Sign Up" button that will be located at the top right corner of the *Edge* home page.
- **During February/March** - a member of the *Edge* Team and someone from your library system and/or the State Library will follow-up to see if you need assistance in completing the Assessment.
- **By March 31** - complete the *Edge* Assessment for your library, which will take approximately two hours.
- **Once the Assessment is completed** - your library will have customized access to all of the other *Edge* tools and resources, including access to training and support for the remainder of 2014 - at no charge.

More information about the *Edge Initiative* is available at: <http://www.libraryedge.org/>

Also, here is the link to a recent article about *Edge* in the January/February 2014 issue of American Libraries magazine:

<http://www.americanlibrariesmagazine.org/issue/januaryfebruary-2014>

Questions? Please contact:

Amy Heebner, Library Development Specialist, New York State Library, ahuebner@mail.nysed.gov

Jake Cowan, Senior Program Manager, Edge Initiative, Urban Libraries Council, jcowan@urbanlibraries.org