Case Study
Miami Public Library (OK)
Marcia Johnson, Library Director
By Alison Saffold

The City of Miami, Oklahoma
In a small community of less than 14,000 people and a median household income of $35,000, Miami, Oklahoma is the Gateway City to Oklahoma! This 9.8 square mile community touts the Coleman Theatre, its Historic Landmark, as the jewel of Route 66. The city is rich in Native American history and is home to nine Native American Tribal Headquarters. Seventeen percent of the population is Native American.

Miami Public Library and the Edge Initiative
In early 2011, the Miami Public Library was invited to participate in the Edge Initiative as a pilot library. Library Director Marcia Johnson was excited about testing the tools - even in its beta form – because she finds value in assessment and evaluation activities and "likes to know what the standards are that I should be working toward for my community."

In the summer of 2012, Marcia and her team worked through the Edge Beta Benchmarks assessment workbook (at the time the Edge online tool was not available), received their score report a few weeks later, identified areas where they could improve and offer more, and hit the ground running with engaging the City of Miami's City Council, Mayor and City Manager to make recommendations for improved services and programs for the community, and increased training for both staff and patrons of the library.

Library Director Johnson shared her experiences with the Edge Initiative in a recent conversation about its impact on her library and the Miami community.

Tell us about some of the achievements you made from being a part of the Edge pilot process.
Going through the benchmarking process with the Edge Initiative helped to shape our library's technology plan. In using this tool to compare what we are doing with a set of standards, we realized that our small library was accomplishing some good things but that we also had areas that needed more focus. When I first received the results report, I looked at our score for Community Value and was pleased to see how well we did - we got 260 out of 300 possible points. I went from feeling really euphoric to feeling a little depressed as I reviewed our other scores. But, taking a practical approach, my staff and I asked ourselves where can we make improvements? What can we do better in the areas that we are weakest in? My staff felt really good about the things we were doing well, and we did pretty darn good! And, we saw other areas where we could easily be doing a better job.

I sent the whole report to the City Council, Mayor and City Manager, and then presented our results and recommendations at a City Council meeting. I went over a few key points and explained the areas I wanted to focus on. My City Manager really likes benchmarking, and because of Edge, I was able to give him real specific numbers. He has since then gotten involved with the International City/County Management Association's benchmarking program and I'm assisting with it for the City.

They were really impressed with the way the documents were designed. I used the PowerPoint slides to go over the key results. I felt they needed to see the entire report because they needed to know what was in it, and the one thing that they didn't realize before Edge was the huge amount of time it takes to help people with technology related needs.

How has Edge impacted your staffing needs?
Recently, when the City was in a hiring freeze, our children's librarian retired, and I was able to use my Edge data to convince my City Manager to fill the position. Based on all we had to do, we couldn't function without a children's librarian. My City Manager really didn't realize how much we did until we did this presentation and I really believe because of Edge, we were able to maintain our staffing level - I was able to share data on the impact the children's librarian has on the community. So, this past fiscal year we had 54 programs for children with a total attendance of 2,713. In the summer we have programs almost daily and our audience includes not only children brought in by parents, but children brought in by three daycares as well as from the Boys and Girls Club. We are emphasizing working with teachers in our long range plan so her role will be even more prominent.

Another thing we realized from doing Edge is that we have a lot of technology –especially for a smaller library, but what really jumped out at us was the amount of training that we needed ([Benchmark 8](#)). No one on staff would be considered an "expert" in technology, so I started scheduling a lot more training for everyone and now, they are even scheduling training for themselves. They schedule training in areas we can use to help us be more on top of what our patrons need.

One of the things we did because of Edge that we've never done before was hold a focus group at the library to get input from our community about what they would like from their library. We had 16 community members attend. I was overwhelmed by this. The participants really honed in on building and strengthening strategic partnerships, and now we are looking at this area of work in our long range plan. Because of this meeting, we have included facilitating digital inclusion as a big part of our long range plan.

Digital inclusion includes providing equitable access, a part of which means we will be setting up a station with an adjustable table for wheel chairs, along with a keyboard with large print keys. It also includes providing relevant content and services which is why we are setting up an area just for job seekers with two computers that have relevant links on the desktop and no time limits on use.   It also includes training and we will continue to offer at least 25 classes annually and have started (after the Edge assessment) offering basic one-on-one 30 minute sessions.

So, a part of your strategic planning will include digital inclusion. What other ways have Edge impacted your strategic planning?
Earlier this year, our City Manager asked all department heads to develop our goals for the year. Seven out of my 10 goals for the library were based on the Edge benchmarks. Some of my projects that are informed by the Edge benchmarks include the training portion of digital literacy – we are developing online technology training using [Camtasia.](#) We are also partnering with law enforcement to offer a program to train parents about online safety for children, and we will use the Edge training curriculum for staff when it becomes available.

What are some of the things your patrons are seeing in the library that are directly related to your Edge results?

Our patrons are seeing a couple things that are a direct result of our Edge participation. We are now offering Learning Express (a comprehensive online platform of academic resources to help children succeed in school) and we have 3 new Early Literacy Stations. These are things the patrons have noticed (especially the Early Literacy Stations). We had some old computers with children's games installed. They were always freezing up and frustrating our littlest patrons and their parents. When I saw the benchmark indicator (Benchmark 3) that mentioned early literacy games, I really felt that we should upgrade these for our youngest customers. They love them! They were used 268 times in June compared to a monthly average of 79 times for the old ones. Also, we had Learning Express earlier but I let the subscription lapse due to budget constraints. Seeing the benchmark indicator (Benchmark 3) that mentioned electronic testing preparation resources convinced me to look for a way to fund it again.

Give us a couple examples of challenges you're faced with and how you're working through them.
Ramping up training for our community is the main challenge right now and how we prepare ourselves to help people in different areas. We've developed partnerships like having someone from the Department of Commerce come in and talk about their job search website for the state. Staff training is one of our biggest hurdles that we've been working on.

One of the things that we do differently now is to offer one-on-one help by appointment for 30 minute sessions. We decided to give it a try even though I thought it wasn't possible in a small library. It has worked so well for people with beginning computer skills. By having them come and set up an appointment with one of our staff, they are able to get the attention they need to learn how to use the mouse, get on the Internet, and set up email. It really has turned out to be a great thing for our library. Because of the demand, we are now talking about bringing in volunteers from the National Honor Society to do some of this training for us. Our patrons really depend on the library for access to technology. In this economy, if faced with a decision to make, you drop your wifi service at home and bring your laptop to the library to get on the Internet.

What would you tell library directors of smaller libraries about Edge?
I would tell them to always keep in mind that the purpose of Edge is to lift you up, to help you recognize where your strengths are and identify areas where you can improve. First, you start by looking at the areas that you are doing well, and then when you look at areas where you aren't doing as well. Ask yourself what can you do? When I was asked about having trained staff with specialized knowledge in education, workforce development, eGovernment, and health and wellness, I could have said this is way too unreasonable. But instead, I said we probably can't have anyone with specialized knowledge, but what can we do? I can train my staff in the different areas so they are better equipped, even if they don't have "specialized knowledge" in any of these areas. I would encourage them to always look at what you can do and know that it's okay that you can't do it all.

There is value in being able to look at where you are now and look at where you want to be. You can also see how you compare to other libraries of your size. You can say we're not doing this, but 80% of other libraries are, so maybe this is an area we should focus on. It gives you such concise data and goals to shoot for.

Have you built relationships with your community leaders?
Definitely. This has made my City Manager appreciate the library, appreciate how much we do, and appreciate my abilities. When I took the goals to him and I referenced Edge and the ways we measure up to these standards, he was extremely impressed. I've presented our results and recommendations to the library board, the friends of the library, community focus group, and other groups, and everyone

was really complimentary about the work and the progress and impact we are making for our community.