

## Denise Davis Interview Sacramento Public Library

In a candid conversation with Denise Davis, Deputy Library Director at the [Sacramento Public Library](#) (SPL), we learn that this large library system that serves more than 1.3 million people was doing exceptionally well with technology planning for their community prior to pilot testing the Edge Initiative. While SPL has had strong public computing services for many years, when Denise joined the team three years ago, bandwidth was an issue. She quickly fixed that by purchasing the highest amount of bandwidth available.

Because the library was already doing so much with technology, Denise thought twice about pilot testing the Edge Initiative. She wondered if there would be any benefits to the library or if SPL could be helpful to other libraries. She suspected that SPL's results would be high, and they were. However, she was pleasantly surprised by the library's score report, and she and her library staff were able to identify opportunities for improvement that would enhance the library experience for their patrons.

Read on to learn how Edge has impacted the Sacramento Public Library internally and externally:

### **What was the greatest impact of Edge in your library?**

Edge really helped our staff. For me, I understood the value of the process, but for our staff, they really got it. I could see the pennies dropping into place as we talked through the results, what the scores really meant and how we could really embrace assessment as a process here.

The timing of this project was great for me because it really drove home doing analysis in a systematic way and not just observing a situation and coming up with a solution but gathering data, looking at the data, understanding the value of the data and matching that with the anecdotal side of things. For staff they benefited greatly from this process, and the supervisors of all of our branches get the requirement for assessment. There's evidence that they practice it when they make decisions. Decisions are not so emotional anymore. They now ask themselves 'What are the core metrics? How do I know this is something we need to do for the community? Where's the data?' I'm confident that much of that came from us going through the Edge process.

Two teams worked on gathering the data for Edge. The core team focused on the definitions and how to complete the assessment. Once we got the results back, a bigger team came together to rank what our gaps were and we went through an iterative process of reviewing, ranking and narrowing them down to five areas to suggest that would go into our strategic plan.

### **Talk a bit about the results you achieved from Edge and how you engaged your stakeholders.**

I knew our numbers would be so different from other libraries. I knew we were going to be the outlier for the study, and that is because our core mission for the organization is that if we bring something into the library, it goes everywhere. Literally a day after our results report was received I got a call from the Edge team to go over our responses. We were very literal in interpreting the questions.

Although we scored really well on the benchmarks, our team came up with areas where we knew that we needed to do a better job internally. We identified inconsistencies in how we were keeping staff trained, how we were reaching out to the public to promote our classes and programs, and scheduling or offering classes. For example, in a community where they don't need a lot of technology training, we didn't offer it every month. We would do it by appointment with a curriculum. We're not going to

schedule a training that no one is going to attend. What we had to do was go back to the library staff and say “for your branch and your community, what would you consider core technology training?” It opened the door for them to say we should really be doing training in other languages. So as an example, if somebody comes in and they speak Hmong, our goal would be to bring someone in to do one-on-one training. So staff suggested we take it to the next level and now we are exploring offering core technology training regionally in Hmong, so instead of doing it in each branch, we’d do it in a central location and promote it in multiple branches in the area.

Another thing we expanded because of Edge is technology staff on the public services side. We have library technology associates and library technology assistants out on the floor working with the public on technology related questions. So, we’re providing general information on how to use technology. We’ve increased the number of staff in this area in all of our branches and we have library technology assistants in 25 of 28 branches. That’s a change that was escalated because of this.

The other priority was digital literacy and making sure we have comparable services in all of the branches. We have centralized reference assistants, so if a staff person doesn’t feel competent to help on a particular question, the staff can call our central reference line and get a technology person on the phone with a patron. This is also a flag that the staff person needs more training, so then we can go back out to do targeted training with the staff person.

We’ve also increased the training opportunities that we offer for staff. We currently do quarterly mandatory training for staff and we’re talking about making them bi-monthly for technology assistants and all the staff.

And, the last piece was, in the partnership area of the Edge benchmarks - the group that worked on our assessment said this is a great opportunity to push us to make a 2-1-1 partnership work and our team is currently working on it. Our Central Library Manager is coordinating the partnership and the goal is for 2-1-1 calls regarding health or other information requests to be forwarded to our central information number. We will connect people with the information resources they need – databases, books, whatever we can help with.

After we received our Edge results, we also met with our board members and representatives from the Friends of the Library who give us a lot of financial support around eBooks and computer equipment. We shared a lot about the process and how we ranked our goals from our results. And then, we met with the library board so they understood the project and how we did. The Chair of the board asked for six-month updates and the next update for them will be in September. By then, I’m hoping we will have implemented everything that we said we would.<sup>1</sup>

**When you were invited to participate in Edge what were your initial thoughts about the Initiative and how do your initial thoughts differ from your thoughts about the project now?**

From the very beginning, I was pretty vocal about whether or not we were going to be a help or hindrance to the project. It was largely because I knew how on-track the library staff were with what national standards had developed about expectations on technology – the research that [John Bertot](#) created over the years. Had that not happened, we would have been in a very different place. My concern with the project was how a library system like ours, where we don’t differentiate by branch around technology, would respond to some of the benchmarks. In our system, every library has exactly

---

<sup>1</sup> See Communities Priorities outlined by the Sacramento Public Library staff

the same infrastructure. Anyone in this county can go to any library and get the exact same service, and I was very vocal about that. The Edge team needed to understand that if they did this study on a branch level or system-wide, it was unlikely that they would see irregularities in response from branch to branch. This is not true in many libraries across the country because they do meter service and they do set local expectations based on the square footage because they have to. I wasn't entirely confident that the benchmarks that were established – especially the beta version – were going to make a difference for us. I didn't think they'd have much of an impact at all.

**What would you say are the benefits of Edge to large, urban libraries?**

Even though we were meeting all the minimum requirements, it exposed areas that even though we scored well, we knew we wanted to do better. Staff would look at a score and say “really, I wish we could do more.” And, I think that's a benefit for a large library system. You can implement at a branch level, if you think you're doing system-wide service, this will help you understand that it's not. Staff will tell you when they are really not doing something like they are supposed to. Sending staff the survey allows them to think differently about what their community needs to change up the programming. And, if they're doing a good job, this pats people on the back.

Edge and our strategic plan are driving all the decisions we make in the library.

---

**COMMUNITY PRIORITIES**

Based on staff knowledge of community needs at our 28 library locations, the following priorities have emerged as those most in need of strengthening:

- Monthly structured and scheduled digital literacy training in all branches, to include:
  - Technology classes in languages other than English
  - Assistance with basic computer skills
  - Assistance with patron-owned devices (e.g. eReaders, iPods and smartphones)
- Individual assistance for digital literacy, ensuring comparable service levels in all branches
- Increase staff technology expertise to better serve patrons and help them achieve their goals
- Support the use of public technology for health and wellness purposes through 2-1-1 service collaboration (this is in process)