Improving Community Outreach Using Technology

Robert J. Kleberg
Public Library
Kleberg County, TX
Population: 32,513

"It's not something you're going to finish in a day; you have to sit down and carefully consider everything to be open and honest with yourself. We had to be persistent. It took a lot of effort and continues to be a work in progress, but at the end of the day, Edge produces priceless results and gives priceless resources back to our library and the community."

Joey Garcia
IT Librarian

Edge provided the Robert J. Kleberg Public Library with an opportunity to see, firsthand, how they measure against their library peers when it comes to technology, and also address the needs of their community in order to solidify the library's role as a community technology hub. By taking the Assessment and using the recommendations given, like conducting community surveys in order to gather customer feedback, the library was able to respond to the community's needs and develop programs that would instruct children and teens on how to use digital content software for web development, multimedia and photo editing. Edge helped the Kleberg Public Library establish its role as a leader in community outreach, engagement, and partnerships.

A year after completing the Edge Assessment, and hearing from the community about what they needed to succeed, the Kleberg Public Library decided to develop a makerspace. They secured a grant from the Texas State Library and Archives Commission (TSLAC) that allowed them to purchase roughly $2000 in resources and new technology. Once the library saw the impact of the makerspace, they created pop-up makerspace activities at community events to build interest and launched a mobile makerspace to travel the community and increase the library's visibility. According to Joey Garcia, IT librarian at Kleberg Public Library, Edge not only helped to create tangible results within the library, but led the library to actively increase their outreach efforts and be a more engaged community partner and resource.

Throughout this process, the library slowly expanded its technology services and added new activities based on community feedback. After receiving requests for Adobe Photoshop, the library established a Make it Station, providing patrons with a combination of paid and free, open-source multimedia editing software. After patrons expressed a desire to learn more about coding, the Library developed a dedicated Raspberry Pi and Minecraft coding station. Their Unplugged Station encourages users to build, fold, and cut their ideas to life through a handful of resources that include LEGOs, HexBugs, gardening books, and more. As a result of their success, a school partnership began, with teachers requesting the library to visit their classrooms to teach students about their STEAM resources and services.

"We want to show them that the library isn't just a place to visit, but is *the* place to visit to learn about everything under the sun," said Garcia. "By

hooking them and getting them to understand that through our technology services, we are also able to expose them to the wide array of other resources that the library has to offer."

After two years of steady improvements, the library completed their second Edge assessment in August 2015 and increased their overall score from 470 to 805. They are now focused on making improvements in staff technology training and organizational management.

For Garcia, the range of resources in the Edge toolkit proved to be essential to their success. The action plan helped identify priority action items and set a timeline for improvement, while the resources and recommendations helped map out how to implement these changes.

"There literally is not a dollar value you could attach to Edge resources," said Garcia. "If we did this on our own, we would have spent volumes of money and time scouring the internet to figure out how to get up to par. Without having that plan, I don't think we would have been as successful as we are now."

About Edge and the Urban Libraries Council

Edge is a groundbreaking leadership and management tool that is helping libraries better serve their communities through improved public technology services. The Edge Initiative was developed by a national coalition of leading library and local government organizations, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and led by the Urban Libraries Council.

The Urban Libraries Council (ULC), founded in 1971, is the premier membership association of leading public library systems in the U.S. and Canada. ULC and its members lead research aimed at creating new models and tools for libraries, enhancing their ability to continuously support the aspirations of the communities and the people they serve.

Get the Edge!

Visit www.libraryedge.org to learn how the Edge Toolkit can improve your library's public technology services to better serve your community.