

TO: ALA Executive Board

RE: *Edge Initiative (formerly Public Library Public Access Technology Benchmarks Project)*

ACTION REQUESTED/INFORMATION/REPORT:

Update of current activities related to the development of public access technology benchmarks for public libraries.

ACTION REQUESTED BY:

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DRAFT OF MOTION:

N/A

DATE: *June 1, 2012*

BACKGROUND:

Edge is a set of national benchmarks developed by a coalition of library and local government organizations designed to inspire continuous improvement and reinvestment in public access technology services in libraries. As members of this coalition, the Public Library Association and the ALA Office for Information Technology Policy offer an update of current activities and next steps for the joint effort, including general information about the project and specific details of their contributions.

Attachments: Edge Narrative Report

The Edge Initiative made progress on several fronts over the last few months. The initiative is funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Led by the Urban Libraries Council, the coalition includes: the Public Library Association, ALA's Office for Information Technology Policy, OCLC/WebJunction, Lyris, TechSoup, the State Libraries of California, Oklahoma, and Texas, The University of Washington, the University of Maryland, and the International City/County Managers Association.

The initiative's website, www.libraryedge.org had a soft launch in March. The site includes information about Edge, along with a copy of the benchmarks framework. ULC is working on building a mechanism so visitors can provide feedback on the benchmark's document. Focus groups also were conducted at the PLA National Conference in March.

In early April, ULC invited a select group of libraries to participate as beta testers. Targeted libraries were identified by the University of Washington to represent a broad sample of size, service population, and governance type. ULC worked with state libraries to coordinate the invitation process. These libraries received a paper assessment workbook and were given one month to complete it. About 150 libraries participated. Preliminary data analysis is encouraging. Libraries seem to be scoring on a distribution curve in line with what the Edge Roundtable expected. Larger libraries tend to score better than smaller, but smaller libraries are still able to score well. More data analysis is currently underway.

In addition to having libraries rank themselves on the benchmarks and indicators, the workbook asked pointed questions about the process to complete the survey. These questions will help identify if any questions or data collection requirements pose particular difficulty. Any survey changes will be addressed in the online version of the survey OCLC is responsible for developing.

ULC and ICMA are in the process of convening advisory groups of both librarians and city/county managers to offer expert feedback with less of a burden of participation than either beta or pilot testers. The group members will be asked to provide feedback on the benchmarks and their alignment with the goals of the initiative, and weigh in on the key executive tool(s) and support materials.

Pilot site visits are scheduled for late summer/early fall. This will allow for any assessment glitches identified in the beta test to be addressed. ICMA will coordinate the pilot site visits. PLA will work with ICMA to seed some early curriculum content during the visits.

Select members of the roundtable, including representatives from OITP and PLA, have been working on a package of materials and resources that will support libraries in implementing recommendations from the benchmarks, as well as communicating recommendations to key decision-makers. Among the materials under development is an Executive Tool intended to succinctly and powerfully communicate to local government officials and other key library funders. It is intended to be a leave-behind document that is customizable with local data and stories, with strong visuals and infographics. These materials will be disseminated to the pilot libraries to use with stakeholder interaction to test their effectiveness.

It is anticipated that the benchmarks and support materials will be reviewed and revised based on findings from the beta and pilot tests, as well as feedback from the advisory groups and other input mechanisms, in the late fall. A second round of pilots is planned for early 2013.

PLA's training plan also has begun to take form. As currently envisioned, the training curriculum will guide participants in using the Benchmarks and related tools to:

1. Increase skills and confidence in building external stakeholder relations that supports reinvestment in public libraries
2. Increase skills and confidence in managing and continuously improving public access technology

Training will cover topics related to advocacy, technology management, and change management. Training will not cover specific technical aspects of the benchmarks or indicators. These will be addressed in the support materials described above, including a report of score results and a resource guide.

Several questions remain prior to a broad launch to the field. Most pressing is a need to determine specifically how the Edge initiative will be rolled out, the adoption targets, and establishing a long-term, organizational home for the benchmarks. The Foundation is working with ULC to establish a framework for making these decisions.

The Foundation has expressed its commitment to supporting Edge past the current development phase. The Executive Board will be kept apprised of any developments that impact ALA or its units.