A Quick Guide to Community Needs Assessment

If I were a library setting out to doing a community needs assessment as part of the Edge Initiative and I had limited time and resources …

I would:

Make sure I understand what a community needs assessment is by reading various definitions (a Google search quickly yields many), and do some thinking about what information would be particularly relevant to an assessment of my community’s technology needs.

Write down what I already feel I know about the community’s technology needs based on my experiences working in the library (ideally this would be done with other colleagues to get a variety of perspectives), and identify potential blind spots – e.g. what don’t we know? This article would be helpful to jumpstart thinking in terms of whose POV we might be missing:

Williment, Kenneth (2011) “It Takes a Community to Create a Library”, Public Libraries Online,

Conduct a scan for already existing needs assessments of my community done by others. This might include an internet search, and also directly contacting other organizations or government offices by email or phone. In particular, I’d check with local or regional digital inclusion taskforces, universities, public interest research centers or consultancies, well-resourced community organizations, government agencies, health centers, and schools or school districts.

Gather relevant demographic data using the Library Research Service Community Analysis Scan Form as a guide for the kind of data I might need to collect but modifying that to my own library’s context and my desire to learn more about the community’s technology needs. I might also take a look at reports on digital inclusion more generally, such as the most recent Pew numbers on internet adoption, which would help me to contextualize local demographics.
I would check out this toolkit on Community Assessment Tools and choose a few tools to use to gather additional information about my community to supplement what I’ve already learned.