



## AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, November 9, 2021

12:00pm – 12:45pm (PT)

Virtual Meeting

### In Attendance:

Michel Castagné, Capilano University, *Member-at-Large*

Ania Dymarz, *Simon Fraser University*

Lynette Gallant, North Island College, *Rural Colleges*

Eva Gavaris, Okanagan College, *Member-at-Large*

Aleteia Greenwood, *University of British Columbia*

Karen Munro, *University of Victoria*

Suzanne Rackover, Emily Carr University of Art + Design, *Small Universities (Chair)*

Debbie Schachter, Langara College, *Urban Colleges*

Derek Yap, Yukon University, *Teaching Universities & Technical Institutions*

### AskAway Administrative Centre:

Anita Cocchia, BC ELN Executive Director

Cristen Polley, AskAway Coordinator

Reba Ouimet, BC ELN Coordinator (Recorder)

### Regrets:

Christopher Reimer, University Canada West, *Member-at-Large*

## 1. Welcome

S. Rackover provided welcoming remarks and introduced new committee representatives K. Munro, D. Yap, and D. Schachter. Agenda was adopted as presented.

## 2. Service Update

C. Polley provided an AskAway service update for Fall 2021:

- AskAway opened two weeks early in September to support students during the transition back to in-person learning; participating libraries and students valued extended opening dates, and there were over 1,400 chat sessions in the first two weeks of service
- After record-breaking traffic in 2020, usage is beginning to stabilize this fall as in-person services open up and students and instructors at many institutions return to campus

- For Section 1 (Sep-Dec) 2021, the Committee approved modified Base Staffing Commitments by Tier, and these have been successful at meeting the demand to date in this term
- Looking ahead to Section 2 (Jan-Apr) 2022, based on the results of a survey of participating libraries, AskAway will open on January 17<sup>th</sup>, which is the pre-pandemic regular opening date for the service
- The AskAway Chat Box newsletter was released to the community in October: <https://conta.cc/3FPWzoi>

### **3. Staffing Commitments Section 2 (Jan-Apr) 2022**

C. Polley provided a refresher on how the Committee has modified Base Staffing Commitments in response to increased usage during the pandemic and presented proposed commitments for Section 2 (Jan-Apr) 2022:

- Since September 2020, the Committee has approved tiered increases to Base Staffing Commitments on a term-by-term basis to add capacity to the collaborative schedule
- The Commitments have been reviewed and modified as needed in response to usage; for example, Base Staffing Commitments were higher in Section 1 (Sep-Dec) 2020 than in Section 1 2021
- Usage remains strong and is levelling off; this is expected to continue into 2022 as in-person services continue to be an option
- Historically, the January to April term is quieter than the fall

For Section 2 (Jan-Apr) 2022, a return to the service's original (pre-pandemic) Base Staffing Commitments was proposed.

In response to a question about staffing levels with Vancouver Island University Library leaving the service in December 2021, C. Polley confirmed that the upcoming Section 2 (Jan-Apr) 2022 collaborative schedule has taken this into account, and there are no anticipated concerns.

As there were no further questions or concerns, S. Rackover confirmed that AskAway will be returning to the original Base Staffing Commitments for all Tiers in Section 2 2022.

### **4. Proactive Chat Recommendation**

S. Rackover provided background for the proactive chat recommendation, which was developed by the Proactive Chat Pilot Task Group:

- Proactive chat is a timed widget that pops-up on a webpage, inviting the user to chat; research and similar pilot programs have shown that this feature is successful at reaching new users at their point-of-need

- The pilot was approved by the Committee in March, and in the spring, the Task Group was formed to manage the pilot
- Four institutions (Alexander College, University of British Columbia, University of Northern British Columbia, and University of Victoria) were represented on the Task Group and implemented the proactive chat widgets on their library websites
- All AskAway service providers participated in the pilot by responding to proactive chats that came in during their shifts
- The pilot ran from July 13<sup>th</sup> to August 12<sup>th</sup> 2021, and the Task Group met frequently from June through to October 2021 to implement the widgets, test the feature, analyze its impact, and bring the recommendation to the Committee

C. Polley presented an overview of the Task Group's findings, recommendation, and proposed next steps:

### *Impacts*

- Users:
  - Based on the results of a user survey, the Task Group found that proactive chat reached a high number of new AskAway users
  - It was clear that the invitation was for research and library help and once users started chatting, they engaged with the AskAway service as normal
- Types of questions:
  - As expected, the types of questions patrons asked reflected the location of the proactive chat widget
    - For example, on library homepages, there was a broad range of question types whereas on pages categorized as research starting points, there was a significantly higher number of research questions
- Usage:
  - Three of the four participating libraries saw a 43-50% increase in usage due to proactive chat during the pilot; this was considered a successful increase and demonstrates how proactive chat can be used to reach new patrons and increase the visibility of the service
  - This increase in usage led to a 10% increase in traffic on AskAway, which was easily supported by the collaborative schedule
- Service providers:
  - In general, proactive chat did not affect AskAway service providers; the majority felt comfortable staffing the service during the pilot

- Several service providers expressed support for the feature and the potential to reach out to new patrons and meet them where they are
- Institutional impact
  - Although the Task Group did not set out to measure institutional impact, they noted that time and expertise from local coordinators as well as IT and web staff was needed to implement proactive chat, from the planning through to the maintenance stages

### *Recommendation*

- Based on the pilot findings, the Task Group recommends that proactive chat is included as an opt-in feature for the AskAway service, to be rolled out to interested institutions in phases

### *Next Steps*

The goal of the proposed next steps is to provide information to the community and clarify the scope of interest in this feature in order to move forward with a phased plan:

- In November/December, the Final Report will be shared with AskAway participating libraries:
  - The Report provides recommendations for libraries interested in implementing proactive chat, based on the Task Group's findings
  - The Admin Centre will develop the Report into Best Practices, to be used by local coordinators and their colleagues
- In the new year, libraries will be surveyed to understand which institutions are interested in implementing proactive chat
- Based on the survey results, the Admin Centre will set a timeline to implement proactive chat for interested libraries
- Throughout, communications will be shared with service providers so they are aware of any changes that will affect their shifts

C. Polley noted that the proposed feature is optional for libraries and invited questions.

In response to concerns and questions that arose, C. Polley clarified the following:

- A maximum of 5-7 libraries would adopt the feature at a time
- Should the feature have a significant impact on traffic, any proposed changes to staffing commitments would be brought to the Advisory Committee for discussion
- Libraries that participated in the pilot would not be required to stop using the feature and could continue to offer it if desired

**MOTION:** To include proactive chat as an opt-in feature for the AskAway service, to be rolled out to interested institutions in phases.

Moved: A. Greenwood

Seconded: D. Yap

**Motion carried unanimously.**

## **5. New Business**

No new business.

## **6. Wrap-Up**

Next meeting will take place in the new year, likely February or March. The Admin Centre will send out a Doodle poll to pick a date.