



ASKAWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Thursday, January 30, 2014

SFU Harbour Centre
Rm 1510
515 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC

Committee Members:

Attending In Person	Attending by Teleconference
Sheryl Adam, UBC	Mary Anne Guenther, NIC/Member-at-Large (alternate)
Janis McKenzie, SFU	Christina Nilsen, TRU/Member-at-large
David Pepper, BCIT/Regional Universities	Marjory Jardine, JIBC/Member-at-large
Debbie Schachter, DC/Urban Colleges	
Caron Rollins, UVic	
Melanie Wilke, NWCC/Rural Colleges/Chair	
Anita Cocchia, BC ELN	
Brandon Weigel, BC ELN (Recorder)	

Regrets:

Ross Tyner, OC/Urban Colleges
Leva Lee, BCcampus
James Rout, ECUAD/Small Universities
Lynette Gallant, NIC/Member-at-large

Minutes

1. Adoption of agenda

Items to add: None

New business: None

Moved: S. Adam
Second: M. Jardine

Motion Carried.

2. Budget Update

A. Cocchia told the committee that BCcampus has indicated that AA funding will be cut due to reductions in their own budget. BCcampus affirms that AskAway is a highly valued service, and these cuts are solely a reflection of their own budgetary issues.

However, it is likely that \$55,000 from BCcampus originally included in the 2014/15 Expenditure Plan will be lost. A revised expenditure plan (appended) was distributed to include the funding changes, showing a shortfall of \$53,000.

The committee was invited to brainstorm ways to ensure AskAway's sustainability in light of these cuts. The committee considered strategies to increase revenues and reduce expenditures.

The following information came up in the discussion:

- Funding cuts will take place in April, creating a challenge for institutions that have already set their annual 2014/2015 budgets.
- AskAway cannot operate at a loss; budgets must be balanced.
- Participating institutions could pay more for the service.
- Expenditures on auxiliary librarians (contractors) are the greatest expense, and are over 90% of the projected shortfall.
- AskAway auxiliary staff are hired as independent contractors and are typically paid \$27 per hour
- Auxiliaries are hired on a per semester basis; there is no long-term obligation to retain them.
- Auxiliary staff only cover evening and weekend shifts, which most institutions prefer not or are not able to staff.

DISCUSSION: How could the Contractors expense be reduced or eliminated?

- Reducing AskAway hours:

The Committee discussed whether it was feasible to reduce daily hours, or eliminate certain segments of service, such as daytime, evenings, or weekends. However, they agreed the financial savings would be small, and that reducing service hours would make the service less valuable and negatively impact both students and institutions.

- Recruiting Interns:

B. Weigel described the internship program offered by AskOntario, in which second-year library students and recent graduates provide one or two weekly hours of virtual reference service in exchange for academic reference experience and mentorship. The Committee discussed the feasibility of adopting a similar model in BC.

While much of the group expressed interest in the idea, concerns were expressed about the reactions of faculty associations and unions, as well as library school students who are presently paid to work on the service. Some members expressed philosophical objections to the notion of unpaid

internships. Further concerns were raised about the time required to hire and train interns.

- Expanding/shifting hours from institutions:

Auxiliary staff cover evening and weekend hours that most institutions prefer not or are unable to staff. Moving shifts or increasing commitment hours could eliminate the need for contractors. This may prove difficult for some institutions facing staffing challenges.

DISCUSSION: What additional revenue could help offset the loss of funding?

- Increase in service support fee:

D. Pepper suggested that the service support fee should increase to reflect the true cost of AskAway and ensure that the service remains sustainable in the future. The Committee agreed that AskAway is a valuable service and institutions should reflect that value in their support of the service.

- AskAway was described as “a very cheap insurance policy” for reference services
- Finding the money is the cleanest and easiest way to show that the service is worth protecting
- It is better to build the real cost of AskAway into library budgets than to rely on uncertain external funding

The group indicated that a service fee increase could be feasible, but not timely as budgets at most institutions have been set for the year.

- Offer directors a choice of higher fees, additional hours, or a combination:
 - Discussions about evening and weekend staffing have not been had at the director level; budget-based decisions from library directors may produce more options.
 - A choice between funding or staff time provides flexibility and allows institutions to contribute the types of resources that they can afford.

DISCUSSION: Could the cuts be reduced?

- Convince BCcampus or the Ministry that funding cuts would hurt the service:

The Committee debated whether quickly adapting to the loss of funding tells the Ministry that such cuts can be easily absorbed and have no consequences. They discussed whether measures such as cutting hours or letter campaigns from students would affect the decision.

A. Cocchia noted that it is unlikely that the full amount could be restored, and the committee agreed that showing suffering instead of creating solutions would have little positive impact and be bad for the service.

- Request transition funding:

It was suggested that the Ministry may be willing to provide transition funding - a reduced amount for 2014/2015, rather than allowing the entire \$55,000 to be cut at once - due to its continued interest in shared services. The Admin Centre will approach BCcampus and Ministry to make the case for transition funding.

The Committee noted that any additional funding granted would be one-time funding only.

QUESTION: If required, how to show the Ministry that the service is valued?

- Testimonials from users
- Questionnaire for users - what if AskAway were not available?
- Letters from institutions
- Show that AskAway is supporting research-level questions
 - Admin Centre can pull together statistics on question types for use in discussions with Ministry if required

The group discussed how to communicate the budget changes to participating institutions. The Committee agreed that they will first develop an action plan based on the brainstorming session, and only then communicate with the institutions, while noting the importance of timeliness to these messages.

The Admin Centre will draft an email to the library directors summarizing our discussion, with feedback from the Advisory Committee. Directors will be asked to forward the message as they see fit. The message will be sent by Tuesday, February 11.

3. Update on Jini Action Plan

B. Weigel updated the committee on actions taken toward dealing with Jini, a non-student AskAway patron whose questions have comprised nearly 30% of traffic in January. At a January 24th emergency Advisory Committee meeting, the group elected to have service providers to stop accepting all questions from Jini, and to investigate possible legal action if her behavior persists.

Action taken by the Admin Centre:

- Spoke with BC ELN's Ministry representative to confirm their support for our approach
- Spoke with SFU's Human Rights Officer for additional advice
- Spoke with Jini to advise her that she would no longer receive service

- Developed scripts and guidelines to empower service providers to deny her service and focus on legitimate patrons

While Jini continues to attempt to use AskAway, the new scripts and procedures have helped librarians disengage from her and diminished her impact on the service. The Admin Centre will monitor their effectiveness and determine whether further action should be taken.

DISCUSSION: The Committee discussed Jini's history on AskAway and how service providers have adapted. The value of communicating with colleagues in Campfire was highlighted.

The Admin Centre will continue to send service providers reminders and updates about handling Jini in order to ensure a consistent approach.

4. Admin Centre Update

B. Weigel provided a brief update on the Admin Centre's activities:

- Trials of SMS software have been rescheduled and will take place in April/May.
- The scheduling software pilot is moving forward, and all institutions have activated accounts. The pilot team will meet soon to discuss how to implement shift trading.
- Analysis of the citation knowledgebase survey is not complete, but preliminary analysis suggests strong interest from most institutions. More detail will be provided at the next meeting.

5. New Business

Service Providers Recognition Event:

A. Cocchia asked the committee whether the AskAway service providers' recognition event, a \$2,000 entry in the 2013/2014 budget, should be removed in light of the upcoming budget cuts.

The Committee agreed that spending \$2,000 on a catered event would be bad optics at this time, but that it is valuable to recognize service providers and acknowledge their good work.

D. Pepper suggested that a well-designed printed card could show appreciation without the expense of an event, and volunteered BCIT resources to design and print the cards. The cards could be sent to many institutions via INTERLINK courier.

The committee agreed to cancel the event and to recognize service providers with printed cards that will be sent near the end of the fiscal year.

Weekend staffing levels:

C. Rollins reported that UVic service providers are seeing heavy usage on weekend shifts, and request additional staffing during those hours. A. Cocchia responded that AskAway cannot hire more auxiliaries, but will make note of this feedback for the next scheduling call-out. She also noted that service providers do respond to the Swamped button on weekends, and service providers needing support should feel free to use it.

Guest logins:

C. Rollins requested that guest login passwords be made shorter and easier to remember. A. Cocchia replied that the Admin Centre will be revising AskAway best practices in the near future, and that guidelines about guest password length and memorability could be included.

6. Next Meeting: April 2014.

The Admin Centre will send a Doodle poll.

ACTION ITEMS:

ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Draft message to library directors, send to Advisory Committee for feedback - February 5

ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Respond with suggested changes - Friday, February 7

ADMIN CENTRE: Request transition funding from BCcampus and Ministry

ADMIN CENTRE: Send budget message to library directors, copying the Advisory Committee - February 11

ADMIN CENTRE: Continue to send updates and reminders on Jini guidelines.

D. PEPPER: Have BCIT Media Works contact the Admin Centre about card design.

Revenues	2013/14 Expenditure Plan	2014/15 Expenditure Plan
BCcampus Support	\$55,000	\$0
BC ELN Support	\$15,000	\$15,000
Service Support Fee*	\$49,769	\$50,119
Carryforward	\$1,759	(\$640)
Total Revenue	\$121,528	\$64,479
Expenditures		
Software / Technology Infrastructure	\$22,254	\$23,029
Coordinator and Support	\$46,592	\$43,680
Contract - Auxiliary and Projects	\$50,322	\$50,322
Governance/Administration (includes teleconferences, etc.)	\$1,000	\$800
Recognition Event	\$2,000	
Total Expenditures	\$122,168	\$117,831
Revenue - Expenditures	(\$640)	(\$53,352)
<i>*for 28 institutions + 2 pro-rated</i>		