

ASKAWAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Friday, January 29th, 2010

In Attendance:

Kay Cahill, Public Library AskAway
Anita Cocchia, BC ELN
Carole Compton-Smith, CPSLD
Debra Flewelling, DC/Member-at-large (recorder)
Mary Anne Guenther, NIC/Rural Colleges/Chair
Todd Mundle, SFU
Sunni Nishimura, AskAway Coordinator
Sally Taylor, UBC

Teleconference:

Gohar Ashougian, UNBC/Small Universities
Jennifer Brownlow, VIU/Member-at-large
Sybil Harrison, CC/Urban Colleges
Ophelia Ma, UVic

Regrets:

Leva Lee, BC Campus
Melissa Lowenberg, Public Library AskAway
Cathy MacDonald, KPU/Regional Universities

1. **Adoption of agenda** with addition of 7.1 by Sally – Security issues
2. **Business arising from the minutes:** Minutes from September 25th, 2009 approved with two friendly amendments:
 - A. **Amendment to Attendance:** Ophelia Ma (UVic) was present via teleconference.
 - B. **Amendment to 8. Coordinator's Report:** Question was raised about recent QuestionPoint technical issues. Sunni reported that the issues stemmed from QP's migration to a new server environment in an effort to deal with increased Qwidget traffic; problems were exacerbated by high network traffic. QP was very diligent in addressing issues, and Sunni reported that technical troubles are now under control.

3. Service Continuity Plan:

<http://www.eln.bc.ca/askaway/documents/AskAwayContinuityDRAFT2.pdf>

Sunni presented the draft of the AskAway Service Continuity Plan that was prepared by the Continuity subcommittee comprised of Gohar, Sybil and Sunni. Although the plan was instigated because of the H1N1 pandemic threat, it was all agreed that the service continuity plan would be broadened to account for any emergency.

Sally commented that it was not practical that the AskAway Advisory Committee would all be available to respond on quick notice to making a decision concerning AskAway service in an emergency. She therefore recommended and it was agreed by all to make the change that the AskAway Coordinator would contact just the Chair of the Advisory Committee and the Chair of ELN.

ACTION - Sunni

Sunni will make the recommended changes to the Service Continuity Plan and send to the Advisory Committee via email for approval.

ACTION – Sunni

It was agreed that an AskAway contingency team should be formed and Sunni will send out an email to all AskAway Administrators requesting names of any service providers who would be interested being on this team.

MOTION:

That the revised AskAway Service Continuity Plan be brought forward to the BC ELN Steering Committee for endorsement.

MOVED: Sally **SECONDED:** Kay

ACTION – The AskAway Service Continuity Plan will be an information item at the next Council of Post-secondary Library Directors meeting.

4. Items for discussion

A. **BCcampus funding request update:** Anita reported that BC Campus would like to receive a report on the AskAway service to accompany the request for funding this year. The request will be made around the end of February or beginning of March.

B. **Increase in Post-secondary AskAway traffic:** The traffic on Post-secondary AskAway had continued to increase steadily and will likely continue to do so in the future.

<http://www.eln.bc.ca/askaway/documents/IncreasedTrafficBrief.pdf>

ACTION – Sunni

There has to be an increase in staffing levels to meet this need so Sunni will send out an email asking each institution if they can provide an extra hour(s) in September.

Sunni reported that so far there has not been an increase in traffic that could be due to the reduced hours of the Public Library AskAway service. She will continue to monitor the situation closely.

C. **AskAway value** – <http://www.eln.bc.ca/askaway/documents/MeasuringValue2.pdf>

Based on Sunni's report there was a discussion on how to measure the value of the AskAway service to libraries and how that might be presented to certain external groups. It was suggested that another statistic that may be of interest to some institutions is the names of the institutions that answered their student's questions.

ACTION – Sunni

Sunni will add an example of this type of statistic to the toolkit and an institution could request that information if they wanted to include it in their statistics

5. **Coordinator's Report** - Sunni

Coordinator's report is available for download:

<http://www.eln.bc.ca/askaway/documents/AACoordRep20100129.pdf>

6. **Public Library AskAway Update** – Kay

Summary of Public Library Coordinator's Report

In September, Public Library AskAway received word that due to provincial budget cuts, 2010 funding for the service was cancelled. This funding covers the coordinator's position, software, administration, and supplementary staff hours. Following the loss of funding, AskAway Coordinator Phil Hall transferred to the Systems

Librarian position at Vancouver Public Library, and Kay Cahill took over the AskAway Coordinator position.

An Advisory Committee meeting was held in early October 2009 to explore the impacts of the funding cut and possible future models for the service. It was agreed that it would be preferable to continue the service until June 2010 (the end of the school year) if current funds permitted, and that public library Directors should be surveyed to assess libraries' ability to commit to AskAway until June 2010, and interest in participating in a new virtual reference collaborative beyond that.

The results of the Directors' survey were received in November. With 12 libraries unable to staff the service beyond December 2009 and an additional 6 libraries looking to reduce hours, the service was down a total of 50 staff hours. With the current supplementary staff at capacity, this left no alternative but to reduce hours in 2010. An extensive traffic analysis resulted in a reduction of 19 service hours per week, targeted at AskAway's quietest shifts. This included closing at 9pm on weekday evenings, and a full day closure on Sundays. In the relatively short time since the changed hours were introduced, no impact on Post-Secondary AskAway has been noted. Kay and Sunni continue to monitor traffic levels of the respective services closely. The new schedule will enable Public Library AskAway to continue until the end of June 2010.

For February, the focus for Public Library AskAway will be on the Olympics. We anticipate a spike in traffic caused by a combination of the inaccessibility of local libraries in Vancouver and along the Sea to Sky Corridor, staffing limitations for libraries directly affected by the Olympics, and an influx of visitors to the Lower Mainland.

In March, we will focus on researching possible future models for collaborative virtual reference among BC's public libraries. The Directors' survey indicated that at least 20 libraries are interested in exploring the possibilities for a new collaborative, but the full impact of the current funding situation remains uncertain. Currently our hope is that following a break in the summer, we will be ready to move forward in September.

7. New Business

7.1 Security issues – Sally

Sally gave an example of when students contact the AskAway service with issues such as noise in the library and request assistance. After a great deal of discussion about, not just noise, but more serious issues a student may encounter, it was decided that the best way to handle these calls is with scripts and including a discussion when training service providers.

ACTION – Sunni

Sunni will create service-wide scripts to help service providers manage security issues and will include a discussion around security issues during AskAway training.

8. Next meeting will be in early May with the date to be determined via email.