



AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, June 26, 2025

9:00am – 10:00am (PT)

Virtual Meeting

Members in Attendance:

Trish Rosseel, Douglas College, *Urban Colleges* (Chair)

Doug Brigham, *University of British Columbia*

Gregg Currie, Selkirk College, *Rural Colleges*

Ebony Magnus, *Simon Fraser University*

Shannon Moist, Douglas College, *Member-at-Large* (Working Group Chair)

Todd Mundle, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, *Teaching Universities and Technical Institutions*

Nicoletta Romano, University Canada West, *Small Universities*

Melissa Svendsen, Thompson Rivers University, *Member-at-Large*

AskAway Administrative Centre:

Kyle Beres (Recorder)

Sunni Nishimura, BC ELN Executive Director

Cristen Polley, AskAway Coordinator (Working Group Member)

Regrets:

Deirdre Grace, BCIT, *Member-at-Large*

Agenda:

1. Welcome
2. Admin Centre Update
3. Emerging Technologies Working Group Update
4. Sustainability Action Planning
5. New Business
6. Next Meeting

1. Welcome

T. Rosseel welcomed committee members and shared a territorial acknowledgement. Committee membership updates included D. Brigham, as the new University of British Columbia representative. T. Rosseel reminded members that committee turnover happens on October 1.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Service Update

C. Polley provided the following service updates:

Presentations

- Represented AskAway at BCcampus Educational Technology Users Group (ETUG) Spring Workshop, UBC Vancouver, together with the WriteAway Coordinator.
 - Shared an assignment template for instructors, which incorporated AskAway and WriteAway into the research and writing process.
 - Received a lot of interest and positive feedback, notably how the services support equitable access to learning support not only across the province but also within the institution and that the services are staffed by qualified humans within the province.
- Presented an online session “All About AskAway” to UBC iSchool students, in collaboration with Elizabeth Fernandes, UBC Librarian and AskAway local coordinator.
 - Opportunity for students to learn about the collaborative service and see someone staff “behind the scenes.” Students said they attended because they were curious about reference work and were applying for positions that require knowledge of AskAway. 100% of participants said they would recommend the session to classmates.

Usage Trends

- 2024 saw an 18% decrease in usage from the previous year, which put usage closer to 2022 levels.
- 2025 projected to see 30% decrease from 2024, which will put usage closer to 2019 pre-pandemic levels.
- Current trends are being continually analysed. Trends include
 - Equitable decrease is across most institutions and different types (universities and colleges), distribution of types of questions over the years is remarkably consistent but have noticed a slight decrease in the number of “research” questions (about 5% so far this year), no clear trends toward usage decreases at specific times of day.

AI and AskAway

- Admin Centre is staying informed on the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL) AI and Machine Learning Program (AIML).
 - C. Polley attended an update presentation and reached out to the AIML Program manager, Kari Weaver
 - Several AIML projects, one of which is “Enhancing Virtual Reference”
 - ♣ Two working groups are moving forward with this work in a “human-centric” way and reaching out to institutions who are publishing or

presenting about reference chatbot implementation to better understand the focus and limitations of their work.

- C. Polley suggested those interested in staying up to date subscribe to the Scholar's Portal Newsletter.
- LibraryH3lp chatbot
 - LibraryH3lp is the chat platform used by AskAway
 - Customers can specify which sources are used to train LibraryH3lp's chatbot (alpha testing phase). Institutions tell it what to crawl, such as internal LibraryH3lp knowledgebase (e.g., FAQs) and/or external websites.
- EBSCO
 - Reference Desk chat tool is under development; EBSCO will share more information in August and know that AskAway is interested in being involved in any beta testing.
- Supporting AI literacy
 - C. Polley asked if it would be valuable to offer training for service providers on supporting students with questions about AI tools and citations (i.e., AI literacy).
 - ♣ Currently, AskAway has an updated list of citation guides and resources to include information and guides for citing GenAI and added a "Generative AI Guidelines" field to the policy pages.
 - ♣ C. Polley thanked S. Moist and N. Romano for the work they did to help update AskAway's citation resources.

Questions were raised around the positive impact that decreased usage trends have on the collaborative scheduling challenges and the tracking and tagging of any AI questions students are asking.

In response, C. Polley explained that the decreased usage has reduced staffing strain on the service, which has lowered the number of swamped calls and the need for volunteer hours. C. Polley and S. Moist said the Emerging Technologies Working Group has implemented an AI Literacy tag to help understand and track students' AI questions and how service providers can best support them. M. Svendsen suggested reaching out to Sarah Eaton from the University of Calgary as a potential AI trainer.

3. Emerging Technologies Working Group Update

S. Moist reminded the group that the Emerging Technologies Working Group was formed to meet AskAway's priority to "leverage technology to enhance the service" and to investigate and make recommendations for emerging technologies that impact the service. The scope of the Working Group includes features and functionality of LibraryH3lp, alternatives to Campfire, and documentation regarding best practices for current and future technology. The areas excluded from scope include alternatives to LibraryH3lp and Zoom/video chatting integration.

Alternatives to Campfire

- Conference room feature in LibraryH3lp saves less provider chats than Campfire and cannot show Current Chats Tool within conference room but can link it at the top as a “topic,” which increases access for service providers.
- In comparison to Campfire, the conference room feature requires fewer logins, less administrative work, and has no additional costs.
- When staff sign in for their shift, they are automatically active in staff chat, which makes it easier for service providers to communicate while on-shift.

Traffic management

- The group reviewed user wait times and concluded that there are no general concerns about long wait times. Current wait times are a median of 11 seconds and an average of 17 seconds. Only 2.5% of chats have wait time greater than one minute.
- The group has set up a demonstration of chat routing with LibraryH3lp, which is designed to improve workflows and reduce distractions for service providers.
 - LibraryH3lp’s chat routing automatically controls how many service providers receive new chats
 - Each new chat is offered to a maximum of two service providers rather than all service providers. Each new chat is given to the least busy two service providers.

Language localization

- Currently, there are approximately 15 languages available to display to students in the user-facing chat box and a possibility to contribute to languages supported. The Working Group identified the top three languages spoken in B.C. that are not already available as Punjabi, Tagalog, and Korean.
- The Working Group tested language localization with mixed results and will be asking LibraryH3lp to further demo this feature when they present chat routing.
- The only Canadian Indigenous language offered widely in browsers and operating systems is Inuktitut. The translation to Inuktitut will only work if the user’s computer supports this language.

Service provider screensharing

- Currently LibraryH3lp does not offer service provider screen sharing and is not working to add this service option. The only option is to share silent screencasts.
- The working group is considering raising awareness of the screencasts feature among service providers.

Student file sharing

- While AskAway does not advertise that students can share files with service providers, this is an option. However, LibraryH3lp cannot limit to types of files students can share, which causes concerns about privacy, security, and consistency for user experience
- The working group will likely not enable this feature on user-facing chat boxes and not explore this further due to these concerns.

Next Steps

S. Moist invited suggestions to inform a survey being sent out in Fall 2025 to AskAway service providers and coordinators to gather feedback and preferences regarding the AskAway service. The Working Group plans to distribute a report of their work and recommendations by the end of 2025.

T. Rosseel asked about AI possibilities with LibraryH3lp. S. Moist explained that LibraryH3lp is in the alpha stage of testing their chat bot, which will need individual institutional training. The Working Group will be looking into the protocol for training and whether there needs to be an AskAway knowledgebase to train this tool once it is ready. The survey to service providers and local coordinators will also ask about AI.

N. Romano asked if institutions have AI tools available to students. Discussion revolved around differing institutional offerings. For example, TRU encourages students to use their institutional Microsoft Copilot account whereas UCW has Microsoft Copilot accounts for staff but not students. This led to a discussion on training and the creation of a resource on AI tool availability at participating institutions to help service providers support students on how to use the AI tools available to them. N. Romano suggested adding this as a field in the AskAway policy pages, so that service providers can easily access this information.

4. Sustainability Action Planning

T. Rosseel began the sustainability action planning by reminding the committee of the commitment model recommendations approved by the Advisory Committee in February 2025 and endorsed by the BC ELN Steering Committee in May 2025. The Steering Committee also endorsed a request to the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills (PSFS) for transitional funding to support next steps. An update was sent to the AskAway community.

The goal of the sustainability work is to provide participating libraries with at least one year's notice of any changes to the commitment models. To begin new commitment models in fiscal 2027-28, new commitment models will need to be presented to the Advisory Committee and BC ELN Steering Committee in Fall 2025. Participating libraries will need to be notified of new commitment models in early 2026.

To implement the recommendations according to the above timeline, the BC ELN office is working on a transitional funding request from PSFS.

If the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills does not approve the funding request, the Advisory Committee will then consider other options, including reduction of service hours, revising the implementation timeline, and/or increasing service support fees.

The next step for action planning was to form a Recommendations Implementation Team. The proposal for membership is the Advisory Committee Chair, Executive

Director (S. Nishimura), Coordinator (C. Polley), and minimum one additional member from the Advisory Committee. N. Romano volunteered as the additional Advisory Committee member. There was agreement that a smaller group was appropriate at this stage because the Commitment Model Working Group was very representative of AskAway participants and consulted broadly.

Participating libraries will be consulted on possible changes regularly using mailing lists and the AskAway Sustainability page on the BC ELN website. E. Magnus suggested holding information sessions or open forums as the Commitment Model Working Group found the information sessions heavily informed the Working Group's focus. E. Magnus added these sessions increased the AskAway community's understanding of the potential changes and impacts.

MOTION: To form a Recommendations Implantation Team to implement the sustainability action plan.

Moved: E. Magnus

Seconded: D. Brigham

Motion carried.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in Fall 2025.