



AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 4th, 2024

9:30am – 11:00am (PT)

Virtual Meeting

In Attendance:

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

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

Aleteia Greenwood, *University of British Columbia*

Courtney Lundrigan, *University of Victoria* (Alternate)

Ebony Magnus, *Simon Fraser University*

Shannon Moist, Douglas College, *Member-at-Large*

Monica Mun, North Island College, *Rural Colleges* (Alternate)

Nicoletta Romano, University Canada West, *Small Universities*

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

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

AskAway Administrative Centre:

Jaclyn Fong, Student Librarian (Recorder)

Sunni Nishimura, BC ELN Executive Director

Cristen Polley, AskAway Coordinator

Regrets:

Lynette Gallant, North Island College, *Rural Colleges*

Karen Munro, *University of Victoria representative*

1. Adoption of Agenda

T. Rosseel welcomed committee members and shared a territorial acknowledgement. Committee membership updates included N. Romano as the new Small Universities representative, D. Grace as the new Member-at-Large, and S. Nishimura as the new BC ELN Executive Director.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. AskAway News

T. Rosseel shared that University of Victoria (UVic) Libraries has given their 12-month notice of withdrawal from the AskAway service, in alignment with the AskAway Partner Benefits and Responsibilities:

- This difficult decision was in response to significant budget cuts at UVic, and consequently, UVic Libraries.
- AskAway expresses gratitude to staff at UVic Libraries, who have been active in the community through their years with the service.
- UVic Libraries will continue to participate and staff the service until March 2025.
- The news of UVic's withdrawal notice was shared via email with the Advisory Committee and the BC ELN Steering Committee.

E. Gavaris asked about the standard procedure for an exit interview when a participating institution decides to leave the service. T. Rosseel explained that there is no specific interview procedure, but that the AskAway Admin Centre communicates with the departing institution about the decision and their experience participating in the service.

Following the meeting, a message will be sent to the broader AskAway community (i.e., service providers and local coordinators) to inform them about the news. Committee members agreed that the messaging shared with the Advisory Committee and the BC ELN Steering Committee would be suitable for the broader AskAway community.

3. Service Update

C. Polley provided the following service updates:

Ministry Funding 2024/25 and 2025/26

- AskAway received funding of \$30,000 over the next two years from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills. The support will be used to help ensure current staffing levels can be maintained in the collaborative schedule while the Advisory Committee reviews the commitment models, and to hire a Student Librarian to support the AskAway Admin Centre.
- The funding will also be used to explore removing barriers to participation for BC ELN partner libraries and Indigenous post-secondary institutions.
- Separately from the AskAway funding, BC ELN has received Ministry funding of \$50,000 to investigate the obstacles to BC ELN membership faced by Indigenous post-secondary institutions and deliver recommendations on removing these barriers.

Usage Trends

- Fall 2023 was the second busiest term on record for AskAway, and the service is anticipating a busy summer, as last summer was the busiest summer on record.
- Longer-term data shows the service has seen a significant and sustained increase in traffic since 2020:
 - A steady increase in the usage of the service was observed from 2016 to 2019, ranging from 5% to 10%.
 - In 2020, there was a dramatic 50% increase during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shift to emergency remote learning.
 - From 2021 to 2023, AskAway has experienced a sustained increase in traffic compared to pre-pandemic years of approximately 45%.

4. Commitment Models Review

T. Rosseel reminded members that the Advisory Committee has endorsed three cost-sharing and collaborative staffing commitment models to support the service and enable participating libraries to provide 73 hours of service per week. As presented in the previous agenda item, AskAway usage has been steadily increasing since 2016, with a significant and sustained increase since the start of the pandemic. The growth of the service, along with the withdrawal of UVic Libraries in March 2025, necessitates a review of the commitment models to ensure the sustainability of the service.

C. Polley provided a brief overview of the current commitment models:

- AskAway commitment models are based on FTEs. There are currently five tiers, with three commitment models that support the service: Service Support Fees, Staffing Commitments, and Flexible Support Contributions.
- Service Support Fees
 - The fees are subject to an annual inflationary increase between 2-5%, allowing the service to meet inflationary increases to expenses such as software (e.g., LibraryH3lp) and service coordination and support. The fee is capped at \$10,000.
- Staffing Commitments
 - The year is divided up into four Sections for scheduling purposes. Each participating institution contributes in staffing hours but not in funds. The current model makes no distinction between weekday, daytime hours and evening and weekend hours. In addition to these base staffing commitments, many institutions volunteer staffing hours to the collaborative schedule and/or staff only their institutional queue in addition to collaboratively scheduled shifts.

- Flexible Support Contributions
 - All libraries contribute flexible support, in the form of funds and/or flexible support hours, allowing AskAway to offer service on evenings and weekends. Libraries can opt to contribute one or more flexible support hour(s), which is an evening or weekend hour in addition to base staffing commitments. Each flexible support hour contributed in any Section reduces the flexible support fee by \$250. At the beginning of each year, institutions decide how they want to allocate their Flexible Support Contributions for the coming year. There has been no change to the Flexible Support fee since it was implemented.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that the current five-tier model has been consistent for many years, that the current Service Support Fees model has always been capped at \$10,000 in Tier 5, and that the only institution in Tier 5 is UBC.

Committee members discussed and decided to proceed with a review of the commitment models.

MOTION: To form a Commitment Model Review Working Group.

Moved: E. Magnus

Seconded: A. Greenwood

Motion carried.

Next steps

Committee members discussed next steps, including the process for review and how the working group will be formed:

- A Commitment Model Review Working Group will be formed by members from the Advisory Committee, local coordinators, and a representative from the AskAway Admin Centre to review the current models and present a recommendation to the Committee.
 - The group will have five to seven members representing institutions from different tiers, and ideally, each constituency group.
 - E. Magnus and A. Greenwood expressed interest in joining the group.
- A callout will be sent to the AskAway community to ask for interest.
- A recommendation by the working group should be delivered by the end of December 2024, with an implementation plan to follow.
- An update will be presented to the Steering Committee, informing them of the formation of this working group.

5. Expenditure Plan 2024/25

The 2024/25 Expenditure Plan was presented by S. Nishimura.

Revenues

The renewed Ministry Bridge funding addresses barriers to participation for all and provides two more years to continue the Advisory Committee's work of understanding service needs.

The recommended increase to the Participating Library Base Service Support fees for 2024/25 is 3%, following a 4% increase in the previous year. The 3% increase translates to between a \$32 and \$169 increase for institutions across Tiers 1 to 4. There is a cap on Tier 5. This increase applies only to the Base Service Support Fee. Participating Library Flexible Support Contributions fluctuate depending on how institutions decide to allocate their contribution; there has been no increase in the rate since they were implemented.

Expenditures

Coordination and Support costs are estimated at \$80,000. This includes the Coordinator's three-day per week position, as well as a Student Librarian who is supporting AskAway work.

The Administration, Communication and Governance budget includes an amount set aside for an in-person Advisory Committee meeting, such as an upcoming meeting to discuss the commitment models.

A question was raised about the \$3,823 decrease in Contract for Auxiliary and Projects in 2024/25 compared to the previous year. S. Nishimura explained that the amount fluctuates in relation to how many flexible support hours libraries contribute.

MOTION: To approve the 2024/25 Expenditure Plan.

Moved: A. Greenwood

Seconded: S. Moist

Motion carried.

6. Action Planning Priorities: Next Steps

C. Polley provided updates on AskAway action planning progress:

- The Framework was approved by the Committee at the last meeting and was posted on the BC ELN website and shared with the AskAway community.
- AskAway is ready to move forward with 2-3 year activities and next steps, according to the suggested timelines.
- The top four priorities in the Action Plan are:
 - Fostering collaboration among participating institutions and service providers
 - Ensuring accessibility for all

- Leveraging technology to enhance the service
- Maintaining or growing service levels
- The [Next Steps](#) will guide the work of AskAway over the next 2-3 years; some of this work is in progress (e.g., offering learning opportunities)
- The highest priority right now is to create an AskAway Emerging Technologies Subcommittee to work on the priority “Leveraging technology to enhance the service,” as early as this summer.

T. Rosseel initiated a discussion about forming a subcommittee. Some topics that require attention include the queuing system in LibraryH3lp, and the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on virtual chat reference services. S. Moist and M. Mun expressed interest in joining the subcommittee.

As a next step, the Committee agreed to send a call-out to the AskAway community to recruit members for the Emerging Technologies Subcommittee.

7. New Business

There was no new business.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting will take place in the summer.