



AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Monday, October 21, 2024

11:00 am – 12:30 pm (PT)

Virtual Meeting

In Attendance:

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

Gregg Currie, Selkirk College, *Rural Colleges*

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

Aleteia Greenwood, *University of British Columbia*

Ebony Magnus, *Simon Fraser University*

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

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

Karen Munro, *University of Victoria*

Nicoletta Romano, University Canada West, *Small Universities*

Melissa Svendsen, Thompson Rivers University, *Member-at-Large* [joined meeting during agenda item 5]

AskAway Administrative Centre:

Laura Moberg, Student Librarian (Recorder)

Sunni Nishimura, BC ELN Executive Director

Cristen Polley, AskAway Coordinator

Guest:

Alison Griffin, BCIT, *AskAway Commitment Models Review Working Group Co-Chair* [left meeting after agenda item 3]

Regrets:

None.

1. Adoption of Agenda

T. Rosseel welcomed committee members and shared a territorial acknowledgement. Committee membership updates included G. Currie as the new Rural Colleges representative, T. Mundle as the new Teaching Universities & Technical Institutions representative, and M. Svendsen as the new Member-at-Large. A. Griffin was welcomed as a guest to share an update from the AskAway Commitment Models Review Working Group.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Service Update

C. Polley provided the following service updates:

Usage Trends

- AskAway usage in 2024 has decreased 14% from 2023 and is on par with 2022 usage data. Traffic in 2024 is still 30-35% higher than pre-pandemic years, with an estimated 32,000 chat sessions between January and October.
- AskAway usage is at a more manageable level, evidenced by the decrease in “swamped” calls sent when service providers are overwhelmed with chats.

Action Planning Progress

- AskAway has outlined [2-3-year service priorities and activities](#), including:
- Leveraging technology to enhance the service
 - A call for members has gone out for the AskAway Emerging Technologies Working Group. Recommended members will be brought to the Advisory Committee to approve via electronic vote.
- Fostering collaboration among participating institutions and service providers
 - The second AskAway Lunch and Learn was held in July and focused on Generative AI (GenAI) in collaboration with the UBC Digital Tattoo Project.
 - Ideas for future Lunch and Learn sessions were discussed at a local coordinators meeting in September; topics of interest included subject-focused training, and accessible and inclusive language.

New AskAway Medical Emergency Guidelines

- With input from coordinators, the Admin Centre developed new guidelines for service providers to use when a patron needs to report a medical emergency. These were developed in response to [new recommendations](#) from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills for overdose prevention at post-secondary institutions.

3. Commitment Models Review Working Group Update

T. Rosseel reminded the Committee about the context for forming the Commitment Models Review Working Group and its goals. Working Group Co-Chairs, A. Griffin and E. Magnus, presented an update on the working group’s progress (report included in the agenda package):

Completed Activities

- Facilitated a member engagement session in early September to share information about the working group's process and hear feedback from the AskAway community on existing service models.
- Surveyed participating institutions to gather information about the nature and extent of local resources used to meet the current service commitment models.
- Surveyed other virtual collaborative chat services in North America through written correspondence and online meetings to learn about their commitment models.
- Identified ideas that are out of scope currently but merit further consideration, such as a platform review, service hours review, etc.
- Reflected on preliminary findings, which identified the following themes:
 - Participating institutions value the service and have a strong shared commitment to ensuring its sustainability.
 - Many participating institutions experience challenges with the existing service commitment models, primarily related to staff turnover/capacity, scheduled shifts, and budget.
 - Similar pressures may be experienced differently among institutions. For example, some institutions find it difficult to staff evening and weekend shifts, while others have limited capacity to cover daytime shifts.
 - Various institutions raised concerns about perceived inequities.

The Advisory Committee agreed with the working group's proposed next steps, which include:

- Continue to analyze and synthesize findings.
- Share an interim update with participating institutions by early November.
- Deliver recommendations to the Advisory Committee by early 2025.

4. Expenditure Plan 2025-26

The 2025-26 Expenditure Plan was presented by S. Nishimura, who noted that the Expenditure Plan is now presented in the fall rather than the spring to align with institutional budgetary timelines.

Revenues

The recommended increase to the Participating Library Service Support Fees for 2025-26 is 5%, which translates to between a \$55 and \$290 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. The total Participating Library Flexible Support Contributions fluctuate depending on how institutions decide to allocate their individual contribution each year; there has been no increase in the rate since they were implemented. The reduced revenue for Service Support Fees and Flexible Service Support Contributions reflects UVic's departure at the end of March 2025.

2025-26 is the second and final year of renewed Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills Bridge Funding to continue work on service sustainability and address barriers to participation, particularly for Indigenous post-secondary institutions.

Expenditures

Contract for Auxiliary and Project costs have increased to cover the scheduling gaps left by UVic's departure (approximately \$15,000).

S. Nishimura noted that if needed the BC ELN budget can accommodate the projected deficit of approximately \$6,000 for 2025-26, and that the Commitment Models Review Working Group's forthcoming recommendations will help support service sustainability.

Questions were raised about the BC ELN Contribution and the Participating Library Flexible Service Support Fees, both of which have not increased for 2025-26. S. Nishimura noted that changes to these revenue items have not been made as the Commitment Models Review Working Group's investigation is still underway.

In response to a question about the additional auxiliary contract expenses, S. Nishimura confirmed that contract hours are adjusted based on how many flexible support hours libraries contribute. The Committee agreed that the 2025-26 Expenditure Plan may be shared with the Commitment Models Review Working Group, recognizing the importance of understanding financial context in their work. The Working Group will work with the Admin Centre to cost out scenarios based on commitment models and flexible support.

T. Rosseel noted that AskAway is in a transition year, and that adjustments will need to be made to budget lines in the 2026-27 fiscal year once decisions about commitment models are made.

MOTION: To approve the 2025-26 Expenditure Plan.

Moved: T. Mundle

Seconded: G. Currie

Motion carried.

5. Artificial Intelligence Conversation

T. Rosseel led the Committee in a discussion about Artificial Intelligence (AI) to determine next steps and actions for members and the Admin Centre. Questions

and concerns have been raised about AI, specifically related to GenAI chatbots in development by LibraryH3lp and EBSCO.

LibraryH3lp is creating a chatbot trained on knowledge bases and web crawling. LibraryH3lp is not currently training the chatbot on transcripts but is considering this option in the future, dependent on permission from customers. The Committee noted concerns about privacy and the use of chat transcripts in AI training.

Outcomes and Next Steps

- The Committee agreed there is value in keeping an open channel of communication with the OCUL Task Force on Machine Learning and AI.
- C. Polley will clarify with LibraryH3lp which knowledge bases are being used to train their chatbot.
- T. Rosseel and E. Magnus volunteered to review LibraryH3lp and EBSCO contracts for language on AI, data usage, and privacy. Results of the license review will be shared with the Committee.
- BC ELN staff will be meeting with EBSCO to discuss their plans around GenAI, including the AI chatbot. The AskAway Admin Centre will follow up with the Advisory Committee with learnings from that conversation.

6. New Business

There was no new business.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be a special meeting in early 2025 to hear recommendations from the AskAway Commitment Models Review Working Group.