Review Chat Reference Software & Investigate Proactive Chat

Through preliminary research and ongoing conversations with collaborative chat reference service coordinators across North America, we learned that the following software options are most commonly evaluated by the services:

QuestionPoint	**LibraryH3lp**	**LibChat**
OCLC	*Nub Games/Altarama*	*Springshare*
Seven collaborative chat reference services (not including AskAway)	Nine collaborative chat reference services	One collaborative chat reference service

Why should we consider a software review?

AskAway last completed a software review five years ago in 2013. Since then, the software landscape as well as the service's priorities have changed. There are now more software options that meet the needs of collaborative chat reference, and AskAway would like to explore new features such as integrated staff chat, accessible and customizable widgets, and options for Canadian hosting. Proactive chat is a vital feature to consider as it is an action planning priority.

Suggested next steps

The Admin Centre will develop a project plan for a software review and bring it back to the Advisory Committee for endorsement. The project plan might include forming a software review subcommittee that would develop a list of functional requirements and a shortlist of vendors, issue an RFQ, and present a recommendation to the Advisory Committee.

Support Libraries in Raising AskAway Visibility

Raising AskAway visibility and promoting the service are interdependent. Once libraries raise visibility, actively promoting the service will ensure that more students know AskAway is available to them. Building on the *Visibility Best Practices*, the Admin Centre will work together with local coordinators to help them raise visibility and promote the service.

Suggested next steps

On a regular basis, share one action that libraries can take to improve visibility, steps to implement it, and an example from a library (e.g. share how libraries can add the Qwidget to EBSCO database search results).

Develop best practices for promotion and provide avenues of communication for local coordinators to share ideas and success stories.

In consultation with local coordinators, explore new ideas to raise visibility and promote the service (e.g. libraries expressed interest in the idea of an AskAway kiosk).

Investigate Options for Evening & Weekend Coverage

To move forward, we need to gain a deeper understanding of evening and weekend usage trends as well as the challenge of staffing these shifts.

Suggested next steps

Three preliminary actions are needed to move forward: survey partner libraries to better understand why these times are difficult to staff, analyse usage over time to see how patrons use the service on evenings and weekends, and talk to collaborative chat reference peers to learn how they staff challenging times.