

AskAway Chat Reference Actions & Achievements

2020



Message from the Chair

In 2020 we heard from many AskAway libraries that the service was a critical support to students, particularly when COVID-19 arrived in B.C. and our institutions had to rapidly pivot to fully online service delivery. As an established service, AskAway was in place to smoothly support this transition. Staff did not have to reimagine how to provide reference assistance virtually, and could instead focus on other immediate needs. Traffic data from the year – a 62% increase in usage over 2019 – tells the story of how much students and other AskAway users relied heavily on the service. Institutions recognized this need and responded with additional shifts and added hours so AskAway could remain open for longer.

I'm very appreciative of the hard work put in by AskAway service providers over the past year to meet the increased demand and deliver excellent service in exceptional times. Thank you to all.



Debbie Schachter
University Librarian
Capilano University
AskAway Advisory Committee Chair

Highlights of 2020:



AskAway Usage Increased 62% over 2019

As COVID-19 forced post-secondary libraries to shutter or limit in-person learner support services, students turned to online services like AskAway more than ever for the help they needed.



Service Providers Answered 60,847 Questions

AskAway service providers answered a record-setting number of questions in 2020, ranging from how to look for information to how to properly cite sources.



42 Extra Days of Service were Added

Institutions saw distinct value in keeping AskAway open during periods that it is typically closed, such as between semesters. Institutions rallied and collectively contributed extra time to keep the service available to students for longer.



\$2.2 Million in Costs Avoided Across the Sector

Thanks to collaborative licensing, staffing, administration, and governance, B.C. and Yukon's post-secondary sectors avoided \$2.2 million in costs.



94% of AskAway Users* are Satisfied

Year after year AskAway users are very satisfied, yet in 2020 satisfaction levels went up *even further* (up from 91% in 2019); comments from users describe appreciation for service providers' assistance, and AskAway's accessibility, convenience, and immediacy.

*that complete an exit survey

2020 Achievements

Bolstered the Service

- ▶ Increased AskAway's capacity to meet the 62% increase in traffic to the service over the previous year:
 - Surveyed partner libraries to determine their chat reference needs throughout the year
 - Implemented revised schedules in support of the Advisory Committee's decision to add hours and extend the service during regular semester breaks
- ▶ Offered training – including an ad hoc online session for twenty new and returning service providers at the onset of the pandemic – to prepare providers to staff the service
- ▶ Developed COVID-19 specific FAQs to support service providers
- ▶ Created online promotional material to help libraries inform their users about service extensions and extra hours of availability
- ▶ Released the LibraryH3lp current AskAway chats status board to help service providers balance traffic on their shifts and provide more efficient service

Developed Communities of Practice

- ▶ Hosted a virtual local coordinators meeting to provide an opportunity for cross-institutional learning, and collectively consider how to support service providers responding to students who are stressed
- ▶ Hosted the inaugural meeting among Canadian collaborative chat reference service colleagues to learn from one another about service updates and responses during the pandemic

Being able to pivot almost immediately to virtual reference after the shutdown of our physical spaces and services [because of COVID-19] was invaluable. Our staff and students are grateful to have the ability to communicate with each other in real time during the crisis, and the work of the AskAway team to ensure everything continued to run smoothly is much appreciated. Thank you!

– Dan Slessor, Librarian, Langara College

Did You Know?



Libraries collectively contributed 3,275 extra hours to AskAway in 2020 to meet higher usage



Who's using AskAway?
40% - 1st/2nd year
19% - 3rd/4th year
21% - Grad/Post-grad
10% - Faculty/Staff
10% - Alumni/Other



Top learning outcome that AskAway users report from their session: Learning where to look for information.

When the pandemic started in March...

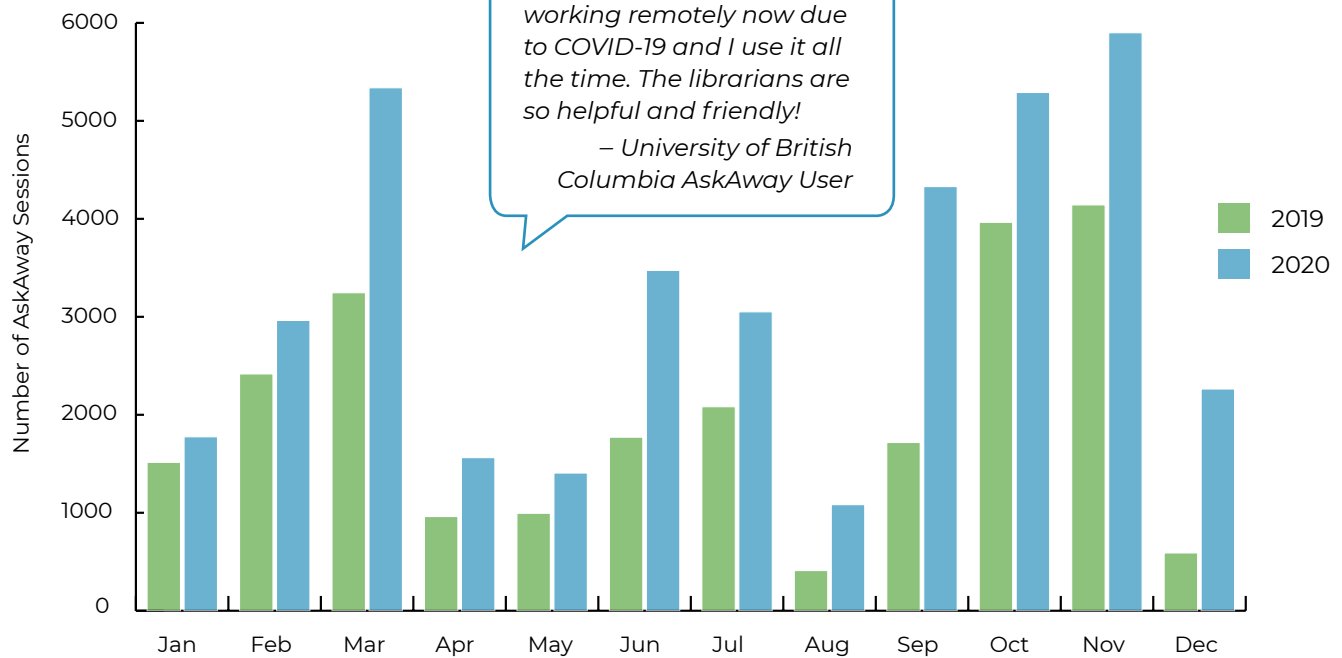
...AskAway provided a critical 'safety net' for institutions that needed to move to online delivery, and for students who continued to need help. AskAway usage went up 64% in March over the previous year, and overall 2020 traffic broke records.

Thanks for keeping your services accessible during COVID-19!

– University of Victoria
AskAway User

I love this service! I am working remotely now due to COVID-19 and I use it all the time. The librarians are so helpful and friendly!

– University of British Columbia
AskAway User



These services make a big difference in my ability to complete assignments and dive deeper into the work I am writing about. I really appreciate their help as I am a distanced learner and access is difficult from here in the northern part of the interior.

– Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
AskAway User

It's so great that [AskAway is] available for immediate assistance on the weekends. Especially right now during COVID-19, it makes finding what you need much easier...

– Douglas College
AskAway User



Capilano University Librarians working on AskAway from home.

Behind the Scenes...

...AskAway service providers kept the chat reference fires burning – answering questions and providing research help from their homes seven days a week during the semester.

AskAway Financials

| | 2019/20 Actual | 2020/21 Projected |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| | Revenue | Revenue |
| Partner Library Support (Service Support Fee & Flexible Contribution) | 95,610 | 96,569 |
| BC ELN Contribution | 8,000 | 10,000 |
| Miscellaneous Revenue (Carryforward, Marketing, etc.) | 2,884 | 2,152 |
| Total | 106,494 | 108,721 |
| | Expenses | Expenses |
| Staffing and Coordination Infrastructure | 87,164 | 89,118 |
| Administration/Communication/Governance | 340 | 1,233 |
| Software & Technical Infrastructure | 17,195 | 14,542 |
| Total | 104,699 | 104,893 |
| Revenue - Expenses (Carryforward) | 1,795 | 3,828 |

A Look Ahead to 2021

- ▶ Ensure AskAway continues to meet the needs of libraries and their users through the COVID-19 pandemic. This might include offering extended AskAway terms based on partner library needs, offering additional training, and strengthening the collaborative schedule.
- ▶ Launch a proactive chat pilot to test the feature and assess its impact. With proactive chat a learner is actively invited to chat and asked if they need assistance after a set amount of time has passed.
- ▶ Continue to support libraries in raising the visibility of the service at their institutions by broadcasting a monthly “AskAway Visibility Tip of the Month” which will include an actionable step that libraries can take to raise visibility, based on the Minimum Visibility Standards.
- ▶ Update Advisory Committee Terms of Reference to ensure alignment with service host BC ELN and BC ELN’s other service areas.



AskAway is a service of the BC Electronic Library Network (BC ELN).
 Questions? Please contact the AskAway Administrative Centre.