AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 24, 2025
9:00am – 10:30am (PT)
Virtual Meeting

Committee Members in Attendance:

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

Doug Brigham, *University of British Columbia*

Gregg Currie, Selkirk College, *Rural Colleges*

Aline Goncalves, Yukon University, *Teaching Universities and Technical Institutions*

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

Nicoletta Romano, University Canada West, *Small Universities*

Abeer Siddiqui, *Simon Fraser University*

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

AskAway Administrative Centre:

Kyla McCallum (Recorder)

Sunni Nishimura, BC ELN Executive Director

Cristen Polley, AskAway Coordinator

Regrets:

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

1. Welcome and New Members

T. Rosseel welcomed committee members and shared a territorial acknowledgement. Committee membership updates included A. Goncalves as the new Teaching Universities and Technical Institutions representative and A. Siddiqui as the new Simon Fraser University representative.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Expenditure Plan 2026/27

Two versions of the 2026-27 Expenditure Plan were presented by S. Nishimura. The revenue and expenditures in each version were identical except that one included the request for $80,500 in Transition Funding from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills (PSFS) as revenue while the other did not.

Revenues

Both versions recommended a 5% increase to the 2026-27 Participating Library Service Support Fee, which translates to between a $58 and $500 increase for institutions. Also

recommended was removing the cap on Tier 5. This increase would apply only to the Base Service Support Fee.

The Participating Library Flexible Support Contributions total fluctuates depending on how institutions decide to allocate their individual contribution each year. No increase was recommended, and it was noted that there has been no increase in the rates since they were implemented.

Expenditures

The Coordination and Support costs decreased as BC ELN will reallocate staffing to foster greater financial efficiency. The long-standing Extenuating Circumstances Fund remained consistent while the Software and Technology Infrastructure expenditure displayed an average increase to account for annual increases and the U.S. exchange rate.

Projected Year End Balance

Without PSFS transition funding, the 2026/27 expenditure plan would result in a structural deficit. T. Rosseel noted how this underlines the importance of transition funding and adopting a more sustainable commitment model.

In response to a question about when PSFS funding would be confirmed, S. Nishimura said she expects an official decision in the next few weeks. A. Goncalves inquired about the Advisory Committee's next steps should PSFS funding not be granted. In response, S. Nishimura explained that the Advisory Committee would convene to consider potential options for accommodating reduced revenue, which could include reducing service hours or increasing the Participating Library Service Support Fee.

Cap on Tier 5

D. Brigham asked why the Tier 5 cap, which historically limited the Participating Library Service Support Fee to $10,000, was being removed. T. Rosseel explained that lifting the cap was proposed as a strategy to offset lost revenue amid membership changes and rising staffing costs. T. Rosseel further noted that, given partner libraries' current financial challenges, removing the cap supports greater equity within AskAway's fee structure. S. Nishimura added that the cap has been in place since the service's inception, but the commitment model must be revised to help mitigate the impacts of financial hardship across all five tiers.

MOTION: **To approve the Expenditure Plan 2026/27.**
Moved: G. Currie

Seconded: D. Grace

The motion carried with 7 in favour and 1 not in favour.

3. Recommendations Implementation Team Update

S. Nishimura acknowledged that many members of the AskAway Advisory Committee were present at a recent forum, where four scenarios for a new commitment model were presented to the community. Based on feedback from this forum, two scenarios (Scenario C and Scenario D) were revised and shared with the Advisory Committee. N. Romano outlined the key factors considered by the Recommendations Implementation Team, which apply to both adjusted scenarios.

- Allocating a set number of evening and weekend hours was a recommendation from the Commitment Models Review Working Group, and this practice would promote transparency, long-term sustainability, and service planning.
- Ensuring an equitable distribution of evening and weekend hours acknowledges that smaller institutions face greater challenges in staffing outside of weekday schedules.
- The revised model introduces a mechanism for flexible support by allowing institutions to contribute financially in lieu of staffing their evening and weekend commitments.
- The new Commitment Model has a Unified Support Fee, which is a combination of the former Base Service Support Fee and Flexible Support Fee.
- Decisions about reducing service hours are guided by heatmap data from 2021–2025, which highlights patterns of student engagement. This data is balanced against the recognized value of evening and weekend hours in that they extend reference support beyond the daytime operating hours of many institutions.

C. Polley presented adjusted versions of Scenario C and Scenario D.

- Scenario C (adjusted):
  - Significantly reduces service hours, resulting in fewer evening and weekend commitments.
  - Incorporates a 5% increase to the Unified Support Fee.
- Scenario D (adjusted):
  - Maintains the same overall service hours but decreases provider coverage during historically slower periods, leading to fewer evening and weekend commitments than originally presented in Scenario D for Tiers 3–5.
  - Incorporates an 8.5% one-time fee increase to the Unified Support Fee.

T. Rosseel led committee members in a guided discussion on the scenarios, with the opportunity to ask questions.

Provider Coverage

- M. Svendsen raised concerns about the scenarios' limited coverage during evening and weekend hours. While these periods may see lower student engagement, assigning only two providers could leave the service exposed to last-minute disruptions that might result in just one AskAway provider being available online

Evening and Weekend Hours: Balancing Value with Staffing Challenges

- Committee members emphasized the significant value of AskAway in extending reference services beyond standard weekday hours.
    - G. Currie highlighted that Saturday hours are particularly beneficial for students at rural institutions.
    - D. Grace and M. Svendsen similarly attested to the importance of weekend hours, noting that their institutions do not staff reference desks during this period.
- At the same time, members acknowledged the challenge of staffing evening and weekend shifts, especially for smaller institutions.
    - G. Currie observed that financial pressures across post-secondary institutions may necessitate fewer evening and weekend hours than would be ideal.

Heatmap Data

- Given that heatmap data indicates lower engagement during evening and weekend hours, D. Brigham questioned why Scenario D (adjusted) does not have further reduced hours.
- Committee members expressed an interest in differentiating 2025 heatmap data from previous years due to the lower engagement seen in recent months.
- A question was asked about the difference in student engagement between evening and weekend hours, and C. Polley responded that the engagement is fairly similar.
- C. Polley noted that the lower engagement shown in the heatmap visualizations—represented in green—solely indicates that comparatively fewer students are using the service during these times, though it continues to be utilized.

Next Steps

Committee members expressed interest in seeing another adjusted scenario with additional service hour reductions that incorporates elements from Scenario D (adjusted), such as the one-time fee increase.

- G. Currie suggested increasing the service hour reduction for Scenario D (adjusted) to 10 total weekly service hours removed.
- M. Svendsen indicated a preference for Scenario C (adjusted) due to its minimal evening and weekend hour commitment for institutional staffing.

D. Brigham stated that UBC would not support either of the two scenarios as presented.

4. Usage and Promotion

C. Polley presented on AskAway's usage statistics, reporting that the service continues to see less engagement in 2025 compared to 2024. Current usage levels are comparable to pre-pandemic 2019, though the extent of reduced student engagement varies by Tier: Tier 3 experienced a sharper drop of 38%, while Tier 5 saw a smaller

decrease of 17%. A few institutions are experiencing modest increases in usage. Overall, this reduction in engagement reflects a broader trend observed across Canadian consortia.

T. Rosseel facilitated a discussion on usage and promotion, structuring the conversation around guided questions.

- Committee members observed that instructors appear to be adapting assignments in response to artificial intelligence (AI), which may be influencing AskAway's usage.
- D. Grace emphasized the importance of consistent messaging that AskAway providers are human, not AI agents, particularly during in-class promotional visits.
- T. Rosseel raised the question of whether additional training should be offered to AskAway providers to prepare them for supporting students with generative AI.
  - M. Svendsen suggested that students be referred to their institution and instructor, given the inconsistency of AI policies across campuses.
  - N. Romano recommended sending regular emails to remind AskAway providers where to access AI guidelines and other relevant resources.
- C. Polley asked whether a document outlining AI literacy best practices would help ensure consistency in AskAway's responses to student inquiries. G. Currie supported this proposal.

D. Grace also noted that declines in international enrollment may be contributing to reduced usage levels.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

6. Next Meeting

The next meeting will be in January or February 2026 to hear recommendations from the Recommendations Implementation Team and Emerging Technologies Working Group.