



AskAway Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday, February 6, 2026

1:00pm – 3:00pm (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*

Shannon Moist, Douglas College, *Member-at-Large* (Chair, Emerging Technologies Working Group)

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 (Moderator)

Guest:

Patricia Foster, University of British Columbia, Emerging Technologies Working Group Member

Regrets: None

1. Welcome and Adoption of Agenda

T. Rosseel welcomed committee members and Patricia Foster, who presented recommendations alongside S. Moist. T. Rosseel shared a territorial acknowledgement.

The agenda was adopted as presented.

2. Emerging Technologies Working Group: Recommendations

P. Foster and S. Moist reminded committee members of the Emerging Technology Working Group's purpose—to investigate and make recommendations for emerging technologies that impact the service—and clarified which actions fell outside the group's scope, such as identifying alternatives to the LibraryH3lp platform. They explored five technical features of LibraryH3lp, which informed five corresponding recommendations.

P. Foster and S. Moist outlined the Working Group's recommendations and provided an overview of survey results from October 2025 that queried service providers on potential changes to AskAway. The Working Group noted strong opposition to integrating an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot into AskAway, as 93% of survey respondents felt it is important or very important that AskAway is human-based and does not include AI chatbots. Furthermore, 87% of respondents said “no” or “I'm not sure” when asked if an AI chatbot—that uses only information from AskAway's own curated knowledgebase—would be helpful as first-line support for patrons. Patrons have also expressed a preference for prioritizing human help in AskAway. While the Working Group did not include AI in its five recommendations, the service is responding to its growing influence by implementing an AI literacy tag to support the collection of chat-based data and by updating the automated concierge message to emphasize that service providers are human. If AskAway were to pilot the LibraryH3lp generative AI/chatbot (under development), D. Brigham mentioned that the University of British Columbia would be interested in participating.

The presenters responded to questions about the language localization feature, which displays automated chat box messages in the user's browser language. Committee members agreed that adding a note to the automated concierge message to say that the full service is provided in English would help set clearer expectations for users who see the effects of language localization. In response to a question, S. Moist clarified that language localization is already in place and that the recommendation would simply expand the available options to include Korean, Tagalog, and Punjabi. She also noted that using service providers' language skills to extend the full chat service beyond English is outside the Working Group's scope.

D. Brigham asked why the Working Group is recommending a semester-long trial of the chat-routing feature—a queuing and load-balancing system for managing AskAway traffic—rather than beginning the trial immediately while traffic is high. S. Moist explained that feedback from the two-week pilot in January 2026 included a request for a longer testing period, and starting at the beginning of the next semester would provide

adequate preparation time. A full-semester trial would also help control for significant week-to-week fluctuations in student engagement.

The Committee discussed the first recommendation, to move the internal service provider communication channel from Campfire to LibraryH3lp's conference room.

- Benefits of moving away from Campfire include:
 - **Streamlined operations:** fewer account logins for the AskAway Admin Centre to create and manage.
 - **Simplified workflow:** service providers use a single platform for patron chats and internal messages; delivery of internal messages through LibraryH3lp may improve responsiveness to transfer requests and calls for help (while on shift).
 - **Cost savings:** Campfire fees are eliminated, and the new conference room is covered under the existing LibraryH3lp license.
- P. Foster and C. Polley confirmed that files can be shared between service providers in the LibraryH3lp conference room.
- S. Moist noted that LibraryH3lp retains only the last 100 conference room messages, unlike Campfire's full archive. While a complete message history is not a priority for the AskAway community, service providers should be aware of this limitation and save any messages they may need later.
- M. Svendsen cautioned that relying solely on LibraryH3lp could hinder internal communication if the platform goes down temporarily, as it has on the rare occasion. S. Moist reiterated the Working Group's recommendation to use the AskAway mailing list as a backup communication channel during any outages.
- C. Polley addressed a concern about the conference room user experience. It appears beneath patron chats but can be opened in a separate browser window.

MOTION: To endorse the AskAway Emerging Technologies Working Group recommendations as presented.

Moved: G. Currie

Seconded: N. Romano

The motion carried unanimously.

3. Recommendations Implementation Team: Recommendations

Recommendations Implementation Team members presented their recommended commitment model for long-term sustainability, which balances three factors of change:

- **Fees:** the Unified Service Support Fee would have a one-time fee increase of 8.4% in 2027-28 compared to 2026-27 fees; the Unified Fee would then be subject to annual inflationary increases of 2-5%. The fee would be capped at \$15,500. Transition funding received from the Ministry of Post-secondary Education and Future Skills (PSFS) would be used to spread out the impact of the one-time fee increase across several years.
- **Staffing:** institutions in tiers 2-5 would have one additional commitment hour per week across all sections, plus a set number of evening/weekend hours. Institutions can pay in lieu of staffing through the Evening/Weekend Offset Contribution. Volunteer hours would be discontinued.
- **Service Hours:** reduced by 10 hours per week, cutting 9-10 AM Mon-Fri and 8-9 PM Sun-Thurs.

N. Romano summarized the recommended model's advantages, including its service-first approach to preserving the value of AskAway. By minimizing service hour reductions during evenings and weekends, AskAway maintains service during key periods when in-person reference support is often unavailable.

Responding to a question about the Flexible Support Contribution Fee, N. Romano clarified that any institution currently lowering their fee by staffing evening and weekend hours would return to staffing only their required commitment hours. They would have the option to staff less evening or weekend hours through the Evening/Weekend Offset Contribution, but the new model does not provide institutions with a means to reduce their fee through additional staffing. Instead, the model's set commitment of evening and weekend hours ensures an equitable distribution across tiers and enhances transparency for participating institutions.

C. Polley explained that the Evening/Weekend Offset Contribution amount was determined through cost-recovery, as BC ELN will staff those shifts in lieu of the institution. The contribution amount depends on the number of hours per week covered, and the number of weeks within a section.

Committee members discussed the recommended model's reduction of service hours (10 hours per week) in comparison to the alternative model outlined in the recommendations document, which proposes an 18-hour reduction per week.

- D. Brigham asked whether the alternative model's larger service hour reduction better aligns with heatmap data indicating periods of lower student engagement.

- M. Svendsen supported the recommended model's more balanced approach, noting that it better positions AskAway to demonstrate its value to institutional leadership by extending in-person reference hours.
- G. Currie and D. Grace echoed M. Svendsen's sentiment, expressing concern about implementing too large a reduction. They suggested making smaller adjustments now and revisiting the service in a few years, once the post-secondary sector has adapted to new fiscal constraints.
- T. Rosseel reminded committee members that data gathered during a November 2025 community engagement session indicates a preference for modest changes across the three factors of change: fees, staffing, and service hours.

In terms of how and when to review the service, M. Svendsen questioned whether a new method of analyzing engagement data (e.g., assigning greater value to evening / weekend shifts) could highlight the value of the service for evening and weekend users. A. Siddiqui asked how the Committee plans to measure the success of a new commitment model during the next service review. In response, Implementation Team members mentioned one of their considerations for further work: a review of the tier structure. Moreover, although the format of a future service review has not yet been determined, N. Romano noted that the current process for developing a commitment model provides a strong foundation.

Committee members agreed to review the commitment model in three years, and the recommendation was revised to reflect this timeline. The recommended model, if approved, would be presented for endorsement to the BC ELN Steering Committee in early March 2026. Additional information about the new commitment model would be provided to participating libraries also in March 2026, before institutional renewals. The new commitment model would be implemented in 2027/2028.

MOTION: To approve the recommended model as a sustainable approach for the AskAway service beginning in the 2027/28 fiscal year, to be reviewed in three years.

Moved: D. Brigham

Seconded: A. Goncalves

The motion carried unanimously.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

6. Next Meeting

The next Advisory Committee meeting will be scheduled in Summer 2026.