askaway
real people. real help

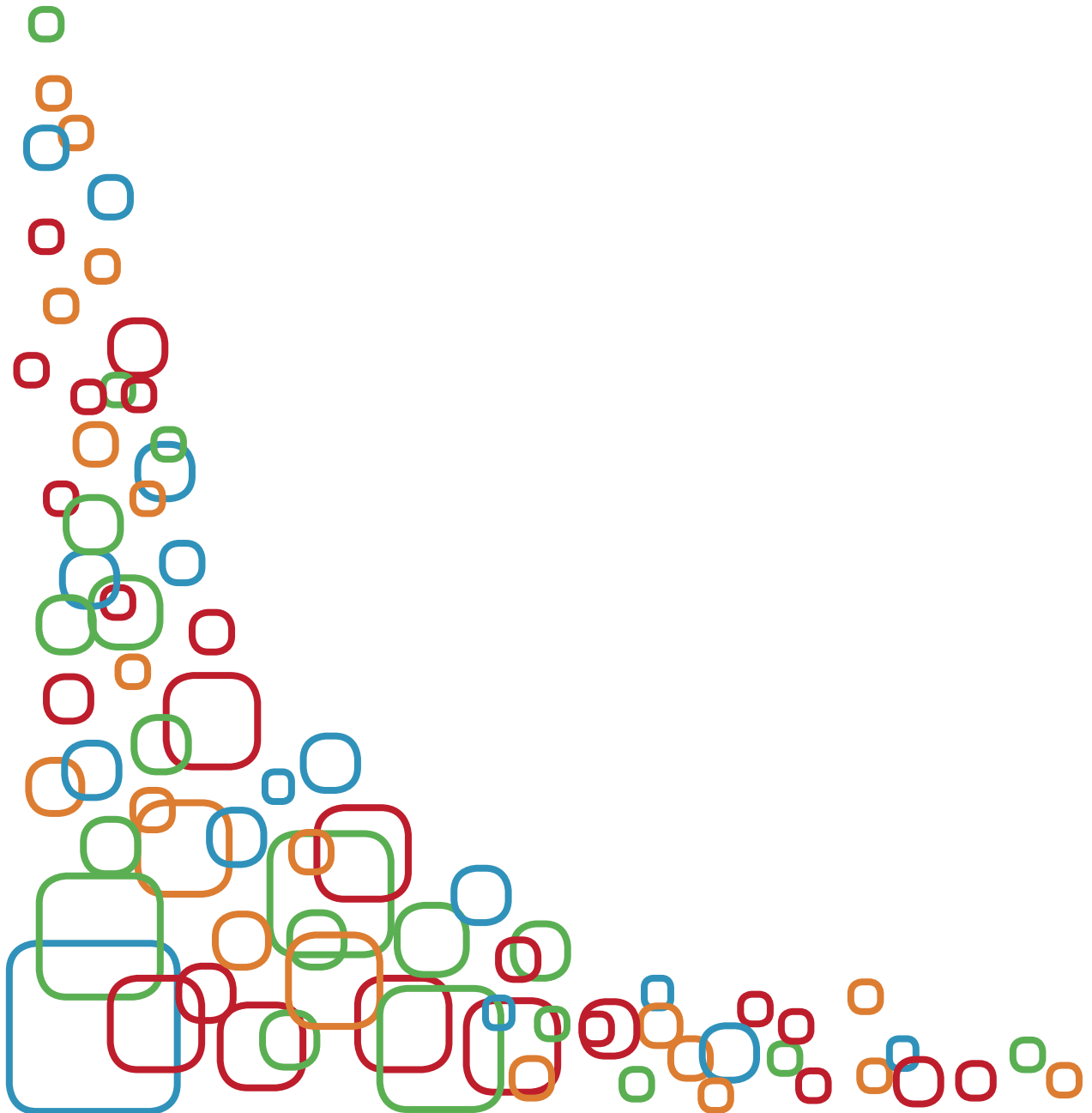# Actions & Achievements 2013

AskAway Actions & Achievements
BC Electronic Library Network

Released April 2014

Contents

Message from the Chair

AskAway user comments - peppered throughout this Actions & Achievements 2013 report - speak volumes about the value that AskAway brings to students, educators and researchers in the BC post-secondary sector.

As students navigate their unique and complicated academic experiences, they can rely on AskAway for quality educational support. From learning effective search strategies to discovering the many ways libraries can help, students receive a myriad of benefits from AskAway.

Institutions benefit from AskAway's collaborative structure. Costs are kept to a minimum through consortial licensing and central coordination by the AskAway Administrative Centre. By pooling staff resources, institutions across BC are able to offer their students online research support seven days a week, well into the evening hours.

Ask away is an amazing way for students to get direct help from an expert, and help find what they are looking for! I love this service! and it has helped me many times!

Kwantlen Polytechnic University learner

I was astounded at the ease with which the librarian found a specific paper for me, based on an incomplete name, an erroneous date, and context. This is a great service!

UBC Faculty/Staff

AskAway has continued to evolve and innovate throughout 2013, with the trialing of institutional queues (allowing institutions to pick up their own students' questions first) and the investigation of efficiency measures such as scheduling software. QuestionPoint was chosen as the platform for AskAway after an in-depth selection process, and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology has joined the service as AskAway's newest participating institution.

I am pleased to share this *Actions & Achievements 2013* report, which outlines the incredible value AskAway brings to the sector and highlights its key achievements of the past year.

Melanie Wilke
Chair, AskAway Advisory Committee,
Library Coordinator,
Northwest Community College

Governance & Partner Libraries

The AskAway Advisory Committee oversees policy development, planning and operation, and reports to the BC ELN Steering Committee. Composed of representatives from a cross-section of AskAway participating institutions, the Advisory Committee reflects the diversity of BC's post-secondary libraries.

Advisory Committee
(as of December, 2013)

Sheryl Adam, *University of British Columbia*

Anita Cocchia, *BC Electronic Library Network*

Lynette Gallant, *North Island College*
(Member-at-Large)

Marjory Jardine, *Justice Institute of BC*
(Member-at-Large)

Leva Lee, *BCcampus*

Janis McKenzie, *Simon Fraser University*

Christina Nilsen, *Thompson Rivers University*
(Member-at-Large)

David Pepper, *BC Institute of Technology*
(Regional Universities and Institutes with 4 year Programs)

James Rout, *Emily Carr University of Art + Design*
(Small Universities)

Tracie Smith, *University of Victoria*

Ross Tyner, *Okanagan College*
(Urban Colleges)

Melanie Wilke, *Northwest Community College*
(Rural Colleges) - Chair

Partner Libraries
(as of December, 2013)

Alexander College
British Columbia Institute of Technology
Camosun College
Capilano University
College of New Caledonia
College of the Rockies
Columbia Bible College
Douglas College
Emily Carr University of Art + Design
Justice Institute of British Columbia
Kwantlen Polytechnic University
Langara College
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology
North Island College
Northern Lights College
Northwest Community College
Okanagan College
Quest University Canada
Selkirk College
Simon Fraser University
Thompson Rivers University
Trinity Western University
University of British Columbia
University Canada West
University of Northern British Columbia
University of the Fraser Valley
University of Victoria
Vancouver Community College
Vancouver Island University
Yukon College

Value for Students

AskAway brings incredible value to students, from supporting learners at time and point of need, to helping them develop key information literacy skills.
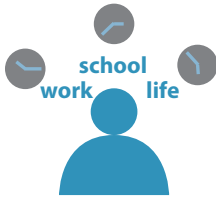
Help at Time and Point of Need

school
work life

Students have packed schedules with multiple commitments; AskAway is available online and during evening and weekend hours when many in-person services are closed.

> *Very convenient service. Appreciate being able to ask a question while researching [and] working off campus!*
>
> Thompson Rivers University learner

Convenient Service

With one click students can connect from home, campus, anywhere! The most frequently given reason for choosing AskAway by users is because they were at home or off-campus (66% of all post-usage survey respondents gave this reason in 2013).
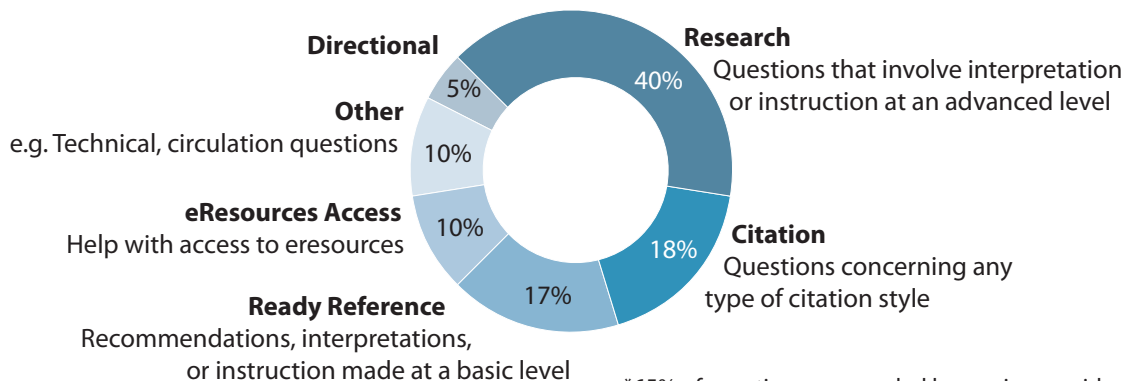
Accessibility is Everything

Approximately 180,000 students from 30 institutions across the province have access to the same quality research assistance. Wait times are rare and students are never turned away.
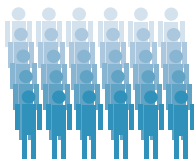
Tapping in to Expertise

Over 200 library professionals staff AskAway each week. Each service provider has full access to all partner library resources, meaning that students experience a seamless exchange - as if they had visited a help desk at their own institution.

What Kind of Help did Students and Other Users get from AskAway in 2013?*

Directional 5%

Other
e.g. Technical, circulation questions 10%

eResources Access
Help with access to eresources 10%

Ready Reference
Recommendations, interpretations, or instruction made at a basic level 17%

Research 40%
Questions that involve interpretation or instruction at an advanced level

Citation 18%
Questions concerning any type of citation style

*65% of questions were coded by service providers.

In Fall 2013, the AskAway post-usage survey was revised with a goal of better understanding how AskAway makes a difference in students' academic work. 318 surveys were completed during the September to December period.

Fall Survey Respondent Demographics

- 47% - 1st/2nd year student
- 28% - 3rd/4th year student
- 15% - Graduate or post-graduate
- 4% - Alumni
- 3% - Faculty or staff
- 3% - Other

I am very satisfied with the service I received today. My understanding of searching for information has improved greatly. Thank you.

Douglas College Learner

What has changed for you as a result of your AskAway session today?

No. of Responses (respondents could select multiple answers)
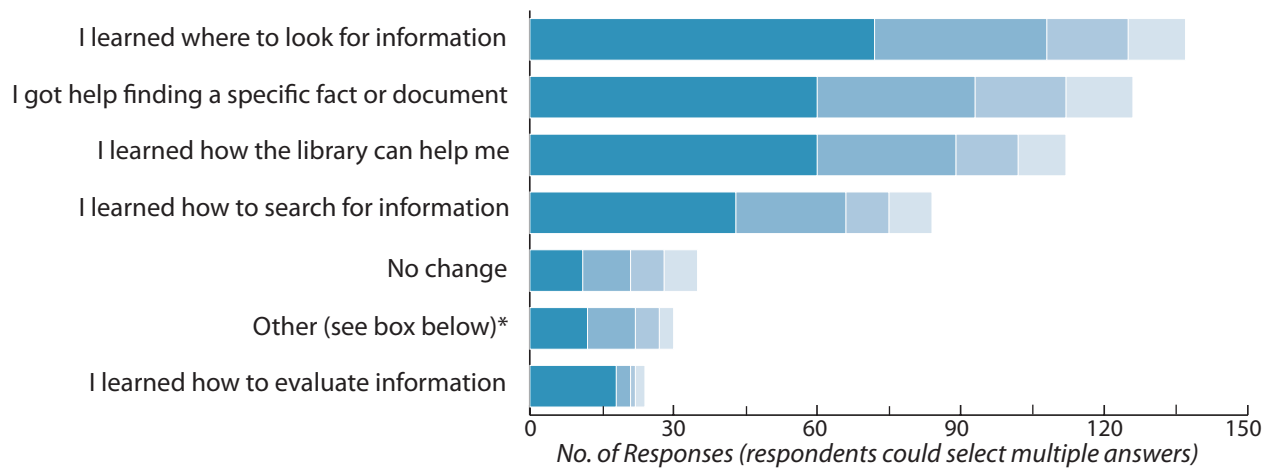
* Respondents who selected "Other" most often mentioned learning about how to cite a source correctly. Other responses included learning who to contact for data, assistance with online access, and how to print using wireless access.

How likely is it that you will use AskAway again if you had another question?

Not likely
Somewhat likely   5%
                   4%
Likely   8%
Very likely   83%
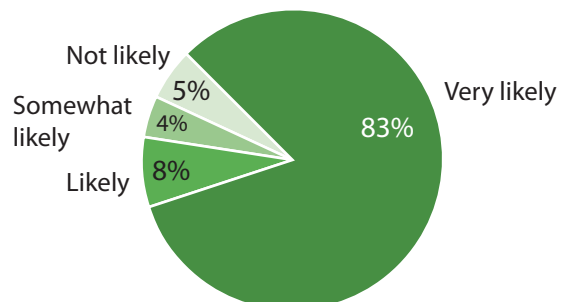
Value for the Sector

AskAway delivers great financial and time savings to the post-secondary sector thanks to consortial licensing, shared costs, and central coordination.

Significant Savings

By licensing QuestionPoint (the software platform used to support AskAway) consortially rather than individually, $123,825 is saved across the sector. Additional savings are being sought out, such as through consortial SMS (text message) software.

What I've learned: students [using AskAway] are the same regardless of their institutional affiliation - some are novice researchers, some are more expert, but they all appreciate the help you provide.

> Mary Anne Guenther,
> Coordinator of Library Services,
> North Island College
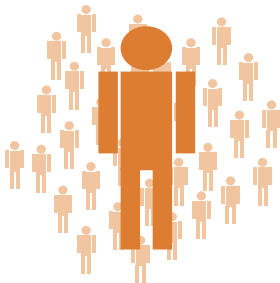
Leveraging Infrastructure

AskAway's central coordination by the AskAway Administration Centre mitigates the need for 30 separate institutions to set up their own infrastructure to support the service. One staff member does the work for all institutions, reducing redundancies and saving staff time.
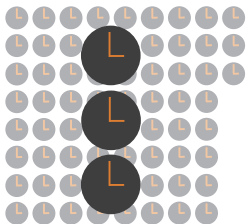
Pooling Resources

By pooling staff time, AskAway makes 67 hours of chat reference available each week - above and beyond what any institution could provide on its own. The smallest institutions need only contribute 3 hours of staffing per week.

Awesome service, love it! I've used it twice to find important research materials, and both times the librarians were terrific help, and they were able to help me while I was on the other side of the campus from the library. I would recommend the service anytime.

> Simon Fraser
> University learner

Mitigating Risk

AskAway provides overarching protection for the sector by providing back-up research help to students should their home library services be disrupted. AskAway's Service Continuity Plan ensures systemic resiliency in the event of interruptions such as natural disasters or pandemics.

AskAway Institution Profile: North Island College

North Island College (NIC), a community college with four campuses scattered on Vancouver Island, has participated in AskAway since its inception. Mary Anne Guenther, Coordinator of Library Services at NIC, explains that without the collaborative AskAway service, NIC would not have the resources – financial or librarian – to offer chat reference on its own. "AskAway is one of those networks and resource-sharing initiatives that makes a tremendous difference to small institutions like NIC," says Guenther.

There are many benefits to offering AskAway as a complement to in-person research assistance. Guenther explains: "For NIC, with a proud history of distributed learning options, AskAway is a reliable option for students who are not near a campus library. As a service provided at the time and point of need, NIC students have the advantage of getting help with their research, narrowing topics, finding and citing credible resources, and more, when NIC librarians are unavailable and in fact, when NIC libraries are closed."

North Island College Coordinator of Library Services, Mary Anne Guenther, works with a student.

Participating institutions work together to meet students' needs collaboratively, and service providers are equipped to handle questions from students at any institution. "There's a shared vision and a sense of professional camaraderie evident in the way that people jump in at busy times, volunteer additional shifts, share information in Campfire and are genuinely "there" for students," says Guenther. "What I've learned: students are the same regardless of their institutional affiliation - some are novice researchers, some are more expert, but they all appreciate the help you provide."

Strength and Savings through Collaboration

By working together, institutions reduce the costs of staffing, licensing and management of the service. Factoring in the costs for these three areas, any institution would spend over $105,000 per year to individually offer a chat reference service comparable* to AskAway. In contrast, a medium-sized university library will spend approximately $32,200 on AskAway.

That's a savings of 70%.

*Figure is based on a conservative calculation of one staff member working each open hour of service, as opposed to the 2-5 staff members that actually work each hour AskAway is open.

Actions & Achievements in 2013

AskAway is a well-established service that continues to grow and innovate. Key achievements in 2013 include:

- **Welcoming Nicola Valley Institute of Technology:** AskAway is pleased to welcome Nicola Valley Institute of Technology as the service's newest participating institution.

- **Selecting Software for Ongoing Service:** After an in-depth software selection process involving numerous committees and spanning several months, the QuestionPoint platform was chosen for a three-year license renewal.

- **Supporting Institutional Queues:** The Administrative Centre provided support for institutions that wished to trial QuestionPoint's institutional queues. These queues allow institutions to pick up questions from their own students before they roll into the common AskAway queue. This innovation allows institutions to explore new service delivery methods to best serve their students.
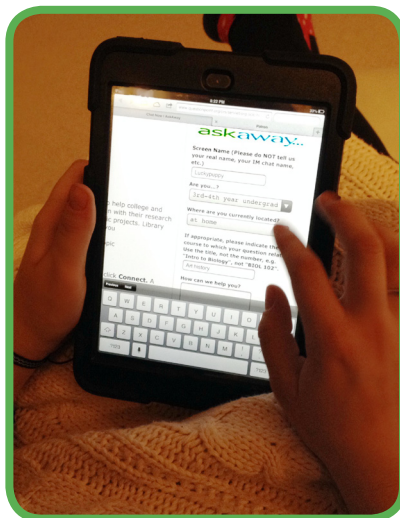
- **Revising AskAway Benefits and Responsibilities:** The Benefits and Responsibilities framework was revised to outline strategies that maintain sustainability of the service while supporting libraries with limited resources.

- **Exploring New Scheduling Strategies:** Scheduling software has been investigated to assist in offering more flexibility and options to participating institutions. Software would allow scheduling further in advance, give institutions the ability to trade shifts across terms, and improve overall efficiency and cost effectiveness of the collaborative.

- **Broadening Assessment:** The AskAway post-usage survey was revised to capture more information about satisfaction with the service and how AskAway usage makes a difference in the academic lives of users (see p. 7 for some key results).

- **Ushering in a New Web Site:** AskAway launched a new Drupal-based staff portal this year. The staff site is now more efficient and easier to use.

The Road Ahead

AskAway is always evolving to meet the needs of students, educators, and researchers. Plans for the year ahead include:

Building Sustainability
Ensuring ongoing accessibility to reliable educational support is paramount. In the year ahead, sustainable strategies around funding and cost sharing will be created to guarantee longevity of the service.

Citation Knowledgebase
In 2013, approximately 18% of AskAway sessions involved assisting students with proper citation of sources. Clearly an area of need, investigation will soon begin into a collaborative citation style knowledge base.

More Efficient Scheduling
Students have come to trust that when AskAway is open, staff is at the ready to help them with their questions. Behind the scenes, scheduling 30 institutions so that continuous service is available is a huge task. Institutions will soon be invited to use a new software to enter and trade shifts. Institutions will have more control over shift management, resulting in a far more efficient process.
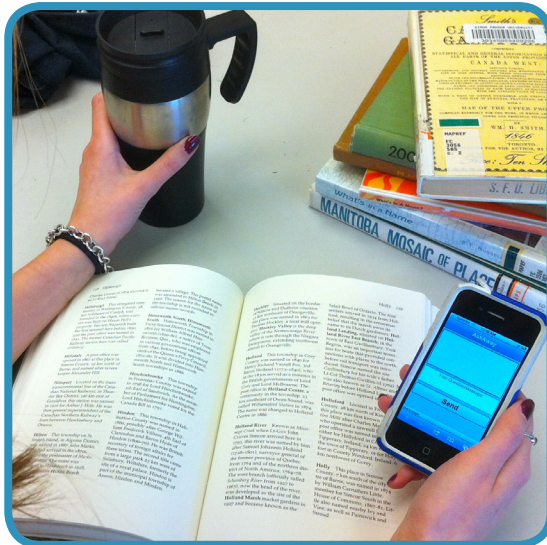
Can't believe I didn't know this existed. Quick answer to a seemingly complicated question. Can't wait to use again!

University of the Fraser Valley learner

I love that you can IM with librarians, so great!! I work primarily from home as a grad student and if I have a problem looking something up and do not want to go all the way to the school library to figure it out, and asking over the phone can be a hassle - and also a hassle for the limited staff working.

University of Victoria learner

Appendix 1 - Financials

Centralised funding and support ensures that AskAway operates from a neutral position, maintaining a system perspective while benefitting all institutions.

	2013/14 Projected $	
	Revenue	**Expenses**
BCcampus Support	55,000	
BC ELN Support	15,000	
Partner Library Service Support Fee	51,528	
Total	**121,528**	
Coordination & Service Support		95,386
Governance / Administration		1,365
Technical Infrastructure		22,777
Total		**119,528**
Revenue - Expenses		**2,000***

*Targeted 2014/15 carryforward

AskAway Vision

Province-wide collaborative virtual reference will:

- Facilitate equitable access to quality information for all post-secondary learners.

- Extend chat reference service to all British Columbia post-secondary libraries.

- Provide post-secondary learners with reference assistance online at point of need.

- Provide convenient, timely access to province-wide reference resources, beyond the restrictions of library buildings and opening hours.

- Facilitate collaborative reference and referral.