

AskAway

Online Chat Reference

Actions & Achievements 2015





British Columbia Electronic Library Network

Released April 2016

A Message from the Chair

AskAway continues to thrive as an essential service that provides equitable, convenient, and quality research support to students across the province. After the challenge of losing external funding last year, AskAway evolved into a self-sustaining service thanks to funding and staffing contributions from partner libraries. As AskAway approaches its tenth anniversary, it is evident that chat reference is greatly appreciated by seasoned and first-time patrons alike. In the words of one learner, "Thank you for a great service. I have used it often and have come to rely on it."

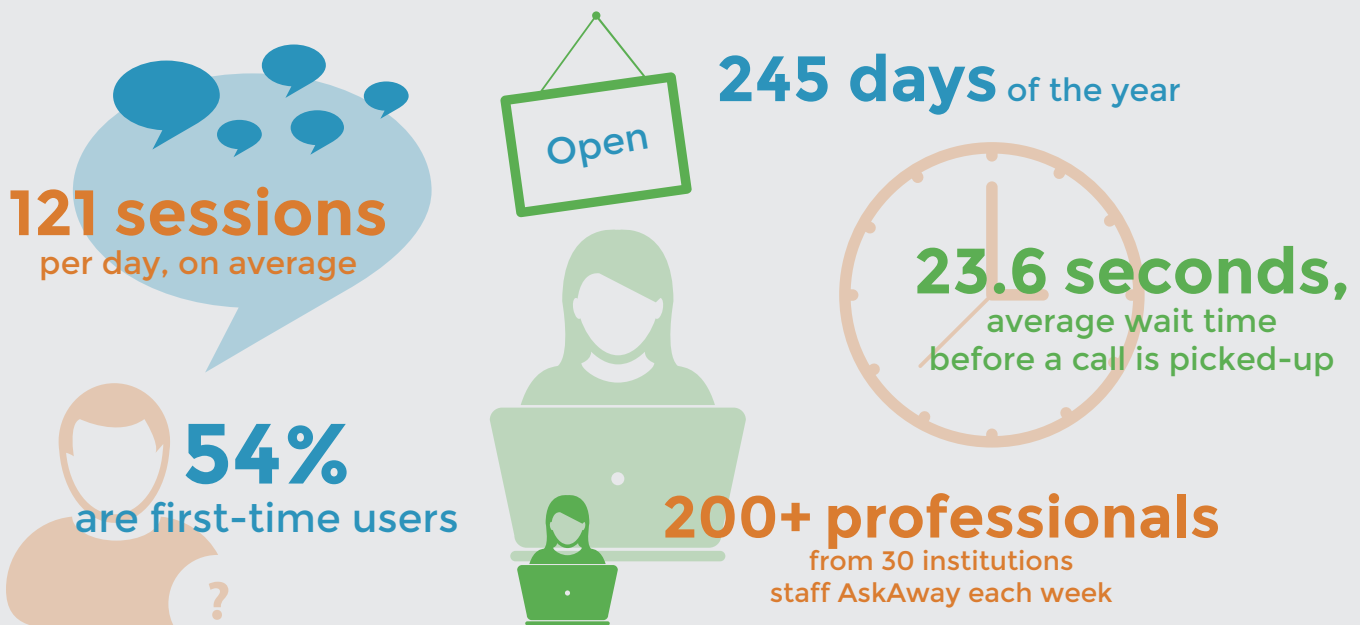
In 2015, the Administrative Centre enjoyed a period of stability yet continued to evolve by offering new support and training to participating institutions. The Admin Centre released its Visibility Best Practices, the first in a series that helps partner libraries take full advantage of AskAway. In May, the Admin Centre hosted the new AskAway Veterans' Boot Camp, which received highly positive feedback. 37 experienced service providers learned up-to-date processes and advanced skills such as how to handle multiple patrons and how to incorporate instruction in the chat environment. AskAway endures as a healthy and valuable service thanks to central coordination and collaboration among partner libraries.

I am pleased to share the *AskAway Actions & Achievements 2015* report, which highlights key accomplishments of the past year and illustrates the ongoing value of AskAway.



Elaine Fairey
AskAway Advisory
Committee Chair
Simon Fraser University

AskAway Fast Facts



Service Provider Spotlight

AskAway service providers from across the province bring their reference expertise to each chat session, empowering learners to develop research and critical thinking skills. Lindsay Tripp, a Librarian at Langara College, has worked as an AskAway service provider since 2010. She shares her thoughts on how AskAway benefits her work as a librarian and the students she serves:

“ AskAway has encouraged me to think more deeply about how I approach the reference interview. I’m continually exploring new ways to explain complex concepts associated with academic research in clear and concise terms. The diversity of questions helps me keep my reference (and multitasking!) skills sharp. I might find myself locating financial ratios for the Canadian dairy industry for an MBA candidate, while evaluating the merits of a website with a first-year undergraduate student. I also appreciate that AskAway allows me to work alongside colleagues from across BC and the Yukon that I might otherwise not have the opportunity to connect with.

This generation of students is accustomed to instantaneous communication. I think they appreciate having access to real-time help from experts at their point-of-need. AskAway blends seamlessly into their everyday online activities. Moreover, a growing number of post-secondary institutions are embracing online learning. AskAway fills in an important gap for off-campus learners who don’t have access to physical reference services through their home library.

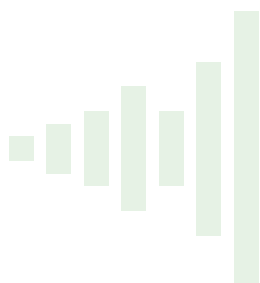


Lindsay Tripp
AskAway Service Provider
Langara College

I recently worked with an undergraduate student exploring the impact of child care costs on the gender gap in women’s earnings. By the time she visited AskAway, she was feeling quite frustrated. With some sleuthing, we found suitable sources and, along the way, had a great conversation about how to approach situations where ‘the perfect article’ might not exist.

She marveled at the speed and directness with which we were able to select databases, hone our search terms, and locate sources. Her only regret was not having visited the service sooner. Such sentiments truly demonstrate AskAway’s effectiveness.

Sounds of AskAway



AskAway Coordinator Brandon Weigel attended the Access 2015 conference where he learned how to use Sonic Pi, a tool that transforms data into sound. Data from January 2015 AskAway usage was fed into the software, creating a string of sounds that represents AskAway activity over the month. Each chat session is a note and different notes represent the variety of institution types.

Click to listen to the sounds of AskAway.
or visit <https://soundcloud.com/brandon-weigel-653198819/askaway-stats-sonified>

Focusing on Value

AskAway generates tremendous value for BC post-secondary institutions and learners...

On average, institutions commit 7 hours a week in exchange for **67 weekly hours of chat reference**

430,000 learners benefit from equitable access to chat reference

Why did students choose AskAway?

- 60%** off-campus or at home
- 42%** searching for online resources
- 34%** prefer online services

“Great resource. The librarian was very helpful and kind. Will definitely use this resource again.”
Langara College learner

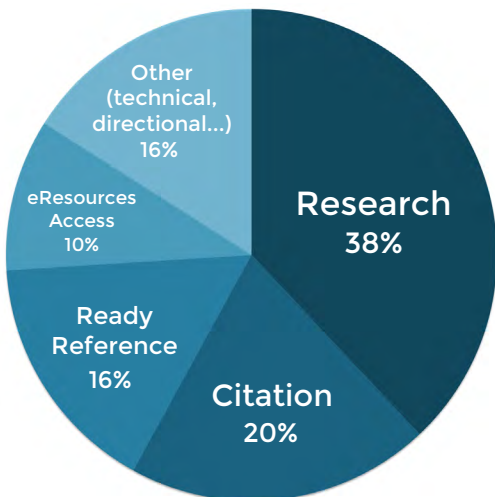
95% of students very likely or likely to use AskAway again

“This was really helpful, especially for a first year student. The librarian helped to clear up my confusion on citations and I couldn't be any more relieved!”
Simon Fraser University learner

A medium-sized institution saves **\$332,574** by participating in AskAway versus offering the service alone

30 AskAway partners benefit from BC ELN's **25+ years** of project management and supportive, collaborative services

What Kind of Help are Patrons Getting?

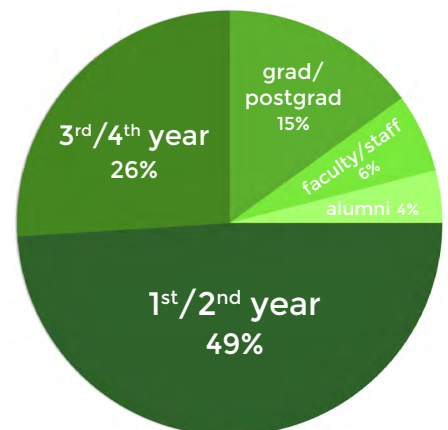


“I just wanted to find some good sources about child development theories. I was hoping to find some medical articles and even ebooks would be great.”

“I have a paper due today in an hour and I have 10 different types of references to complete.”

“Does the library have aerial photos in its database? I'm looking for aerial photos of Richmond, BC.”

Who's Using AskAway?



Achievements & Outcomes

AskAway chat reference connects learners with expert help at their point-of-need. Centralized coordination through the Administrative Centre and consortial scheduling allows libraries to offer consistent and extended hours of support with minimal staffing.

Key Achievements

- Created and distributed AskAway Visibility Best Practices, the first in a series of best practices.
- Introduced a new type of training, AskAway Veterans' Boot Camp, focusing on advanced skills and updated procedures. 37 experienced service providers attended the first in-person and online sessions.
- Secured stability by negotiating AskAway QuestionPoint software for a one-year extension plus optional years.
- Co-presented a session on virtual reference assessment with AskOntario at the Ontario Library Association Super Conference.
- Facilitated two AskAway basic training sessions in September: one online with 6 attendees, and one in person at Simon Fraser University with 10 attendees.

Outcomes

- Participating institutions have clear guidelines for promoting the service, introducing valuable support to more learners.
- Experienced AskAway librarians apply and share new skills, enhancing the quality of research support provided to patrons.
- Infrastructure and coordination of the service is enhanced through centralized administrative and operational support provided by BC ELN, contributing to service stability and longevity.

“AskAway is a lifesaver!

As a person with a disability, this gives me the opportunity to get help finding information and ask any questions that I have in an environment that is most comfortable for me (where I can take as much time as I need to read and discuss my challenges that I am facing while trying to use the library website at home).

Simon Fraser University learner

“I am so impressed with this service.

North Island College learner

31,212
questions
answered on
AskAway

198
sessions/day
on March 10 &
November 10
(busiest days)

91%
patrons satisfied or
very satisfied with
AskAway

53
service providers
received basic
or advanced
training

Governance & Collaboration

AskAway Advisory Committee

The AskAway Advisory Committee meets once per term 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.

The Advisory Committee members oversee policy development, represent the interests of their regions and institution types, carry out research and make recommendations in support of the service, and communicate regularly with colleagues on the aims and progress of AskAway.

AskAway Administrative Centre

AskAway runs smoothly as a collaborative service due in large part to centralized coordination and support through the Administrative Centre.

The Administrative Centre coordinates scheduling, training, marketing, and communication, supports networking among partner libraries and stakeholders, negotiates software licenses at a fair rate, provides efficient technical support, and evaluates the service on a regular basis to anticipate and respond to trends in service usage.

“Facilitating and hosting AskAway has allowed the library to support distance learners in ways not possible before.

BC Institute of Technology Respondent,
Library Staff Survey 2015

“AskAway is a key resource allowing us to reach a student group that doesn't necessarily seek us out in person as well as expanding our reference capacity.

It also shows the provincial government our ability to collaborate and offer cost-effective services to all students within BC.

Kwantlen Polytechnic University Respondent,
Library Staff Survey 2015

Advisory Committee

(as of December 2015)

Elaine Fairey

Simon Fraser University
Chair

Anita Cocchia

BC ELN Executive Director

Lin Brander

BC Institute of Technology
Member at Large

Ken Cooley

University of Victoria

Greg Currie

Selkirk College
Rural Colleges

Lynette Gallant

North Island College
Member at Large

Grace Makarewicz

Capilano University
Regional Universities and Institutes
with 4 year Programs

Scott Marsden

Alexander College
Member at Large

Brenda Mathenia

Thompson Rivers University
Small Universities

Simon Neame

University of British Columbia

Debbie Schachter

Douglas College
Urban Colleges

Administrative Centre

Anita Cocchia
Brandon Weigel

Financials

A fully self-sustaining service, AskAway is funded by BC ELN and participating libraries.

	2015/16 Projected \$	
	Revenue	Expenses
BC ELN Support	15,000	
Partner Library Service Support and Flex Fees	84,430	
Miscellaneous Revenue (incl. additional unplanned contract hours, marketing, carryforward, etc.)	9,823	
Total	109,253	
Service Support		75,193
Administration / Communication / Governance		2,936
Technical Infrastructure (incl. platform, etc.)		23,075
Total		101,204
	Revenue - Expenses	8,049

Moving Forward

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Developing Best Practices
 After releasing the first in a series of best practices, the Administrative Centre will continue to develop more best practices. These resources encourage service providers, local coordinators, and Advisory Committee members to take full advantage of AskAway and ultimately better serve learners.
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Participating in Strategic Planning for 2016-2021
 As BC ELN develops its 2016-2021 Strategic Plan, supporting AskAway remains a key strategy for the consortium in the years ahead. The AskAway Advisory Committee will work with BC ELN to set strategic directions and goals for AskAway in line with the new strategic plan.
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Celebrating AskAway's 10 Year Anniversary
 In 2016, AskAway celebrates its tenth anniversary. AskAway was launched on October 17, 2006 with support from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education. At launch, 46 public libraries and 20 post-secondary libraries across the province were on board. The tenth anniversary will provide an opportunity to reflect on how the service has evolved since its inception. To honour the contributions of partner libraries and service providers over the decade, the Admin Centre will host a celebration at the 2016 BC Library Conference and reach out to more remote sites to include them in the celebrations.

In Their Own Words

“ The librarian I was assisted by tonight was absolutely amazing. The answers were very quick and they were all very accurate!

It cut my research time in half.

Northwest Community College learner

“ The librarian I spoke with was extremely helpful, positive, and efficient.

A potentially stressful situation was made a whole lot easier by this person's attitude and effort.

University of the Fraser Valley learner

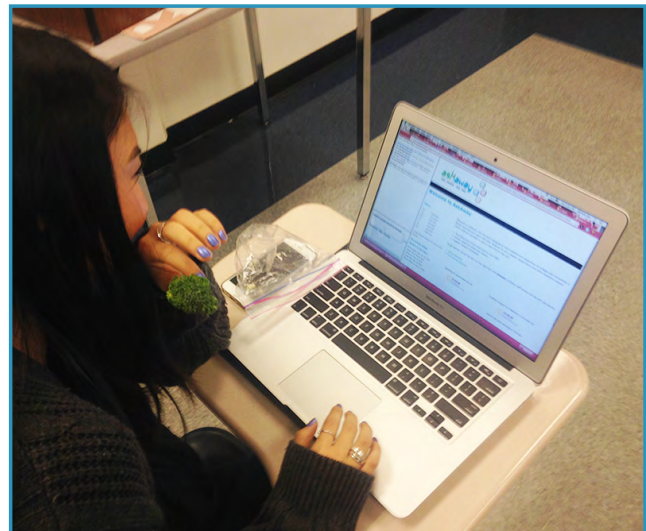
“ Whomever was on the other end was both positive and helpful. Even though what I needed was not in the library, she helped me get there with some deductions.

AWESOME!

Wish I had found AskAway sooner...

I wasted alot of time searching on my own.

UBC learner



Health Sciences Student at Langara College connects to AskAway

“ The librarian that helped me today was wonderful. I came in dreading research as I was finding nothing relevant. However with the help I received, the use of buzzwords, symbols, how to research effectively, etc.

I immediately felt more in control of my research.

Thank you so much!

Kwantlen Polytechnic University learner

“ Short and sweet session.

Saved me a trip to the library on my last study day before finals. (Tried the phone first several times but it was busy). AskAway got back to me in seconds. Thanks.

University of Northern BC learner



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