



## WESTERN NEW YORK LIBRARY RESOURCES COUNCIL

Questioning existing practices.  
Testing new ideas.  
WNYLRC: a leader in library innovation.

# Ask Us 24/7



Virtual reference has become an important component of library service today and one that can bolster a library's effectiveness and visibility as an information provider. To help WNYLRC member libraries and library systems implement virtual reference, WNYLRC's Regional Advisory Committee oversees a regional virtual reference service called [AskUs247.org](https://www.wnylrc.org/askus247) using OCLC's QuestionPoint chat software (formerly 24/7 Reference). Funding to support marketing materials and QuestionPoint subscription costs is provided through RBDB grant money as well as participation fees from libraries providing desk time to the service for their patrons. **Is your library participating?**

Libraries interested in joining the service can contact Caitlin Kenney at [ckenney@wnylrc.org](mailto:ckenney@wnylrc.org) or 716-633-0705, ext. 115.

**Benefits:** When compared to providing virtual reference services on their own, libraries have found that it is far less costly and requires less staff hours to participate in the regional Ask Us 24/7 service.

- Lower Costs
- Less staffing requirements
- Free ongoing training and free promotional materials to publicize the service to their patrons
- Use of the state of the art chat and follow-up software for conducting the service (not your ordinary instant messaging)
- Sophisticated reporting and statistical tools
- Opportunity to directly contribute to the direction and quality of the service
- Access to subject experts both locally and nationally
- Direct links from a participating library's website to the Ask Us 24/7 form for patrons twenty-four hours a day, 7 days per week

### **Requirements:**

- All participating libraries pay an annual fee, and contribute a specific number of hours of staffing each week.
- For a price quote and staffing requirement, we will need the following information:

- Population served (for public libraries) or student FTE (for academic libraries)
- Librarian FTE number (similar to student FTE number - this includes the number of full-time librarians, and also counts half-time librarians as .5, etc.)
- Total materials budget figure (this includes both print purchases and electronic database subscriptions)
- All participating libraries must fill out a policy page for their library to make available to other librarians participating in the service to assist in helping your patrons.

#### **Computer workstation requirements:**

- Any of these browsers: Microsoft Internet Explorer 7 or higher, Firefox 3.5 or higher, Chrome 10 or higher, Safari 4 or higher.
- Adobe Flash Player: Version 9.0.124.0 or higher

#### **Participating Libraries**

Ask Us 24/7 is a project of the Western New York Library Resources Council and owes its success to all the participating member libraries and New York 3Rs Councils who have made this cooperative venture a reality. Participating members are listed at <http://www.askus247.org/info/partlibry.php>

#### **Resources for Participating Libraries**

Training manuals, scheduling information, and virtual reference resources are available at <http://www.askus247.org/librarians/>

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