

*Got a question in the middle of the night?*

## *Ask?Away delivers for Wisconsin patrons and libraries*

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Wisconsin residents reap a variety of benefits from the Ask?Away virtual reference service, which augments the resources provided by libraries and library systems throughout the state.

Ask?Away is part of the global QuestionPoint 24/7 Service, which provides email and chat-based reference service. Patrons may turn to Ask?Away for reference help when their local library is not available. Fifteen out of 17 public libraries and 14 academic libraries in Wisconsin participate as full partners in the consortium. Wisconsin librarians staff the chat service more than 40+ hours a week. When Wisconsin librarians are not on chat duty librarians from other states and the QuestionPoint back-up staff respond to questions.

Students of all ages, including adult learners turn to Ask?Away for help with homework and major academic research projects. Teachers often recommend that students explore the Ask?Away service to build their computer technology skills. Patrons of all ages seek assistance with a variety of general reference questions. They may be looking for source related to their hobbies, ranging from selecting and training a new puppy to locating an expert appraiser for highly collectible music memorabilia, or they may turn to Ask?Away for help finding local service providers in a range of fields, from dentists to lawyers to counselors.

The subscription cost to join the national cooperative is subsidized by a Library Services and Technology Act grant. Any library in the state can add a logo to its website and get 24x7 chat service from the global cooperative. Libraries or library systems that pay an additional fee for the software

have access to the email reference system, a global knowledge base of reference questions and answers, and the opportunity to follow up on chat sessions of their local patrons that have initially been handled by members of the consortium.

The experience of the Reference and Loan Library and other participating Wisconsin libraries has shown that patrons are using Ask?Away to find out more about local library policies. Patrons are turning to Ask?Away to resolve questions about the collections, circulation and interlibrary loan practices of their local libraries. Librarians staffing Ask?Away refer to the Ask?Away policy pages submitted by participating libraries to the library's website to respond accurately.

Younger patrons, who are used to connecting to resources and contacts through the Internet, are often more comfortable posting questions anonymously on the Ask?Away service or their local library email or Instant Messaging service than approaching their public or school librarian in person. These younger patrons are often the hardest group to attract to the library, and Ask?Away can reach them on their own terms, and direct them back to their local library, reinforcing the value of resources provided locally and on a state-wide basis. Wisconsin residents who are elderly, mobility-constrained, or located in more remote parts of the state, or in communities with limited hours of public library service, can be well-served, and connected to the resources of their local public library in additional ways through the Ask?Away service.

To learn more about the service, and to see how your local library presents Ask?Away, go to <http://www.askaway.info/>. To view the Ask?Away Virtual Library Publicity Kit, go to <http://www.askaway.info/librarykit/>.

