

## **STATEWIDE VIRTUAL REFERENCE PROJECT**

### ***Steering Committee Meeting Notes***

DATE: December 8, 2005  
LOCATION: Regional Justice Center, Kent

ATTENDEES: Linda Fenster, Alice Goudeaux, Buff Hirko, Nancy Huling, Lisa Oberg, Rita Kaiser, Barbara Pitney.

The 2004 budget is now closed. One unanticipated expense was noted: the new subscription year (10/1/05-9/30/06) for wa.lii.org was paid from this budget. The 2005 budget is minimal, with the primary allocation being the final contract payment to Seattle Public Library for converting the Anytime, Anywhere Answers training curriculum to an online, self-paced tutorial.

After extended discussion, committee members made recommendations for sustaining VRS activities beyond the end of the LSTA-funded project year, which ends 9/30/06. A generic web site for the cooperative VRS service (similar to those provided by New Jersey, Maryland, and Oregon) should be developed and maintained by WSL. In addition to gathering information on a central web site, this would provide direct service to Washington citizens living in underserved areas. Because the State Library has a multi-type, “neutral” perspective, there was unanimous agreement that coordination and leadership should continue to be provided by WSL. A half-time coordinator position should be sufficient, given the many VRS support tools now available via the Internet. The coordinator would act as liaison between cooperative libraries and QuestionPoint and also manage the cooperative coverage schedule, quarterly cooperative meetings, web site maintenance, and related activities.

The inclusive dates for cooperative coverage funded by the VRS Project from the 2004 budget were changed to cover calendar year 2006 (1/01 – 12/30). One possible change to be considered for the following year is a subscription to two Basic Management Environments, one for academic and one for public libraries, by WSL. All libraries participating in cooperative coverage could pay for a Service Unit Profile associated with one of these BMEs, plus a share of the statewide cooperative cost. (Libraries that wished to continue subscribing to an individual BME could still participate in the statewide cooperative.)

Buff reported that the Northwest regional cooperative is still in its infant stage. Oregon is switching from Tutor.com to QuestionPoint, and Colorado may do the same at the end of their current funding year in June 2006. Montana has delayed implementation of cooperative coverage, but it is hoped that they will join by July 2006. Every state added to the NW regional cooperative will reduce the population-based coverage costs.

The training tutorial is under development (see <http://vrstrain.spl.org/vradventure>); it is anticipated that it will be ready for field-testing by the end of January 2006. The final version will be available by May. At the Virtual Reference Desk conference in November, RUSA Executive Director Cathleen Bourdon expressed interest in hosting the tutorial. Committee members agreed that this would be ideal, but noted several conditions that should be placed on such an agreement:

1. The site should be freely available (not requiring member logon).
2. No fees should be charged for use of the tutorial.
3. Control of the structure should be maintained by the developers for a specified time (perhaps 2 years) to ensure its integrity.
4. Guidelines for maintenance of the site by RUSA should be provided by the developers. When control is passed from the developers to RUSA, it is recommended that a specific RUSA committee be given the charge for maintenance.
5. Continued direct access to the site should be provided to the developers through the initial control period and through any transition period.

Buff reported that UW constraints will prevent convening a focus group of students there. Given the difficulties encountered in gathering focus groups in 2002, she recommended that the group discuss alternative ways to compile information on user experiences. Among the suggestions discussed were: online (chat) interview appointments, a contest to elicit stories about great chat experiences (similar to Vancouver Public Library's "Beyond Words"—see <http://www.beyondwords.ca/>), telephone interviews, and more. The final recommendation was that libraries be asked to cull chat transcripts during a specific time period (2-3 weeks in May) for examples of customer reports on their use/satisfaction. A list of questions or guidelines for the transcript review will be developed and distributed to all Washington libraries offering chat, possibly QP email as well. This information will be submitted to the project coordinator for compilation in the final evaluation.

The next Steering Committee meeting will be held at the Regional Justice Center on Thursday, April 6, 2006. The final meeting will be scheduled for next August.