

STATEWIDE VIRTUAL REFERENCE PROJECT

Final Steering Committee Meeting Notes

DATE: August 17, 2006
LOCATION: Regional Justice Center, Kent

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

NOTETAKER: Nancy Huling

Notetaker's note: The Steering Committee has been meeting regularly under the dynamic and able leadership of Buff Hirko for five years, with some changes in membership during that time. Alice Goudeaux replaced Liz Stroup; Linda Fenster replaced Verla Peterson; Rita Kaiser replaced Jean Holcomb; Lorena O'English replaced Lou Vyhnanek; and Lisa Oberg joined the group as the liaison from the Library Council of Washington. Other past members include Linda Malone, Matt Saxton, and Lara Ursin Cummings.

Buff Hirko retires effective 28 September 2006. Buff introduced Heather Muller, who has been appointed Coordinator of Statewide Database Licensing and Virtual Reference. Heather has been a reference librarian for over six years, most recently serving as a genealogy and history specialist at the Washington State Library. She participated in the Anytime, Anywhere Answers training, in the last class taught in the 2005. Prior to the new appointment, Heather used QuestionPoint at WSL to provide chat and email reference service.

Budget, 2007 funding . The remaining 2006 budget will fund incidentals. Next year: There is a proposal from Lauri McIntosh, our QuestionPoint Account representative, which will go forward. The State Library is funding Heather as a half-time coordinator (the other part of her job is coordinating statewide database licensing). The State Library will fund 3 QuestionPoint Basic Management Environments (BMEs: one public, one academic, one Washington State (for libraries not participating in the chat national cooperative) and unlimited Service Unit Profiles (SUPs) in 2007. The knowledge base tool is attached to the BME (not to the SUPS). Institutions that don't mind sharing a knowledge base can be a SUP linking to the appropriate BME. There can be unlimited SUPs in Washington State, as long as they are attached to one of these three BMEs. Libraries in the chat cooperative will share the cost of the national cooperative coverage on a pro-rated basis. Lauri will make the calculations. The more libraries that participate, the lower will be the cost. Lauri will talk about this at the WA QP meeting in September. Two new libraries are coming on board: Highline Community College is linked with the Spokane group. Spokane Public will join in January 2007. Training: Heather will coordinate with QP, and also will assist libraries in using the online tutorial for local training. QP charges new libraries for

implementation and on-site training. In addition, Nancy Huling is available (under contract with QP) for on site training. There is the potential in future to have a Northwest queue to monitor in chat.

Online Tutorial – report. Buff demonstrated a flash chat tutorial created with Camtasia software by Mary Ross and Daria Cal for the new online VR Adventure interactive tutorial called *Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience*. Currently, the tutorial is hosted by SPL (<http://vrstrain.spl.org/vradventure/>). This fall, our vision to have the course available through RUSA will be realized. After RUSA implements the new ALA content management system, *Virtual Reference Experience* will be highlighted on the front web page; it will use a short URL. It will not require a member login and there will be no charge for use. Send comments about the tutorial to Buff. The RUSA MARS Virtual Reference Committee has committed to maintaining the site as a regular duty. Donavan Vicha (RUSA webmaster) was impressed by site maintenance guidelines.

Transition from VRS to QPWA

Buff provided “Recommendations for 2007” as a starting point for reviewing the next steps following the end of LSTA project funding and her retirement. The group agreed that an advisory committee should be established, and that at least two members from the current Steering Committee should continue in order to provide continuity and experience. Nancy Huling immediately volunteered. Interest in advisory group membership will be solicited at the QP Washington meeting on 21 September, letting the members determine the makeup of the new committee. At least one member (if not more) should represent Eastern Washington, where there is active involvement in the cooperative. One QP Washington meeting each year should be held on the East side, possibly in Spokane.

Buff announced that the WaLLI subscription will not be renewed after September 30, 2006. WSL and the Library Council of Washington decided that those funds would be better utilized in support of virtual reference activities.

Buff noted that Kitsap Regional Library, although a member for several years, has now implemented QP email. It was mentioned that our new Washington members need to request that they be added to our Washington State Cooperative Group – this allows us to refer questions.

Another recommendation is the establishment of a *real* statewide cooperative: procedures needed to provide true cooperative service, share chat monitoring as a state, discuss scheduling, etc. As examples, Buff highlighted well-coordinated statewide programs: New Jersey and Maryland, as well as Colorado and Oregon. They have guidelines in place. Buff urged committee members to take a look at the various statewide services prior to the September QPWA meeting.

Scheduling: our current statewide commitment is 35 hours per week for the 24/7 cooperative coverage. Next year, Heather will need to coordinate the scheduling, the commitment will rise significantly.

2007 Recommendations for QPWA

Discussion and brainstorming continued on the 2007 recommendations for QP Washington. We identified the following activities:

- Develop and implement web portal

The Steering Committee felt that it would be best to build and maintain a web portal, to be used internally by librarians and externally by Washington State citizens, using a commercial web host. It is important that the site be neutral, not housed at a particular library, and that several people have write access to the site. We envision libraries being able to update their own information, since library information changes daily and it is critical in providing a cooperative service to be able to note those changes immediately. This site will be “owned” by member libraries, and will be a member/cooperative site. It would have a “Washington” brand, e.g., Ask Washington. The new advisory committee might designate specific committee members to take the lead in the areas of best practices and marketing. It is important for QP Washington members to feel involved in the portal and have a sense of ownership; those can be achieved only with a neutral site.

Good examples of the kind of data/information included in statewide portals are New Jersey and Maryland web sites. Maryland’s public portal is very clear--just one descriptive paragraph.

The time frame for establishing the portal should be as soon as possible. We need to balance internal and external audiences. The main page would be for patrons; internal pages for library use won’t be linked to it. Other possible inclusions are policies, FAQs, and a listserv for all participants.

Other uses of the portal that other statewide cooperatives might not yet offer:

Linda suggested having a test queue for libraries considering getting involved in chat, to encourage them to try it in the hope they will join.

Use the portal as a recruitment tool to attract more libraries.

Use the portal as a mentoring tool and for expertise – librarian to librarian (consulting with a colleague on a question through chat)

Are there portals would we like to emulate?

When emailing Buff with ideas for the portal through the end of September, please copy Heather (hmuller@secstate.wa.gov)

- Establish a Quality Assurance Committee

Colorado has been doing this for several years. This includes a methodology on inappropriate use and a checklist for quality (similar to the one used in Anytime, Anywhere Answers).

As an aside, Buff drew our attention to the RUSA MARS program at ALA on Abuse is in the Eye of the Beholder. A blog of the session is available at: <http://www.askalibrarian.wordpress.com>. Much work has been done in the area of quality assurance, so we need not reinvent the wheel. Susan McGlamery is revising the quality guidelines for the chat cooperative.

- Other? What has VRS done that the group wants to ensure is continued?
 - We want to remain involved – we are a cooperative membership body!
 - Subcommittee structure has worked well for tackling issues
 - Use Lisa as representative of Library Council of Washington – she can be an advocate for QPWA
 - Communication and grass roots participation
 - Tradition of WA being a test bed and experimental body – growth of our VR because of willingness to jump in and try things
 - Being a risk taker – known for innovation (marketing, training, software, etc.) What is the next frontier? Getting the doubters on board and getting them enthusiastic. Beyond innovation and adaptation, it’s getting libraries in the state to “play with others.” Buff has done much to establish cooperation in reference that did not previously exist – let’s keep the momentum going.
 - VRS steering committee members are leaders; need people to follow their enthusiasm – some need a push.
 - Concentrate on ways to move people forward in this state and continue to be a model service, and then have them encourage others.
 - Message to libraries: galvanize your resources in a different way

Our final meeting of the Washington State Virtual Reference Steering Committee was bittersweet. Much has been accomplished with Buff’s vision and leadership, and the Committee wished her a fond farewell. She has empowered us to move on to our next adventure!

The QuestionPoint Washington quarterly meeting will be held in Allen Auditorium at UW from 10:00 a.m. to 12:30 on Thursday, September 21.