

# Ask Here PA FAQ

## Topic: About Ask Here PA

**Q: What is Ask Here PA?**

**A:** Ask Here PA is a new service of the Office of Commonwealth Libraries, Bureau of Library Development, and managed by HSLC/Access PA that will provide synchronous virtual reference, including online chat services to the residents of Pennsylvania, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Ask Here PA will also be part of a national consortium organized by OCLC which will provide shared virtual reference services on a national basis.

**Q: What is a participant?**

**A:** A participant is a library that:

1. Submits an application and partnership agreement form to the Office of Commonwealth Libraries
2. Contributes staff to the service
3. Is provided with access to the QuestionPoint software
4. Is provided with a unique patron entry point identifying users as yours
5. Is provided with detailed usage statistics based upon entry point usage

**Q: Does my library have to participate for my patrons to use Ask Here PA?**

**A:** No. All residents of PA will be able to use Ask Here PA regardless of whether or not their home library contributes staff to the service.

**Q: How will my patrons use Ask Here PA if I am not a participant?**

**A:** Ask Here PA will provide a link to Ask Here PA that you may add to your website so that visitors to your site will be able to connect to Ask Here PA.

**Q: How much will it cost to participate?**

**A:** There will not be a fee to participate or to provide links to your patrons to use Ask Here PA.

## Topic: Ask Here PA Participation

**Q: How do we join?**

**A:** Complete the application and agreement form located on the Ask Here PA web site ([www.askherepa.org](http://www.askherepa.org)) and submit it to the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

NOTE: You don't have to apply for your patrons to have access to the service.

**Q: What type of libraries can participate?**

**A:** All types of libraries may participate. Staff that contribute time to the Ask Here PA collaborative service must have an MLS or be certified to be a Librarian in Pennsylvania. Additionally, as a collaborative reference service, participants must have a strong commitment to sharing the expertise of their reference staff.

**Q: We are a small library with limited resources, how can we answer questions with our limited print collection?**

**A:** Most questions answered via live chat will be done utilizing online resources

**Q: If we join, how long do we have to participate?**

**A:** The commitment is made for a period of one year and is automatically renewed or it can be terminated by the participating library or the Office of Commonwealth Libraries.

**Q: How much staff do we have to contribute to participate?**

**A:** The minimum number of hours per week is 5 hours. These hours will be spent providing coverage to the live chat service. Larger libraries may be asked to provide additional coverage.

**Q: Once we have provided our minimum weekly coverage to the statewide service, can we use the service to provide additional coverage to our own patrons?**

**A:** Yes. Participating libraries will be able to serve their own patrons during the times in which they are providing their minimum hours on Ask Here PA and if they elect to provide additional coverage to their own patrons.

**Q: We are a special library. Will our collection be unequally accessed?**

**A:** No. Most questions are general reference questions and can be answered utilizing online resources.

**Q: Our special library is not in practice handling general reference questions. Should we consider participating?**

**A:** Yes. If your library can contribute 5 hours per week and has an eager staff willing to answer the questions posed on a statewide service, then you should consider participating. Another option in the future may be that Ask Here PA will ask special libraries to serve as a back-up e-mail option for referral. For example, legal and medical questions taken during live chat could be saved for referral and distributed to law or hospital librarians.

**Topic: Ask Here PA Timeline**

**Q: When will Ask Here PA start?**

**A:** The trial period will begin in July 2006.

**Q: What is the purpose of the trial period?**

**A:** The trial period will provide the trial libraries and Ask Here PA staff with a test run as we prepare for the statewide launch.

**Q: What libraries will participate in the trial?**

**A:** Approximately twelve libraries will be selected from the list of applicants that submit applications by May 21.

**Q: When will the service be statewide?**

**A:** The service will begin the statewide implementation in the fall. Additionally, Ask Here PA will shortly thereafter be available for live chat 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

**Topic: 24/7 Live Chat**

**Q: How will we provide live chat coverage 24 hours per day, 7 days per week?**

**A:** In addition to coverage provided by staff from participating libraries, Ask Here PA will utilize the OCLC 24/7 Cooperative to ensure that live chat reference is available 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

**Q: What is the OCLC 24/7 Cooperative?**

**A:** The 24/7 Cooperative provides round-the-clock coverage for libraries and to bolster service when and where it is needed most. Librarians at participating locations in the cooperative utilize the QuestionPoint software system hosted by OCLC in order to provide virtual reference to all member libraries, contributing a fraction of time in order to receive complete coverage.

**Q: How are requests for homework help handled? Will we be expected to spend time providing tutoring services?**

**A:** Ask Here PA will help students understand what they can expect from the Ask Here PA service. Assistance will be provided to students with research and answering questions but not with tutoring.

**Topic: Technical Questions**

**Q: What is QuestionPoint?**

**A:** QuestionPoint is a total reference solution composed of three basic tools: E-mail reference, Chat reference, and a 24/7 cooperative reference. QuestionPoint is designed to be a fully integrated service. This is accomplished by utilizing an add question feature that allows you to input and track questions by walk-in, fax, phone, etc. You will be able to respond to and manage these questions and they become part of the statistics reporting system. The live chat consists of two basic features; chat and co-browse. Co-browsing enables the librarian and patron to peruse the same webpage. The 24/7 cooperative reference service will enable Ask Here PA to provide live chat coverage 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. Our plan is to utilize PA staff from 8 am to 9 pm and the cooperative service will cover the other hours.

**Q: Will I have to install the QuestionPoint software on computers for staff and/or patrons?**

**A:** No. QuestionPoint is a web-based product and is entirely hosted on servers at OCLC.

**Q: What are the minimum computer requirements for staff?**

**A:** The minimum system requirements for staff are:

- A web browser: Microsoft Internet Explorer 6 using Microsoft Windows (2000 or XP) (Requirement. No other OS/browser combination possible for librarians using Flash Chat with Cobrowse.)
- A high speed connection to the internet
- Adobe-Macromedia Flash Player: Version 7 is supported; Version 8 is recommended
- A virtual machine (Java engine) from either Microsoft (version 1.1.4) or Sun Run Time Environment 1.4 or 1.5

**Q: What are the minimum computer requirements for patrons?**

**A:** The minimum system requirements for patrons are:

- A web browser: Microsoft Internet Explorer 6, Netscape, Firefox, Opera and Safari
- A connection to the internet (the faster the connection the better the experience)

**Q: Will my patrons be able to use traditional instant messaging services like Yahoo!, MSN and AIM with Ask Here PA.**

**A:** Not at this time. OCLC has plans to integrate this functionality into a future version of QuestionPoint.

**Q: What is co-browsing?**

**A:** Co-browsing is collaborative web browsing. It is a web-enabled technique that allows staff using QuestionPoint to interact with a patron by using the customer's Web browser to show them something. For example, a patron having difficulty searching the catalog could access Ask Here PA and a librarian could then show the patron how to search the catalog. Collaborative browsing allows a librarian and a patron to be on the same Web page. Patron co-browsing requires a more recent browser version and possibly additional (free) environment software.

**Topic: How will Ask Here PA function?**

**Q: How does a statewide live chat service work?**

**A:** Library staff from participating libraries jointly provides coverage (a minimum of 5 hours per week per library) for Ask Here PA. There will be two queues; an academic queue and a general queue. Staff from participating libraries will staff the appropriate queue and serve as backup for the other queue.

**Q: What is a queue?**

**A:** A queue is where a patron arrives in the QuestionPoint software and where staff monitoring the service accepts a patron into a live chat session.

**Q: When I am staffing Ask Here PA, how will I help patrons of other libraries?**

**A:** Each participating library in QuestionPoint has a complete Policy File, which includes detailed information about the library that staff can use to assist patrons of that library.

**Q: How is the use of proprietary databases handled in Ask Here PA?**

**A:** There will be databases from the POWER Library that will be available to all staff when they are staffing Ask Here PA. Additionally, the procedure will be to ask participating libraries to share an authorization that is entered into the staff only policy file entry for that library. Ask Here PA staff is only to use the authorization when assisting a patron from the library that provided the authorization.

**Q: What is the follow-up process when the live chat session ends?**

**A:** When a chat session ends, the librarian selects one of the following resolution codes in the chat monitor:

- Follow-up by patron's library (the patron's home library or group will follow up)
- Follow-up by me (the librarian who chatted with the patron will follow up)

**Q: How do I obtain Ask Here PA technical support?**

**A:** E-mail [support@accesspa.state.pa.us](mailto:support@accesspa.state.pa.us)