

Maryland AskUsNow!
Fall Federal Depository Library Conference
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Participation info at www.askusnow.info/join

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"...a partnership of Maryland public, academic, and special libraries."

Academic Libraries:

Allegany College
 Anne Arundel CC
 Baltimore City CC
 Prince George's CC
 UM College Park
 Villa Julie College

Public Libraries:

Allegany
 Anne Arundel
 Baltimore County
 Calvert
 Caroline
 Carroll
 Cecil
 Charles
 Enoch Pratt/SLRC
 Frederick
 Harford
 Howard
 Montgomery
 Prince George's
 Somerset
 St. Mary's
 Washington
 Wicomico

Special Libraries:

Maryland State Law
 Maryland State LBPH

Plus 8 new partners! *

A Quick Look Back

Get answers from a librarian, not a machine!
Feel free to peek at our staff support web site
at www.askusnow.info/partners

- **When did we start?** Planned in 2002; Launched on March 17, 2003.
- **What is it?** "Maryland AskUsNow! is a 24/7 live online interactive service. It uses the expertise of librarians to provide answers to questions, research guidance, and help navigating the Internet." Format is *Live chat* with *E-mail follow-up*.
- **How do our customers access it?**
 - Yellow icon on our partner library's home pages and links throughout site.
 - The statewide promoted www.askusnow.info page.
 - Links on K-12 school, nonprofit, and other organization's web sites.
- **Why do it?** Allows our students & the public to access to the same trusted library service in a new desirable format at their time and place of need. Our librarians are learning even more about using online sources to provide quality reference service.
- **Why cooperate?** It's cost effective. We are drawing from each library's strengths, as well as building an effective communication and learning network of libraries.
- **Who's involved?** It's provided by over 300 librarians for 266 hours a week at our 34 public, academic, & special library system partners across Maryland. In addition, librarians from around the country with "QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference" back us up at busy times, overnight, & weekends. Training is provided by the Maryland project.
- **Where do we get the software?** QuestionPoint is a service of OCLC. The backup staffing, chat software, and e-mail follow-up software are all included in our contract with QuestionPoint. The software is online, so nothing needs to be loaded on our machines.
- **Who's paying for it?** LSTA grant funding from Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Library Development and Services covers the total cost of our QuestionPoint contract, full-time coordinator, training, & statewide marketing. Partner libraries contribute existing staff, Internet workstations, and enthusiasm!



It's Busy!

- **What is usage like?** The highest month of usage so far was April 2005, with 5970 questions submitted. Spring and fall are busiest. In total, we have received over 140,000 chat questions since the service launched!
- **Who are these people?** In the first half of 2005, 44.36% of people who filled out the AskUsNow! pop-up survey identified themselves as "Student (Kindergarten – 12th)". About half of all survey responders say they've used the service before. Over 40% of people find out about it just by seeing the link on the library's web site.

*** Eight new libraries join!**

- Since May 2006, these libraries have become AskUsNow! partners: Carroll Community College, Salisbury University, Montgomery College, Worcester County Library, Charles Co. Public Law Library, College of Southern Maryland, UM Eastern Shore, and Harford Community College

Sample Questions:

- "What kind of salary should a nurse make?"
- "This question relates to electric or gas scooters. I need to look up the Maryland law that governs the use of these scooters on public roads in Maryland?"
- "What kind of food was there in the late 1800's?"

Exemplary Survey Feedback:

- "The service was very knowledgeable and they knew just where to look to find the information that I needed!"
- "Fast, helpful, easy to use, friendly and I can always count on!!"
- "My librarian was very helpful and she didn't take long at all!"

A Model Service for Others



When we planned AskUsNow! in 2002, we had model services to draw from here in the state. Since then, our service has become an international example for others, including projects in Arizona, Florida, Louisiana and the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec. AskUsNow! staff has given presentations to libraries in South Africa, Poland, and Malta through U.S. Dept. of State programs. In 2004, Maryland AskUsNow! was recognized with an *Exemplary Digital Reference Service Award* from the U.S. Department of Education's Virtual Reference Desk Project.