

## Colorado Virtual Reference Symposium: Working Document "Funding, Sustainability and Managing Growth"

**QandANJ.org** librarians have been volunteering their time to provide statewide virtual reference service since October, 2001, and on a 24/7 basis since January 2002. They were initially attracted to the project because it offered an opportunity to do something new, exciting, and revolutionary. Now, more than 5 years later, those initial incentives to participate have lost some of their appeal. Our strategic approach to keeping libraries on board and engaged is to focus our energies in one of these (often mutually reinforcing) areas:

1. Appreciate (our participating libraries, librarians and freelancers)
2. Energize
3. Innovate.

### **Overview of QandANJ.org**

1. Providing service since October, 2001. Started with 10 libraries.
2. Now: 47 member libraries (30 public, 16 academic, NJ State Library)
3. Funding: LSTA funded for 6<sup>th</sup> straight year (\$375,000 plus extra 50K as a one-shot for marketing)
4. Approximately 300 trained librarians.
5. 14 paid freelancers work nights and weekends
6. Full-time project coordinator, part time admin asst.
7. QuestionPoint Coop / Back-up staff cover overnight
8. NJ librarians monitor the service 9AM-11PM every day
9. Most of the libraries staff the service 6 hours per week
  - a. Some large systems staff 8 or 10 hours per week
  - b. Some smaller libraries staff 4 hours per week



**Appreciate / Energize / Innovate:** Our 3 point approach to anything that we spend our time/resources on.

- 1. Appreciate: Our volunteers are all we've got! So we take every opportunity to show them our appreciation...**
  - a. With gifts (hats, t-shirts, briefcases, balloon bouquets, flowers, pizza)
  - b. Ribbons to wear at conference (reinforce group identity; identify staffing librarians as "elite" among their peers)
  - c. Library service award presented by the State Librarian.
  - d. Sharing customer comments (give everyone the "mid week warm fuzzies")
  - e. Offer freelancing positions to top librarians
  - f. Recommend librarians as speakers on VR at conference, and for participation in research studies.
  - g. Grant money
  - h. Free pre-conference attendance, special programs and get-togethers, meals at NJLA conference
  - i. Free Gale Database (Discovering Authors) and Facts on File Database
- 2. Energize – the libraries, the librarians and ourselves!**
  - a. We have quarterly library Project Manager meetings. Chance to talk, share, vent, celebrate!
    - i. Meetings used to be monthly, but that became draining rather than energizing so we went to quarterly.

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- ii. Instituted transcript review exercise which participants find highly energizing.
  - b. Continual recruitment and addition of new libraries; new blood energizes with new faces and new ideas
  - c. User group at annual state conference
  - d. Marketing – SJRLC has continually provided attractive, professionally designed marketing materials in a variety of media (posters, bookmarks, pens) and themes ("Got a Question, Get a Live Answer", "Does Your Dog Know Something You Don't?") for our QandANJ.org staffing libraries. New marketing materials and themes have proved energizing and exciting (for SJRLC staff and staffing libraries.)
3. **Innovate:**
- a. In October, 2006 we instituted Library barcode authentication to the service. Why did we introduce this barrier to use?
    - i. Our capacity was maxed out.
    - ii. Our growth (through WOM) continued.
    - iii. We had to either increase supply (staffing) or decrease demand.
    - iv. We had stats that suggested 40% of business was from out of NJ
    - v. We had paved the way with an 18 month pilot project: "Get A Library Card Online (GALCO) that allowed customers to request a library card online and be given a temporary access # to use until their physical card arrived in the mail. ([www.sjrlc.org/galco](http://www.sjrlc.org/galco))
    - vi. More appropriate use of our most valued resource (people); serving NJ residents non-NJ residents.
    - vii. Yes, it's a barrier to use, but an acceptable barrier ("every choice has a downside...")
    - viii. IT WORKED! Usage dropped approx. 50%
    - ix. Uh oh....
  - b. Just implemented authentication via geolocator software
    - i. Users are authenticated by IP address
    - ii. ICONN uses it and reports approx. 85% accuracy
    - iii. Goal is to have manageable usage levels while ensuring that our resources are being used to serve NJ customers
    - iv. This will allow us to return to the fun, energizing stuff: Marketing!! NJ has two media markets, Philadelphia and NY. Prior to geolocation it was difficult to advertise in newspapers, tv, radio that penetrates into NY/PA markets. Now we can!!
  - c. In the process of producing an awesome commercial that appeals to teens; plans to run commercial on MTV!
  - d. New MySpace page
  - e. Planned You Tube commercial contest for Spring ("Your commercial on MTV!")
  - f. Again, you can see how these are mutually reinforcing, and by focusing all of our energies on some aspect of Appreciating, Innovating or Energizing we have managed to sustain and grow library participation in our service.

