

AskMN: The Librarian Is In!

FY18 Report

July 1, 2017 – June 30, 2018



AskMN: The Librarian Is In! is Minnesota's 24/7 statewide digital reference service. AskMN has been in service since March 2008, with 40 libraries and library systems participating from across Minnesota.



10 years strong! FY18 marked AskMN's 10th year in service. AskMN began in 2008 with eight libraries willing to try something new – be part of a cooperative of libraries helping each other answer patron questions 24/7. Since then more libraries have joined and patrons caught on quickly to the fact that they could get help whenever they needed it. AskMN has grown steadily through the years and since 2008, AskMN participating libraries have answered and followed up with nearly 300,000 patron questions!

Overall Activity

To offer 24/7 coverage of the service we partner with the QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference Cooperative, made up of libraries from the United States and the United Kingdom. When a Minnesota librarian is not available to assist a Minnesota patron, a Cooperative librarian will step in and help that patron. AskMN libraries provide the same assistance to other Cooperative libraries.

In FY18 AskMN librarians answered a total of 37,257 questions. Of those, 32,997 questions were from Minnesota patrons and 4,260 questions were from non-Minnesota patrons. The overall number of questions decreased 5% from 39,078 in FY17 to 37,257 in FY18. However, Minnesota academic libraries saw an increase of 13% of incoming questions from 9,393 questions in FY17 to 12,220 questions in FY18. This is the largest increase the academic queue has experienced since the service began.

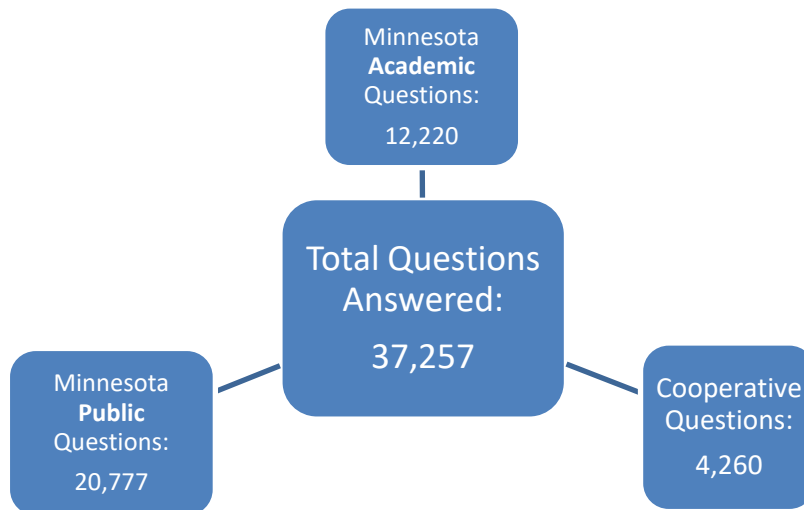
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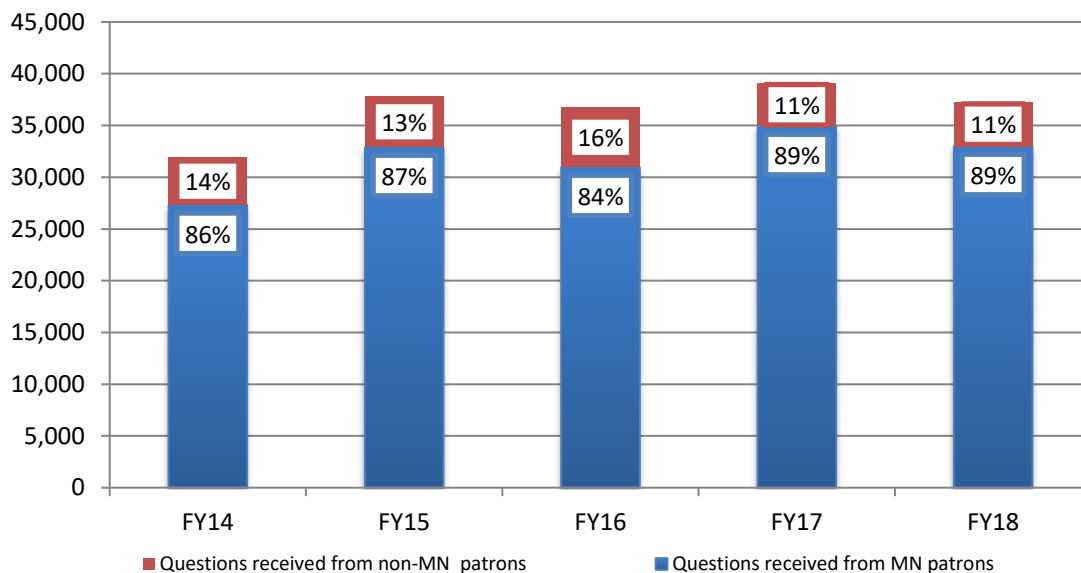
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Total Questions Received, FY18



Total Questions Received by Fiscal Year

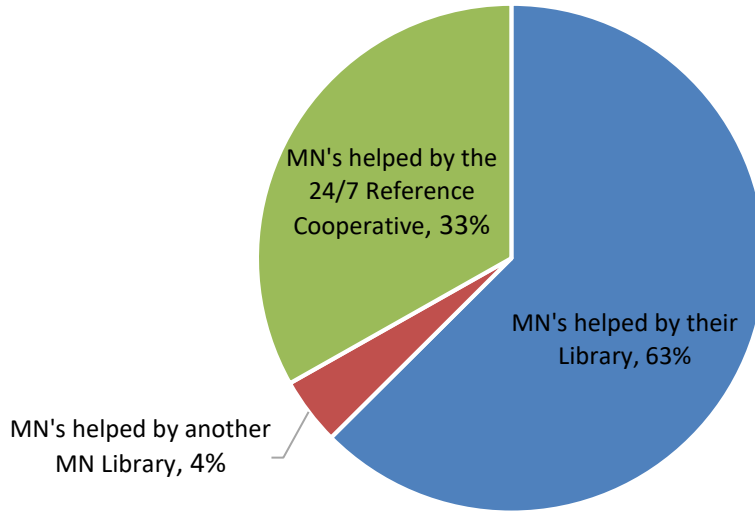


How were Minnesota Patrons helped?

AskMN allows libraries to provide a tiered-service level giving each library the first opportunity to connect with their own patrons. When a librarian from a patron’s library is not available to pick up their patron’s question, that question becomes available to other AskMN librarians. If an AskMN librarian is not available, the question goes to the 24/7 Reference Cooperative for assistance. In FY18, AskMN libraries were able to assist their own patron 63% of the time. The 24/7 Reference Cooperative helped pick up one third of the overall questions from Minnesota patrons.



Minnesota Patron questions answered by type of library



When Did Patrons Ask Questions?

Traffic from Minnesota patrons tends to follow closely with the beginning and end of the school year, with summer seeing less activity. We see an increase in October through December for the academic queue, which would follow with the beginning of mid-terms running through the end of the Fall semester. History Day research has also played a role in activity for the Minnesota public library queue. The research phase of History Day projects typically falls between December through February. For this fiscal year we see a slight increase in traffic for that period. Chat sessions, on average, take about twenty minutes in length.

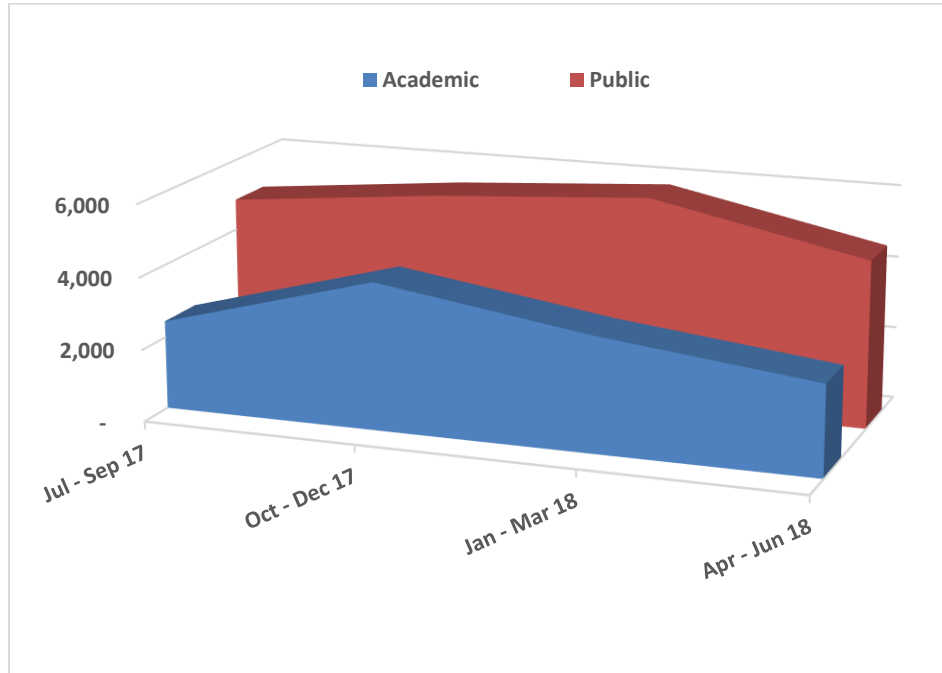
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Questions from Minnesota Patrons, FY18



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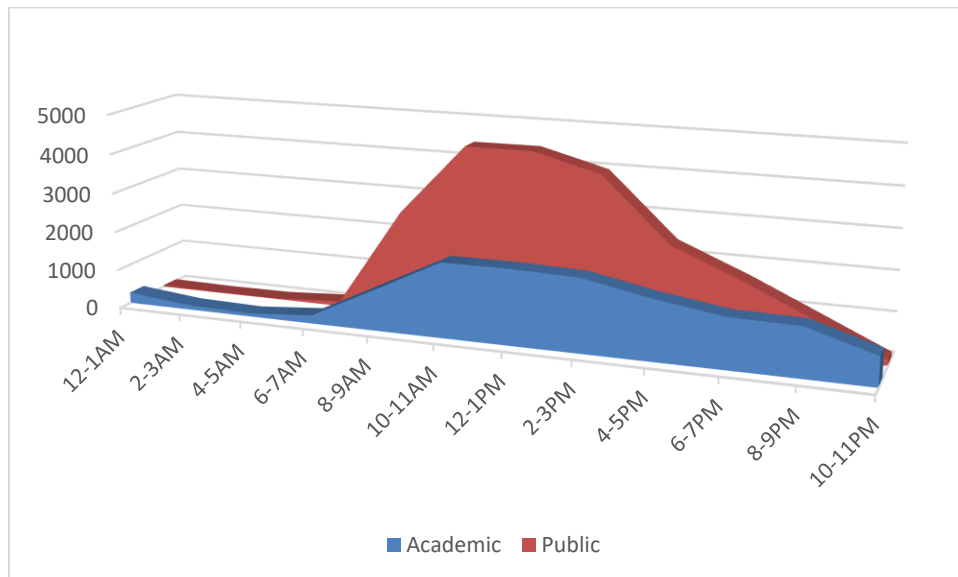
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Traffic patterns for the time of day patrons are coming to the service to ask their questions is tracked to better staff the service to meet more Minnesota patrons at their time of need by Minnesota library staff. While there are more questions coming from the public library queue than the academic library queue, we consistently see a switch in the evening hours where more questions start originating from the academic library queue. Around the 8 PM mark there is a switch-over in activity with academic questions rising and public questions falling. This is a great example of the need for the after-hours service, when information and reference desks in libraries are typically closed.

Questions Asked by hour of day



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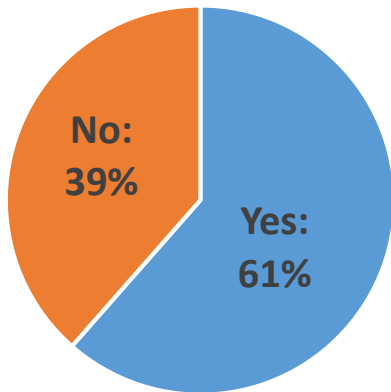
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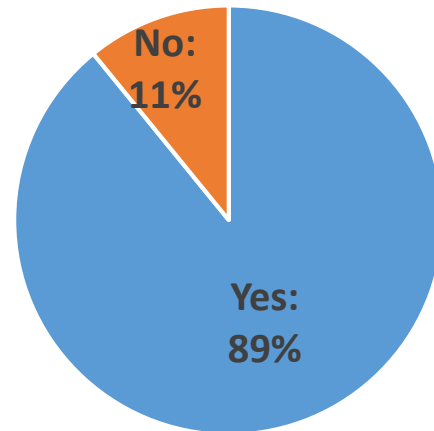
Patron Feedback

Patron satisfaction also helps gauge the quality of the service. Of the 40 libraries participating in AskMN, 13 libraries use the QuestionPoint patron feedback forms after a chat session has ended. From those feedback forms we have received 1,070 responses for FY18, a total of 3% of all 32,997 questions from Minnesota patrons. Here are the responses to the questions from those surveys:

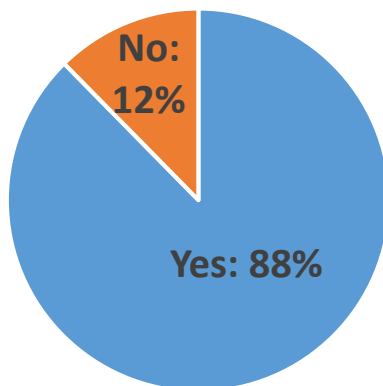
This was the first time I used this service:



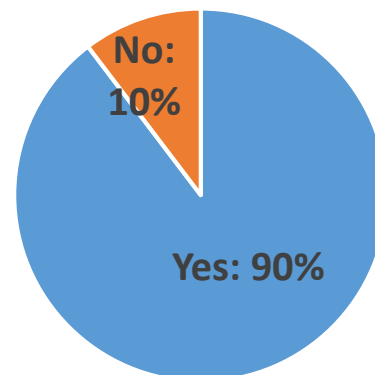
The librarian was helpful:



Were you satisfied with the answer to your question:



Would you use this service again:



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List of Participating Libraries

Appendix 1 shows the list of participating libraries for FY18.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Dana Kocienda, Minitex Support Staff, for her assistance in creating the figures.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to all the participating libraries for their work in shaping the AskMN service for the past 10 years!

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Appendix 1 - -AskMN Participating Libraries

Participating Academic Libraries

Augsburg University
Bethany Lutheran College
Bethel University
Carleton College
Century College
Concordia University – St. Paul
Dakota County Technical College
Hamline University
Hennepin Technical College
Inver Hills Community College
Lake Superior College
McNally Smith College of Music
Metro State University
Minnesota State University – Mankato
Normandale Community College
North Central University
North Hennepin Community College
Ridgewater College
St. Catherine University
St. Cloud State University
St. Olaf College
St. Paul College
University of Minnesota – Duluth
University of Minnesota - Morris
University of Minnesota – Twin Cities
University of Northwestern, St. Paul
University of St. Thomas

Participating Public Libraries

Anoka County Library
Carver County Library
Cloquet Public Library
Dakota County Library
East Central Regional Library
Great River Regional Library
Hennepin County Library System
Lake Agassiz Regional Library
Minitex
Saint Paul Public Library
Scott County Library
Washington County Library
Willmar Public Library