Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

Here's a "what if" scenario to think about as you decide how to evaluate your virtual reference service.

WHAT IF your library board requests a report on chat service effectiveness?

Your library board of trustees wants a report on the overall value of virtual reference service, but did not specify how it should be evaluated. Your library does use Web Trends to track Web site usage and the chat service application provides a variety of reports, as well as an archive of questions and answers. Your library director also recommended measuring the cost effectiveness of the service.

How will you define "effective"?

Which existing tools should be used to evaluate the service? What new tools might be needed?

Who will compile the data and write the report?

Here are some resources that may help you:

"E-Metrics Instructional System," Information Use Management & Policy Institute, Florida State University, 2005. (Registration & login optional) Online modules available at
http://www.ii.fsu.edu/solutions_emis.cfm

Hill, J.B. et al, "Digital Reference Evaluation: Assessing the Past to Plan for the Future," *Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship*, Fall 2003. Available at
http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v04n03/Hill_j01.htm

Evaluation of VRS at the University of Guelph. This page features a number of tools used by a university library in the evaluation of their virtual reference service.
http://www.lib.uoguelph.ca/help/chat/VRD/vrdevaluation.html