

Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

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

WHAT IF your library budget is unexpectedly cut?

Your library serves a community of 45,000. A manufacturing plant that is the city's largest employer and primary revenue source has announced that it will close at the end of the year. In response, the mayor announces an across-the-board 20% reduction in city agency budgets for the next fiscal year. The mayor also warns that future cuts may be necessary. Your library director asks you to recommend both short- and long-term strategies that will trim costs for your chat reference service. Currently, your library is part of a four-library consortium that licenses a sophisticated software application. You pay for reference coverage from the software vendor when your consortium libraries are closed.

What resources will you use for decision-making?

Does your service plan provide priorities and direction for changes to the service?

What short-term strategies will you recommend? Long-term strategies?

Here are some resources that may help you:

Boss, Richard W., "Virtual Reference," *PLA TechNotes*, December 2004. Available at <http://www.ala.org/ala/pla/plapubs/technotes/virtualreference.htm>.

Bromberg, Peter and Marianne Sweet, "Collaborative Staffing Models and Sustained Participation," Virtual Reference Symposium presentation, July 2005. Materials available at <http://www.qandanj.org/colorado/>.

Nelson, Sandra. *The New Planning for Results*. American Library Association, 2001. An excellent general guide to planning that includes templates for staffing, budgeting, and service analysis.