



RUBA Community Feedback Survey:

ANCHORAGE REGIONAL OFFICE SUMMARY

RUBA PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, Division of Community and Regional Affairs contracted with Information Insights to conduct a comprehensive and objective evaluation of the RUBA Program in December 2006. Although demand for RUBA Program services has steadily increased since the program's establishment in the early 1990s, a comprehensive and objective program evaluation had not previously been completed. The Division's primary objective in voluntarily conducting a program evaluation was to collect information related to: 1) program performance; 2) program effectiveness; 3) community feedback; 4) partner agency feedback; and 5) overall program impact.

The RUBA Program Evaluation, completed July 2007, yields significant information related to community needs, program strengths, program weaknesses, and service delivery opportunities. Program evaluation findings suggest program strengths include: 1) staff knowledge and experience; 2) UTM course content and delivery; and 3) the RUBA Assessment process as a means of providing utility management capacity benchmarks. Project findings suggest program weaknesses include: 1) growing emphasis on the RUBA Assessment process; 2) RUBA Program understaffing; 3) limited frequency of training opportunities; and 4) inadequate program recordkeeping and documentation.

RUBA Program Evaluation findings have the potential to guide service delivery decisions, inform decision-making regarding program direction, and improve overall program effectiveness and long-term community impact.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

One of the most important components of the RUBA Program Evaluation was the collection of community feedback via a statewide mail-out survey and on-site key-informant interviews conducted in select communities during April and May 2007. Community feedback was gathered by mailing surveys to 288 people in 146 communities who have either used RUBA Program services or worked directly with RUBA Program staff during the recent past. On-site interviews were also conducted with 12 key-informants from seven communities located across Alaska.

The purpose of the mail-out survey and key-informant interviews was to systematically gather community input regarding perceptions of the RUBA Program, satisfaction with RUBA Program services, community needs, recommendations to improve service delivery, and the RUBA Program's overall community impact.

This report, *RUBA Community Feedback Survey: Anchorage Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for the communities served by the Anchorage Regional Office. The report is organized into five substantive sections: Respondent Profile, Utility Profile, RUBA Program Technical Assistance, RUBA Program Courses and Workshops, and RUBA Program Staff.

Community survey results provide a foundation for Anchorage-based RUBA Program staff to better understand community perceptions of the RUBA Program, utility management assistance needs, and overall satisfaction with RUBA Program services.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The statewide community feedback survey was conducted during May 2007. In total, 146 rural communities located across Alaska were identified as having received RUBA Program services during the recent past and therefore included in the community survey (Table 1). Generally two key-informants from each community were selected to participate in the survey. Selection of key-informants was based on three primary criteria including: 1) current ties to local water/wastewater utility; 2) local government involvement; and/or 3) likelihood of interaction with the RUBA Program. Statewide survey response rates indicate 65% of communities (i.e., at least one key-informant survey response) and 42% of key-informants responded to the community survey.

Table 1. Statewide Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	146	95	65%*
Key-Informant	288	122	42%

* At least one key-informant per community responded.

Community survey findings within this report are based solely on responses provided by key-informants from the communities the Anchorage Regional Office serves. In total, 80 key-informants from 41 communities received a community survey (Table 2). Anchorage Regional Office survey findings indicate 66% of communities (i.e., at least one key-informant survey response) and 45% of key-informants responded to the community survey.

Table 2. Anchorage Regional Office Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	41	27	66%*
Key-Informant	80	36	45%

* At least one key-informant per community responded.

Analyses throughout the following substantive report sections are strictly limited to mail-out survey responses from communities served by the Anchorage Regional Office. Survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 36 individuals located in 27 communities that have received RUBA Program services from Anchorage Regional Office staff. Community and key-informant names are intentionally excluded throughout the report to protect respondent and utility confidentiality.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

Twenty-eight percent (28%) of respondents identify themselves as city clerks, followed by tribal administrators (17%), utility or public works managers (14%), and city administrators or managers (14%) (Table 3).

Two-thirds (68%) of respondents have worked for rural utilities for three or more years, 18% for one or two years, and 12% less than one year (Figure 1).

Table 3. Respondent Positions

Position	Percentage
City Clerk	28%
Tribal Administrator	17%
Utility/Public Works Manager	14%
City Administrator/Manager	14%
City Finance Officer	8%
Tribal Finance Officer	3%
Utility Operator	3%
Utility Clerk	3%
Other	10%

Three-quarters (76%) of respondents indicate they have been employed in one or two utility jobs; 18% indicate they have never had a utility job (Figure 2). A majority (58%) of respondents report being in their current job for three or more years, 17% report being in their current jobs between one and two years, and one-quarter (25%) indicate they have worked in their current job less than a year.

Most (81%) respondents summarized their top job priorities (Table 4). On average, administrative duties are the highest priority among respondents, followed by accounting functions and utility management responsibilities including electric, fuel, and water/wastewater operations.

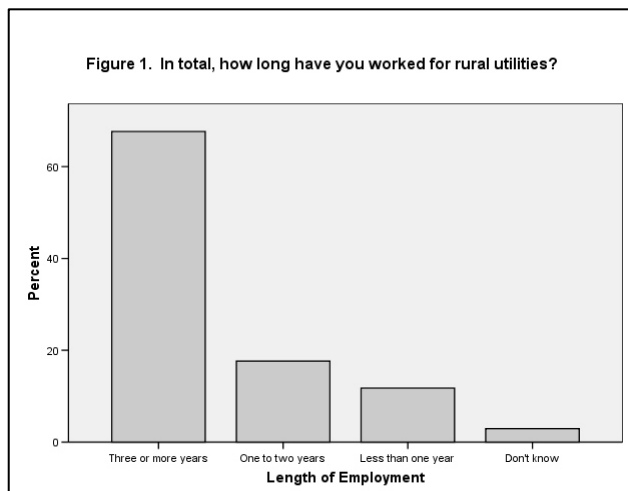
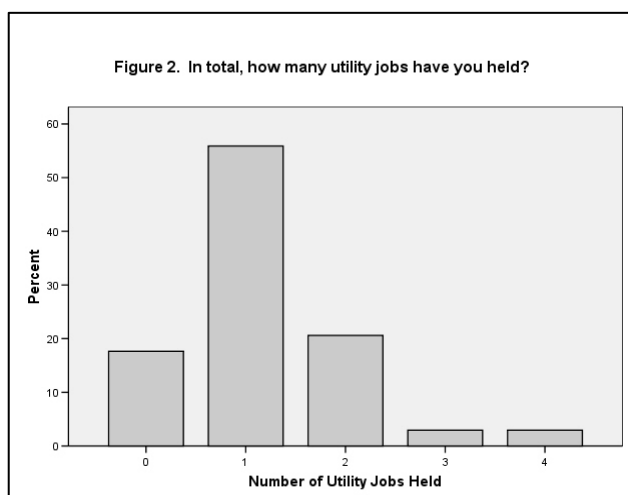
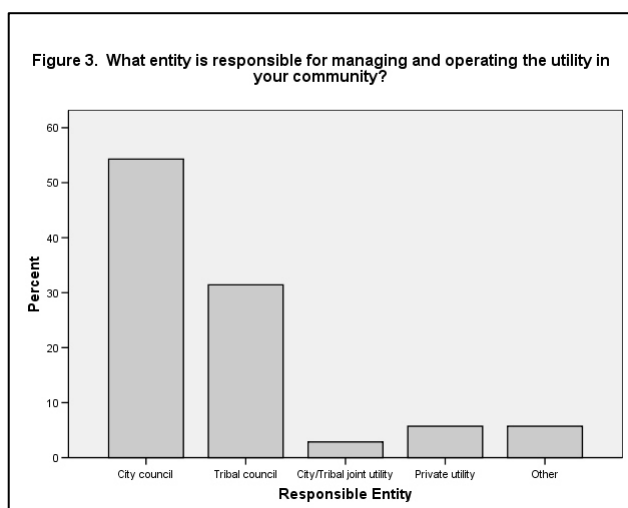


Table 4. Respondent Job Priorities

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	Power remains on line and affordable	Water quality is as good as can be with present equipment & affordable	Landfill is maintained
2	Oversee all programs	Seek funding sources	Make sure all grants are monitored
3	Housing	Economic development and sustainability	Education and training
4	Bookkeeping	Accounting	Secretarial
5	Prepare annual budget	Water and sewer billing and collections	Other municipal related duties
6	Quality water and satisfied customers	Maintenance and upkeep	Budget
7	Personnel management	Site control	Financial management
8	Monthly water and sewer billing	Accounts payable and receivable	City correspondence, mail, reports, and payroll
9	Budgeting and financial management	Grant management	Supervise employees
10	Utility manager	Teacher's aide	Water operator
11	Bookkeeping and payroll	City clerk related duties	Filing
12	Administrative	Utility manager	Paperwork
13	Money management and budget	Answering questions/surveys - not important but takes up a lot of time	Personnel
14	Basic city management	Water and sewer management	Electric utility
15	Fuel and electric sales	Roads	Garbage collection
16	Operator needs	Customer needs	Proper billing
17	Office organization	Information dissemination	Communication
18	Grant management	Accounting	Payroll
19	Water quality	Water testing and regulations	Sewage collection and maintenance
20	Administration and management	Finance and budgeting	Planning
21	Posting customer payments and payroll	Paperwork for water operations	Customer service
22	Communication	Bills - paying and sending out	Utilities
23	Record keeping and billing	Day to day operation	Repair and maintenance
24	Manage the council's money	Accounts payable and receivable	Payroll and reports
25	Accounts payable and receivable	Administrative responsibilities	Collections
26	Accounts payable and receivable	Payroll and all other aspects of city banking	
27	Jobs	Homes	
28	The mayor is in charge of all departments		
29	Abundant clean water		



UTILITY PROFILE



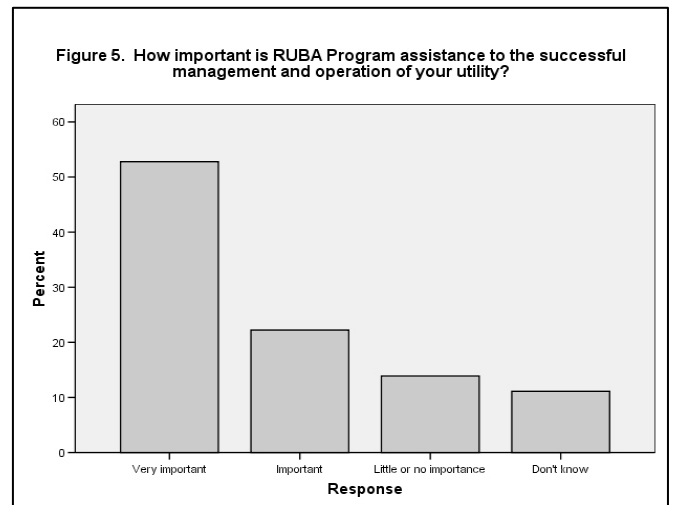
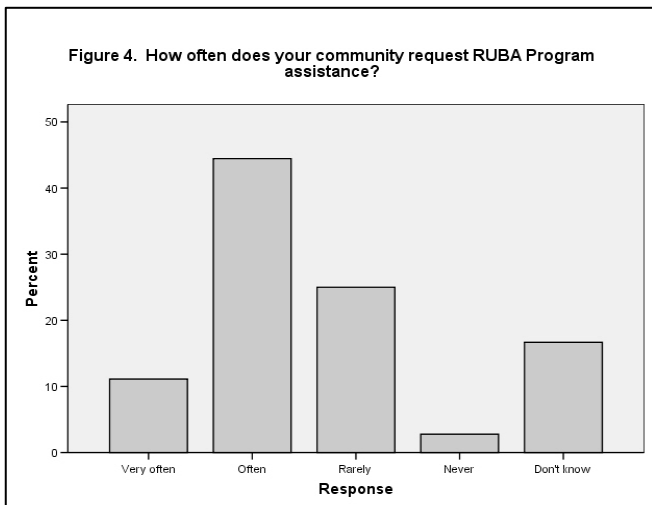
City councils (54%) and tribal councils (31%) are most likely to manage, operate, and set utility policy in respondent communities (Figure 3).

A majority (54%) of respondents indicate their utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement in place. One-third (31%) indicate they do not know whether an agreement is in place.

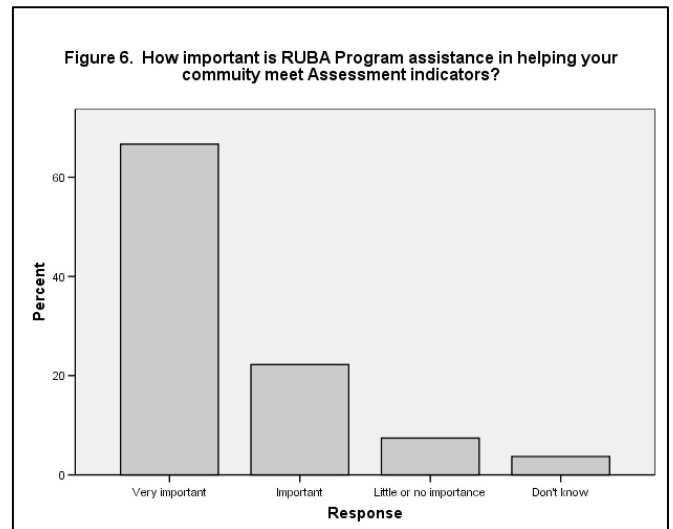
Half (49%) of respondents report no delays in community utility projects related to not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. One-third (34%) indicate projects were delayed. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents whose projects have been delayed report a delay of 18 months or less; one person (10%) indicates a project delay of nine years. The median number of months a project has been delayed is nine.

RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Half (55%) of respondents indicate they either very often (11%) or often (44%) request RUBA Program assistance, while one-quarter (25%) report rarely requesting assistance (Figure 4).



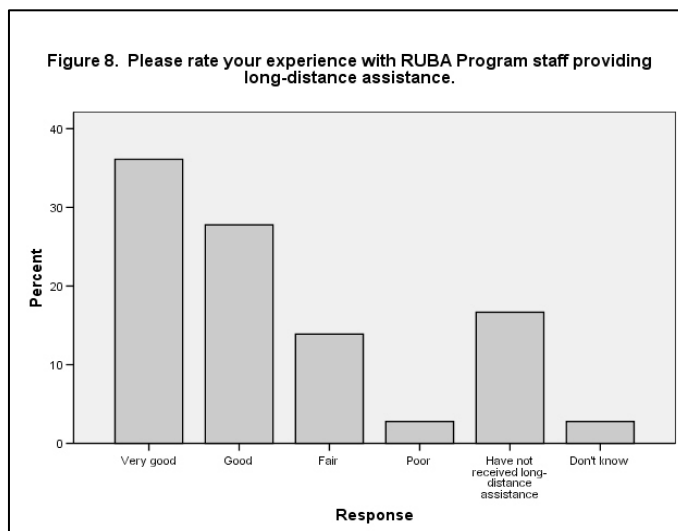
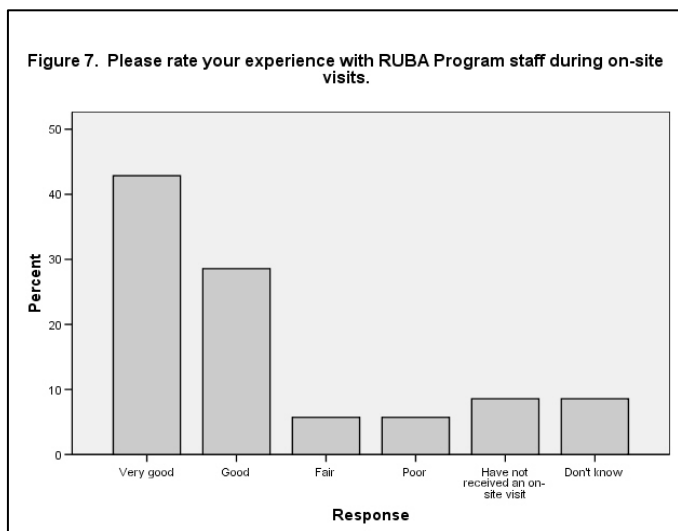
Three-quarters (75%) of respondents report RUBA Program assistance is either very important (53%) or important (22%) to the successful management and operation of their utility (Figure 5).



A majority (72%) of utilities report completing a RUBA Assessment. Half (52%) of respondents report meeting RUBA Assessment indicators while one-third (37%) indicate they have not. Almost all (89%) respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is either very important (67%) or important (22%) to helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators (Figure 6). Three-quarters (77%) of respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators prior to utility project construction is either very important (50%) or important (27%).

Half (54%) of respondents indicate community utility management issues are addressed with RUBA Program staff assistance. One-quarter (23%) of respondents address management issues internally without RUBA staff assistance. One respondent (3%) indicates the utility does not address utility management issues.

Nearly three-quarters (72%) of respondents report either very good (43%) or good (29%) experiences with RUBA staff during on-site visits (Figure 7). Two-thirds (64%) of respondents report the quality of long-distance assistance from RUBA Program staff is very good (36%) or good (28%) (Figure 8). Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents indicate they have not received long-distance assistance.



After experiencing RUBA Program assistance, at least half of respondents indicate organizational management (58%), utility planning (54%), and utility management (55%) moderately or significantly improved (Table 5).

Table 5. Change in Utility Management Capacity

Management Capacity	Declined Significantly	Declined Moderately	Remained the Same	Improved Moderately	Improved Significantly	Don't Know
Finances	0%	0%	40%	27%	15%	18%
Accounting	0%	0%	38%	26%	18%	18%
Tax issues	0%	0%	47%	19%	12%	22%
Personnel system	0%	0%	40%	27%	15%	18%
Organizational management	0%	0%	27%	40%	18%	15%
Utility operation	0%	0%	37%	30%	18%	15%
Overall utility management	0%	3%	30%	30%	25%	12%
Utility planning	0%	3%	25%	33%	21%	18%

A majority (66%) of respondents plan to use RUBA Program assistance very often (22%) or often (44%) in the future. Less than one-quarter (19%) of respondents indicate they rarely expect to be using RUBA Program assistance in the future.

RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

A majority (76%) of respondents indicate RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses are either very important (52%) or important (24%) to improving their utility's management and operations. Fifty-four percent (54%) of respondents report attending at least one UTM course.

While half (43% - 56%) of respondents have not attended UTM courses, those who have attended have a favorable view of the quality of UTM training (Table 6). Only one respondent (3%) is undecided regarding the quality of UTM training, with the remainder reporting training is either very good (17% - 27%) or good (17% - 31%).

Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	0%	24%	17%	3%	56%
Personnel Management	0%	0%	27%	27%	3%	43%
Planning Management	0%	0%	17%	24%	3%	56%
Financial Management	0%	0%	31%	21%	3%	45%
Operational Management	0%	0%	25%	25%	3%	47%
Organizational Management	0%	0%	28%	21%	3%	48%

A large majority (69% - 89%) of respondents indicate they do not attend other DCRA workshops including local government and community planning workshops (Table 7). For each course, more respondents report the quality of training is either very good (4% - 14%) or good (7% - 14%) than fair (3% - 7%). No respondents rate the quality of DCRA local government and community planning workshops as poor.

Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	0%	0%	7%	4%	0%	89%
City clerk training	0%	7%	14%	10%	0%	69%
QuickBooks Pro	0%	3%	7%	14%	0%	76%
Financial record keeping	0%	4%	11%	11%	3%	71%
Payroll tax	0%	3%	11%	7%	0%	79%
Community planning	0%	7%	11%	4%	0%	78%
Elections	0%	0%	7%	4%	3%	86%
Planning commission	0%	0%	11%	4%	3%	82%

RUBA PROGRAM STAFF

Half (51%) of respondents report having contact with RUBA Program staff either very often (11%) or often (40%). In contrast, one-third (37%) indicate they rarely have contact and 9% have no interaction with RUBA Program staff (Figure 9).

Over half (52% - 60%) of respondents indicate staff assistance is either very good or good in all seven areas including availability of staff assistance (55%), timeliness of staff assistance (56%), applicability to the community (58%), addressing the utility's current challenges (58%), addressing the utility's long-term challenges (54%), understanding the community as a whole (60%), and willingness to travel to the community (52%) (Table 8).

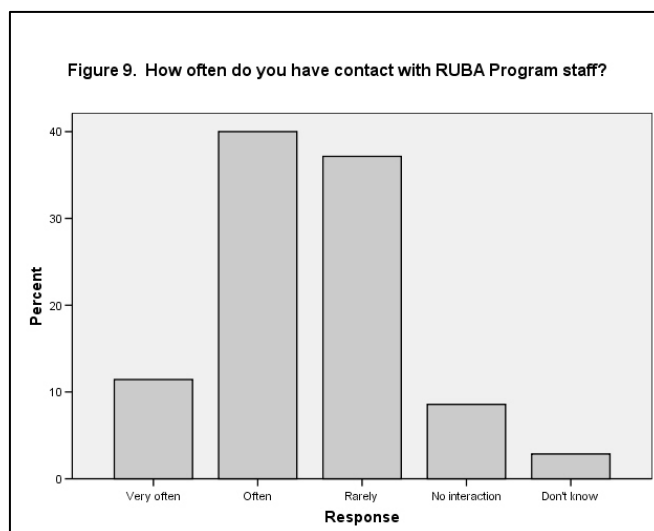
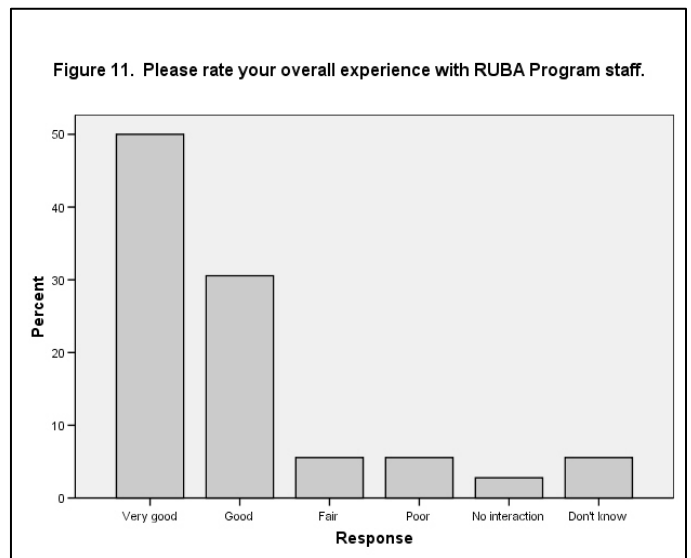
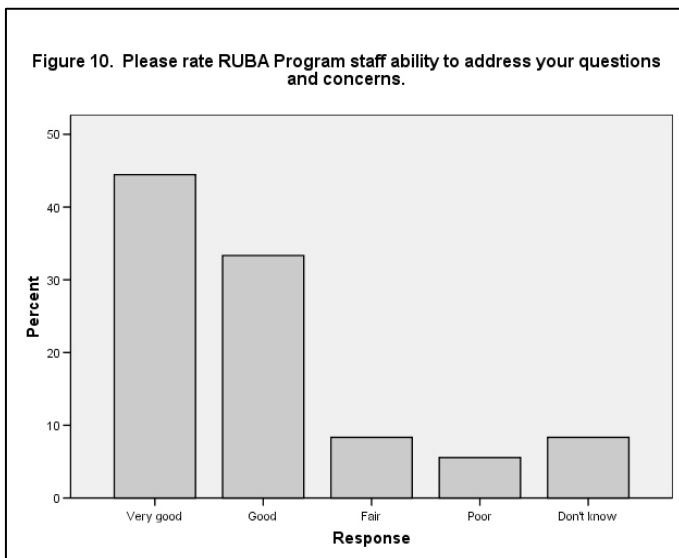


Table 8. Quality of RUBA Program Staff Assistance

Assistance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Don't Know
Availability of staff assistance	0%	12%	24%	31%	3%	30%
Timeliness of staff assistance	0%	10%	31%	25%	3%	31%
Applicability to the community	0%	9%	31%	27%	6%	27%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	0%	12%	27%	31%	6%	24%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	0%	16%	27%	27%	6%	24%
Understanding the community as a whole	0%	16%	30%	30%	3%	21%
Willingness to travel to the community	3%	12%	24%	28%	6%	27%

Three-quarters (77%) of respondents report RUBA Program staff's ability to address community questions and concerns is either very good (44%) or good (33%) (Figure 10). Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents indicate their overall experience with RUBA Program staff is either very good (50%) or good (31%) (Figure 11).



Respondents were asked to rate RUBA Program activities including RUBA Assessments, on-site community visits, RUBA Program staff correspondence, UTM courses, local government and planning workshops, and RUBA publications. A majority of respondents (59% - 70%) indicate the aforementioned program activities are either very important (20% - 47%) or important (23% - 46%) to successful utility management and operations (Table 9).

Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	6%	35%	35%	24%
On-site community visits	9%	23%	47%	21%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	12%	32%	35%	21%
UTM courses	6%	23%	45%	26%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	6%	24%	35%	35%
RUBA publications	6%	46%	20%	28%

Three-quarters (73%) of respondents are very satisfied (56%) or somewhat satisfied (17%) with the RUBA Program. Only one respondent (3%) is very dissatisfied with the RUBA Program.

Finally, respondents were asked to provide comments intended to improve RUBA Program service delivery. Ten respondents included the following feedback:

- [Current RUBA staff] does a great job with our community. We appreciate her dedication and hard work. She deserves a raise.
- RUBA is just another government agency to deal with. We will always have problems having enough money for a utility.
- Schedule more classes so people can obtain the certification. Make classes available to everyone instead of just by region. In our region they can't get enough people to sign up to make a class go.
- I have no criticisms of the program. The RUBA training is good and I have used the information provided. I haven't really used the technical assistance because I don't really have a need for it in the utility management area... Program staff have hands-on experience working with small, remote villages and this is a great advantage to the program.
- Training opportunities have greatly helped improve knowledge and work performance of our employees.
- The RUBA UTM classes are very important and we are glad they are provided to our community.
- Maybe more on-site visits.
- It takes time away from the daily business of the tribal office and is viewed as another way to keep us from moving forward. Again, most villages will never have enough money to be efficient.
- A one-day visit firing 300 questions and asking for 6 inches of documentation is not effective. If documentation is needed for every little thing you do, what's the point of getting audited every year with no funding.
- Would like to get more positive feedback when sending in reports. If everything looks OK, positive reinforcement helps.
- Why do you need to use utility information! No use for us!
- Why so much paperwork just to have it?
- Already doing a great job.
- Program is well run.

SUMMARY

This report, *RUBA Community Feedback Survey: Anchorage Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings of the communities served by the Anchorage Regional Office. Survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 36 individuals located in 27 communities that have received RUBA Program services from Anchorage Regional Office staff.

Three-quarters of respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators prior to utility construction is important. Nearly all respondents indicate RUBA Program staff assistance is important to helping meet RUBA Assessment indicators. Half of the respondents address utility management issues with RUBA Program assistance and one-quarter address utility management issues internally.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is high. Most respondents' overall experience with RUBA Program staff is positive and two-thirds of respondents intend to use RUBA Program services frequently in the future. Three-quarters of respondents believe RUBA Program assistance is very important to the success of their utility's management and operations.

