



RUBA Community Feedback Survey:

DILLINGHAM 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: Dillingham Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for the communities served by the Dillingham 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 Dillingham 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. 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 3) likely to have had prior interaction with the RUBA Program.

Statewide survey response rates indicate 65% of communities (e.g., at least one key-informant survey response) and 42% of key-informants responded to the community survey (Table 1).

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 Dillingham Regional Office serves. In total, 15 key-informants from eight communities received a community survey. Dillingham Regional Office survey findings indicate 63% of communities (e.g., at least one key-informant survey response) and 40% of key-informants responded to the community survey (Table 2).

Table 2. Dillingham Regional Office Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	8	5	63%*
Key-Informant	15	6	40%

* At least one key-informant per community responded.

As previously noted, analyses throughout the following substantive report sections are strictly limited to mail-out survey responses from communities served by the Dillingham Regional Office. In short, survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of six individuals located in five communities that have benefited from Dillingham Regional Office RUBA Program services.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

City administrators account for half (50%) the total number of respondents, followed by city clerks (33%) and tribal administrators (17%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Respondent Positions

Position	Percentage
City Administrator	50%
City Clerk	33%
Tribal Administrator	17%

One hundred percent (100%) of respondents have worked for rural utilities three years or more. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents report being in their current position three or more years, and one-third (33%) for less than a year.

Eighty-three percent (83%) of respondents summarized their top job priorities (Table 4). Administrative duties, water and sewer projects, and housing issues are generally the highest priorities among respondents regardless of ranking.

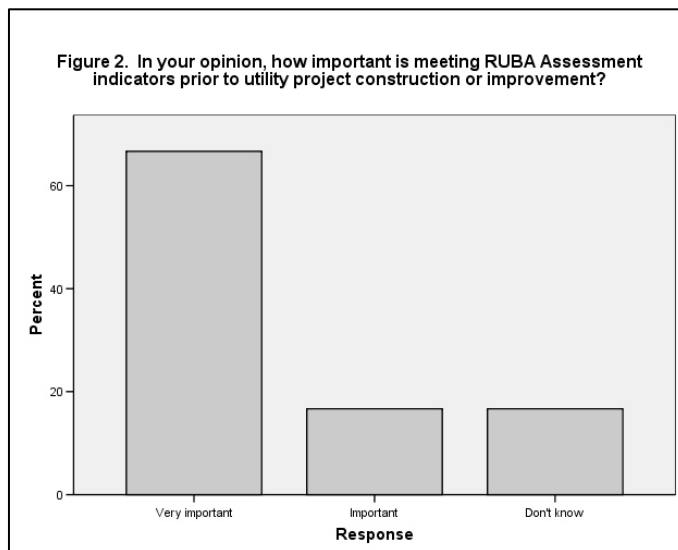
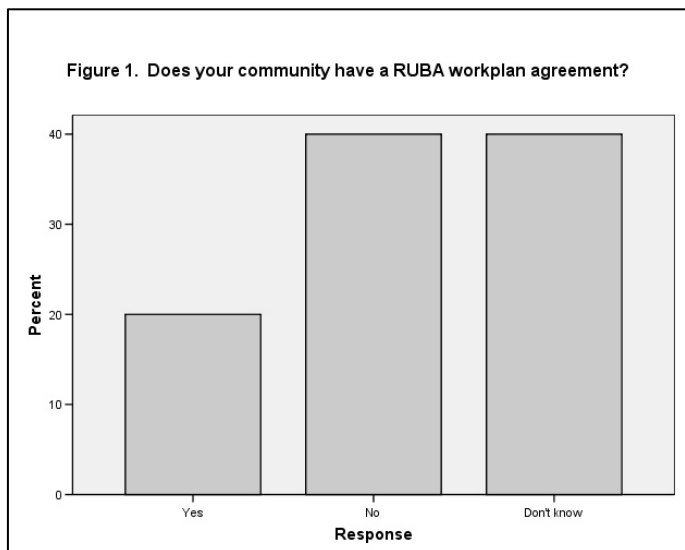
Table 4. Respondent Job Priorities

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	Communication with customers	City council meetings	Filing, data entry, supplies
2	Daily management of tribal office	Look after the interests of the community	Create jobs by bringing in projects
3	New community water system	Upgrade community sewer system	Equipment and training to maintain systems
4	City budget, water and sewer	Grants	Reports
5	Water and sewer projects		

UTILITY PROFILE

City councils (67%) are most likely to manage, operate, and set utility policy in respondent communities. Twenty percent (20%) of respondents indicate their utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement in place (Figure 1). Forty percent (40%) of respondents report their utility does not have a RUBA Workplan Agreement. Forty percent (40%) do not know whether an agreement is in place.

One respondent (17%) reports a project delay caused by not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. The remainder have either not experienced project delays (17%) or do not know (66%) whether a project was delayed. A large majority (83%) of respondents state it is either very important (66%) or important (17%) to meet RUBA Assessment indicators before undertaking a utility construction project or improvement (Figure 2).



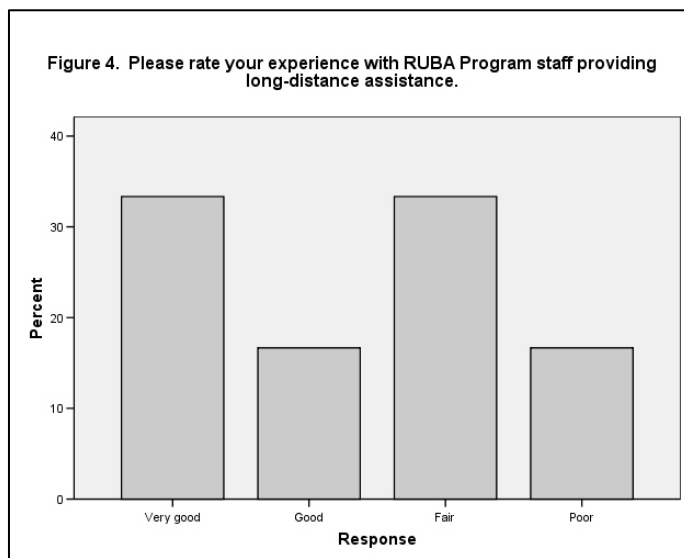
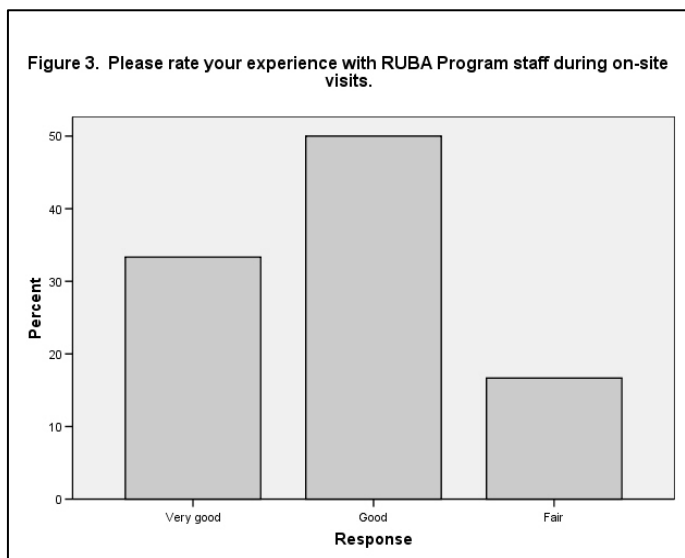
RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

RUBA Program assistance is requested often by half (50%) of respondents. One-third (33%) indicate rarely requesting assistance. All (100%) respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is either very important (33%) or important (67%) to the successful management and operation of their utility.

One-hundred percent (100%) of respondents report a RUBA Assessment has been completed for their utility. Half (50%) state their utility meets all RUBA Assessment indicators. Most (83%) respondents report RUBA Program assistance is either very important (33%) or important (50%) to helping communities meet RUBA Assessment indicators.

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents report addressing utility management problems with RUBA staff assistance, while one-third (33%) does so with assistance from a non-RUBA entity. Of significant note, no respondents report their utility does not address utility management problems.

Most (83%) respondents report very good (33%) or good (50%) experience with RUBA staff during on-site visits (Figure 3). Respondents are less optimistic regarding the quality of long-distance assistance (Figure 4). Half (50%) of respondents report long-distance assistance is very good (33%) or good (17%) while the other half (50%) indicate it is fair (33%) or poor (17%).



After experiencing RUBA Program assistance, over half of respondents report significant or moderate improvements in accounting (80%), financial management (60%), tax issues (60%) utility planning (60%), and overall utility management (60%) (Table 5). Forty percent (40%) report no change in personnel system, organizational management, and utility operation. One respondent (20%) reports a significant decline in all eight management areas. Most (83%) respondents anticipate using RUBA Program assistance either very often (17%) or often (66%) in the future.

Table 5. Change in Utility Management Capacity

Management Capacity	Declined Significantly	Declined Moderately	Remained the Same	Improved Moderately	Improved Significantly	Don't Know
Finances	20%	0%	20%	20%	40%	0%
Accounting	20%	0%	0%	40%	40%	0%
Tax issues	20%	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%
Personnel system	20%	0%	40%	20%	20%	0%
Organizational management	20%	0%	40%	0%	40%	0%
Utility operation	20%	0%	40%	20%	20%	0%
Overall utility management	20%	0%	20%	20%	40%	0%
Utility planning	20%	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%

RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

A majority (80%) of respondents indicate UTM courses are very important to improving utility management and operations. Two-thirds (67%) of respondents attended at least one RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses.

Between 25% and 50% of respondents have not attended five of the six UTM courses offered (Table 6). All respondents attended the Financial Management course. One-quarter (25%) of respondents rate each course as very good and one-quarter (25%) rate each as fair. The Financial Management course is rated the highest, with three-quarters (75%) rating it as very good (25%) or good (50%).

Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	25%	25%	25%	0%	25%
Personnel Management	0%	25%	0%	25%	0%	50%
Planning Management	0%	25%	0%	25%	0%	50%
Financial Management	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Operational Management	0%	25%	0%	25%	0%	50%
Organizational Management	25%	25%	0%	25%	0%	25%

Respondents also provided information for eight DCRA workshops. The majority (60% - 80%) of respondents report not attending the DCRA workshops (Table 7). The QuickBooks Pro workshop is rated the highest by attendees with forty percent (40%) rating it as very good (20%) or good (20%).

Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	80%
City clerk training	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
QuickBooks Pro	0%	0%	20%	20%	0%	60%
Financial record keeping	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Payroll tax	0%	0%	0%	20%	20%	60%
Community planning	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Elections	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%
Planning commission	0%	0%	0%	0%	20%	80%

RUBA PROGRAM STAFF

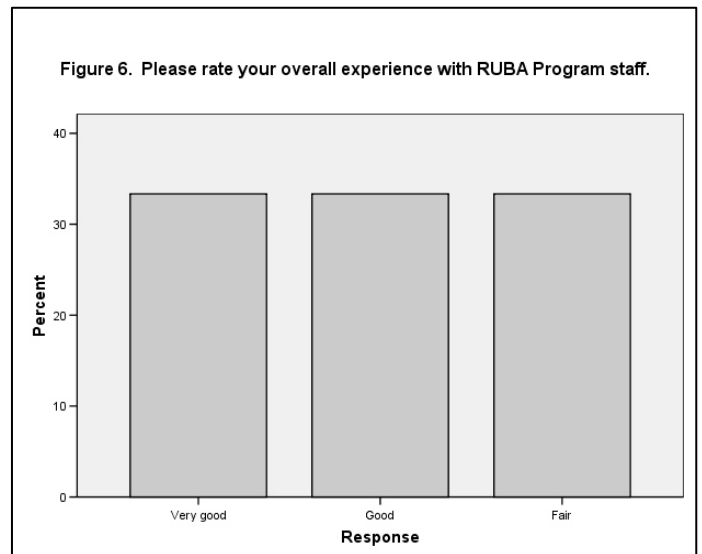
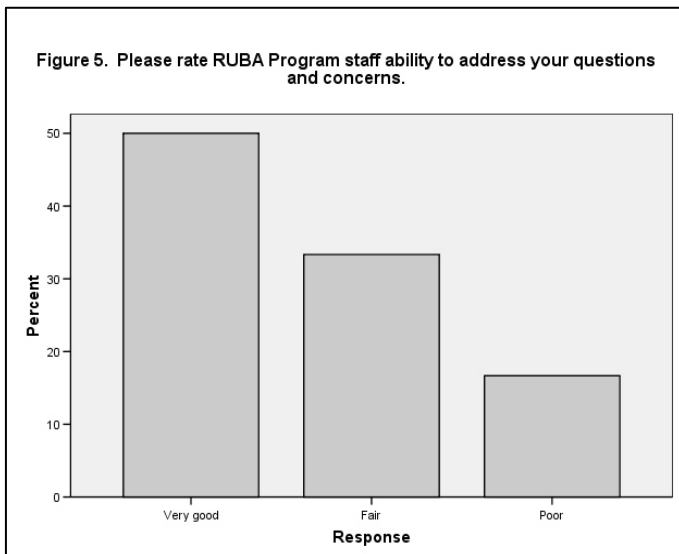
RUBA Program staff assistance is requested often by half (50%) of all respondents. In contrast, one-third (33%) indicate rarely requesting RUBA Program staff assistance.

At least half (50% - 66%) of respondents rate RUBA Program staff assistance as very good or good in six of seven areas including addressing the utility's current challenges (66%), availability of staff assistance (50%), timeliness of staff assistance (50%), applicability to the community (50%), addressing the utility's long-term challenges (50%), and understanding the community as a whole (50%) (Table 8). One-third (33%) of respondents rate staff willingness to travel to the community as very good. One respondent (16%) rates availability of staff as poor.

Table 8. Quality of RUBA Program Staff Assistance

Assistance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Don't Know
Availability of staff assistance	16%	0%	0%	50%	17%	17%
Timeliness of staff assistance	0%	16%	17%	33%	17%	17%
Applicability to the community	0%	16%	0%	50%	17%	17%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	0%	17%	33%	33%	17%	0%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	0%	33%	17%	33%	17%	0%
Understanding the community as a whole	0%	33%	17%	33%	17%	0%
Willingness to travel to the community	0%	33%	0%	33%	34%	0%

Half (50%) of respondents indicate RUBA staff ability to address their questions and concerns is very good; the other half rate it as fair (33%) or poor (17%) (Figure 5). Two-thirds (66%) of respondents indicate their overall experience with RUBA staff is either very good (33%) or good (33%) (Figure 6).



Respondents were asked to rate RUBA Program activities in six areas (Table 9). Two-thirds of respondents (67%) rate RUBA Assessments, on-site community visits, correspondence with RUBA staff, and UTM courses as very important. All respondents rate local government and planning workshops as either very important (33%) or important (67%), and two-thirds (66%) of respondents rate RUBA publications as very important (33%) or important (33%). No respondents rate any of these six activities as having little or no importance.

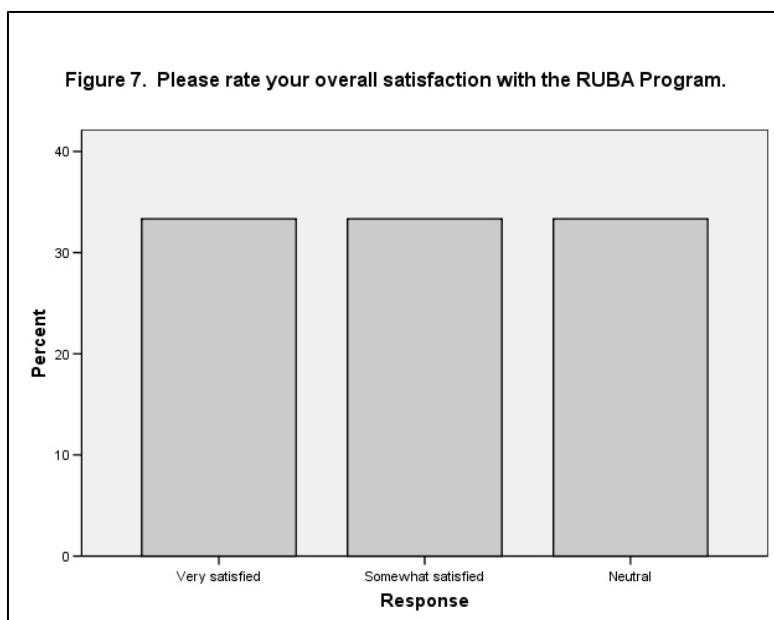
Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	0%	17%	67%	16%
On-site community visits	0%	33%	67%	0%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	0%	33%	67%	0%
UTM courses	0%	17%	67%	16%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	0%	67%	33%	0%
RUBA publications	0%	33%	33%	34%

Respondents were asked to provide specific recommendations and criticisms intended to improve RUBA Program services. Four respondents provide the following qualitative recommendations:

- When distributing same/or one course taught, should also be taught at the same place and the same subject/topic taught instead of later dividing 1 course into another [sic] - not fair. I missed the course taught at [a nearby community], so I went to Personnel Management Sanitation Utilities at Dillingham and it was a 1 credit [sic]. This is an example.
- RUBA Program staff are too busy; I recommend more staff.
- Reimbursement [for] trainings. Training fund should be funding directly from RUBA, without the reimbursement program. Some city governments do not have funds to send officials and employees to these important training sessions. I do not understand why the reimbursement is [issued] in this manner.
- Every little question the City Council does not have an answer for, RUBA is there with one or similar to it.
- Small communities need more local government assistance; the RUBA Program staff are too busy.

Finally, two-thirds (66%) of respondents report they are very satisfied (33%) or somewhat satisfied (33%) with the RUBA Program as a whole (Figure 7). No respondents report being dissatisfied with the RUBA Program.



SUMMARY

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

Almost all respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators before the start of a utility construction or improvement project is important and RUBA Program assistance is important to helping their utility meet RUBA Assessment indicators. Two-thirds of respondents rely on RUBA Program staff assistance to address utility management issues. The remainder address utility management issues with help from a non-RUBA entity.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is high among respondents. Respondents' overall experiences with RUBA Program staff are generally positive and respondents intend to use RUBA Program services frequently in the future. All respondents conclude RUBA Program assistance is important to the successful management and operation of their utility.

