



RUBA Community Feedback Survey:

FAIRBANKS 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: Fairbanks Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for the communities served by the Fairbanks 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 Fairbanks 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 Fairbanks Regional Office serves. In total, 42 key-informants from 21 communities received a community survey (Table 2). Fairbanks Regional Office survey findings indicate 48% of communities (i.e., at least one key-informant survey response) and 26% of key-informants responded to the community survey.

Table 2. Fairbanks Regional Office Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	21	10	48%*
Key-Informant	42	11	26%

* 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 Fairbanks Regional Office. Survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of eleven individuals located in ten communities that have received RUBA Program services from Fairbanks Regional Office staff. Community and key-informant names are intentionally excluded throughout the report to protect respondent and utility confidentiality.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

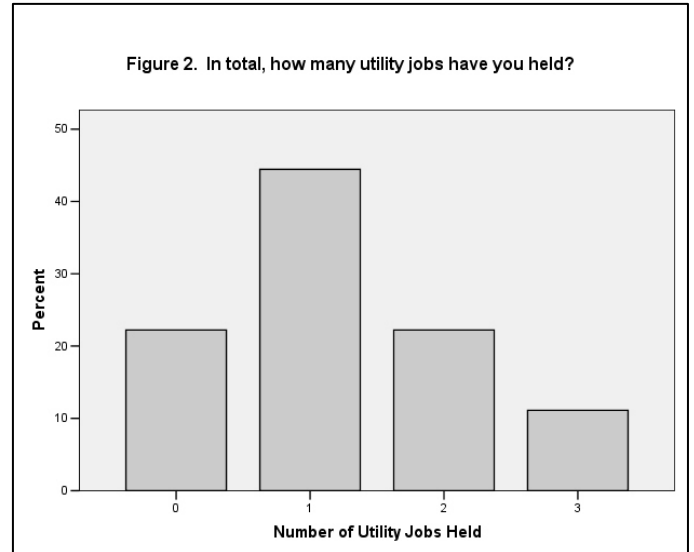
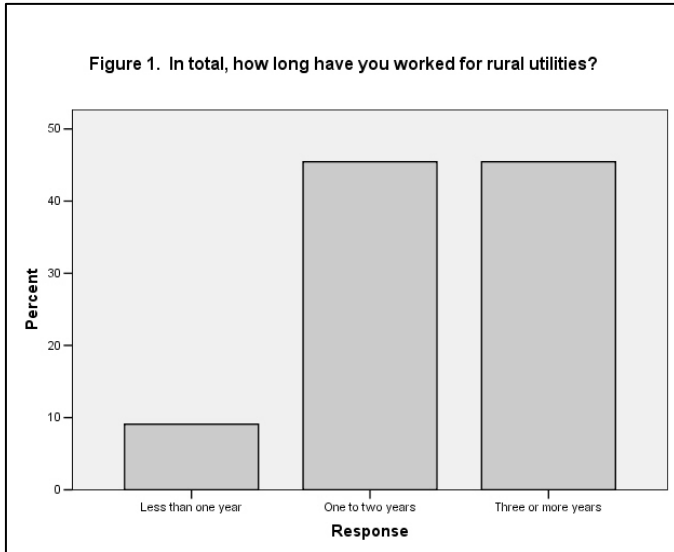
Thirty-six percent (36%) of respondents identify themselves as tribal administrators, followed by city clerks (18%) (Table 3). Only one (9%) staff person from each of the following job classes responded to the survey: city administrator, city finance officer, tribal finance officer, and utility operator.

Nearly half (45%) of respondents have worked for rural utilities three or more years (Figure 1). Just as many respondents (45%) have worked for rural utilities one to two years. Nearly half (44%) of respondents indicate

Table 3. Respondent Positions

Position	Percentage
Tribal Administrator	36%
City Clerk	18%
City Administrator	9%
City Finance Officer	9%
Tribal Finance Officer	9%
Utility Operator	9%
Other	9%

they have been employed in one utility-related job (Figure 2). Twenty-two percent (22%) report never having a utility job. A majority (55%) of respondents report being in their current position one to two years; one-third (36%) indicate they have worked in their current job for three or more years.



All (100%) respondents summarized their top three job priorities (Table 4). Utility-related duties are generally the highest priority among respondents regardless of ranking, followed by administrative and grant-related duties.

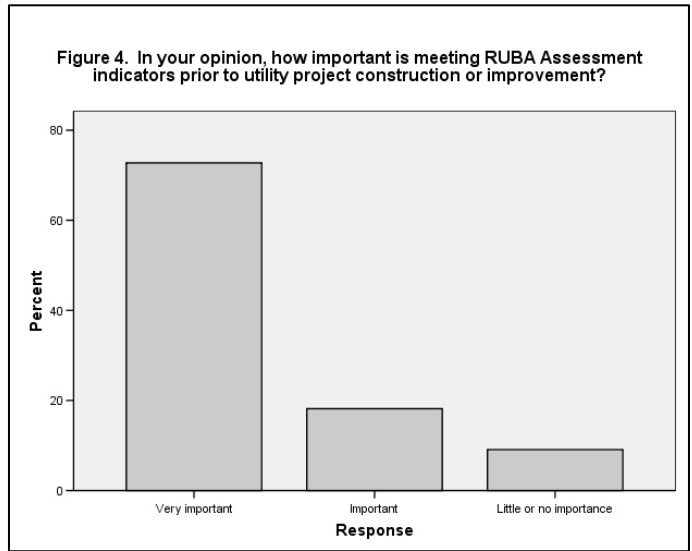
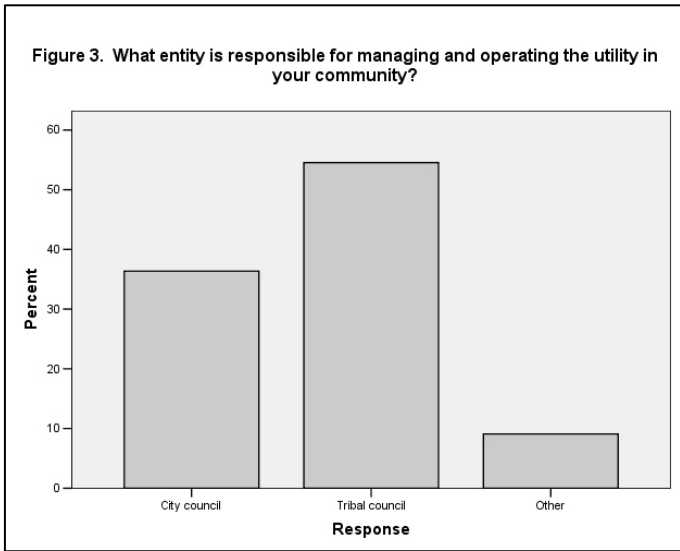
Table 4. Respondent Job Priorities

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	Keep [utility] solvent	Liaison between board and VSW	Board directed research and correspondence
2	Meet state and federal demands/reporting	Maintain customer and vendor files and accounts	Keep current with trainings
3	Keeping city council members informed	Keeping accurate records - ordinances, resolutions, minutes	Keeping an open line of communication with different agencies
4	Grant management	Tribal affairs	Utility management
5	Tribal council	Tribal administration	Utility operation
6	Utilities	Grant management	Supervision
7	Tribal funding reimbursements	Tribal payroll and taxes	Washeteria and tribal expenses
8	Administration	Utilities	Budgeting
9	City meetings	City electric	All paperwork for City and electric utility
10	Tribal administration	Finances	Policy
11	Finances	Reporting	Planning

UTILITY PROFILE

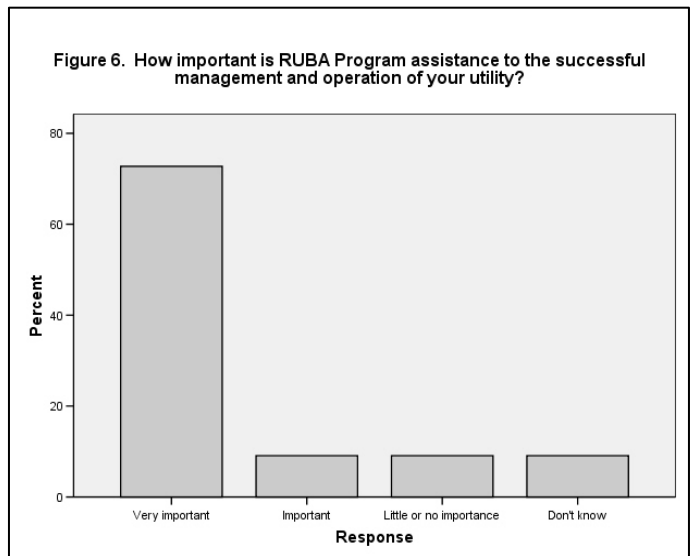
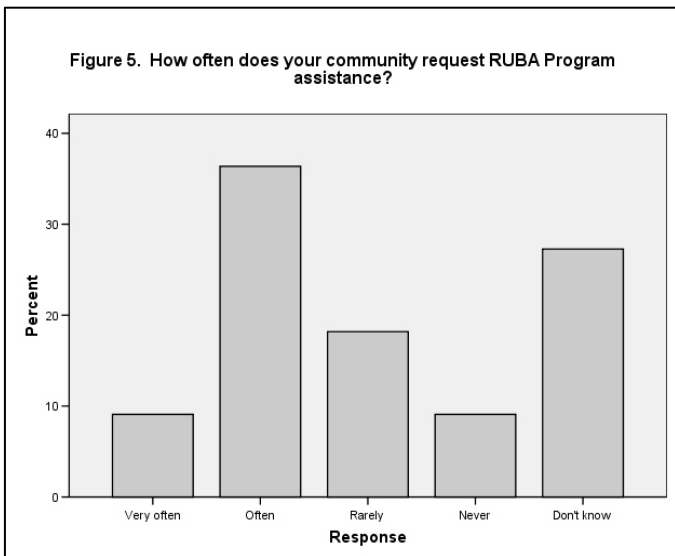
Tribal councils (55%) and city councils (36%) are most likely to manage, operate, and set utility policy in the respondents' communities (Figure 3). Only one utility (9%) is not operated by a city or tribal council. Half (46%) of respondents indicate the utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement; 18% suggest it does not, and one-third (36%) indicate they do not know whether an agreement is in place.

One-third (36%) of respondents report delays in community utility projects related to not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. Of those reporting delays, two respondents (50%) report project delays of two months or less, one (25%) reports a delay of 18 months, and one (25%) reports a delay of 70 months. Almost all (91%) respondents suggest meeting RUBA Assessment indicators before the start of construction on a utility project or improvement is either very important (73%) or important (18%) (Figure 4).



RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

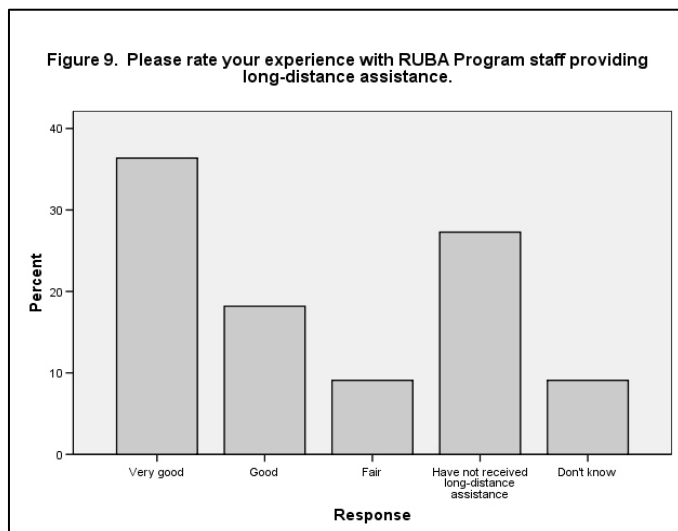
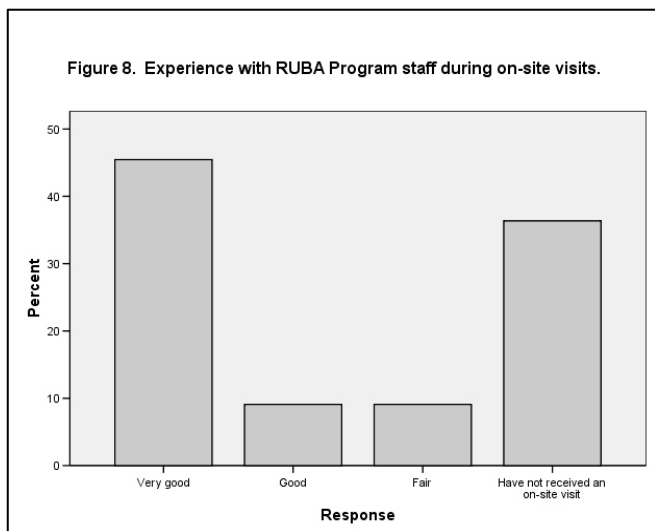
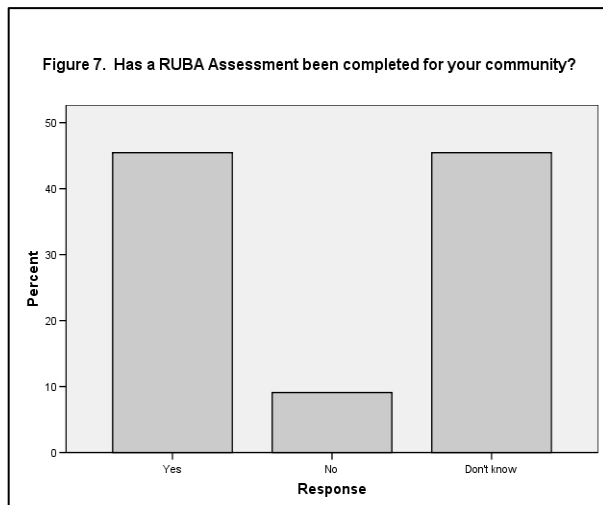
Half (45%) of respondents indicate either very often (9%) or often (36%) requesting RUBA Program assistance (Figure 5). In contrast, one-quarter (27%) either rarely (18%) or never (9%) request assistance. One-quarter (27%) do not know how often the utility requests RUBA Program assistance. Three-quarters (73%) of respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is very important to successful utility management and operation (Figure 6). Only one respondent (9%) suggests RUBA Program assistance is of little or no importance.



Nearly half (45%) of respondents do not know if a RUBA Assessment has been completed for their community (Figure 7). Just as many (45%) respondents indicate a RUBA Assessment has been completed. One respondent (10%) reports a RUBA Assessment has not been completed. For utilities with a completed RUBA Assessment, 60% report the utility meets all RUBA Assessment indicators; 40% report the utility did not meet all RUBA Assessment indicators.

All respondents (100%) indicate RUBA Program assistance is very important to helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators. One-third (36%) indicate utility management problems are addressed with RUBA Program staff assistance. An additional 18% address utility challenges internally without RUBA Program assistance. One-quarter (27%) do not know how utility-related problems are addressed. One utility (9%) does not address utility-related problems.

A majority (55%) of respondents report RUBA Program on-site assistance is very good (46%) or good (9%) (Figure 8). One-third (36%) indicate they have not experienced an on-site visit. More than half (54%) of respondents report RUBA Program long-distance assistance is either very good (36%) or good (18%) (Figure 9). One-quarter (27%) indicate not receiving long-distance assistance.



After experiencing RUBA Program assistance, at least half of respondents indicate financial management (60%), utility planning (60%), and overall utility management (50%) moderately or significantly improved (Table 5). On average, one-third (27% - 40%) of respondents do not know if RUBA Program assistance has impacted any aspect of management capacity.

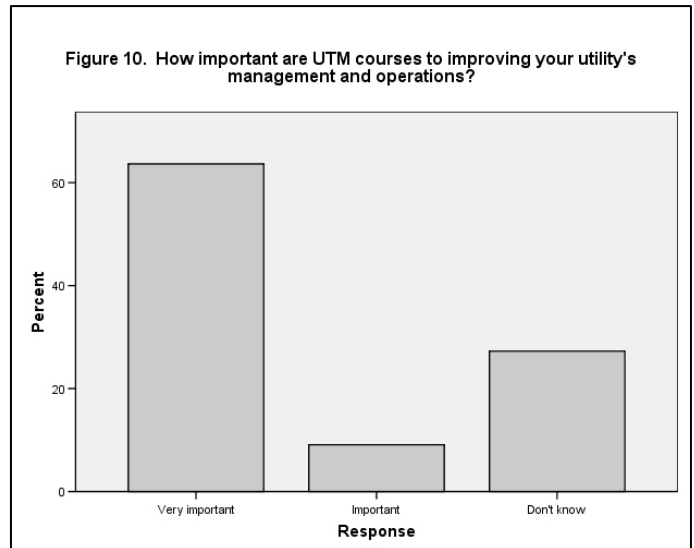
Most (82%) respondents anticipate using RUBA Program assistance very often (46%) or often (36%) in the future; only one (9%) respondent expects to rarely use RUBA Program assistance.

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%	10%	30%	30%	30%
Accounting	10%	0%	27%	18%	18%	27%
Tax issues	0%	0%	30%	10%	20%	40%
Personnel system	0%	0%	50%	10%	10%	30%
Organizational management	0%	0%	40%	10%	20%	30%
Utility operation	0%	0%	30%	20%	20%	30%
Overall utility management	0%	0%	20%	30%	20%	30%
Utility planning	0%	0%	10%	40%	20%	30%

RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Three-quarters (73%) of respondents report RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses are very important (64%) or important (9%) to improving utility management and operations (Figure 10). The remainder (27%) does not know whether UTM courses improve management capacity. Despite the perceived importance of UTM training, half (46%) of respondents have not attended any UTM courses.



Respondents generally do not have a favorable view of the quality of UTM training. For all UTM courses, as many or more respondents provide a rating of fair or poor as provide a rating of very good or good (Table 6). *Introduction to Utility Management* is rated the most favorably; one-third (38%) rate it as very good and none rate it as poor.

Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	38%	0%	38%	0%	24%
Personnel Management	13%	29%	0%	29%	0%	29%
Planning Management	14%	14%	14%	14%	14%	30%
Financial Management	0%	43%	14%	14%	0%	29%
Operational Management	0%	43%	14%	14%	0%	29%
Organizational Management	0%	29%	14%	14%	0%	43%

Respondents also rate eight additional DCRA workshops. Of noteworthy importance, the majority (50% - 78%) of respondents have not attended these workshops (Table 7). The QuickBooks Pro workshop is rated highest by attendees with one-third (30%) reporting it is very good.

Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	0%	22%	0%	11%	0%	67%
City clerk training	0%	11%	0%	11%	0%	78%
QuickBooks Pro	0%	10%	10%	30%	0%	50%
Financial record keeping	0%	22%	11%	11%	0%	56%
Payroll tax	0%	10%	10%	20%	0%	60%
Community planning	0%	11%	0%	11%	0%	78%
Elections	0%	11%	0%	11%	0%	78%
Planning commission	0%	11%	0%	11%	0%	78%

RUBA PROGRAM STAFF

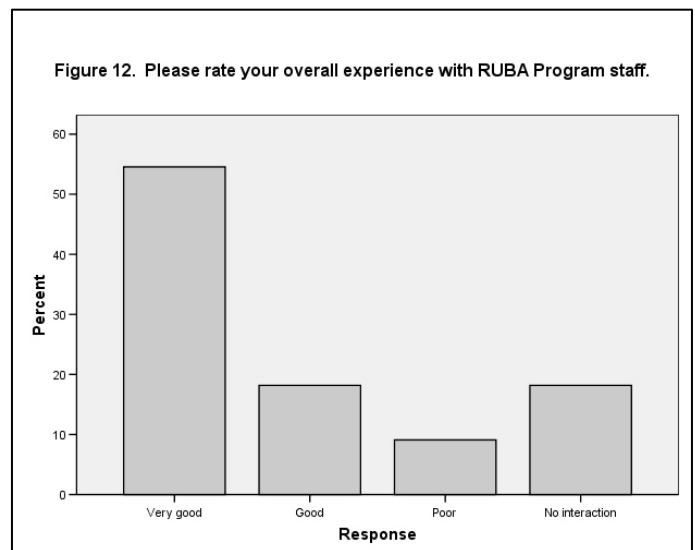
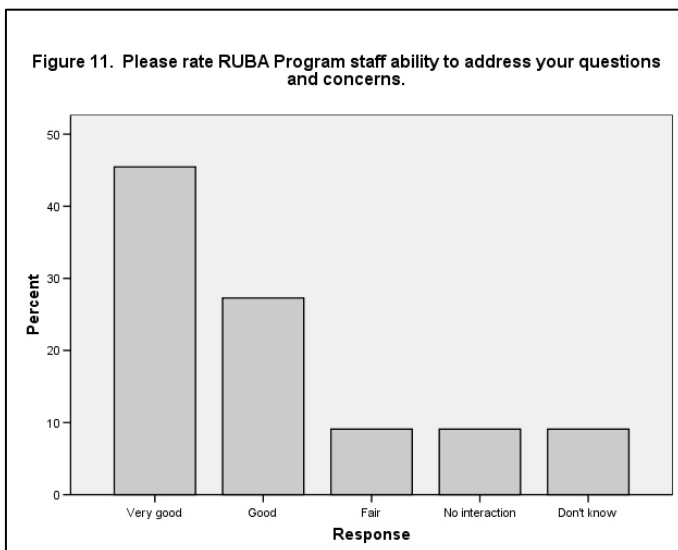
Half (55%) of respondents report having contact with RUBA Program staff very often (9%) or often (46%). In contrast, one-quarter (27%) rarely interact with RUBA Program staff and 18% report no interaction.

At least half (50% - 60%) of respondents rate RUBA Program staff assistance as very good or good in five of seven areas including availability of staff assistance (60%), timeliness of staff assistance (60%), applicability to the community (50%), understanding the community as a whole (60%), and willingness to travel to the community (60%) (Table 8). Of noteworthy importance, 30% to 40% are unable to rate RUBA Program assistance in each of the seven areas. No respondent rates any aspect of RUBA Program staff assistance as poor; however 40% rate RUBA Program staff's ability to address current utility challenges as fair.

Table 8. Quality of RUBA Program Staff Assistance

Assistance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Don't Know
Availability of staff assistance	0%	10%	40%	20%	0%	30%
Timeliness of staff assistance	0%	10%	30%	30%	0%	30%
Applicability to the community	0%	10%	30%	20%	0%	40%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	0%	40%	10%	20%	0%	30%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	0%	20%	30%	10%	0%	40%
Understanding the community as a whole	0%	10%	40%	20%	0%	30%
Willingness to travel to the community	0%	10%	30%	30%	0%	30%

Three-quarters (73%) of respondents report RUBA Program staff's ability to address community questions and concerns is very good (46%) or good (27%) (Figure 11). Three-quarters (73%) of respondents also indicate their overall experience with RUBA staff is very good (55%) or good (18%) (Figure 12). Eighteen percent (18%) report no interaction.



A majority of respondents (56% - 78%) 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 as very important to successful utility management and operations (Table 9).

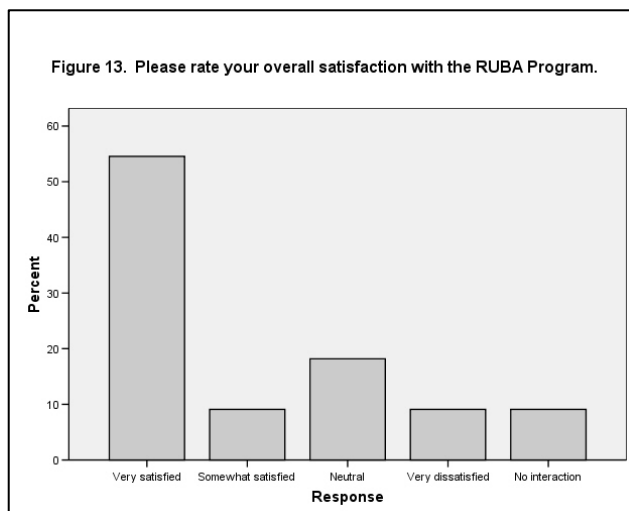
Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	0%	30%	60%	10%
On-site community visits	0%	30%	70%	0%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	0%	40%	60%	0%
UTM courses	0%	11%	78%	11%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	0%	11%	78%	11%
RUBA publications	0%	22%	56%	22%

Overall, two-thirds (64%) of respondents are very satisfied (55%) or somewhat satisfied (9%) with the RUBA Program (Figure 13). Eighteen percent (18%) have no opinion regarding the RUBA Program, and one respondent (9%) reports being very dissatisfied with the RUBA Program.

Finally, respondents were asked to provide specific recommendations and criticisms intended to improve RUBA Program services. Three respondents give the following qualitative recommendations:

- Would like more onsite training for village staff to get familiarized on doing a RUBA Assessment to move forward on getting sewer and water in all villages.
- It's important to continue the training necessary to meet the demands of the State; the City needs trained personnel to effectively operate. RUBA provides training.
- More hands on training would be good. Training for places that have no real bookkeeping experiences.



SUMMARY

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

Nearly all respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators before the start of a utility construction or improvement project is important, and all respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is important to helping their utility meet RUBA Assessment indicators. Only one-third of respondents report relying on RUBA Program staff assistance to address utility management issues.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is high. Respondents' overall experiences with RUBA Program staff are mixed. A slight majority of respondents report both on-site and long-distance assistance are very good or good; however, one-third report not receiving on-site assistance and one-quarter report not receiving long-distance assistance. All respondents conclude RUBA Program assistance is very important to helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators.

