



# **RUBA Community Feedback Survey:**

## *KOTZEBUE REGIONAL OFFICE SUMMARY*

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### **RUBA PROGRAM EVALUATION**

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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.

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### **COMMUNITY FEEDBACK**

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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: Kotzebue Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for the communities served by the Kotzebue 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 Kotzebue RUBA Program staff to better understand community perceptions of the RUBA Program, utility management assistance needs, and overall satisfaction with RUBA Program services.

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## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

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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 Kotzebue Regional Office serves. In total, 15 key-informants from eight communities received a community survey. Kotzebue Regional Office survey findings indicate 88% of communities (i.e., at least one key-informant survey response) and 53% of key-informants responded to the community survey (Table 2).

**Table 2. Kotzebue Regional Office Response Rate**

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	8	7	88%*
Key-Informant	15	8	53%

\* 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 Kotzebue Regional Office. In short, survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of eight individuals located in seven communities who have benefited from Kotzebue Regional Office RUBA Program services.

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## RESPONDENT PROFILE

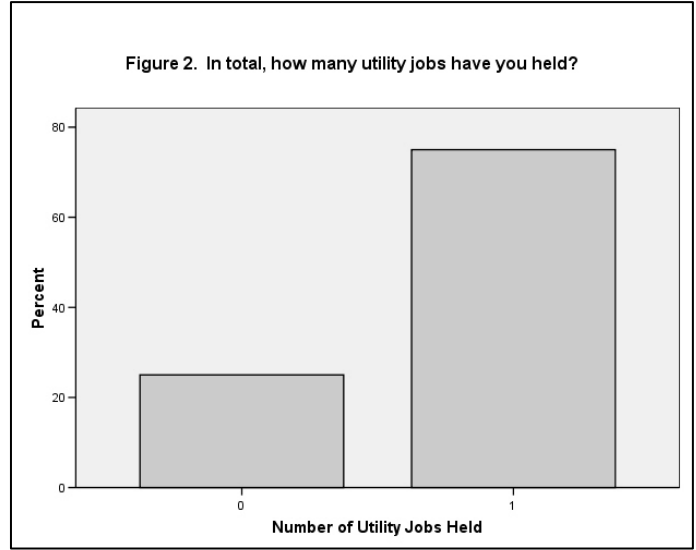
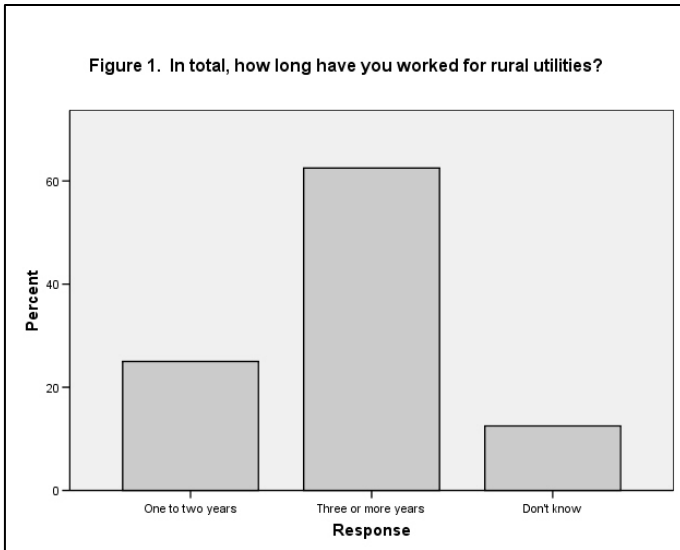
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Two-thirds (63%) of respondents list a title of city administrators, 25% as city clerks, and 12% as city finance officers (Table 3).

**Table 3. Respondent Positions**

Position	Percentage
City Administrator	63%
City Clerk	25%
City Finance Officer	12%

A majority (63%) of respondents indicate they have worked for utilities three or more years, and 25% for one to two years (Figure 1). Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents indicate they have been employed in only one utility-related job (Figure 2). Two-thirds (63%) of respondents report they have been employed in their current job for three or more years. Six respondents (75%) summarized their top job priorities (Table 4): utility projects, bookkeeping, and administrative duties are generally the highest priority among respondents.



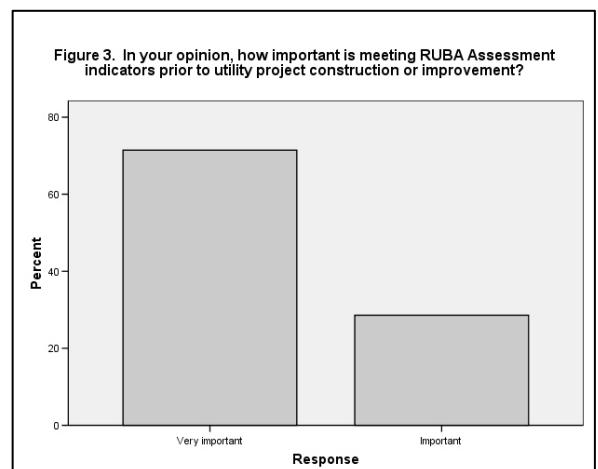
**Table 4. Respondent job priorities**

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	941 payments up to date	ESC payments up to date	Check register, payroll, and FTD up to date
2	Carpentry	Office administration	Heavy equipment operator
3	Financial	Public safety	Health and welfare
4	Water and sewer utility	Grant management	Supervise employees
5	Take city council's minutes	Record documents into computer	Conduct city council elections
6	Safe water and sewer system operation	Balance budget	

**UTILITY PROFILE**

City councils (100%) manage and operate utilities in all respondents' communities. Half (50%) of respondents indicate they do not know if their utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement, 25% report having a RUBA Workplan Agreement, and 25% indicate they do not have a RUBA Workplan Agreement.

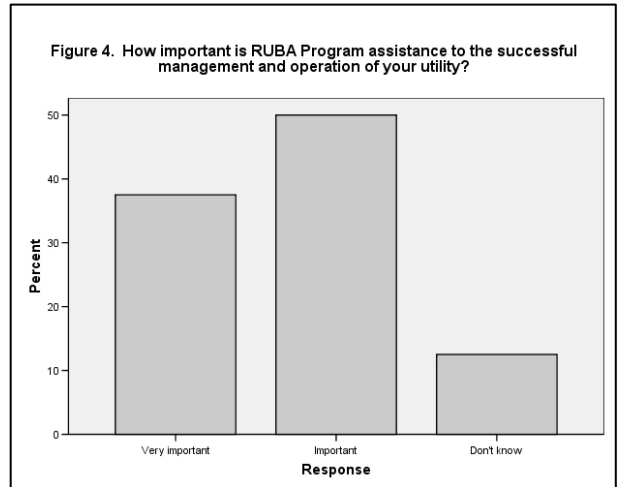
All respondents (100%) indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators before the start of a utility project construction or improvement is either very important (71%) or important (29%) (Figure 3). Only one respondent (13%) reports a delay with a community utility project due to not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. This respondent reports a delay of 24 months.



## RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

One-third (38%) of respondents indicate either very often (13%) or often (25%) requesting RUBA Program assistance. In contrast, one-third (38%) indicate rarely (25%) or never (13%) requesting RUBA Program assistance.

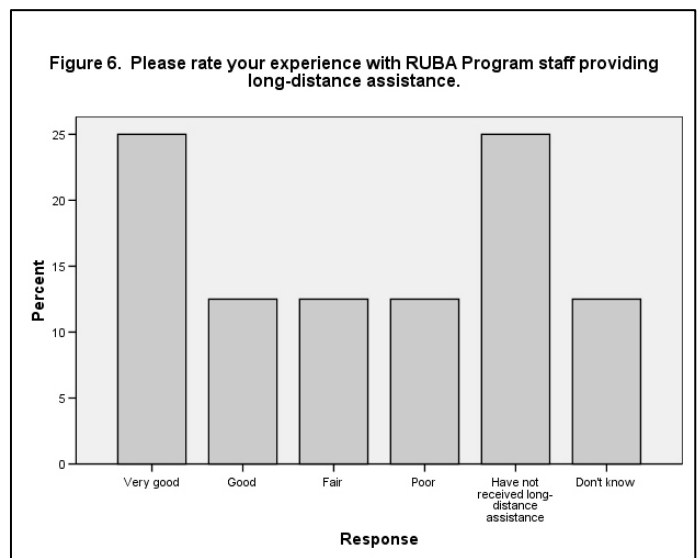
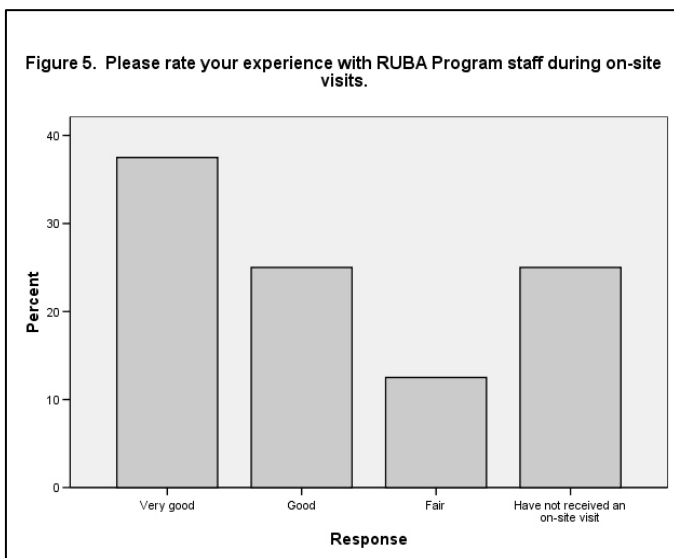
An overwhelming majority (88%) of respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is either very important (38%) or important (50%) to utility management and operations (Figure 4).



Half (50%) of respondents indicate they have completed a RUBA Assessment, one-quarter (25%) report they have not completed a RUBA Assessment, and one-quarter (25%) of respondents do not know if a RUBA Assessment has been completed for their utility.

Three-quarters (75%) of respondents whose utility has a completed RUBA Assessment indicate their utility meets all RUBA Assessment indicators; one-quarter (25%) 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. Half (50%) indicate utility management problems are addressed internally, without RUBA Program staff assistance. One-quarter (25%) of respondents indicate RUBA staff assistance is needed, and 13% of respondents indicate their utility does not address utility-related management problems.

A majority (63%) of respondents report RUBA Program on-site assistance is either very good (38%) or good (25%) (Figure 5). Twenty-five percent (25%) of respondents indicate they have not experienced an on-site visit. One-third (38%) of respondents report long-distance assistance is either very good (25%) or good (13%) (Figure 6). One-quarter (25%) of respondents indicate not receiving long-distance assistance.



After experiencing RUBA Program assistance, between 29% and 57% of respondents report no change in eight management capacity elements (Table 5). Approximately one-half (43% - 50%) do not know if RUBA Program assistance has impacted these eight aspects of management capacity. All respondents who indicate a change has occurred report an improvement in management capacity. At least one respondent reports an improvement in each area, with the exception of finances.

Two-thirds (63%) of respondents indicate they anticipate using RUBA Program assistance either very often (25%) or often (38%) in the future.

**Table 5. Change in Utility Management Capacity**

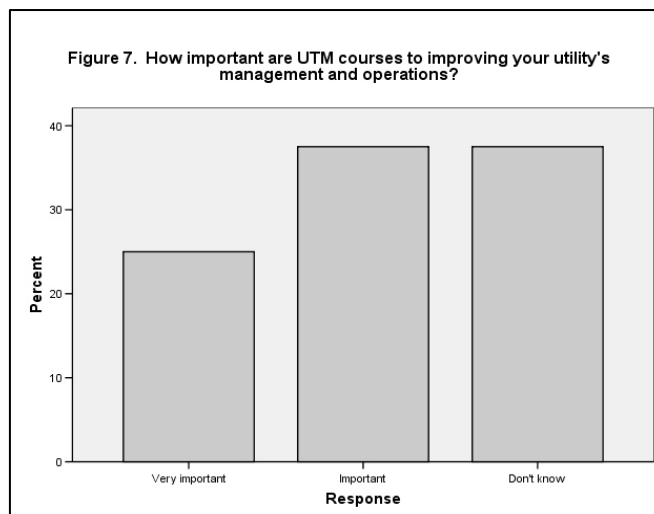
Management Capacity	Declined Significantly	Declined Moderately	Remained the Same	Improved Moderately	Improved Significantly	Don't Know
Finances	0%	0%	57%	0%	0%	43%
Accounting	0%	0%	33%	17%	0%	50%
Tax issues	0%	0%	43%	0%	14%	43%
Personnel system	0%	0%	33%	17%	0%	50%
Organizational management	0%	0%	29%	14%	14%	43%
Utility operation	0%	0%	33%	17%	0%	50%
Overall utility management	0%	0%	29%	14%	14%	43%
Utility planning	0%	0%	33%	17%	0%	50%

## RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Two-thirds (63%) of respondents report RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses are either very important (25%) or important (38%) to improving utility management operations (Figure 7). Despite the perceived importance of UTM training, half (50%) of respondents have not attended any UTM courses.

Respondents generally have a favorable view of the quality of UTM training; a majority of respondents (60% -75%) indicate a rating of either very good or good for all six UTM courses (Table 6).

Respondents also provided information for eight DCRA workshops. Of noteworthy importance, between 50% and 83% of respondents report not attending seven of eight workshops offered (Table 7). Seventeen percent (17%) of respondents rate the QuickBooks Pro and payroll tax workshops as poor. In contrast, 17% rate the newly elected officials, QuickBooks Pro, and payroll tax workshops as very good.



**Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses**

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%	20%
Personnel Management	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Planning Management	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%	20%
Financial Management	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%
Operational Management	0%	20%	40%	20%	0%	20%
Organizational Management	0%	25%	50%	25%	0%	0%

**Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops**

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	0%	0%	0%	17%	0%	83%
City clerk training	0%	0%	20%	0%	0%	80%
QuickBooks Pro	17%	16%	0%	17%	0%	50%
Financial record keeping	0%	20%	20%	0%	0%	60%
Payroll tax	17%	16%	0%	17%	0%	50%
Community planning	0%	40%	20%	0%	0%	40%
Elections	0%	17%	33%	0%	0%	50%
Planning commission	0%	40%	0%	0%	0%	60%

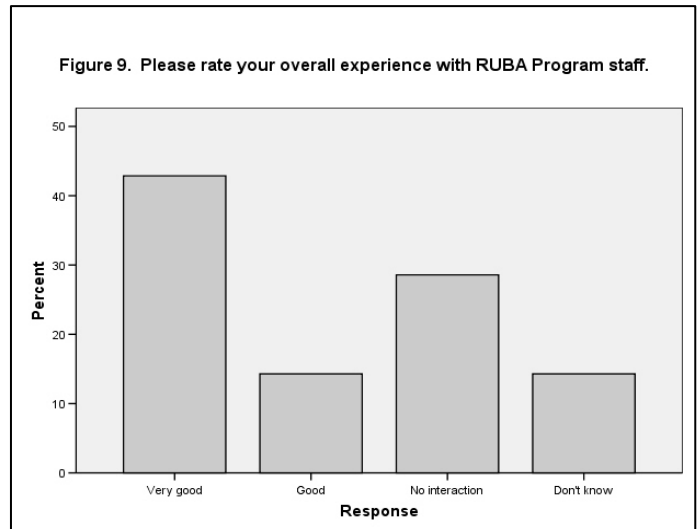
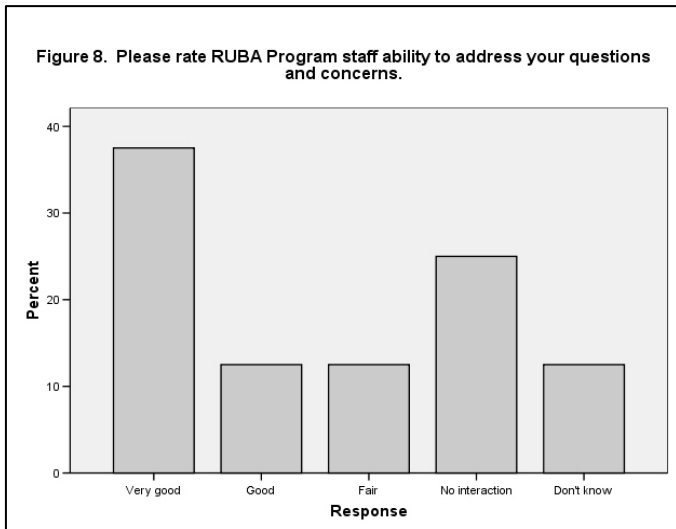
**RUBA PROGRAM STAFF**

Two-thirds (63%) of respondents report they rarely have contact (25%) or have no contact (38%) with RUBA Program staff. The remainder indicate having contact either very often (25%) or often (12%).

Half (50%) of respondents rate RUBA Program staff assistance as very good or good in four of seven areas including availability of staff (50%), applicability to the community (50%), addressing a utility’s long-term challenges (50%), and willingness to travel to the community (50%) (Table 8). The majority (60%) of respondents rate timeliness of staff assistance 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%	33%	17%	33%	0%	17%
Timeliness of staff assistance	0%	60%	0%	20%	0%	20%
Applicability to the community	0%	33%	33%	17%	0%	17%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	0%	40%	20%	20%	0%	20%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	0%	33%	33%	17%	0%	17%
Understanding the community as a whole	0%	40%	0%	40%	0%	20%
Willingness to travel to the community	16%	17%	0%	50%	0%	17%



Half (50%) of respondents report RUBA Program staff ability to address community questions and concerns is either very good (37%) or good (13%) (Figure 8). A majority (57%) of respondents indicate their overall experience with RUBA Program staff is either very good (43%) or good (14%) (Figure 9). Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents report no interaction.

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 (60% - 67%) of respondents suggest RUBA Assessments (67%), on-site community visits (60%), and correspondence with RUBA staff (67%) are either very important or important to successful utility management and operations (Table 9). In contrast, a majority (60%) of respondents do not know whether UTM courses (60%) or RUBA Publications (60%) improve utility management and operations. No respondents indicate RUBA Program activities are of little or no importance.

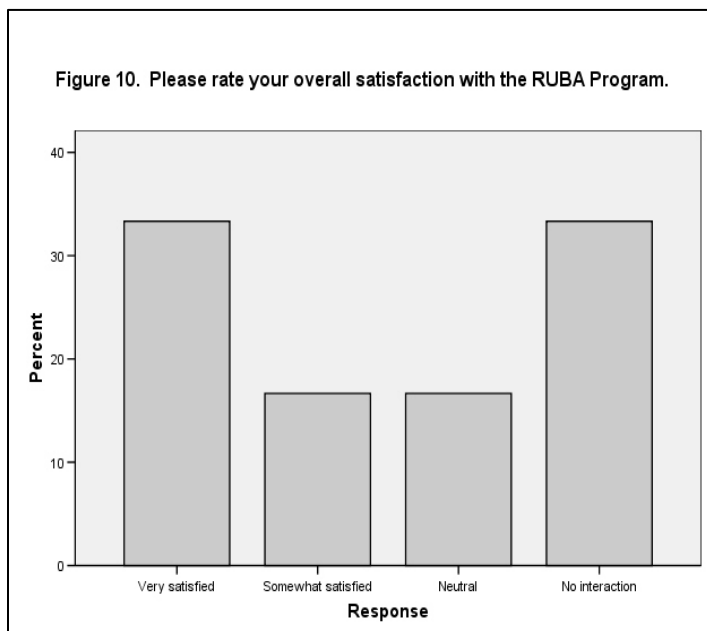
**Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities**

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	0%	0%	67%	33%
On-site community visits	0%	20%	40%	40%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	0%	17%	50%	33%
UTM courses	0%	40%	0%	60%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	0%	33%	17%	50%
RUBA publications	0%	40%	0%	60%

Overall, half (50%) of respondents are either very (33%) or somewhat satisfied (17%) with the RUBA Program (Figure 10). One-third (33%) report no interaction, and 17% have no opinion regarding the RUBA Program.

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

- I would strongly recommend sending clerks who are not familiar with elections to a workshop. Being hired as City Clerk before November 2006 elections and having no election training, it was difficult to quickly go through the process without prior training. Although it went smoothly, I'd still like to attend (at least before 2007 election).
- Do [not] really know about RUBA.



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## SUMMARY

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

All respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators prior to the start of a utility construction or improvement project is important, and all respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is very important to helping their utility meet RUBA Assessment indicators. One-quarter of respondents rely on RUBA Program staff assistance to address utility management issues, while half address utility management problems internally.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is mixed. One-third of respondents are very satisfied with the RUBA Program, but one-third report having no interaction. Despite a perceived lack of interaction, nine out of ten respondents believe RUBA Program assistance is very important or important to the success of their utility's management and operations. All respondents report RUBA Program assistance is very important to helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators.

