



RUBA Community Feedback Survey:

NOME 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: Nome Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for the communities served by the Nome 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 Nome 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 Nome Regional Office serves. In total, 28 key-informants from 14 communities received a community survey.

Nome Regional Office survey findings indicate 86% of communities (e.g., at least one key-informant survey response) and 64% of key-informants responded to the community survey (Table 2).

Table 2. Nome Regional Office Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	14	12	86%*
Key-Informant	28	18	64%

* 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 Nome Regional Office. In short, survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 18 individuals located in 12 communities that have benefited from Nome Regional Office RUBA Program services.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

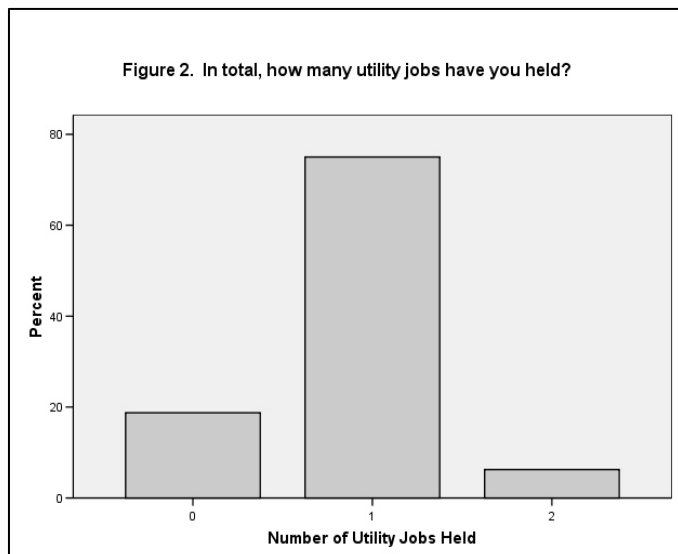
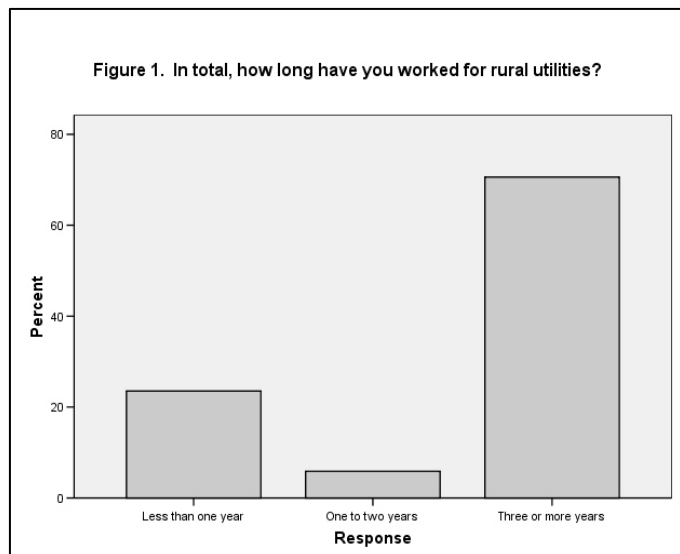
Thirty-three percent (33%) of respondents served by the Nome Regional Office identify themselves as city clerks; 22% as city administrators or managers, and 17% as utility clerks (Table 3).

Three-quarters (71%) of respondents indicate they have worked for rural utilities three or more years (Figure 1). One-quarter (24%) of respondents have worked for utilities less than one year. Three-quarters (75%) of

Table 3. Respondent Positions

Position	Percentage
City Clerk	33%
City Administrator/Manager	22%
Utility Clerk	17%
Utility Manager	6%
City Finance Officer	5%
Other	17%

respondents report working in one utility-related position (Figure 2). Nineteen percent (19%) of respondents indicate they have never had a utility-related job, and one respondent (6%) reports having been employed in two utility-related jobs.



A majority (56%) of respondents report being in their current position three or more years; 22% indicate they have worked in their current job one to two years, and 22% for less than one year.

Most (83%) respondents summarized their top job priorities (Table 4). Administrative duties are generally the highest priority among respondents regardless of ranking, followed by utility-related priorities including electric, fuel, water, and sewer operations.

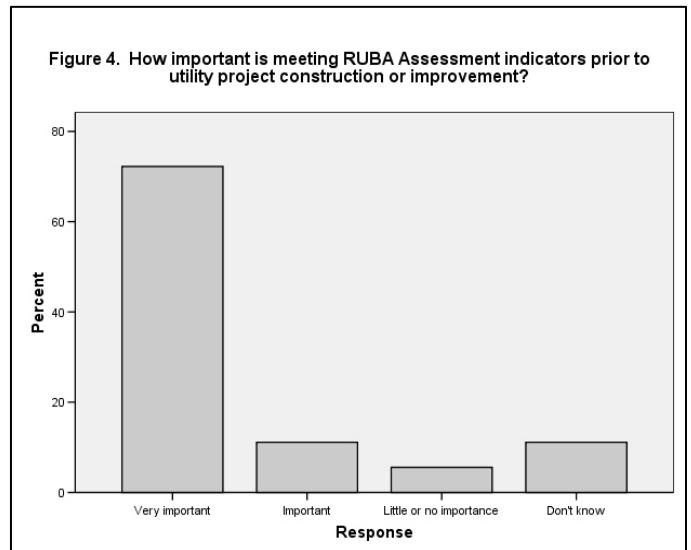
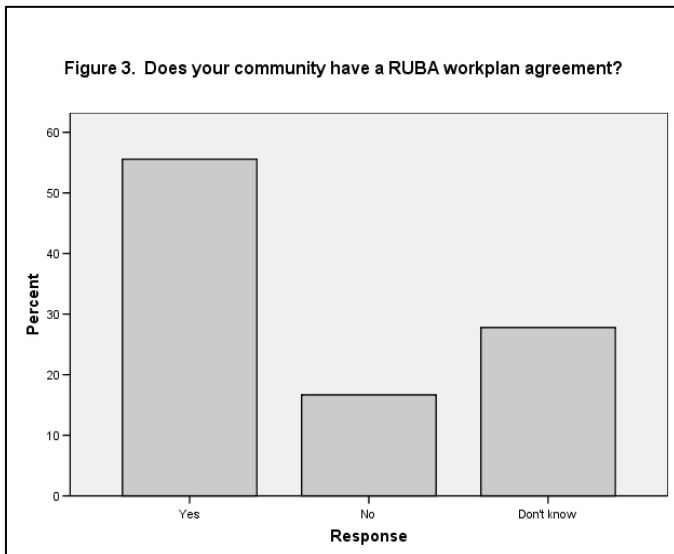
Table 4. Respondent job priorities

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	Conducting meetings twice a month	Reassuring city is up and running	Correspondence to outside entities
2	Financial reports	Timely monthly billings	Bulk fuel order generation
3	Compliance with water and wastewater regulations	Payroll taxes	Annual finance statements
4	Sending monthly water/sewer billings	Depositing payments	Payroll
5	Payroll taxes	Washeteria	Clinic and city office
6	City administrator	City clerk	Bookkeeper
7	Overseeing day-to-day operations	Conducting staff meetings	Prepare agendas and minutes
8	Administration	Washeteria maintenance	Local economic development
9	Payroll	Payroll taxes	Paying bills
10	Washeteria upgrade	Landfill upgrade	Road maintenance
11	Financial statements	Certification of employment	Annual visits
12	Enterprise and financial administration	Personnel management	City projects
13	VPOs	Utility clerk	Water delivery
14	Bookkeeping	Billing and receiving	Supervising VPOs
15	Financials		

UTILITY PROFILE

City councils manage, operate, and set utility policy in all (100%) of the respondents' communities. Over half (56%) of respondents indicate the utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement in place (Figure 3).

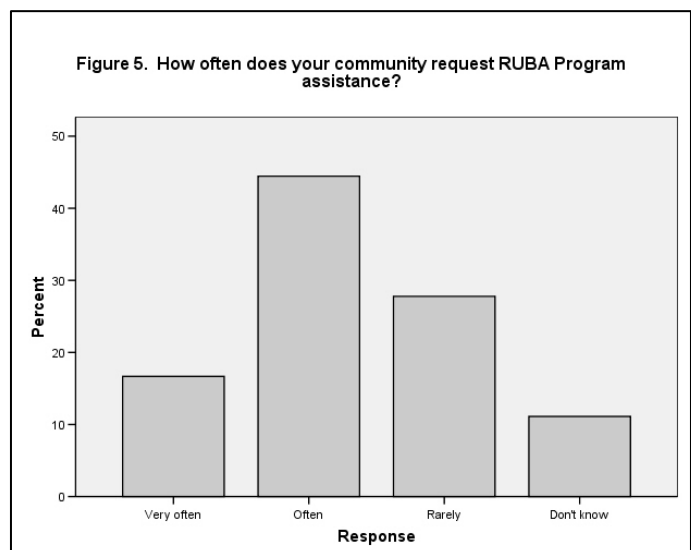
Forty-one percent (41%) of respondents report delays in community utility projects related to not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. One-third of respondents (35%) report no delays. Among respondents who report project delays, 83% have been delayed for one year or less. One respondent reports a delay of ten years. Most (83%) respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment Indicators before starting construction on a utility project or improvement is very important (72%) or important (11%) (Figure 4).

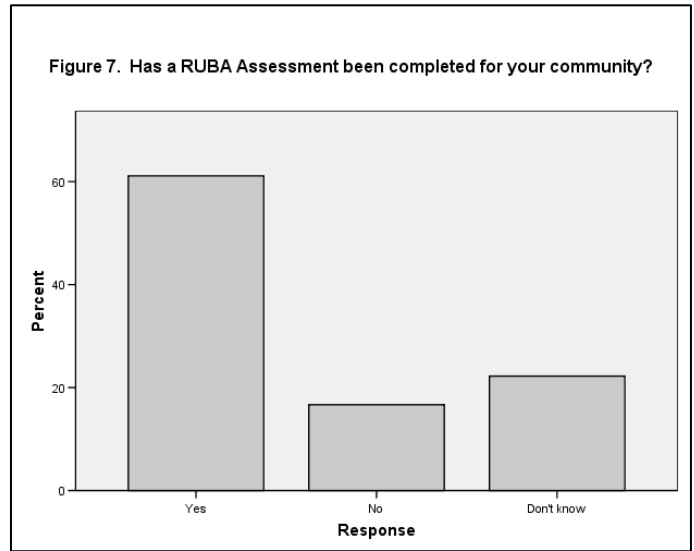
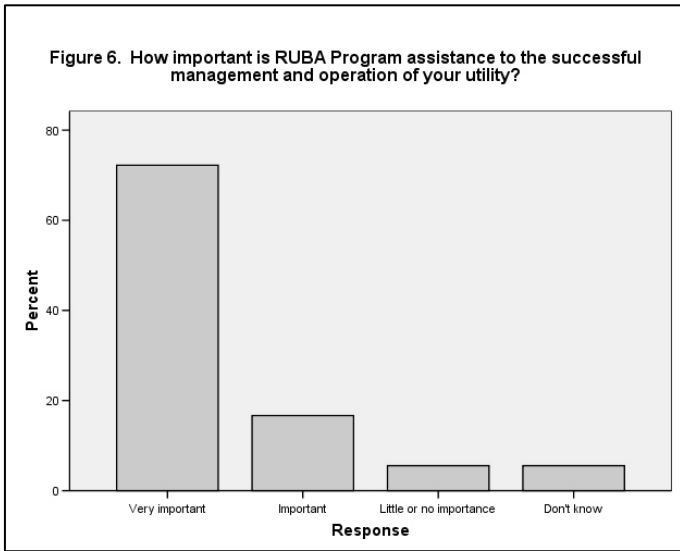


RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Sixty-one percent (61%) of respondents indicate either very often (17%) or often (44%) requesting RUBA Program assistance (Figure 5). One-quarter (28%) rarely request assistance. Most (89%) respondents state RUBA Program assistance is very important (72%) or important (17%) to successful utility management and operation (Figure 6).

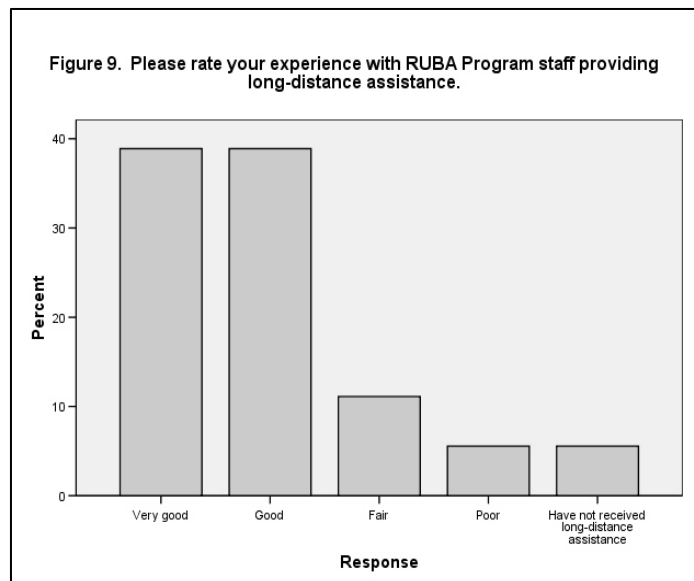
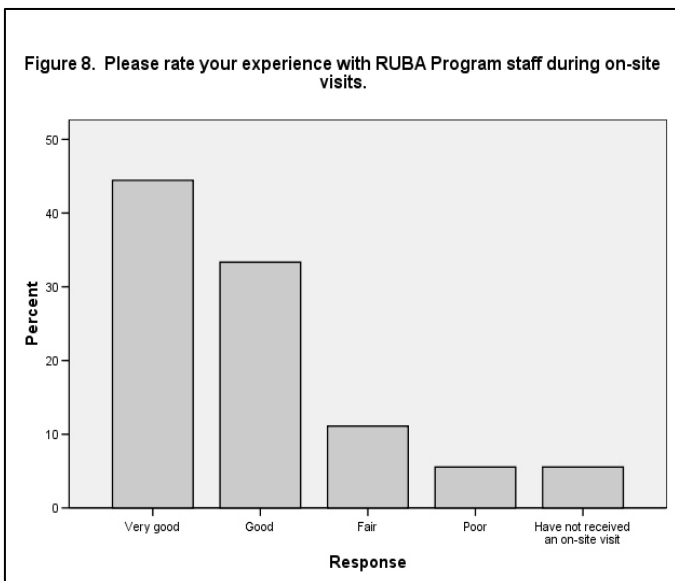
A majority (61%) of respondents report a RUBA Assessment has been completed for their utility (Figure 7). For respondents whose utilities have a completed RUBA Assessment, 64% report meeting all RUBA Assessment indicators. Eighteen percent (18%) report not meeting all indicators.





All respondents (100%) indicate RUBA Program assistance is either very important (64%) or important (36%) to helping their utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators. Forty-four percent (44%) of respondents indicate utility management problems are addressed with RUBA Program staff assistance, 22% address utility challenges internally without RUBA staff assistance, and 11% report they do not address utility management problems. One respondent indicates obtaining assistance for utility issues from a non-RUBA entity.

Three-quarters (77%) of respondents report RUBA Program on-site assistance is either very good (44%) or good (33%) (Figure 8). Three-quarters (78%) of respondents report RUBA program long-distance assistance is either very good (39%) or good (39%) (Figure 9).



When asked how RUBA Program contact has affected utility management capacity, respondents generally indicate their management capacity in each of eight areas either improved (30% - 46%) or remained the same (23% - 46%) (Table 5). One-quarter (23% - 31%) do not know how RUBA Program contact has affected utility management capacity.

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%	46%	23%	8%	23%
Accounting	0%	0%	31%	23%	15%	31%
Tax issues	0%	0%	39%	23%	15%	23%
Personnel system	7%	0%	31%	31%	0%	31%
Organizational management	0%	0%	31%	31%	7%	31%
Utility operation	0%	8%	31%	15%	15%	31%
Overall utility management	0%	0%	23%	31%	15%	31%
Utility planning	0%	0%	23%	15%	31%	31%

Most (83%) respondents anticipate using RUBA Program assistance either very often (22%) or often (61%) in the future; one respondent (6%) expects to rarely use RUBA Program assistance.

RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

Nearly all (94%) respondents report RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses are either very important (65%) or important (29%) to improving utility management and operations (Figure 10). Three-quarters (72%) of respondents report attending a RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) course.

Respondents generally have a favorable view of the quality of UTM training. A majority (50% - 69%) of respondents suggest all UTM courses are either very good or good (Table 6). Financial Management is rated the most favorably, with 69% rating this workshop as very good (25%) or good (44%).

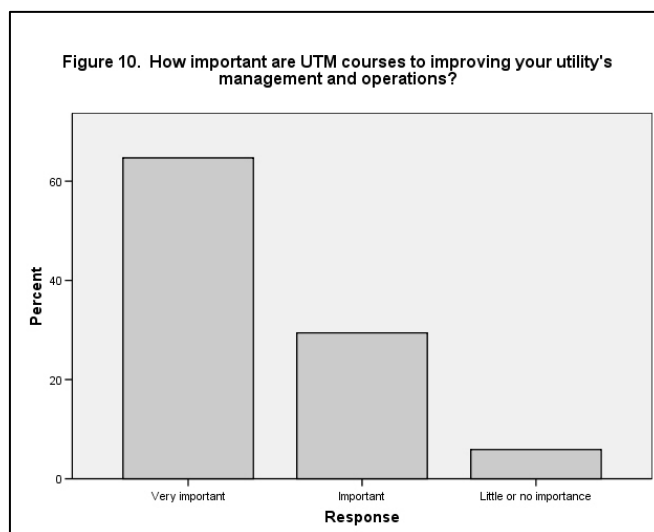


Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	12%	38%	25%	0%	25%
Personnel Management	0%	12%	38%	19%	0%	31%
Planning Management	0%	12%	31%	19%	0%	38%
Financial Management	0%	12%	44%	25%	0%	19%
Operational Management	0%	12%	31%	19%	0%	38%
Organizational Management	0%	12%	31%	19%	0%	38%

Respondents also provided information relating to eight additional DCRA workshops. Of noteworthy importance, the majority (50% - 63%) of respondents have not attended five of the eight workshops including newly elected officials, city clerk training, QuickBooks Pro, elections, and planning commission (Table 7). The payroll tax workshop is rated highest, with 56% rating it as either very good (25%) or good (31%).

Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	0%	6%	25%	6%	0%	63%
City clerk training	0%	6%	19%	25%	0%	50%
QuickBooks Pro	7%	13%	13%	13%	0%	53%
Financial record keeping	0%	12%	19%	25%	0%	44%
Payroll tax	0%	13%	31%	25%	0%	31%
Community planning	0%	20%	33%	7%	0%	40%
Elections	0%	6%	38%	0%	6%	50%
Planning commission	0%	6%	19%	0%	12%	63%

RUBA PROGRAM STAFF

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents report having contact with RUBA Program staff either very often (11%) or often (56%). In contrast, one-third (33%) of respondents indicate they rarely interact with RUBA Program staff.

On average, two-thirds (55% - 78%) of respondents rate RUBA Program staff assistance as very good or good across seven categories including availability of staff assistance (78%), timeliness of staff assistance (77%), understanding the community as a whole (67%), willingness to travel to the community (66%), applicability to the community (62%), addressing the utility's long-term challenges (61%), and addressing the utility's current challenges (55%) (Table 8).

Table 8. Quality of RUBA Program Staff Assistance

Assistance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Don't Know
Availability of staff assistance	6%	16%	67%	11%	0%	0%
Timeliness of staff assistance	6%	17%	65%	12%	0%	0%
Applicability to the community	0%	33%	56%	6%	0%	6%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	0%	28%	44%	11%	6%	11%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	0%	22%	55%	6%	6%	11%
Understanding the community as a whole	5%	17%	50%	17%	5%	6%
Willingness to travel to the community	6%	11%	50%	16%	6%	11%

Eighty-nine percent (89%) of respondents report RUBA Program staff's ability to address community questions and concerns is very good (33%) or good (56%) (Figure 11). A large majority (83%) of respondents indicate their overall experience with RUBA Program staff is either very good (50%) or good (33%). Almost all (89%) respondents are very satisfied (83%) or satisfied (6%) with the RUBA Program.

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. An overwhelming majority (88% - 94%) of respondents suggest these program activities are either very important or important to successful utility management and operations (Table 9).

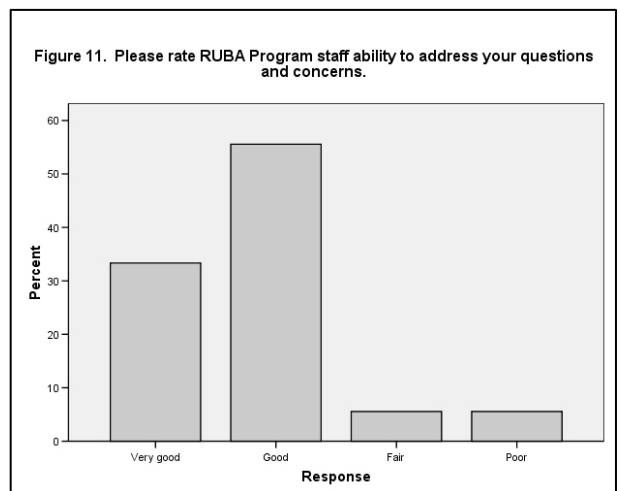


Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	0%	47%	47%	6%
On-site community visits	0%	53%	41%	6%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	0%	65%	29%	6%
UTM courses	0%	59%	35%	6%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	0%	35%	53%	12%
RUBA publications	0%	63%	31%	6%

Respondents provided specific recommendations and criticisms intended to improve RUBA Program services. Six respondents list the following comments and qualitative recommendations.

- [We] need more QuickBooks training for the Bering Strait region located in the region.
- Work directly with the staff.
- When I took over rebuilding the City [from] January 2005 till present, May 11, 2007, RUBA has visited [the City] twice.
- A quarterly visit or two visits per year.
- More computer training.
- Send a packet on the subjects we will be discussing ahead of time so the people who are new to this kind of work will kind of have an idea of what they are getting into.
- We want to work directly within City office.
- [We] paid \$2500 for training and help with indicators. Paying for training of our staff instead of being trained by RUBA staff is not the action I would consider management. RUBA has an obligation to help [the City]. Start helping!
- We need a lot of financial and bookkeeping training. Mostly offered by other entities.

SUMMARY

This report, *RUBA Community Feedback Survey: Nome Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings of the communities served by the Nome Regional Office. Survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 18 individuals located in 12 communities that have received RUBA Program services from Nome Regional Office staff.

A large majority of 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. Less than half of respondents address utility management issues with the assistance of RUBA Program staff.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is very high among the majority of respondents, with 83% stating they are very satisfied. Respondents' overall experiences with RUBA Program staff are very good and respondents intend to use RUBA Program services frequently in the future. Additionally, the vast majority of respondents believe RUBA Program assistance is very important to the success of their utility's management and operations.

