



RUBA Community Feedback Survey:

BETHEL 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: Bethel Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings for communities served by the Bethel 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 Bethel 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 Bethel Regional Office serves. In total, 86 key-informants from 43 communities received a community survey.

Table 2. Bethel Regional Office Response Rate

Level	Total	Responses	Response Rate
Community	43	27	63%*
Key-Informant	86	34	40%

* At least one key-informant per community responded.

Bethel 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).

As previously noted, analyses throughout the following substantive report sections are strictly limited to mail-out survey responses from communities served by the Bethel Regional Office. In short, survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 34 individuals located in 27 communities that have benefited from Bethel Regional Office RUBA Program services.

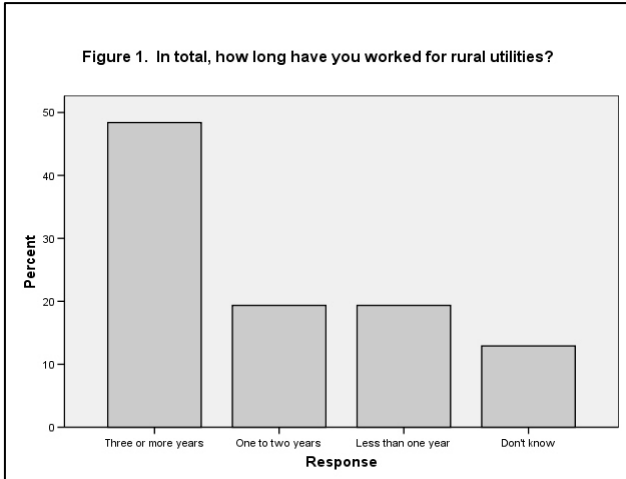
RESPONDENT PROFILE

Respondents identify themselves by a variety of titles. City administrator or manager (38%) is the most common title, followed by tribal administrator (20%) and utility or public works manager (12%) (Table 3).

Table 3. Respondent Positions

Position	Percentage
City Administrator/Manager	38%
Tribal Administrator	20%
Utility/Public Works Manager	12%
City Clerk	9%
City Finance Officer	9%
Tribal Finance Officer	6%
Other	6%

Half (48%) of respondents have worked for rural utilities three or more years (Figure 1). An equal number have worked for rural utilities one to two years (19%) or less than one year (19%). One-third (29%) of respondents have had one utility job in their lifetime. Forty-three percent (43%) of respondents report never being employed by a utility.



Half (52%) of respondents report being employed in their present position for three or more years. All other respondents report serving in their job either one to two years (24%), or less than one year (24%).

Three-quarters (76%) of 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.

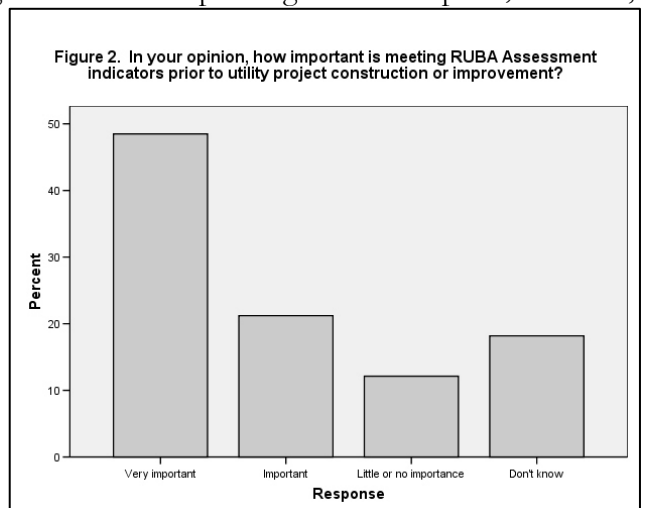
Table 4. Respondent Job Priorities

Respondent	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3
1	941 and EST tax reports	Grants	Financial and progress reports
2	Water plant	Power plant	Laundromat
3	City finances	Operations	Maintain cash flow for operations
4	Contracts and grants compliance	Financial responsibility	Maintenance compliance
5	Monthly financial reports	Payroll	Keeping track of daily revenue and expenditures
6	Keeping contracts in place	Answer e-mails	Respond to problems in tribal council office
7	Supervise all city employees	Supervise funds and accounts	Meet with council on regular basis
8	Operation of electricity	Operation of water, sewer, and washeteria	Financial management
9	Community road improvements projects	Water and sewer to subdivision plat	Accounting and providing budget
10	Business grants manager	Maintain federal grant funds	Making sure funds are correctly posted
11	Employee training on sewer system	Sewer system maintenance	Payments and accounts receivable
12	Electricity	Water and sewer	Raw sewage
13	Produce safe, potable water	Maintain water and sewer lines	Utility maintenance
14	Water and sewer haulers	Airport	Native village buildings
15	City administration/clerk duties	City maintainer	Village police officer
16	RUBA	Bank register, statements, and payroll	Serving the community
17	Water and sewer projects	Getting a new clinic	Fixing up our roads
18	Carpentry	Bookkeeping	Office administration
19	PILT and SRS applications	Fuel ordering	Insurance coverage
20	Certified nurse	Notary	ICWA counselor
21	Administration and managerial work	Correspondence and paperwork	Water and sewer operator
22	Overseeing employees	Making sure office work is getting done	Customers
23	Public safety	Health	
24	Safe water product	Jobs	
25	Water/sewer billings	Whatever needs to be done	
26	Unity	Bring jobs and economic opportunity	

UTILITY PROFILE

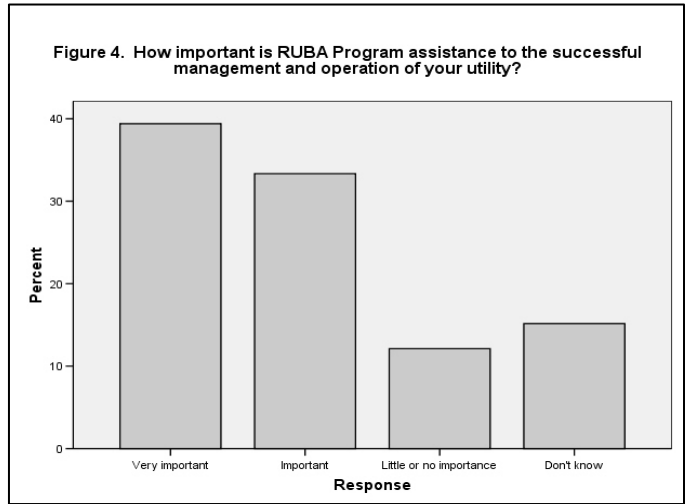
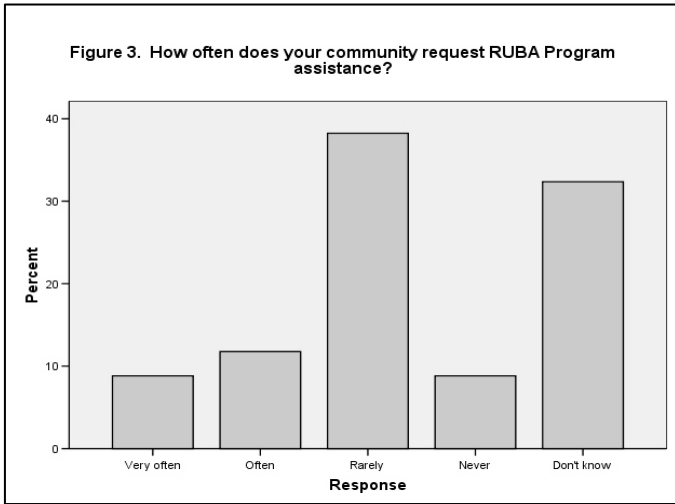
City councils (40%) and tribal councils (33%) are most likely to manage and operate utilities in respondent communities. One-third (36%) of respondents report having a RUBA Workplan Agreement in place; however, the majority (58%) of respondents indicate they do not know if their utility has a RUBA Workplan Agreement.

One-quarter (24%) of respondents report delays in community utility projects related to not meeting RUBA Assessment indicators. Of those reporting delays, four of seven (57%) indicate projects were delayed less than one year. The remainder (43%) report delays of four and a half years, five years, and eleven years. For projects encountering delays, the median number of months a project has been delayed is eleven. Three-quarters (70%) of respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators before the start of construction on a utility project or improvement is either very important (49%) or important (21%) (Figure 2).

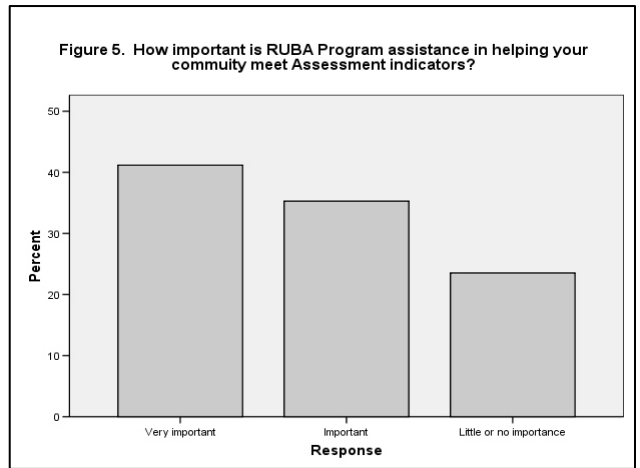


RUBA PROGRAM TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

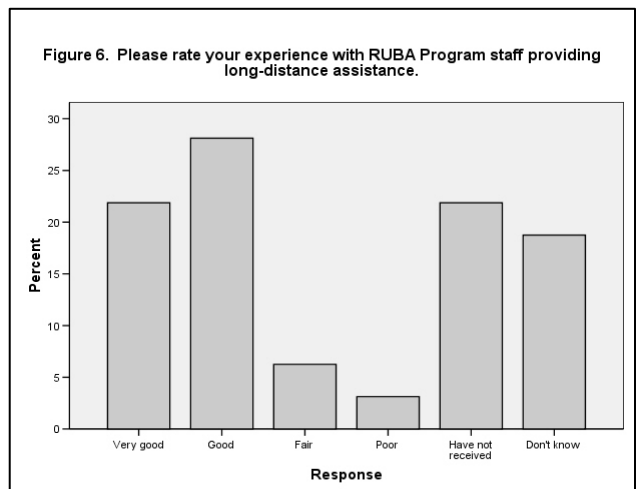
Half (47%) of respondents indicate they rarely (38%) or never (9%) request RUBA Program assistance (Figure 3). One-third (32%) do not know how often RUBA Program assistance is requested. Despite the lack of use, three-quarters (72%) report RUBA Program assistance is either very important (39%) or important (33%) to the successful management and operation of their utility (Figure 4).



Half (52%) of respondents report a RUBA Assessment has been completed for their utility. Forty-five percent (45%) do not know whether a RUBA Assessment has been completed. Three-quarters (77%) of respondents with a completed RUBA Assessment report all RUBA Assessment indicators have been met.



Three-quarters (76%) of respondents indicate RUBA Program assistance is either very important (41%) or important (35%) in helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators (Figure 5). One-quarter (27%) indicate utility management problems are addressed with RUBA Program staff assistance. One-quarter (24%) addresses utility management problems internally. Fifteen percent (15%) of respondents report not addressing utility management problems at all.



Half (44%) of respondents report either very good (25%) or good (19%) experience with RUBA staff during on-site visits. One-quarter (22%) of respondents have not experienced an on-site visit. Half (50%) of the respondents rate their experience with long-distance RUBA staff assistance as either very good (22%) or good (28%), while one-quarter (22%) indicate having never received long-distance assistance (Figure 6).

After experiencing RUBA Program assistance, one-third (28% - 39%) of respondents do not know whether their utility's management capacity has changed (Table 5). Only one respondent (4%) reports management capacity has declined following RUBA Program assistance. Half (50%) of respondents report finances and accounting improved following 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	4%	0%	14%	43%	7%	32%
Accounting	4%	0%	18%	46%	4%	28%
Tax issues	4%	0%	32%	21%	11%	32%
Personnel system	4%	0%	37%	22%	4%	33%
Organizational management	4%	0%	25%	28%	4%	39%
Utility operation	0%	4%	31%	24%	7%	34%
Overall utility management	4%	0%	41%	17%	7%	31%
Utility planning	4%	0%	38%	24%	0%	34%

Forty-two percent (42%) of respondents anticipate using RUBA Program assistance very often (15%) or often (27%) in the future. One-third (30%) of respondents indicate they will rarely use RUBA assistance in the future.

RUBA PROGRAM COURSES AND WORKSHOPS

A majority (56%) of respondents indicate the RUBA Utility Management Training (UTM) courses are either very important (44%) or important (12%) to improving their utility's management and operations. Of noteworthy importance, despite the perceived value of UTM training, three-quarters (76%) of respondents indicate they have not participated in training.

On average, three-quarters of respondents (65% - 77%) did not attend the six UTM courses (Table 6). All six courses are viewed favorably by attendees, with almost all providing ratings of very good or good. No respondents rate the quality of any UTM course as either fair or poor.

Table 6. Quality of UTM Courses

UTM Course	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Introduction to Utility Management	0%	0%	18%	9%	0%	73%
Personnel Management	0%	0%	22%	13%	0%	65%
Planning Management	0%	0%	18%	5%	0%	77%
Financial Management	0%	0%	23%	4%	0%	73%
Operational Management	0%	0%	23%	0%	4%	73%
Organizational Management	0%	0%	14%	9%	0%	77%

Respondents also provided information for eight DCRA workshops. Of noteworthy importance, the majority (52% - 73%) of respondents have not attended these workshops (Table 7). The QuickBooks Pro workshop is rated highest, with 41% rating it as very good (19%) or good (22%).

Table 7. Other DCRA Workshops

Workshop	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Did Not Attend
Newly elected officials	4%	8%	15%	0%	0%	73%
City clerk training	7%	0%	15%	7%	0%	71%
QuickBooks Pro	7%	0%	22%	19%	0%	52%
Financial record keeping	4%	11%	11%	15%	0%	59%
Payroll tax	4%	7%	19%	11%	0%	59%
Community planning	7%	4%	15%	11%	0%	63%
Elections	7%	7%	12%	7%	0%	67%
Planning commission	7%	7%	15%	4%	0%	67%

RUBA PROGRAM STAFF

The majority (60%) of respondents indicate they rarely (39%) or never (21%) have contact with RUBA Program staff. In contrast, one-quarter (27%) report they either very often (9%) or often (18%) have contact with staff.

Approximately one-third (30% - 44%) of respondents rate RUBA Program staff assistance as very good or good in six of seven areas including availability of staff assistance (44%), timeliness of staff assistance (44%), applicability to the community (37%), addressing the utility's current challenges (37%), understanding the community as a whole (34%), and addressing the utility's long-term challenges (30%) (Table 8). Respondents are most critical of RUBA Program staff's willingness to travel to the community, with more respondents rating staff's willingness as fair or poor (27%) than very good or good (23%). Of noteworthy importance, at least one-third (33% - 47%) of respondents are generally unable to rate the quality of RUBA Program assistance.

Table 8. Quality of RUBA Program Staff Assistance

Assistance	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Undecided	Don't Know
Availability of staff assistance	7%	13%	27%	17%	3%	33%
Timeliness of staff assistance	3%	7%	27%	17%	3%	43%
Applicability to the community	7%	10%	20%	17%	3%	43%
Addressing the utility's current challenges	10%	7%	20%	17%	3%	43%
Addressing the utility's long-term challenges	7%	16%	20%	10%	0%	47%
Understanding the community as a whole	10%	10%	17%	17%	3%	43%
Willingness to travel to the community	7%	20%	10%	13%	3%	47%

Half (48%) of respondents report RUBA Program staff's ability to address community questions and concerns is either very good (27%) or good (21%) (Figure 7). Half (45%) of respondents rate their overall experience with RUBA Program staff as either very good (18%) or good (27%) (Figure 8). Twenty-one percent (21%) report no interaction with RUBA Program staff.

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. Respondents are generally three times more likely to rate these activities as very important (17% - 37%) than as having little or no importance (7% - 13%) (Table 9). A significant quantity (30% - 48%) of respondents do not know whether these RUBA Program activities are important.

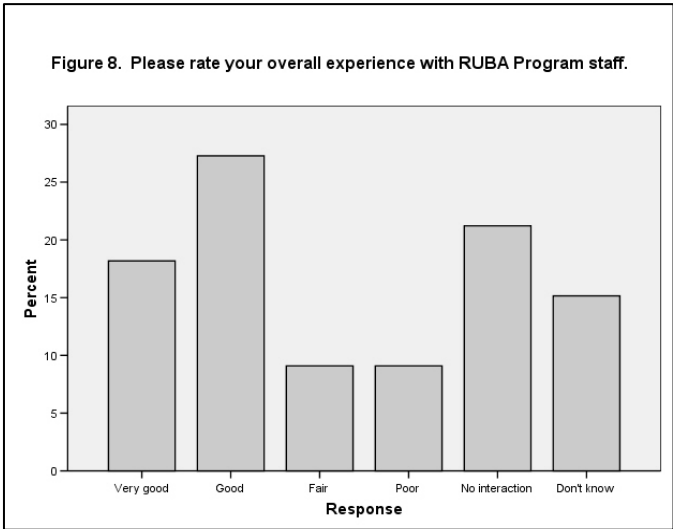
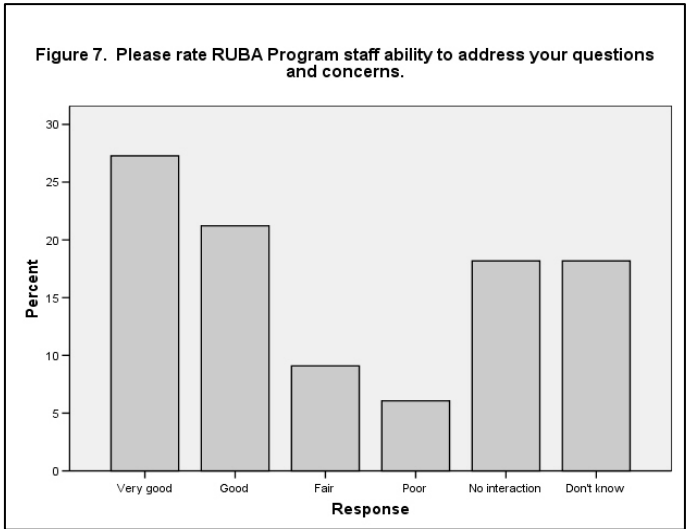


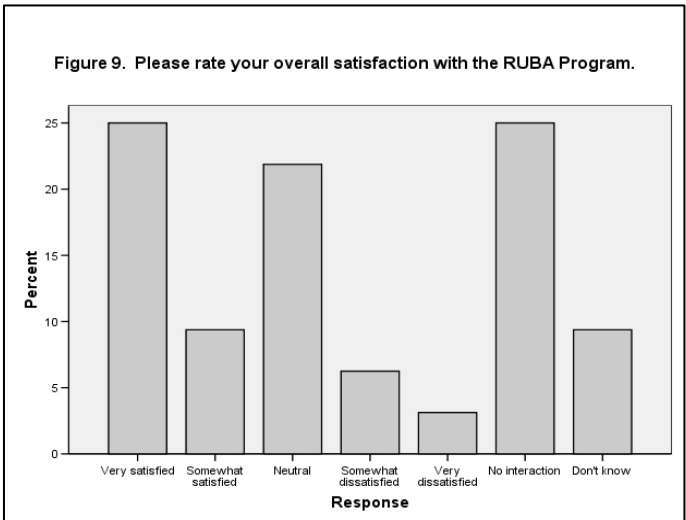
Table 9. Importance of RUBA Program Activities

Activity	Little or No Importance	Important	Very Important	Don't Know
RUBA Assessments	13%	20%	30%	37%
On-site community visits	13%	24%	33%	30%
Correspondence with RUBA staff (e.g., e-mail, mail, phone, fax)	13%	27%	30%	30%
UTM courses	10%	20%	33%	37%
Local government and planning workshops (e.g., elected officials, city clerk)	13%	10%	37%	40%
RUBA publications	7%	28%	17%	48%

Overall, one-third (34%) of respondents indicate they are very (25%) to somewhat satisfied (9%) with the RUBA Program (Figure 9). One-quarter (22%) indicate they are neutral, and nine percent (9%) report being somewhat dissatisfied (6%) or very dissatisfied (3%) with the RUBA Program.

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

- Stop playing political games and finish our water and sewer project.
- Having been employed by [the City] for less than a year, I am not aware to what extent there has been any involvement between RUBA and the past council or administration of [the City] to accurately describe or to answer the questions in the survey. I would like to obtain more information as to what kind of relationship can be established between RUBA and [the City]. Most of the present council for the Municipality are first or second year members and are willing to establish any and all working relations with other entities that would be beneficial to the community for reasons that would assist us in re-establishing our municipal organization as a viable service source to our citizens. I can only say that since our water/wastewater utility is handled by Rural Utilities Coop they have more information that would help in this survey.



- RUBA should make a listing of personnel on their staff. Their contact numbers, e-mail, telephone, and fax. Each village receives this listing and proper contacts can improve the communications and efficiency.
- Could be willing to attend workshop in future, if available.
- More communication.
- State commissioner to review the non-profit incorporation entity within the unincorporated tribal entity.
- Need new community assessment ASAP.
- Contact the City.
- It would be nice if someone came out and showed me what to do. I'm new here and don't really know what to do on most parts of RUBA.
- I have good communication with [current RUBA staff] in Bethel. Very informative and able to work cooperatively. Very impressed with him.
- Have more training.
- [Our] water and sewer improvement projected started 11 years ago and the completion is yet to be seen.
- I would like more information on RUBA.
- After [former RUBA staff] resigned we did not have any contact with RUBA, with the exception of one site visit to [the City] by [current RUBA staff].
- The answers to your survey would be very different, now if [former RUBA staff] was employed by RUBA. She just about did everything to assist the staff of [the City]. With only one visit to [the City] by [current RUBA staff], your survey has "Don't know."

SUMMARY

This report, *RUBA Community Feedback Survey: Bethel Regional Office Summary*, summarizes mail-out survey findings of the communities served by the Bethel Regional Office. Survey results represent the perceptions, attitudes, and opinions of 34 individuals located in 27 communities that have received RUBA Program services from Bethel Regional Office staff.

Three-quarters of respondents indicate meeting RUBA Assessment indicators prior to utility construction or improvement projects is important and RUBA Program assistance is important in helping utilities meet RUBA Assessment indicators. Only one-quarter of respondents indicate they address utility management issues with RUBA Program staff assistance.

Overall satisfaction with the RUBA Program is mixed. Half of respondents rate their experience with on-site and long-distance assistance as very good or good, while one-quarter report receiving no assistance from the RUBA Program. Less than half of respondents expect to use RUBA Program assistance very often or often in the future.

