
Rural Utility Business Advisor

Program Evaluation
Overview and key findings

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About the evaluation

Purpose of RUBA Program Evaluation

- ❖ DCA identified need for evaluation in order to
 - Determine community needs
 - Determine satisfaction with RUBA Program
 - Guide service delivery decisions
 - Inform decision-making processes
 - Improve program effectiveness and long-term impact

About the evaluation

Information Insights collected information related to

- ❖ Program history – History Overview
- ❖ Program activity – Activity Inventory
- ❖ Agency perceptions of program – Agency Feedback
- ❖ Community needs & satisfaction with program – Community Feedback
- ❖ Overall program impact & effectiveness – Community Impact

Overview of methodology

Analysis of qualitative & quantitative data using the following methodological tools:

- ❖ Personal interviews with select current & former RUBA staff
- ❖ Review of program reporting & administrative documents
- ❖ Interviews with current & former utility staff & agency representatives
- ❖ Surveys of utility staff in rural communities

Overview of methodology

Limitations

- ❖ Past & present methods of data collection & activity documentation
- ❖ Lack of data-rich records that lend themselves to quantitative analysis of community impacts
 - difficult to assess changes at community level before & after contact w/RUBA Program
 - Inconsistent & incomplete nature of available data

Overview of chapters

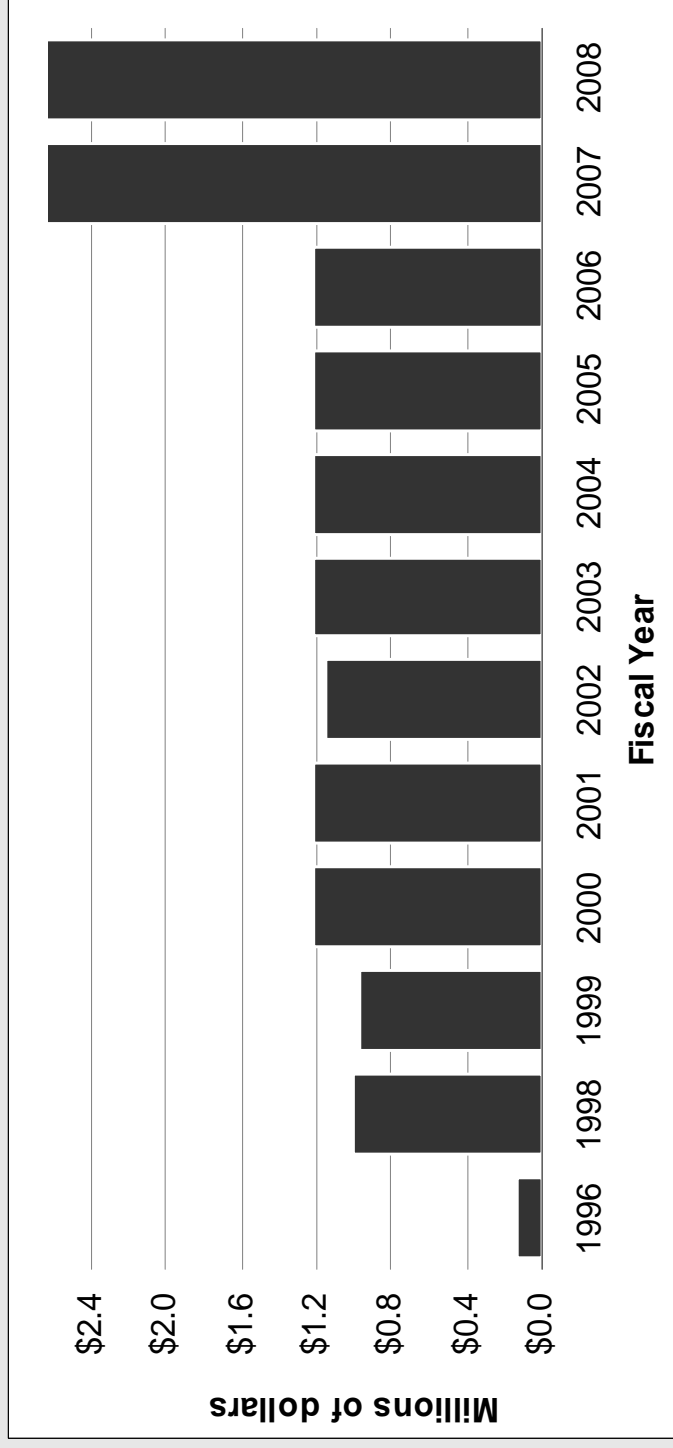
Program history overview

- ❖ Concentrates on changes over time in staffing, resource allocation, program focus
 - 1990 to 1997 – Program establishment & early growth
 - 1998 to 2001 – Funding independence & increased demand for services
 - 2002 to 2006 – Development of RUBA assessment & indicators sets
 - 2006 to present - Program funding increase

Overview of chapters

Program history overview

- ❖ Funding history
 - FY1996 – 1st big increase
 - FY2000 – next significant increase
 - FY2006 – funding doubles



Overview of chapters

Program history overview

- ❖ Staff identification of program strengths & weaknesses over time
 - Strengths
 - RUBA asked for performance, measured performance & rewarded successes [for communities]
 - RUBA was key to [statewide rural] sanitation improvements
 - RUBA looked at management of communities w/more holistic perspective [than other agencies]
 - Staff are “locals” & quite knowledgeable of communities & regions in which they work; some were born there

Overview of chapters

Program history overview

- ❖ Staff identification of program strengths & weaknesses over time
 - Weaknesses
 - Restricting communities from having sanitation improvements until they could satisfy requirements set forth by RUBA
 - Equitability [of standardized indicators for all communities]: judging/evaluating all communities w/same indicators & performance measures. It's not this cut & dried...each RUBA staff person observes communities differently

Overview of chapters

Activity inventory

- ❖ Compiles range & scope of work conducted by RUBA staff in rural communities & regional offices
 - RUBA assessments
 - On-site/long distance community assistance
 - UTM courses
 - Special projects
 - Staff development
 - Program administration
 - Other program activities
- ❖ Data sources
 - Quarterly reports
 - STARS
 - Travel spreadsheets
 - UTM course spreadsheets
 - Staff questionnaire
 - Training Information System

Overview of chapters

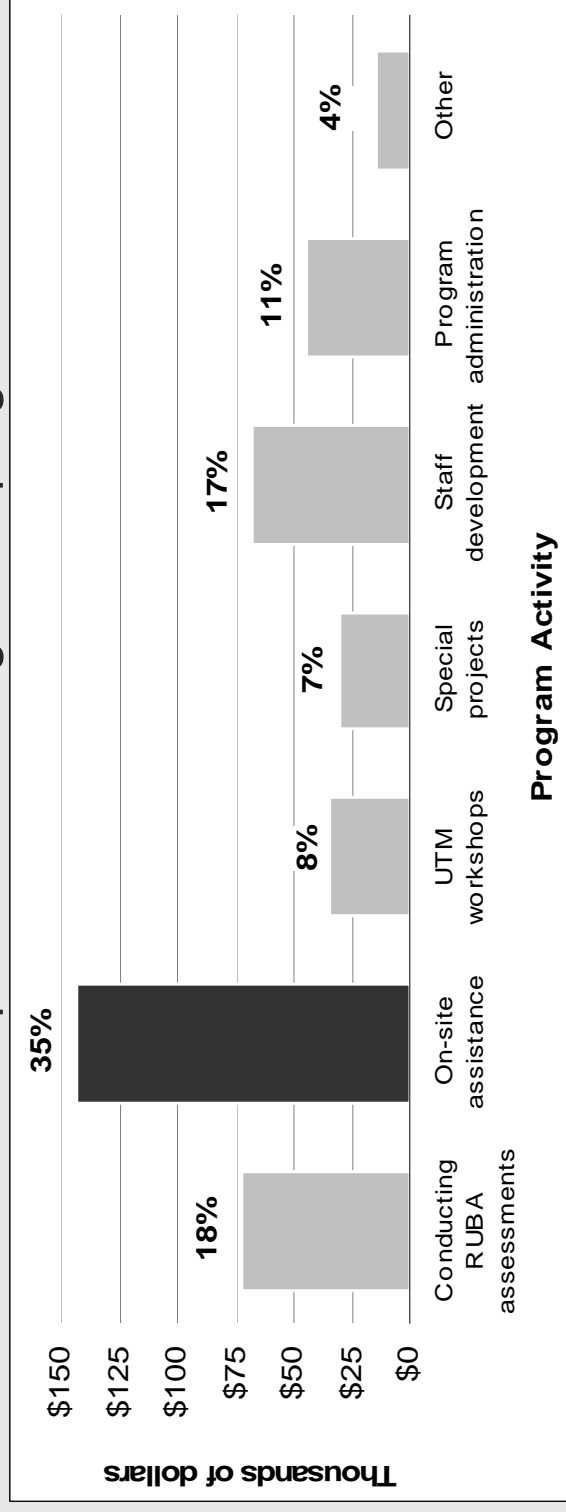
Activity inventory

- ❖ Most challenging component of program evaluation
 - Differing level of detail at which RUBA Program staff submit activity reports
 - Current structure of staff reporting mechanisms, especially those in STARS

Overview of chapters

Activity inventory

- ❖ Most time/resources spent conducting RUBA assessments & providing on-site assistance
 - 35% of total travel expenses for FY 2005 – 2007
 - Over 60% of total travel dollars spent providing assistance to communities
 - Less than 40% spent conducting other program tasks



Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Summarizes interviews with 18 representatives from 12 federal, state & tribal agencies:
 - Program strengths
 - Program weaknesses
 - Recommendations for improving current service delivery methods

Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Agency representatives
 - Work closely w/communities RUBA serves
 - Have some oversight/regulatory function over RUBA/RUBA communities
 - Share some of same goals & objectives
 - Set policies that impact scope & nature of RUBA work
 - Have funding relationship w/RUBA
 - Provide assistance/guidance to RUBA Program staff

Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Participating agencies
 - Federal agencies (4)
 - Denali Commission
 - EPA
 - IRS
 - USDA-RD
 - State agencies (2)
 - DEC-VSW
 - RCA
 - Regional entities (6)
 - ANTHC
 - APIA
 - NSHC
 - SEARHC
 - TCC
 - YKHC-RUC

Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Strengths
 - Training content & approach
 - Indicators as benchmarks
 - Staff as community advocates
 - Improved access to & continuity of RUBA staff
 - Improved assessment process

Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Weaknesses
 - Staff regulatory role
 - Accuracy & emphasis on indicators
 - Staffing & training presence
 - Changing mission & stability of RUBA Program

Overview of chapters

Agency feedback

- ❖ Recommendations
 - Restructure & revise indicators
 - Reassess program approach
 - Increase program communication & collaboration
 - Plan for program sustainability
 - Expand training curriculum & opportunities

Overview of chapters

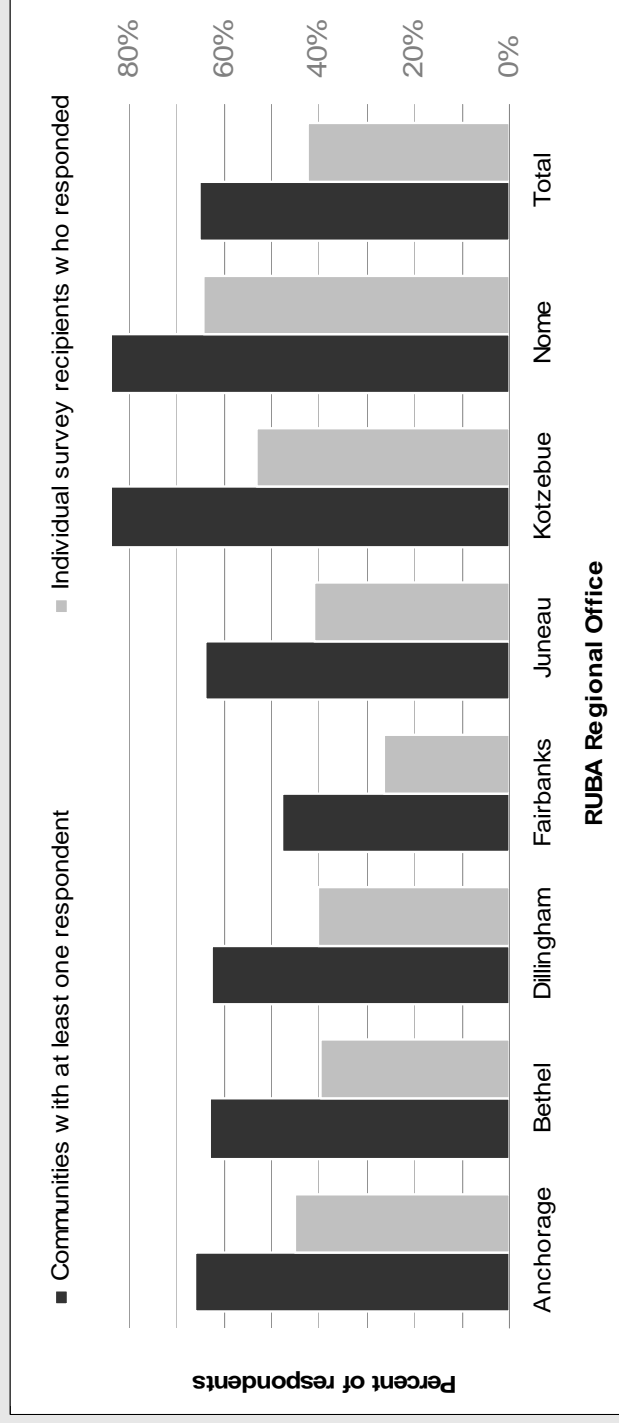
Community feedback

- ❖ Summarizes results from survey of 200+ community members in 146 communities & site visits to 6 RUBA communities
 - Respondent & community background & demographics
 - RUBA Program assistance
 - RUBA Program staff
 - RUBA training
 - Program strengths, criticisms & recommendations

Overview of chapters

Community feedback

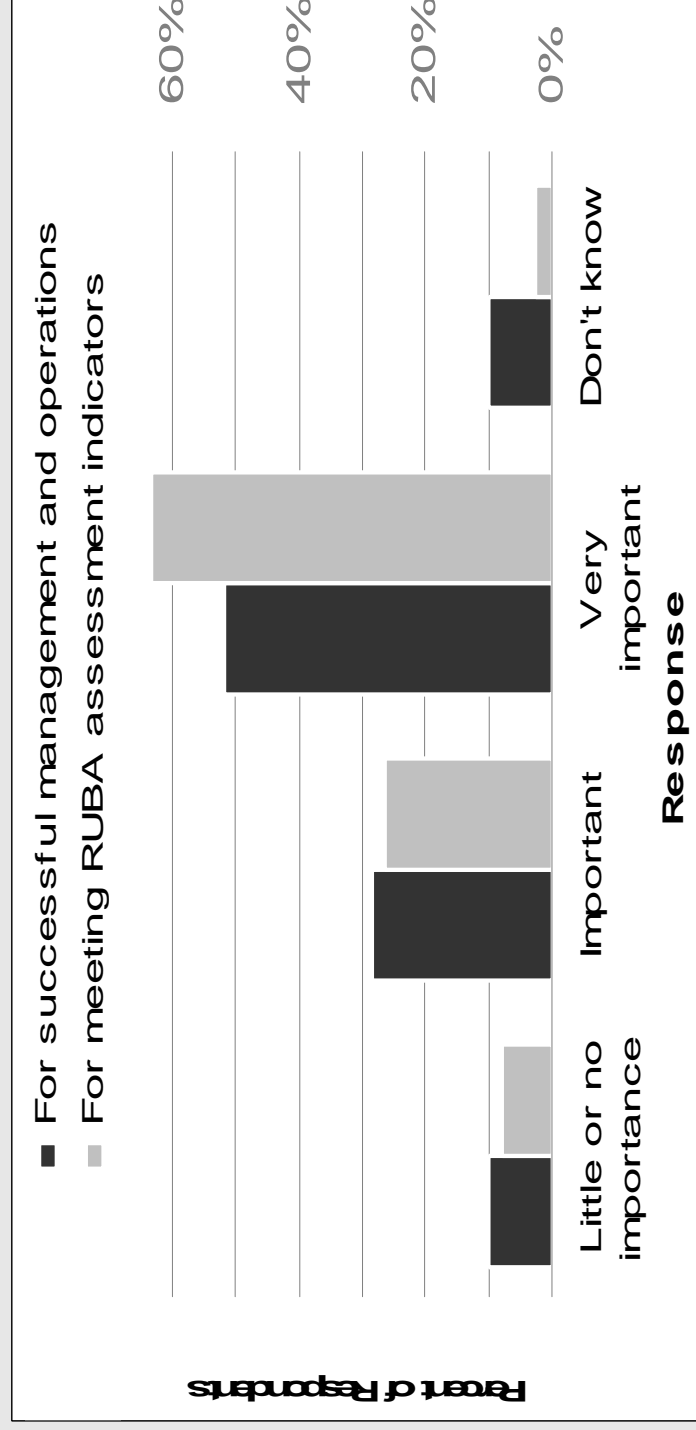
- ❖ Overall response rate – 42% (122 of 288)
- ❖ Community response rate – 65% (95 of 146)
- ❖ Regional response rate
 - Highest – Kotzebue (88%) and Nome (86%)
 - Lowest – Fairbanks (48%)



Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Importance of RUBA Program Assistance
 - 90% report “important” or “very important” to meeting indicators
 - 80% report “important” or “very important” to successful management & operations



Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Impact of RUBA staff on utility management areas
 - Over half rated at least one area as “improved moderately” or “improved significantly”
 - More than one quarter rated six or more areas as “improved moderately” or “improved significantly”

Overview of chapters

Management Area (Total N)	Don't Know (N)	Declined (N)	Remained the Same (N)	Improved (N)
Finances (N=103)	25.2% (26)	1.9% (2)	30.1% (31)	42.7% (44)
Accounting (N=103)	24.3% (25)	2.9% (3)	29.1% (30)	43.7% (45)
Tax issues (N=101)	28.7% (29)	2.0% (2)	37.6% (38)	31.7% (32)
Personnel system (N=99)	26.3% (26)	3.0% (3)	38.4% (38)	32.3% (32)
Organizational (N=103)	26.2% (27)	2.9% (3)	29.1% (30)	41.8% (43)
Utility operation (N=101)	24.8% (25)	4.0% (4)	34.7% (35)	36.7% (37)
Utility planning (N=101)	25.7% (26)	4.0% (4)	27.7% (28)	42.6% (43)
Overall utility management (N=103)	22.3% (23)	3.9% (4)	31.1% (32)	42.7% (44)

Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Experience with RUBA staff
 - 70% rate experience as “very good” or “good”
 - Surprising – 40% of city administrators indicate they “rarely” contact RUBA staff; 52% of city clerks say they contact RUBA staff “often”

Overview of chapters

Program Aspect (Total N)	Don't Know (N)	Undecided (N)	Poor (N)	Fair (N)	Good (N)
Availability of staff assistance (N=109)	22.9% (25)	2.8% (3)	3.7% (4)	13.8% (15)	56.8% (62)
Timeliness of staff assistance (N=106)	26.4% (28)	2.8% (3)	1.9% (2)	13.2% (14)	55.7% (59)
Applicability to your community (N=108)	26.6% (29)	3.7% (4)	1.8% (2)	15.6% (17)	52.3% (57)
Addressing your utility's current challenges (N=108)	25.9% (28)	4.6% (5)	2.8% (3)	17.6% (19)	49.0% (53)
Addressing your utility's long-term challenges (N=108)	27.5% (30)	3.7% (4)	1.8% (2)	19.3% (21)	47.7% (52)
Understanding your community as a whole (N=108)	24.1% (26)	3.7% (4)	3.7% (4)	15.7% (17)	52.8% (57)
Willingness to travel to your community (N=108)	28.4% (31)	5.5% (6)	4.6% (5)	14.7% (16)	46.8% (51)

Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ UTM courses
 - Less than half (46%) attended UTM course; over half (51%) did not attend UTM course
 - 28% did not answer this question

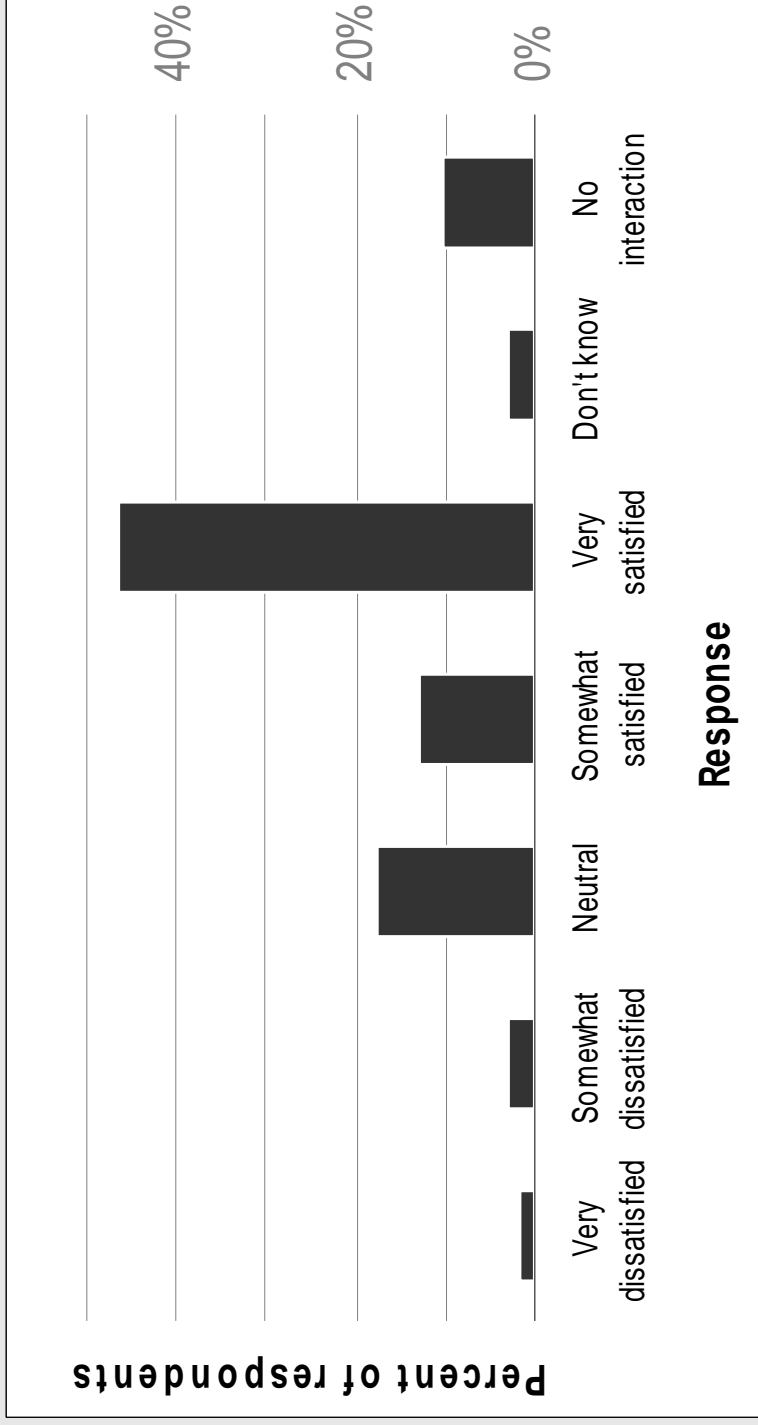
Overview of chapters

UTM Course	Did Not Attend (N)	Undecided (N)	Poor (N)	Fair (N)	Good (N)
Introduction to Utility Management	48.8% (42)	1.2% (1)	0% (0)	8.1% (7)	41.9% (36)
Personnel Management	44.7% (38)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	7.1% (6)	45.9% (39)
Planning Management	54.1% (46)	2.4% (2)	1.2% (1)	5.9% (5)	36.5% (31)
Financial Management	42.2% (35)	1.2% (1)	0% (0)	8.4% (7)	48.2% (40)
Operational Management	50.0% (42)	2.4% (2)	0% (0)	8.3% (7)	39.3% (33)
Organizational Management	49.4% (41)	1.2% (1)	1.2% (1)	7.2% (6)	41.0% (34)

Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Overall satisfaction with RUBA Program
 - Half were “very satisfied”; 17% “neutral”; 13% “somewhat satisfied”; 11% had “no interaction” w/staff



Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Program strengths
 - Usefulness of training
 - Program administration & value of assistance
 - Interactions w/RUBA Program staff
- ❖ Program criticisms
 - Assessment process
 - Administration of training
 - Staff availability

Overview of chapters

Community feedback

- ❖ Recommendations
 - Increase & focus training
 - Better allocation of staff time
 - Improve communications

Overview of chapters

Community impact

- ❖ **Impact** defined as conditions in a community/region before and after RUBA assistance
- ❖ Proposed data sources
 - SNC List
 - IRS Tax Liens & Releases
 - Program Evaluation Agency Feedback
 - Program Evaluation Community Feedback
 - Quarterly Reports
 - Training Information System
 - STARS

Overview of chapters

Community impact

- ❖ Limitation of data sources
 - Inconclusive
 - Inconsistent
 - Incomplete
 - Redundant
- ❖ Identifies most & least effective program components based upon cumulative findings
 - Historical documents
 - Interviews/surveys of select RUBA Program staff
 - Agency interviews
 - Key informant interviews/surveys

Overview of chapters

Community impact

- ❖ Most effective program components
 - Training
 - Multi-faceted approach to providing technical assistance
 - Staff experience
- ❖ Least effective
 - Emphasis on assessment process
 - Allocation of staff resources
 - Tracking program activity

Overview of chapters

Community impact

- ❖ Overall recommendation
 - Community/Regional Impact Matrix
 - Background (combination of resources)
 - Staff Activity (STARS)
 - Capacity Indicators (Quarterly Reports)
 - Sample Community Impact Matrix – Anchorage Region
 - 4 sample communities – False Pass, Larsen Bay, Marshall, Nondalton

Summary of findings

Strengths

- ❖ RUBA staff are accessible & knowledgeable
- ❖ UTM course content & delivery help rural utility staff
- ❖ RUBA assessment process

Summary of findings

Weaknesses

- ❖ Changing role of RUBA staff
- ❖ Inadequate staffing
- ❖ Rural utility staff training (UTM courses & non-UTM workshops) not offered as frequently as rural utility staff would like/need

Summary of findings

Most effective program components

- ❖ UTM courses, non-UTM workshops & on-site assistance provide rural utility staff w/useful knowledge & skills for improving rural utility management
- ❖ Staff employ multiple modes of service delivery
- ❖ Staff have lived & worked extensively in rural Alaska

Summary of findings

Least effective program components

- ❖ Adoption & current use of RUBA assessment
- ❖ Expansion of client list without increase in staff
- ❖ Staff reporting

Recommendations

Based on two assumptions

- ❖ RUBA Program will have funding & staff to undertake these tasks
- ❖ Each task falls under purview of program

Recommendations are inclusive of short- and long-term program activities:

- ❖ RUBA assessment
- ❖ On-site & distance-delivered technical assistance
- ❖ UTM courses
- ❖ Special projects
- ❖ Staff development
- ❖ Project administration

Recommendations

RUBA Assessment

1. Restructure & revise indicators
2. Formally group RUBA communities according to levels of technical & managerial fitness & need
3. Encourage RUBA staff to work closely with other agencies & document status reports & feedback from agency representatives
4. Communicate more clearly the quantitative requirements that comprise each indicator

Recommendations

RUBA Assessment (cont'd)

5. Separate duties of certain RUBA Program staff
6. Establish a category of RUBA assistance agreement goals for RUBA communities & staff that correlate w/management areas
7. Prepare communities for assessment process by consistently sending a packet or other explanatory materials about RUBA Program expectations prior to assessment

Recommendations

On-site and Delivered Technical Assistance

8. Prioritize assistance to communities based on capacity levels
9. Separate assessment from assistance tasks
10. Allocate staff time for on-site assistance according to utility management areas
11. Define each indicator in quantitative terms

Recommendations

UTM Courses

12. Improve the quality & quantity of UTM materials
13. Increase number of UTM course offerings
14. Publicize UTM opportunities

Recommendations

Special Projects

15. Develop RUBA-related publications & materials based on needs identified by communities & agencies
16. Document special assistance to communities according to management areas
17. Increase number of training opportunities for non-UTM workshops, such as QuickBooks Pro instruction, & consider multiple methods of providing training materials

Recommendations

Staff Development

18. Work with an outside facilitator & current program staff to develop a strategic plan
19. Use Quarterly Report indicators of community performance & staff activity reports from STARS as tools to review performance of each regional office
20. Consult current staff about how they conduct RUBA assessments to develop a programmatic standard & encourage consistency across regions

Recommendations

Program Administration - Reporting/Data Mgmt.

21. Improve staff reporting system
 - Report staff interaction w/communities by management area, including recommendations made to communities for upcoming quarters
 - Require standardized approach for staff reporting across regions
 - Require staff compliance across regional offices
 - Provide staff the option to specify amount of time spent on each activity by management area

Recommendations

Program Administration – Reporting/Data Mgmt. (cont'd)

21. Improve staff reporting system (cont'd)
 - Integrate reporting tools across reporting mechanisms & data sources
 - Establish a common understanding of use, necessity & application of standardized reporting procedures
 - Revise reporting system to create reports tied to programmatic needs, such as planning, budgeting & scheduling
 - Output staff activities in manner accountable & transparent to funding sources & other collaborating agencies

Recommendations

Program Administration – Reporting/Data Mgmt. (cont'd)

22. Implement quantitative reporting of indicators by assessment management areas
23. Implement minor revisions to Quarterly Reports
24. Integrate results of reporting modifications to develop a community impact matrix that presents community performance & staff activity together

Recommendations

Program Administration – General

25. Make overall investment in IT for RUBA Program
26. Establish MOU with other agencies to increase interagency collaboration & cooperation
27. Conduct a program evaluation every 5 years

Discussion – Next Steps

Prioritization and Evaluation of Recommendations

- ❖ Which recommendations are the most important programmatically?
 - Align with program mission
 - Align with reporting requirements
 - Address community needs/demands
 - Address agency needs/demands
 - Align with data needs
 - Require IT investment
- ❖ What investment would it take to accomplish priority recommendations?
 - Increases in current available resources
 - Outside resources

Discussion – Next Steps

Future Program Evaluations

- ❖ Need to plan for doing program evaluation in the future
 - Program evaluation & ability to demonstrate impact & need are critical to continued & increased funding for RUBA Program
 - Next grant application should include allocation for conducting program evaluation & developing tools to measure impact

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