

**STATUS REPORT: A BREAKDOWN OF THE RISK NEEDS ASSESSMENT  
BY SECTION**

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**INTRODUCTION**

This fourth status report provides details on the data collected regarding the use of specific aspects of the separate forms of which the Risk Needs Assessment Instrument is composed. This data serves to complement the validation of the current Division Risk/Needs Assessment instrument also being conducted by ISR. The evaluation team placed the emphasis on gathering information about the instrument's overall implementation, its relevance, appropriateness, and usefulness as

perceived by Probation and Parole Officers. This section of the survey was designed to elicit information that will allow us to better understand how the instrument is currently used by Officers.

As stated in our original proposal, the beneficial outcomes of a validation of the RNA instrument are 1) a high level of community protection from those individuals who present the greatest risk of committing further law violations 2) good supervision and resocialization programs and 3) the ability to use scarce resources most wisely. In constructing the survey on the use of Risk Needs Assessment tools within PPD, ISR took into account the role of the RNA within the overall matrix of responsibilities and procedures carried out by Probation/Parole Officers. In order to elicit a picture of how the RNA fit in with other mechanisms and strategies for assessing risk and needs, we inquired into the officers' perceptions of the forms' usefulness and relevance in providing a foundational basis for carrying out the responsibilities of offender monitoring and service provision.

In conjunction with the validation check of the RNA, the data collected through this survey of Probation/Parole officers will allow the PPD to make informed policy decisions and address inconsistencies in the implementation of tools. An incorrectly administered instrument may collect unreliable data but this poor data collection may have less to do with the makeup of the instrument than with improper implementation.

The survey conducted by the ISR complements the validation check of the RNA instrument by gathering information on the role of the RNA in the determination of supervision classifications and overall management of offenders, in addition to obtaining data on perceptions of the RNA instrument's reliability and validity. We have combined two research strategies: the validation check and compiling a descriptive account of the role of the RNA instrument within the larger scheme of completing the daily tasks of a Probation/Parole Officer. Using these two different methodologies, ISR may be able to provide suggestions regarding the need for revisions to the current instrument and recommendations for consolidation of paperwork in general. This report serves to address the specific relevance and appropriateness of the Risk/Needs Assessment forms currently in use in terms of fulfilling the stated purpose of accurately determining supervision levels and classifications.

## **RISK ASSESSMENT**

### **Question 26: “At what stage of the offenders’ path through the system is the Risk Assessment completed?”**

The primary purpose of this question is to determine if Probation and Parole Officers administer the instrument before offenders are assigned to a program. Assessment of client Risk and Needs should take place before they are assigned to a particular program within Probation and Parole in order to ensure that their status is determined according to standardized measures. The secondary purpose of this question is to determine whether implementation of the instrument is being done in a consistent manner throughout the division or if there is variation amongst officers that could influence the accuracy of Risk and Needs Assessment. What the evaluation team found was that 60% of officers were consistent with one another in implementing the form at the *Case Opening/ Initial Meeting/ Onset of Supervision/ First Contact* with the offender. However, implementation of the instrument after assignment to a particular program within the Division constitutes improper administration in that the status of the offender has been determined without the

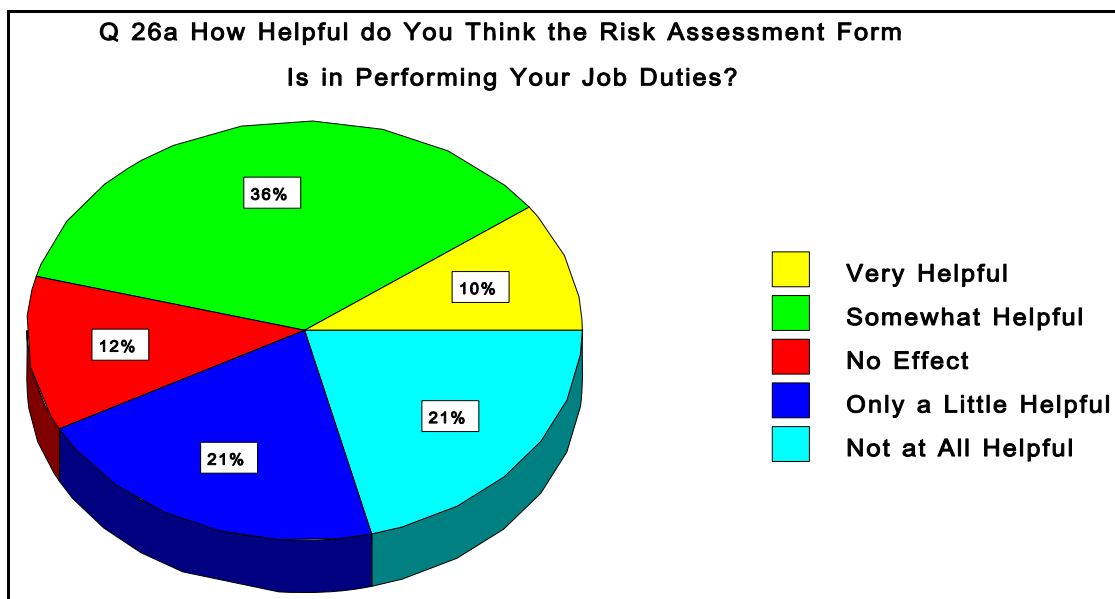
aid of the Risk and Needs Assessment. Eighteen percent of offenders told us that the RNA was administered *At Six Month Intervals/ Reassessment/ Periodically* but did not confirm when the initial implementation took place. Eight percent of officers stated that the instrument was used *As Needed/ When Changes Occur* while another 5% stated that they administered the RNA *Within 30 Days/ First Month of Supervision*. None of these answers demonstrates that the instrument is being utilized correctly, but rather that some officers feel it is up to their discretion when they will administer the RNA. This lack of standardization essentially invalidates the use of the instrument to determine the risks and needs of clients. Risk or Needs classification cannot be legitimately compared across clients or division-wide due to the variable use of the RNA tool. A total of eighteen officers chose not to answer this question, six of whom were Drug Court Officers who stated they did not use the RNA in their program.

| Q 26 At What Stage is the RNA Completed?                           |                 |         |
|--|-----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (166) | Percent |
| Case Opening/ Initial Meeting/ Onset of Supervision/ First Contact | 100             | 60%     |
| At Six Month Intervals/ Reassessment/ Periodically                 | 29              | 17.5%   |
| As Needed/ When Changes Occur                                      | 13              | 8%      |
| Within 30 Days/ First Month of Supervision                         | 8               | 5%      |
| In Conjunction with Pre-Sentence Report                            | 5               | 3%      |
| Not Applicable in Drug Court                                       | 5               | 3%      |
| At Closing   | 4               | 2.5%    |
| “When Offender Reaches Minimum Supervision”                        | 2               | 1%      |

**Table 1**

**Question 26a: “ How helpful do you think the Risk Assessment form is in performing your job duties?”**

This question was designed to give an overall sense of the officers’ perception of the Risk form’s usefulness. While only 10% felt the form was *Very Helpful* another 36% felt the form was *Somewhat Helpful* in carrying out their job duties. However, 42% of respondents told us that they consider the Risk form either *Only A Little* or *Not At All Helpful* in performing their job duties. In terms of their overall perception of the form, officers appear to be almost equally divided in their perceptions. When less than 50% of respondents view the form as helpful, it is reasonable to conclude that the form could benefit from revisions or several risk assessment instruments could be consolidated to eradicate superfluous categories and encompass all those that officers feel reflect on the risk status of the client. Five officers chose not to answer this question; 3 from Drug Court.



**Question 27: “In your opinion, what are the most relevant aspects of the form for assessing risk?”**

The evaluation team then asked officers to consider which aspects of the form they consider to be most relevant for assessing risk. We received a total of 322 answers from 135 respondents, meaning that officers provided us with an average of slightly less than 2.5 responses each. The largest percentage of responses cited *Substance Abuse* as one of the most relevant aspects of the form for assessing risk (19%) while 15% stated that the overall *Criminal History* of the offender was an effective category for risk assessment. The next most frequently cited category of *Prior*



*Convictions & Severity of Crimes/ Felonies/ Assaults* is closely connected to the *Criminal History* category but more specific in nature (14%) and 10% of officers told us that the client’s *History of Violence* was relevant for determining their risk status. *Prior Performance on Supervision* and the fact that the risk assessment provides a *Structure for Treatment Plans* were also considered to be relevant aspects of the form. Five percent of those responding to the question told us they *Do Not Use the Form* or that they find *None* of the form’s aspects to be relevant for assessing risk.

The categories officers cited most frequently as relevant for assessing risk refer primarily to offenders’ patterns regarding the three related factors of criminality, substance abuse, and violence. One officer responding positively to the usefulness of the form states, “The most relevant aspect is that it makes the worker take stock of facts in general so he/she can then have a base from which to supervise meaningfully. The overall picture from the aggregate of answers is an accurate gross predictor of risk.” On the other side of the equation, one of the officers who does not feel the risk portion of the form is useful states, “Not relevant - not used. It is a document placed in the file period. The Judgement and Sentence, Pre/Post Sentence Report, Criminal History (etc.) Have to be reviewed whether a Risk Needs is completed or not. These are the tools used to develop a supervision plan not Risk Needs.” Fifteen officers did not answer this question, four of whom were from Drug Court. Later in the report we will discuss whether the same factors cited for determining risk are consistently cited as relevant for determining needs and reassessment of risk as well.

| <b>Q 27 What are the Most Relevant Aspects of the Form for Assessing Risk?</b> |                 |         |
|--|-----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (322) | Percent |
| Substance Abuse  | 61              | 19%     |
| Criminal History   | 47              | 15%     |
| Prior Convictions & Severity of Crimes/ Felonies/ Assaults                     | 45              | 14%     |
| History of Violence  | 31              | 10%     |
| Prior Performance on Supervision   | 24              | 7%      |
| Structure for Treatment Plans  | 19              | 6%      |
| Do Not Use the Form/ None  | 17              | 5%      |
| Attitude/Future Plans  | 14              | 4%      |
| Employment   | 14              | 4%      |
| Prior Probation and Parole   | 13              | 4%      |
| Provides Summary and Basic Info  | 12              | 4%      |
| Family Background/ Current Relationships                                       | 10              | 3%      |
| Education  | 7               | 2%      |
| Special Problems-Sex Offenders, Psychological                                  | 6               | 2%      |
| Fines/ Court Costs/ Fees   | 5               | 1.5%    |

**Table 2**

**Question 28: “What additional information would make the form more relevant for assessing offender risk status?”**

The survey requested that officers give us their impressions of what additional information could be included on the form to make it more relevant. Only eleven percent of officers told the evaluation team that they feel the *Form is Complete/ No Additional Information is Necessary* to increase its relevance. A rate of satisfaction with the Risk Assessment form of only 11% indicates that almost 90% of responding officers are dissatisfied with the form in some manner. The largest

percentage of officers state that information on offenders' *Past Performance on Probation and Parole/ Incarceration/ Absconding History/ Attitude* would make the form more relevant (11.5%) while 10% percent of officers noted that there should be *Higher Score for Drugs/ Specifics of Drug Use & Treatment/ DWI History* in order to make the form relevant in assessing risk. Another 8.5% of officers responded that information regarding *Gang Involvement* should be included on the form for assessing risk. As compared to the previous question, the top three areas that officers feel impact the performance of offenders are criminal history, drug use and gang involvement. Since gang affiliation is often associated with a pattern of violence, this category can be considered related to the offenders' history of violence. There were also three types of responses which cite a general dissatisfaction with the form without note of specific categories: *Get Rid of or Shorten the Form/ Form is Not Relevant or Not Used, Re-evaluate Instrument* and *Make the Form More Specific*. These responses which indicate that officers feel the form should be eliminated or revised without the benefit of specific suggestions account for a total of 19% of officer opinion. The primary revisions suggested by this portion of officers include: *Shorten the Form; Making it More Specific; and Change the Scoring Guidelines or Provide Training* to officers so they know how to better utilize the form to their best advantage.

Several officers provided us with more explanatory answers which highlight problems in policy and procedure that need to be addressed regardless of how the instrument may be revised to be more effective. One officer stated: " Ask more direct and open-ended questions. But I already have a profile sheet that does this. So just get rid of the forms, get us computers and have the bean counters access what they need from our database." Another officer noted: "After a client is interviewed and a post/pre-sentence report is done, an officer has a good idea of the risk status of the offender. The assessment does not provide us with any additional information that I am aware of." The problem with this officer's statement is that in order to be useful for its intended purpose, the RNA instrument must be filled out prior to the offenders' assignment to a particular program. Since this policy has not been established in Probation and Parole, one Community Corrections officer's comment that: "most of the forms are redundant and meaningless. It wastes our times and the taxpayer's money" should be given careful consideration. The chart below shows two other factors that account for more than 5% each of officer opinion on how to increase the relevance of the form: *Family Criminal/ Substance Abuse History* and *Employment & Education Status/ Job Training/ Economic Circumstances*. Forty-four officers chose not to respond to this question, six of whom were from Drug Court. This is roughly one quarter of the survey respondents, which indicates that although officers experience dissatisfaction with the makeup of the form, many are not sure what revisions would make the form more useful.

| <b>Q 28 What Additional Information Should be Included to Increase the Relevance of the Risk Form?</b> |                 |         |
|--|-----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (136) | Percent |
| Past Performance on Probation and Parole/ Incarceration/ Absconding History                            | 16              | 11.5%   |
| Form is Complete/ No Additional Information is Necessary   | 15              | 11%     |
| Higher Score for Drugs/ Specifics of Drug Use & Treatment/ DWI History                                 | 14              | 10%     |
| Gang Involvement   | 12              | 8.5%    |
| Get Rid of or Shorten the Form/Form is Not Relevant or Not Used  | 11              | 8%      |
| Re-evaluate Instrument/ Change Scoring Guidelines/Provide Training                                     | 10              | 7%      |
| Family Criminal/ Substance Abuse History   | 8               | 6%      |
| Employment & Education Status/ Job Training/ Economic Circumstances                                    | 8               | 6%      |
| Support System: Social Interaction/Negative Association/Family Relations                               | 7               | 5%      |

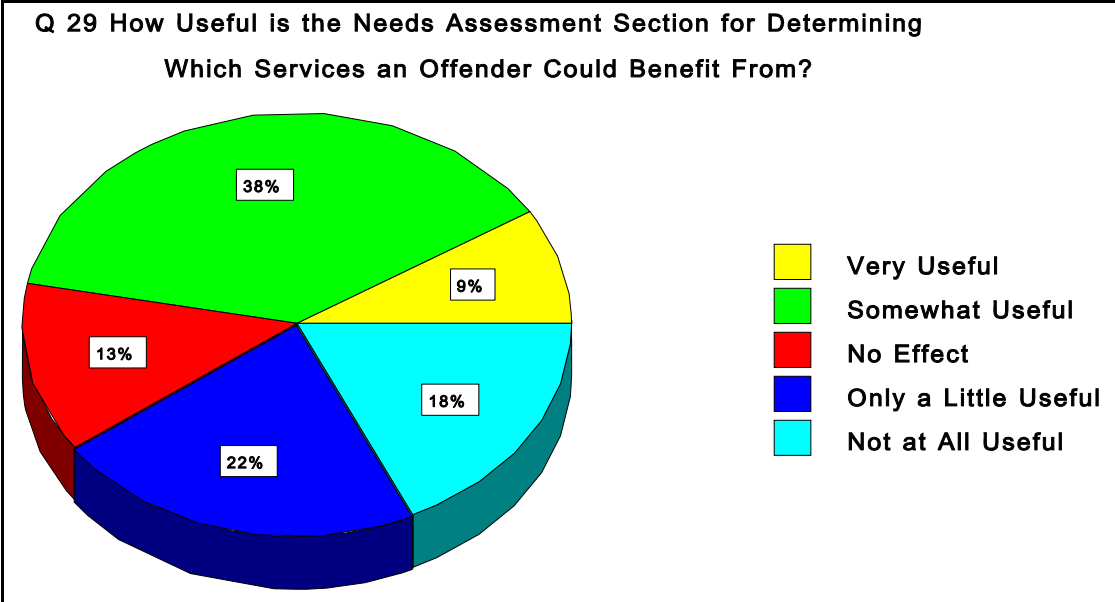
| <b>Q 28 What Additional Information Should be Included to Increase the Relevance of the Risk Form?</b> |   |    |
|--|---|----|
| Higher Scores by Type of Crime/ Prior Offenses/ Recent Arrests/ Victims                                | 7 | 5% |
| Mental Health Status/ Medical Problems   | 5 | 4% |
| Don't Know   | 5 | 4% |
| Childhood History– Sexual Abuse and Upbringing   | 5 | 4% |
| Make the Form More Specific/ Include More Details  | 5 | 4% |
| Sex Offender Status  | 4 | 3% |
| Higher Scores for Violence & Weapons - Current Crime/ Violence History                                 | 4 | 3% |

**Table 3**

## **NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

### **Question 29: “How useful is the Needs Assessment section for determining the services from which an offender could benefit?”**

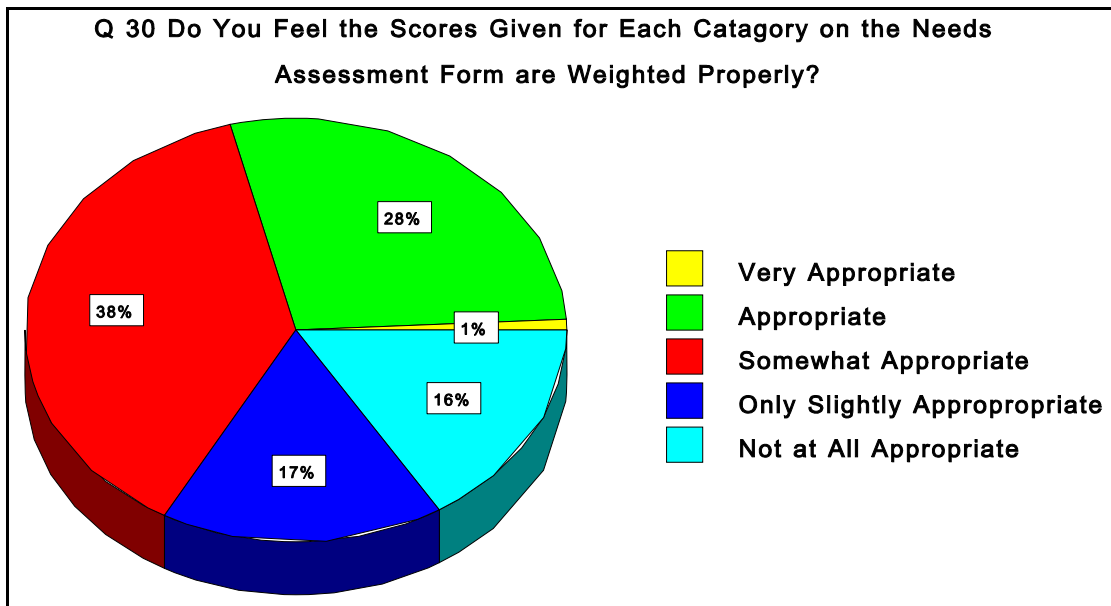
Forty-seven percent of responding officers told the evaluation team that they find the Needs Assessment portion of the instrument either *Very Useful* or *Somewhat Useful*, while 40% told us that they feel the form is *Only a Little Useful* or *Not At All Useful*. The remaining 13% of officers answered that the Needs Assessment section has *No Effect* on determining what services would be beneficial to offenders. Forty percent of officers stating that the form was *Only a Little Useful* or *Not at All Useful* indicates that revisions to this section may be needed in order to increase its relevance for serving the Probation and Parole offender population in New Mexico. Three officers chose not to respond to this question; 2 from Drug Court.



**Question 30: “Do you feel the scores given for each category on the Needs Assessment form are weighted appropriately?”**

We asked officers to give us their opinion regarding the appropriateness of the scores assigned to each section in the Needs Assessment and only 1% feel the scores are *Very Appropriate*, although another 28% feel the scores are *Appropriate*. The largest number of officers (38%) responded that the scores are *Somewhat Appropriate*, indicating that they feel the weights need to be

revised in some areas to accurately reflect the service priorities of offenders. It is significant that one-third of officers told us they feel the scores are either *Only Slightly Appropriate* or *Not At All*



*Appropriate*. With 33% of officers responding that scores are inappropriate, the following question asking officers to specify areas of concern will be particularly important for informing suggested revisions to this portion of the form. A total of 5 officers chose not to respond to this question, 3 from Drug Court.

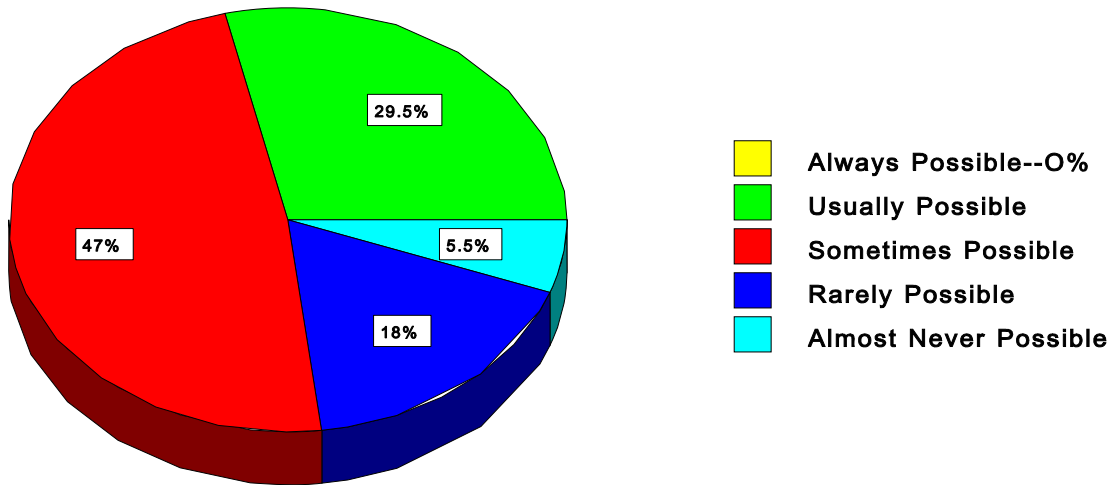
**Question 30a: “Please specify which elements of the weighting system are unclear or inappropriate.”**

One quarter of all officers responding to this question told us *Make Drug Use Equal to or Higher than Alcohol & More Specifics on Drug Use* should be provided. Another 16% of all respondents told us that the *Form is Not Useful or Irrelevant & Categories are Inappropriate*. Nearly 11% of the total expressed the concern that *PPOs are not Qualified to Evaluate Mental or Emotional Stability* of offenders. Nine percent told us that *More Accurate, Specific Scoring for Health Status and Handicap* is needed. Other responses include officers stating that the *Guidelines for Weighting Factors are Unclear or Subjective* (6%) and that *PPOs Need More Training & Information on Rationales for Weighting* (7%). These responses account for over three-quarters of officer opinion and they include four specific categories where they feel there are problems: Drug Use, Emotional Stability, Mental Ability and Health. The rest of the most frequently cited categories refer to overall problems with the form’s accuracy, level of detail, categories’ irrelevance for determining needs, and the fact that PPOs need more training or information in order to use the form appropriately. Only four officers told us that they feel the *Scores are OK/ No Revisions are Needed*.

The three categories PPOs feel they are not professionally qualified to evaluate are: Emotional Stability, Mental Ability and Sexual Behavior. They state that they do not have backgrounds in counseling and also that relying on self-report for some of this information may be problematic. Several officers also draw attention to the fact that they believe sex offender status is much more relevant for determining needs than the overly general scores provided under sexual behavior. Other officers note that the form does not incorporate a place to include unique considerations of specific individuals which may influence their needs status. With only 4% of respondents telling us *Scores are OK/ No Revisions are Needed*, it is reasonable to conclude that most officers feel the form would benefit from changes or even a complete overhaul. Almost 50% (46.5%) of officers answering this question cite not a specific category but an aspect of the overall instrument that concerns them. This indicates that the use of the form may not improve drastically if only certain sections are minimally adjusted. Officers appear to feel that the overall usefulness of the form is compromised by its structure, content, or their lack of understanding of the implementation process, particularly rationales for scoring weights. Over one-third of officers respond to this survey did not answer this question, however 23 of the 61 individuals who did not respond told us that they felt the weighting system was either *Very Appropriate or Appropriate* which would serve as adequate reason for skipping question 30a. The number of missing responses then decreases to 35 officers.

| <b>Q 30a “Which Elements of the Weighting System are Unclear or Inappropriate ?”</b> |                |         |
|--|----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (94) | Percent |
| Make Drug Use Equal to or Higher than Alcohol & More Specifics on Drug Use           | 24             | 25.5%   |
| Form is Not Useful/ Irrelevant & Categories are Inappropriate                        | 15             | 16%     |
| PPOs are not Qualified to Evaluate Emotional or Mental Stability                     | 10             | 11%     |
| More Accurate, Specific Scoring for Health Status and Handicap                       | 8              | 9.5%    |
| PPOs Need More Training & Information on Rationales for Weighting                    | 7              | 7%      |
| Guidelines for Weighting Factors are Unclear, Subjective                             | 6              | 6.5%    |
| Individual Clients Have Considerations Not Incorporated Into the Form                | 5              | 5.5%    |
| PPO Not Qualified to Evaluate Sex Dysfunction/Sex Offender Status Important          | 4              | 4%      |
| Scores are OK/ No Revisions are Needed   | 4              | 4%      |

**Q 31 With All of the Referral Systems Available to You, How Often do You Feel It is Possible to Provide All Offenders with the Services They Need?**



**Q 30a “Which Elements of the Weighting System are Unclear or Inappropriate ?”**

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| The Instrument is too Vague and Generalized; Needs More Flexibility       | 3 | 3% |
| PPO Impression of Client Needs: Maximum, Medium, Minimum/ Delete Low      | 2 | 2% |
| Scoring Measures on Assessment and Reassessment Differ/ This is Confusing | 2 | 2% |
| Score For Employment Too High   | 2 | 2% |
| Need Better Mechanism to Account for Client’s Violence History            | 2 | 2% |

**Table 4**

**Question 31: “With the referral system available to you, how often do you feel it is possible to provide all offenders with the services they need?”**

Not a single officer told us that they feel it is *Always Possible* to provide offenders with the services they need, although 29.5% of officers state that it is *Usually Possible* to provide offenders with the services they need. Almost half (47%) of respondents told us that it is *Sometimes Possible* to provide offenders with needed services while another 18% told us that it is *Rarely Possible* to provide the necessary services. Five and a half percent state that it is *Almost Never Possible* to provide the services they believe offenders need. These statistics show that 70% of officers feel it is only *Sometimes, Rarely or Almost Never Possible* to provide necessary services to offenders. This large percentage of PPOs, who do not believe they have access to necessary services, indicates that offenders are not receiving maximum benefit from supervision. Three officers did not respond to this question, one of whom was from Drug Court.

**Question 31a: “If you feel offenders are not being adequately serviced, please name the additional services you would recommend incorporating into the system.”**

Considering that only 30% of officers feel that they have access to all the necessary services from which offenders would benefit, it is important to determine the additional services PPOs would recommend incorporating into the system. The service PPOs most frequently recommend for incorporation into the system is *Inpatient Drug Treatment - Long Term & More Facilities* (15%). While some areas do have this service available they claim they need more facilities and in other areas, PPOs claim that Inpatient Drug Treatment is not an available service. Respondents also cited *Mental Health Services and Counseling* (11%) as one of the services with limited accessibility. They claim that qualified counselors and facilities are not accessible enough to serve all offenders in need. Another service area which officers feel is critical and not readily available is *Treatment & Services for Sex Offenders* (10%). The concern officers express regarding lack of treatment for sex offenders echoes their sense that information about *Sex Offender Status* should be included on the Needs portion of the RNA instrument. PPOs seem to feel at a loss regarding how to address the Risk Status or Needs of sex offenders because they have not been provided with a proper evaluation tool for this purpose nor do they have access to appropriate services. PPOs also state an overall sense that the referral system and providers at their disposal are inadequate to provide services from which offenders could benefit. Hence they recommend a general *Improvement in the Quality of the Referral System and Providers* (8%).

Since substance abuse is noted as one of the primary indicators of Risk, it is crucial that officers have adequate treatment services available to them in this area. Increased availability and quality of mental health services and sex offender treatment would also address what PPOs express as a lack of expertise on their part in this area. If they were able to refer to appropriate and qualified providers they would not have to bear the entire burden of evaluating the emotional and mental stability of their clients, a task they feel unprepared to accomplish. Quotes from several officers may help to further clarify the situation. One officer from Farmington states: “We have only six service components available to offenders, there are probably 25 to 30 components that are needed by most offenders” and another states “small communities do not have treatment facilities available that are ordered by the court.” A third officer makes the point that “Better Probation and Parole officer training for how to select great treatment programs versus mediocre treatment; how to appropriately match the needs of the client to the program versus just sending them to any open bed. More emphasis from top levels as to importance and responsibility to see that treatment is appropriately accomplished.” Officers also note that treatment for sex offenders is inadequate or unavailable, that more subsidized or sliding fee scale counseling services are needed to serve all offenders and that many of their clients could benefit from “life skills” training separate from psychological counseling or substance abuse treatment.

| Q 31a Name Additional Services You would Recommend Incorporating into the System |                 |         |
|--|-----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (202) | Percent |
| Inpatient Drug treatment-Long Term & More Facilities                             | 31              | 15%     |
| Increasing Accessibility of Mental Health Services/ Counseling                   | 23              | 11.5%   |
| Treatment & Services for Sex Offenders   | 20              | 10%     |
| Improvement in the Quality of the Referral System and Providers                  | 17              | 8%      |
| Financial Assistance for Counseling: State-Funded, Sliding Scale, Free           | 14              | 7%      |
| Adult Education: Life Skills, Job Skills, GED                                    | 14              | 7%      |
| Halfway Houses/ Day Treatment/ Daily-Check-ins                                   | 14              | 7%      |
| Long Term Residential Treatment  | 13              | 6.5%    |
| Broader Scope of Counseling: Marital, Family, Dual Diagnosis                     | 9               | 4.5%    |



| Q 31a Name Additional Services You would Recommend Incorporating into the System |   |      |
|--|---|------|
| Housing Assistance and Medical Care  | 9 | 4.5% |
| Counseling Logistics: Locations & Times Available and Transportation             | 8 | 4%   |
| Issue Oriented Services: Max Supervision ,Gang Intervention, Anger Management    | 8 | 4%   |
| Facilitate PPO Responsibility: More Officers, Better Equipment, Less Paperwork   | 8 | 4%   |
| Inadequate Services Available in the Area/ Too Rural                             | 7 | 3%   |
| Counseling   | 4 | 2%   |
| Increase Consequences for Probation/Parole Violations                            | 4 | 2%   |

**Table 5**

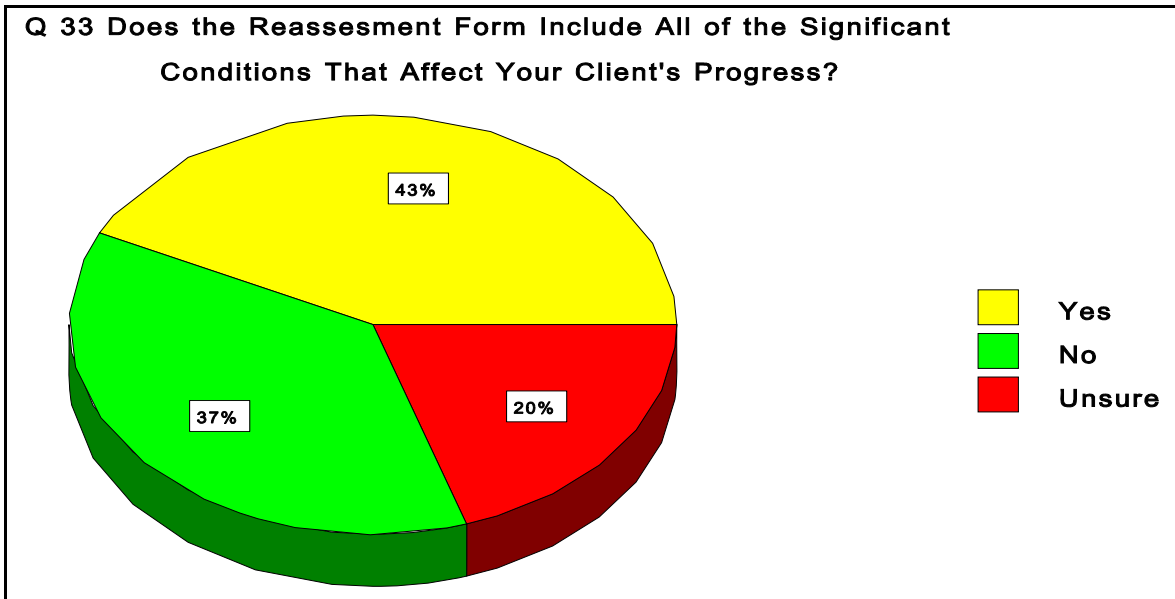
## **REASSESSMENT SECTION**

### **Question 32: “How accurate do you feel the Reassessment Form is in evaluating your clients’ progress?”**

When asked about the accuracy of the Reassessment Form for evaluating the progress of clients, less than 2% of officers state that they feel the form is *Very Accurate* while 24% believe the form is *Generally Accurate*. Over half of respondents state that the form is only *Somewhat Accurate* (51%) while another 13.5% believe the form is *Rarely Accurate*. Ten percent of officers told us that they feel the form is *Very Inaccurate*. Only 25% of respondents express a measure of confidence in the accuracy of the form and the remaining three quarters state the form is *Somewhat or Rarely Accurate* or *Very Inaccurate* in terms of its ability to evaluate offender progress. This indicates that officers feel the Reassessment form is in need of revision in order to accurately portray the degree of progress made by clients between the initial assessment and the reassessment. Five officers chose not to answer this question, three from Drug Court.

### **Question 33: Does the Reassessment Form include all of the Significant Conditions that Affect your Clients Progress?”**

Forty three percent of responding officers answered *Yes* to this question telling us that they believe the Reassessment Form does include all significant conditions, however, another 37% answered *No* stating that they do not believe the form includes all significant conditions. Twenty percent of the officers answering this question state that they are *Unsure* as to whether the form includes all significant conditions or not. Since officers holding an opinion are almost equally divided between Yes and No, it is important to investigate further what categories officers would recommend adding to the form to increase its relevance. Question 34 looks at this issue in depth. Eight officers chose not to respond to question 33, three of whom supervise Drug Court clients.



**Question 33a: “If you answered No or Unsure, please describe the categories you would add to improve the form.”**

The largest percentage of officers feel that the Reassessment form should include *More Information on Employment History and Current Employment* in order to increase its relevance (12%) while an almost equal number simply state that the *Form Doesn't Measure Progress/ Don't Use the Form* (11%). Ten percent of responding officers report that the Reassessment form should include more information on *Compliance with Probation and Parole/ Reporting & Special*

*Conditions.* Two categories received eight cites each (8.5%), officers want more information on the Reassessment Form about *Counseling- Attendance/Completed & Mental Health Specifics* and they feel more information on *Past and Current Drug and Alcohol Abuse* would increase the accuracy of the form. Officers also note that information on *Recent Violations and Arrests* or on the general *Attitude & Commitment* of the offender towards treatment would enhance the relevance of the form.

Although some of the categories on the Reassessment form either directly or indirectly address some of the areas noted above, officers feel that the form does not request enough specific information to be useful in evaluating any progress the client has made during their tenure in the program. Some note that their case notes are more readily oriented towards demonstrating offender’s progress with their treatment plans over time. Officers’ lack of confidence in the Reassessment section of the form is evidenced by the fact that the form’s inability to measure progress is the second most frequent response.

Several officers provided narrative responses which explain what they see to be some of the inherent flaws in the Reassessment process. One officer told us: “The current form does not provide for the offender being reassessed due to no compliance, revocation or being placed on Intensive Supervision. [Offender] should not automatically score less just because, [reassessment] should actually be based on progress or lack thereof.” Officers expressed concern that the Reassessment was very similar to the Assessment as well as expressing concern about the differences between the two forms. This seems to indicate a low level of understanding on the part of PPOs regarding the structure and rationale for certain features of the RNA instrument. Another officer states: “The reassessment is almost a carbon copy of the assessment form; the reassessment does not appear to be designed as a tracking/ monitoring tool - only repeats the initial assessment.” It may be worthwhile to provide additional information or training to officer regarding the design of the form and why it is thought to be an effective instrument. It may also be worthwhile for the Probation and Parole Division to consider training a designated number of officers in assessment procedures and the use of the RNA and have them conduct intake for all offenders prior to assignation to particular programs. This strategy would not only decrease the paperwork load on supervising officers but would increase the probability of implementing the form in a more standardized manner across programs and regions. Of all officers responding *No* to Question 33 about whether the form included all significant conditions, 16 officers did not provide details or suggestions for additions to the form that would improve its efficacy.

| Q 33a What Categories Should be Added to Improve the Reassessment Form? |                |         |
|---|----------------|---------|
|   | Frequency (94) | Percent |
| Employment History and Current Employment                               | 11             | 12%     |
| Form Doesn't Measure Progress/ Don't Use the Form                       | 10             | 11%     |
| Compliance with Probation and Parole/ Reporting & Special Conditions    | 9              | 10%     |

| Q 33a What Categories Should be Added to Improve the Reassessment Form? |   |      |
|---|---|------|
| Counseling-Attendance/ Completed & Mental Health, Specifics             | 8 | 8.5% |
| Past and Current Drug and Alcohol Abuse                                 | 8 | 8.5% |
| Recent Violations or Arrests  | 7 | 7.5% |
| Offender Attitude & Commitment  | 7 | 7.5% |
| Family Relationships/ Current Relationships/ Support Systems            | 6 | 7%   |
| Case Plans/ Accomplishing Goals, Changes Made                           | 5 | 5%   |
| Violence History  | 4 | 4%   |
| Paying Costs-Restitution Fees   | 3 | 3%   |
| Reason for Reassessment-Absconding, Violated, Other Problems            | 3 | 3%   |
| Get Rid of the Form/ Duplicates Information                             | 3 | 3%   |
| Gang Affiliation  | 3 | 3%   |
| Community Resources/ Community Complaints                               | 3 | 3%   |
| Education   | 2 | 2%   |
| Expanded Priors   | 2 | 2%   |

**Table 6**

**Question 34: “Which three indicators on the Reassessment form do you think contribute most to offenders success in accomplishing the goals outlined in their case plans?”**

The last two questions in this section of the survey asked officers to provide us with an overall sense of which aspects of offender behavior included in the Risk Needs Assessment instrument they consider to be effective predictors of offender success or failure. We received 251 responses to question 34, averaging 1.5 answers per officer. Twenty percent of officers stated that abstaining from *Drug or Alcohol Use* is a primary indicator of offender success and almost equal number of officers (19%) told us that maintaining *Employment* is a primary indicator of success. Twelve percent of respondents state that *Client Attitude and Compliance with Imposed Conditions* is a prime indicator of offender success and 10% tell us that *Family and Peer Relationships/ Lack of Negative Associations/ No Gang Affiliation* is another effective indicator of success. In terms of both success and failure, officers told us that *Drug or Alcohol Use* and *Employment* are the two most important factors. *Client Attitude and Compliance with Imposed Conditions* was cited third most frequently in both Questions 34 and 35 as contributing to offenders’ success or failure in accomplishing the goals outlined in their case plans. Answers to this question reflect responses we received to questions 27 and 28 that addressed the relevance of the Risk Assessment portion of the RNA. Officers stated that *Substance Abuse* was the most relevant aspect of the form, one of the core behaviors on which they needed more specific information and that drug and alcohol use should receive higher scores. The emphasis on abstention from substance use as a key feature of offender progress is consistent throughout this Status Report. Twenty four officers did not answer this question.

| Q 34 Indicators of Offender Success Measured on the Reassessment Form |                 |         |
|---|-----------------|---------|
|   | Frequency (251) | Percent |
| Drug or Alcohol Use   | 51              | 20%     |
| Employment  | 47              | 19%     |
| Client Attitude and Compliance with Imposed Conditions                | 31              | 12%     |

| Q 34 Indicators of Offender Success Measured on the Reassessment Form           |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| Family & Peer Relationships/ Lack of Negative Associations/ No Gang Affiliation | 24 | 10% |
| Use of Community Resources  | 14 | 6%  |
| None  | 14 | 6%  |
| Financial Conditions/ Economic Background/ Residence                            | 13 | 5%  |
| Supervision Plan/ Client Problems/ Objectives                                   | 12 | 5%  |
| Criminal History/Arrest Record/Prior Offenses                                   | 11 | 4%  |
| Client Attitude Cooperation   | 11 | 4%  |
| Counseling/Therapy & Health   | 11 | 4%  |
| Education   | 8  | 3%  |
| Past Performance on Probation and Parole/ Revocations/ New Arrests              | 4  | 2%  |

**Table 7**

**Question 35: “Which three indicators on the Reassessment Form are the best predictors of offender failure?”**

Over one fourth of responding officers told us that *Drug or Alcohol Use* was a primary indicator of offender failure (26%) while 16.5% reported that *Lack of Employment* was an effective predictor of offender failure. Again, *Client Attitude and Compliance with Imposed Conditions* was cited third most frequently as an effective indicator (15%) and 12% of PPOs told us that *Criminal History & Prior Felonies/ Age at First Conviction* is a prime indicator of failure. These answers echo those above as well as reiterating some of the opinions expressed by PPOs in response to previous questions. Drug and Alcohol use is considered the primary indicator of offender failure and when asked about the appropriateness of the weighting system, 25% of respondents told us that more specifics on drug use should be provided and that drug use should be weighted equal to or higher than alcohol use on the needs section of the instrument. Likewise, when asked what additional services they would recommend incorporating into the system, 15% of officers told us that more long-term, inpatient drug treatment facilities are needed. In terms of the Reassessment form, although *Drug Use* was among the top five most frequently cited answers, information about *Employment* was the top answer in terms of categories to add to improve the Reassessment Form. Also, *Compliance with Probation and Parole* was cited as a category that would be useful on the Reassessment form just as it was cited as a primary indicator of offender success or failure. Officers also told us that information about *Past Performance on Probation and Parole* would increase the relevance of the Risk assessment portion of the RNA. Fifteen PPOs provided no response.

| Q 35 Best Indicators of Offender Failure                   |                 |         |
|--|-----------------|---------|
|  | Frequency (291) | Percent |
| Drug or Alcohol Use  | 74              | 26%     |
| Lack of Employment   | 48              | 16.5%   |
| Client Attitude and Compliance with Imposed Conditions     | 41              | 15%     |
| Criminal History & Prior Felonies/ Age at First Conviction | 35              | 12%     |

| Q 35 Best Indicators of Offender Failure   |    |      |
|--|----|------|
| Negative Associations/ Poor Quality Family or Peer Relationships/ Gang Affiliation | 21 | 7%   |
| Non-Payment of Fines, Fees and Restitution/ Poor Financial Management              | 16 | 5.5% |
| Prior Performance on Probation or Parole/ Revocation History                       | 14 | 5%   |
| Non-Use or Over-Use of Community Resources   | 12 | 4%   |
| None   | 10 | 3%   |
| Attendance at Counseling   | 7  | 2%   |
| Lack of Education  | 6  | 2%   |
| Living Situation/ Residence  | 6  | 2%   |

**Table 8**

## **SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS**

As was stated in the introduction to this report, analysis of data collected from this portion of the survey is oriented towards providing the Division of Probation and Parole with recommendations regarding the use of the Risk Needs Assessment Instrument that would ultimately improve the quality of offender supervision and resocialization programs. This section has addressed the fact that there are foundational inconsistencies in terms of the implementation of the RNA instrument which may obviate the productivity of suggesting particular revisions to the instrument or even the strategy of collapsing this instrument with others used within the Division to generally consolidate paperwork for which officers are responsible. The survey data allowed the evaluation team to determine that not only is there a lack of standardization as to when the RNA is administered but even for those 60% of officers who consistently administer the form at Case Opening, the intended use of the form is undermined by the fact that it is meant to be administered before offenders are assigned to particular programs. Assignment to programs within probation and parole before the administration of the RNA indicates that risk assessment and supervision levels are being determined through other means. Since less than 50% of respondents view the RNA as helpful it may be useful to substantially revise or eradicate the form or amend the procedures through which the form is implemented. Analysis of Subsequent sections of the survey may provide more information regarding the unofficial means officers employ to determine the risk status of their clients.

PPOs told us that the most relevant aspects of the Risk Assessment form are those sections that cover substance abuse, and patterns of criminal behavior and violence. Only 11% of officers told us that the form is fine as it is and the primary suggestions were to include information about past performance on Probation/Parole and more information on drug use and gang involvement. Forty percent of respondents regarded the form as less than substantially useful and one third of officers told us that they do not feel the weights attributed to Needs categories on the form are appropriate. Officers feel there are overall problems with the form as well as specific areas that need revision. The particular areas of concern are Drug Use, Emotional Stability, Mental Ability and Health. In terms of overall issues with the Needs Assessment, officers tell us that the form needs increased accuracy, level of detail, removal of irrelevant categories and provision of more training or information regarding the form's makeup in order to use it appropriately. PPOs also feel that sex offender status is more relevant for determining needs than the current category of "sexual behavior" and that there may be problems with reliability of information that comes from offender

self-report. Seventy percent of officers indicated that they feel it is only sometimes or rarely possible to provide offenders with necessary services, hence offenders may not be receiving maximum benefit from supervision. Officers told us that the primary additional services they would incorporate into the system are 1) more long-term, inpatient drug facilities, 2) increased accessibility of counseling and mental health services (subsidized or sliding fee scale) and 3) treatment and services for sex offenders. Eight percent of officers feel that a general improvement in the quality of the referral system and providers is needed.

A full 75% of respondents told us the Reassessment form was only somewhat or rarely accurate and nearly 40% of officers told us that the form does not include all significant conditions that affect offender progress. Officers told us that the form should contain more information on employment history and current employment and on compliance with probation parole. They also said that more information regarding attendance and completion of counseling and past versus current substance abuse would be helpful in assessing offender progress. Overall PPOs would like the form to be more specific and feel that case notes more readily portray the progress of their clients. It may be beneficial to provide officers with more training regarding the structure of the form and the rationales for scoring weights, however, the most useful strategy may be to designate a certain number of PPOs to conduct all Risk Needs Assessment of offenders before assignment to programs in order to standardize the administration of the instrument and cut back on the paperwork load for supervising officers. There are some consistencies throughout the responses we received in this section of the survey that officers emphasized in their responses regarding indicators of offender success or failure. The top three indicators for both success and failure were: 1) substance use 2) employment and 3) compliance with Imposed Conditions. These indicators echo the feelings of PPOs regarding the usefulness and relevance of the RNA instrument, in that they feel more information on these issues should be incorporated into the forms in lieu of some categories they have deemed superfluous. According to the answers we received from surveyed officers, the Risk Needs Assessment Instrument currently in use by the PPD is in need of significant revision in addition to implementing appropriate standards for its administration that are not currently in place.