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**STATUS REPORT: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE PROBATION
AND PAROLE OFFICER SURVEY – COMPUTER USAGE/ TRAINING**

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Background/Goals and Objectives of Research

This status report is one in a series of deliverables for our current New Mexico Corrections Department (NMCD), Probation and Parole Division (PPD) evaluation of Community Corrections (CC) Programs statewide. The background and context for this third installment of status reports can be found in the initial two status reports which describe the process through which we were awarded the contract and how the tasks contained in the Scope of Services are delineated. The initial status report also describes the study design in detail and its relationship to the objectives of the evaluation research.

The survey was divided into the following ten sections and the data collected and analysis performed will be delivered to PPD in a total of seven status reports as follows:

Job Satisfaction-Report #1 (June 1998)
Job Training-Report # 2 (December 1998)
Computer Information & Overall Use of Current RNA-Report # 3 February 1999)
Department Forms: Risk-Report # 4 (April 1999)
Department Forms: Needs-Report #4 (April 1999)
Department Forms: Reassessment-Report #4(April 1999)
Scoring Procedures- Report # 5 (June 1999)
Measuring Outcomes- Report # 5 (June 1999)
Overview- Report #6 (July 1999)
Summary- Report #7 (August 1999)

This third status report focuses on the use of computers by Probation and Parole Officers in fulfilling their job responsibilities on a daily basis. To ascertain the importance of computer usage and computer knowledge we asked PPOs questions regarding the frequency of their computer usage and we asked them to evaluate the adequacy of their computer knowledge in terms of their ability to use computers to facilitate completion of daily tasks. We further requested that PPOs prioritize those tasks for which they regularly use a computer and tell us which they consider most important and to let us know on which aspects of computer usage they could benefit from further training. Due to results received through a survey the ISR had previously conducted on computer usage within the Community Corrections program, we anticipated the possibility that PPOs may not be currently equipped with what they considered to be adequate computer training or equipment.

In order to account for the fact that PPOs may not have adequate equipment, software or other technology, we asked officers to tell us how they envision computers best facilitating their daily responsibilities *if* they were equipped with both proper training and machinery. This final question provided important information in terms of how aware officers are of the capacity of computers to facilitate their workload. Finally, in this report we will discuss responses to an additional question not related to computer usage. Question 25 was aimed at soliciting officers' opinions about the relevance and usefulness of the current risk/needs assessment instruments for special populations. The ultimate goal of all sections within the survey is to contribute pertinent data to the consolidation of paperwork, the task of informing revisions to current instruments and procedures, and recommendations for procedural changes which will facilitate case management duties and completion for assigned tasks.

Research Strategy, Scope and Objectives

This status report primarily covers issues related to adequate provision of computer equipment and appropriateness of training provided to Probation Parole Officers on the equipment available to them. This section of the survey requests officer feedback and suggestions regarding computer usage and training and the relevance of current risk/needs assessment tools for use determining the risk status, needs, and case management strategies for special populations (Intensive Supervision; Drug Court; Community Corrections; and Domestic Violence). This portion of the survey which focuses on computer usage helps to contextualize previous sections which dealt with job satisfaction and the overall basic training received by PPOs at the initiation of their employment and any follow-up refresher courses. The primary connection between these sections is that the facilitation of workload through automation of duties and a decrease in repetition of tasks through use of technology may affect levels of job satisfaction. Furthermore, revisions to basic training may be recommended based on the intersection of overall duties and the capabilities of computers to contributing to the completion of daily responsibilities. Information on computer usage may also provide us with a mechanism for streamlining paperwork and developing possible recommendations for automating portions of associated assessment, service provision and client management tasks.

Data Collection, Automation and Analysis Strategies

As stated in our previous two reports, when the survey was mailed to all Probation and Parole officers in New Mexico in March 1998, we initially encountered resistance from PPOs, resulting from an environment of distrust between line officers and supervisors. According to PPOs, they were anxious that ramifications would result from any negative responses or criticism they might have included in their survey responses. This initial feedback was confirmed by responses to a survey question in which a significant number of respondents referred to a lack of trust between themselves and their superiors, citing *Bureaucracy/ Lack of Support or Recognition from Administration and Management* (26%). The Institute received 135 surveys out of 201 sent out to the regional offices, comprising a 68% response rate. To analyze narrative responses, the evaluation team used a standardized strategy to develop coding schemes for the qualitative data we collected.

In brief, developing coding schemes to facilitate analysis of the qualitative data contained in the narrative sections of the survey entails reading a majority of the responses and continually developing categorical descriptives into which answers can be accurately distributed. This process requires that the coder achieve a level of saturation at which answers no longer require the creation of new categories. Saturation indicates that the substantive content of responses has been exhausted to the point that all data can be effectively accounted for by the categories available. Answers are then distributed within the parameters of the developed categories while guarding against significant overlap or contradictory indications. Our analysis in third status report on **Computer Usage and Training** will be focused on ascertaining the level of computer knowledge currently possessed by PPOs versus the level of knowledge they deem necessary for effective facilitation of their daily responsibilities. We have also asked PPOs to give us a sense of which important tasks they regularly use computers for and which tasks they envision would be made easier through automation and reduction of paperwork. The evaluation team will then isolate the strengths and weaknesses in this area and isolate strategies for addressing areas of deficit. We have also coded the narrative

responses to the question about the usefulness of risk/needs assessment forms in dealing with special populations and will discuss the feedback we received from officers regarding the forms' lack of relevance.

Preliminary Findings and Interpretation of Data

In this third status report, analyses have been completed on questions 20 through 25, which covers the section on **Computer Usage and Training** as well as the Use of the Current RNA for Special Populations. Twenty-eight supervisors responded out of a total of 35 employed by the PPD, meaning approximately 80% of Supervisor opinion is accounted for in our data. Conversely, approximately 60% of Line Staff opinion is accounted for, in that we received 100 surveys from officers out of a possible 166 potential line staff respondents. The response rate can be alternately presented by stating that of the 135 respondents who completed the survey, 79% were Probation and Parole Officers and 21% were Probation/Parole Office Supervisors. The respondents were further divided by type of program, with roughly 3% of respondents stating that they worked with more than one program, such as Regular and Intensive Supervision or Community Corrections and Drug Court. The number of officers who reported having a combined caseload was quite small, 3% of the total, accounting for only 4 officers, therefore the sample size for this subpopulation distorts the significance of their responses when presented as percentages.

Percentage of Survey Respondents by Type of Probation/Parole Officer Caseload							
Regular Supervision	61%	Intensive Supervision	12%	Community Corrections	9%	Drug Court	7%

For the purpose of analyzing this third section of the survey on **Computer Usage/Training and Use of the RNA for Special Populations**, we hypothesize that the responses we received regarding the use of computers and the RNA instruments influence the ways in which PPOs view their roles, their responsibilities, their relationships with supervisors and clientele an ultimately their job satisfaction and sense of effectiveness. The answers to questions 20-25 provided by the Probation/Parole Officers have been analyzed for the insights they provide into the efficiency of current instrumentation, policy, procedure and the quality of staff interaction within the Division. A discussion of the officers' answers follows with tables and graphs which display the data collected. The discussion includes any possible suggestions or recommendations the evaluation team was able to provide for addressing strengths and weakness that have been identified.

Question 20: “How often do you use a computer to complete your daily tasks?”

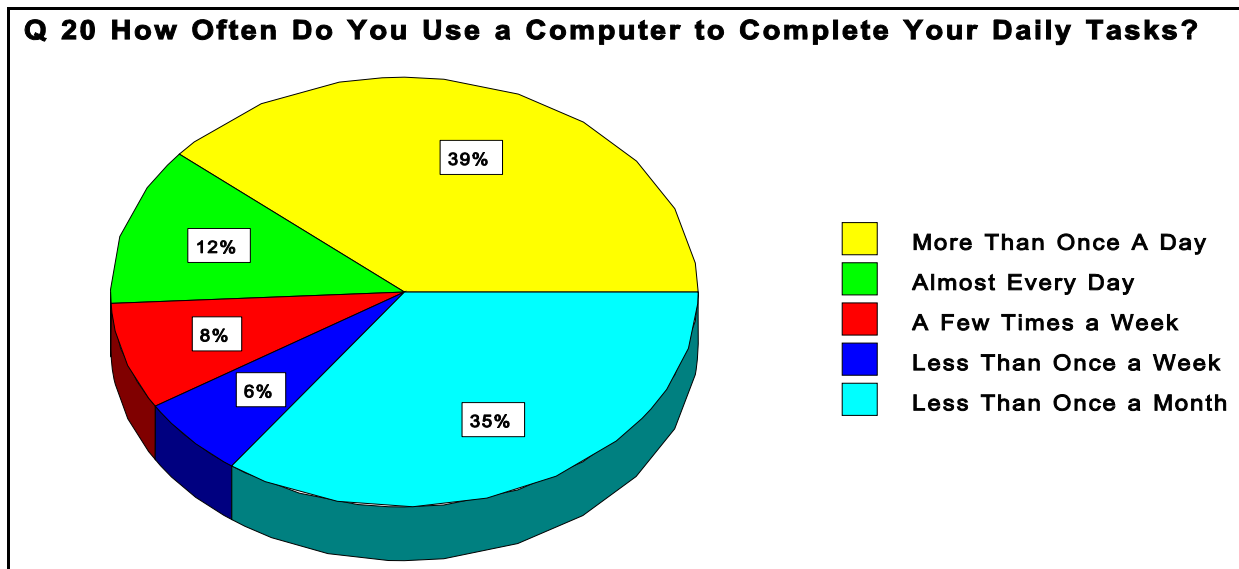
This question provided officers with a five point Likert scale on which they were to plot the frequency of their normal computer usage. Over half of the officers (51%) told us that they use their computers approximately once a day to complete daily tasks. Almost 40% of officers (39%) stated that they use their computer *More Than Once a Day*, while another 12% stated that they use their

computer *Almost Once a Day*. Considering that the largest percentage of officers report using their computers on average on a daily basis, it would seem important that they are equipped with adequate, up-to-date equipment with which they will have the opportunity to facilitate their workload. In later questions within this section of the survey, many officers report that they do not have proper equipment or have no computer at all at their disposal. This lack of appropriate computer access should be addressed by the Probation and Parole Division, in view of the fact that over half of the survey respondents use their computers on average daily to fulfill regular responsibilities. Over one-third of respondents told us that they use their computers *Less Than Once A Month*, however, it is difficult to tell whether this is due to a lack of appropriate equipment and training. Subsequent questions should help to clarify the situation.

Figure 1

Question 21: “What are the two most important tasks for which you would use a computer?”

The evaluation team felt it would be useful to know which tasks facilitated by computer usage are considered to be most important to PPOs. The tasks for which a computer is used to facilitate completion can then be compared to those tasks considered most central to carrying out daily



responsibilities and effective case management. In this way, we can see which aspects of the workload would be eased by proper equipment and training as well as isolating those areas that may suffer most seriously from lack of adequate equipment. Eight categories were developed for coding the narrative responses we received from PPOs. Two hundred and twenty-seven responses were provided by 94 officers, averaging more than two responses per officer. Thirty-five percent of officers told us that one of the important tasks they use computers for is *Report Writing--Pre-Sentence and Probation Violation Reports*. Another 16% of officers told us that they use computers to compose their *Daily Ledger/Chronological Log and Contact Notes*, documents which are also used to track offender progress on a daily basis. An additional 13% stated more generally that they use their computers for *Tracking Offender Progress, Case Management & Updating Files*. Considering

that documentation of offender progress through the mechanisms of regular reporting, daily logs and updating files is integral to case management duties and that officers regularly use computers for this purpose, the case for provision of appropriate equipment by the Division is strongly supported. It would also seem reasonable to assume that the word processing functions mentioned by 14% of officers also serve to facilitate or support case management duties. Since nearly two thirds of responding officers (64%) told us that daily case management duties are among the two most important tasks for which they use a computer. This would indicate that computers are central to the facilitation of PPOs primary job responsibilities. Four percent of respondents told us either that they *Don't Have a Computer*, or *Don't Have Enough Training* to efficiently use a computer.

Table 1

Q 21 Two Most Important Tasks for which Computers are Used		
	Total Frequency(227)	Total Percent
Report Writing-Pre-Sentence Reports/Probation Violation	80	35%
Daily Ledger/Chronological Log and Contact Notes	35	16%
Word Processing-Memos, Letters, Correspondence, Meeting Notes	32	14%
Tracking Offender Progress, Case Management & Updating Files	29	13%
Other Forms/Paperwork-(Investigation Requests/Discharge Requests)	17	7%
Accessing Databases/Research/Records Check with Agencies: DA Courts APD-Criminal History	16	7%
Monitoring Workload	9	4%
Don't Have a Computer/ Don't Have Enough Training	9	4%

Missing=6

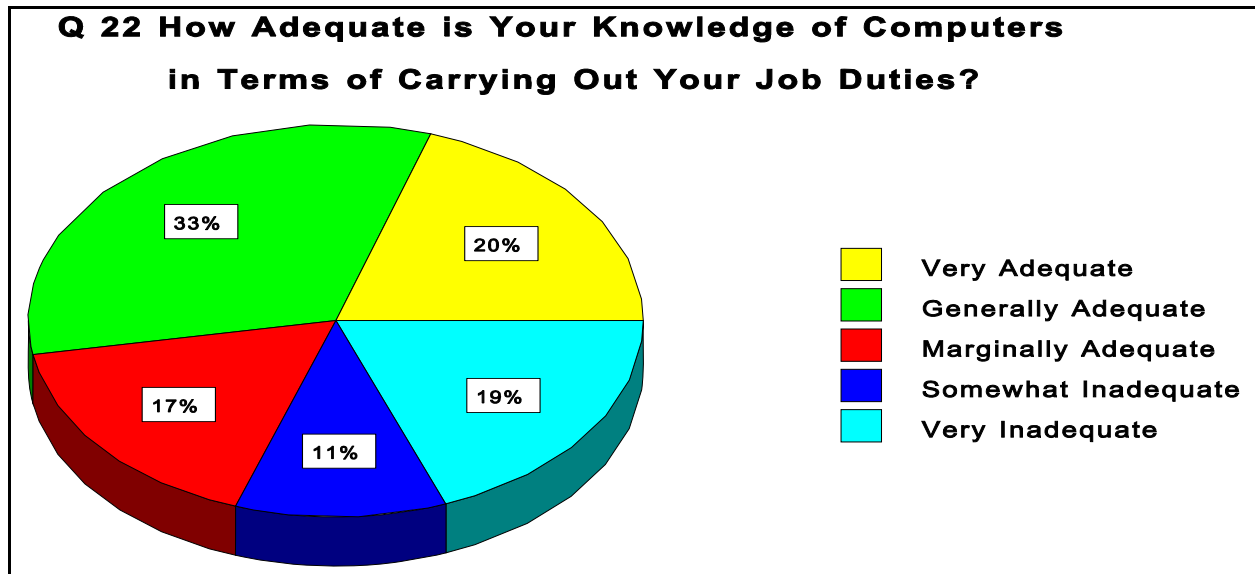
Question 22: “How adequate is your knowledge of computers in terms of carrying out your job duties?”

In order to follow up on the issue of computer training, the evaluation team asked officers to rate the adequacy of their computer knowledge on a five point Likert scale in terms of their ability to carry out daily responsibilities. Over half (53%) of respondents state that their knowledge of computers is either *Very Adequate* or *Generally Adequate*. Therefore, the combined total of officers stating that their knowledge is above *Marginally Adequate* falls at 53% while the remaining 47% feel that their knowledge is either *Marginal*, *Somewhat* or *Very Inadequate*. Thus, 47% of respondents indicate that they feel their knowledge base regarding computers could be improved. The responses we received to this question further support the idea that the Probation and Parole Division may be able to garner the greatest improvement in increasing efficiency and workload management by using the double pronged effect of enhancing both equipment and training initiatives.

Figure 2

Question 23: “What are the two most important aspects of computer usage on which you feel you could benefit from further training?”

Since nearly half (47%) of officers responding to the survey state that their knowledge of computers was either *Marginal*, *Somewhat Inadequate* or *Very Inadequate* for carrying out their job duties, it



will be useful to look at the responses to what type of training officers felt would be most beneficial. We received 159 answers from a total of 82 respondents for an average of almost 2 answers per officer. Twenty-seven percent of officers told us that they would benefit from further training in the areas of *Database Management, Spreadsheets & Automated Reports and Forms*. These answers indicate that officers feel their workload could be eased by automation of information and computer facilitation of regular documentation. If the instruments with which officers collected data related to case management, such as the Risk/Needs Assessment, were automated, they would be able to conduct searches for specific information and more easily view a client’s history. In addition, automating data collection instruments and other information gathering strategies, may reduce filling out forms with redundant information and may increase the ability to compare client outcomes and/or more accurately ascertain indicators of offender success or failure.

Another 18% of officers stated that they felt they needed training in *Comprehensive Computers Basics and Fundamentals*. This group of answers echoes those we received to previous questions about computer equipment and training, indicating that some officers are not adequately prepared to utilize efficient computerized systems for dealing with offender information on a daily basis. In this case, computerized facilitation of officers’ workloads would only be effective if coupled with training focused on improving staff computer skills. Seventeen percent of survey respondents also told us that they need further training in *Word Processing, Windows, and Other Software*. This category reflects the need for basic instruction in software used for the preparation and completion of regular documentation related to case management. Another 11% of responding officers told us that they *Don’t Have a Computer/Don’t Know Enough to Answer*. Again, these responses make the case for both providing adequate computer equipment and appropriate training and instruction for computer facilitation of Probation and Parole officer workload. Only two percent of officers specifically told

us that they *Don't Need Training*. This extremely low number of officers who do not feel they would benefit from computer further training indicates that a training initiative in the Division may be an essential strategy for ensuring productivity and effective case management.

Table 2

Q 23 Further Computer Training from which Staff Could Benefit		
	Total Frequency(159)	Total Percent
Database Management, Spreadsheets &Automated Reports and Forms	43	27%
Comprehensive Computers Basics and Fundamentals	29	18%
Word Processing, Windows & Other Software	27	17%
Don't Have Computer/Don't Know Enough to Answer	18	11%
Facilitating Workload/Troubleshooting	14	9%
Updated Equipment/Newer Programs	9	6%
Programming/Networking	9	6%
Hook Up to Criminal Justice Agencies/Internet	7	4%
Don't Need Training	3	2%

Missing= 18

Question 24: “Assuming that your office is provided with first class training and equipment, how do you envision using a computer to facilitate managing your daily job responsibilities?”

This question asked PPOs to envision themselves provided with what they perceive to be optimum computer equipment and training. We requested that they then project how they would use this equipment and the knowledge with which they have been provided to facilitate managing their daily tasks. We received a total of 185 responses from 92 officers, averaging about two answers per officer. Many officers gave us their thoughts on how computers would most significantly facilitate their workload. Twenty-eight percent of officers feel their daily responsibilities could be eased by the *Automation of Reports and Forms/Reduced Paperwork* which would reduce the amount of paperwork they would be required to complete. Another 28% state that the availability of adequate computer equipment and training would lead to *Increased Productivity and Increased Professionalism*. Eighteen percent of officers responded that further training and better equipment would allow for *Improved Case Management, Tracking of Client Progress, and Spending More Time with Clients*. While 15% of responding officers felt that computers would be useful for *Networking with Law Enforcement Agencies & Access to Criminal Histories* and other relevant information surrounding case management duties.

We received comments from five officers stating that they did not believe the Division would ever provide them with adequate training and/or equipment. One officer wrote: “Everyone knows that computers are the future to any successful business or office operation. Probation and Parole are very much behind and no one seems to care. I doubt very seriously that we will ever get computers to help us do our daily work.” This officer offers a representative attitude of frustration regarding the lack of provision of adequate computer equipment and training within the Division. The three primary categories officers cited for how they would facilitate their workload with computers all refer to critical aspects of case management duties or general efficiency in fulfilling responsibilities. These categories account for 88% of all responses, thus indicating, that survey respondents consider

computers to be of central importance in terms of managing daily responsibilities. This data further reinforces the assertion that the Probation Parole Division should establish a proactive position towards upgrading provision of equipment and training in order to increase productivity and efficiency among its officers.

Table 3

Q 24 How Would You Use a Computer to Facilitate Managing Your Daily Responsibilities?		
	Total Frequency (185)	Total Percent
Automation of Reports and Forms/Reduced Paperwork	51	27.5%
Increased Productivity and Increased Professionalism	51	27.5%
Improved Case Management, Tracking of Client Progress, and Spending More Time with Clients	33	18%
Network with Law Enforcement Agencies & Access to Criminal Histories	28	15%
Laptops & Modems-Internet Research/ Plug Into Systems Outside Office	8	4%
Computers Would Not be Helpful/Don't Know Enough About Computers	9	5%
Don't Believe Division Will Provide Proper Equipment/Training	5	3%

Missing=80

Question 25: “Summarize the relevance and utility of the current risk/needs assessment tool in relation to the unique characteristics or conditions of offenders under your supervision.”

The evaluation team felt it would be important to ask those officers who work with Special Populations whether the current Risk/Needs Assessment Instrument was useful and relevant for the clients with whom they regularly deal. We feel it is important to distinguish between the offenders Regular Supervision officers work with versus the typical offender that officers in Intensive Supervision, Drug Court, and Community Corrections regularly see. These programs constitute a significant percentage of the Probation and Parole Division’s workload and 39% of the officers responding to the ISR survey. The survey instructed that only officers working within these programs respond to this question, hence the numbers of responses we received fell sharply to 57. Forty-four percent of the officers responding to this question stated that the current RNA instrument is *Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used* to determine supervision plans for the populations with which they deal. Two other categories were also cited which indicate that the forms are not particularly relevant or useful for special populations. In these cases, the responding officers told us either: *1) All Clients are Classified Maximum and More Specific Instruments are Used* or that there is a need for *2) Program Specific Forms, Revised Categories, or More Frequent Administration* of the current instrument in order for it to be deemed useful and/or relevant.

Only 26% of all responding officers from Drug Court, Community Corrections or Intensive Supervision told us that the forms were *Relevant for Establishing Supervision Levels and Evaluating Offenders Needs or Success at Reassessment*. It would be reasonable to conclude that if only slightly over one quarter of the officers functioning outside of the Regular Supervision framework find the current RNA useful and relevant for their populations, that it may be necessary to develop other program specific instruments to address the particular characteristics of special populations. One officer working in Community Corrections described his perception of the RNA instrument in the

following way: “Not relevant - Not used. It is a document placed in the file - period. The Judgment and Sentence, Pre-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 the Risk & Needs.” A number of officers referred to the fact that offenders in Intensive Supervision, Community Corrections and Drug Court are generally considered to be “maximum risk” and then their status is downgraded depending on their performance in the program, while several officers also mentioned that according to their experience drug usage and violence were not given enough weight or emphasis by the scoring measures utilized in the current RNA. It would be worthwhile for the Probation and Parole Division to initiate further inquiry into this issue, perhaps holding focus groups with officers working with special populations. These focus groups could be usefully geared towards finding out whether the current instrument requires minor revisions to be made relevant or if it would require a complete overhaul/ development of new instruments to provide the officers with an RNA instrument useful for managing the specific type of offenders with which they work.

Table 4

Q 25 Relevance and Utility of RNA for Special Populations		
	Total Frequency (57)	Total Percent
Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used	25	44%
Relevant for Establishing Supervision Levels and Evaluating Offenders Needs or Success at Reassessment	15	26%
All Clients are Classified Maximum and More Specific Instruments are Used	9	16%
Only Partly Useful/Program Specific Forms, Revised Categories, or More Frequent Administration	8	14%

Missing=11

In order to clarify whether the current RNA may be more useful for some officer dealing with Special Populations than others, the evaluation team has cross-tabulated the responses we received for relevance of the RNA by type of officer. Although the survey instruction requested that only officers working with special populations answer question 25, seventeen Regular Supervision officers answered the question regardless. Forty-five percent of Regular Supervision officers feel that the RNA is relevant for the population with which they work, this is the highest percentage represented by any one type of officer. Still, a full 35% of Regular Supervision officers responding to this question reported that the RNA is *Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General* or *Use Other Criteria* and 20% reported that the RNA is *Only Partly Useful* and that *Program Specific Forms, Revised Categories, or More Frequent Administration* are needed. Among Intensive Supervision PPOs, 47% state that the RNA form is *Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used*. Twenty seven percent of officers in Intensive Supervision state that all offenders are *Classified Maximum* or that they use *Program Specific Instruments* to develop supervision plans. Only 13% of Intensive Supervision officers feel that the current RNA is *Relevant for Establishing Supervision Levels and Evaluating Offenders Needs or Success at Reassessment*. For those Officers working in Community Corrections, the most common answer referred to the fact that *All Clients are Classified Maximum and More Specific Instruments are Used*, this category accounted for 43% of officer opinion. Another 30% of Community Corrections officers told us that the current RNA was *Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used*. Only 13.5% of the Community Corrections officers feel that the form is *Relevant for Establishing Supervision Levels*

and Evaluating Offenders Needs or Success at Reassessment, leaving 86.5% of the officers in Community Corrections with a less than positive opinion of the RNA instrument currently in use.

Drug Court Officers feel overwhelmingly that the current RNA is *Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used*, with over two-thirds of the officers (67%) citing this category. The remaining third of officers feel that the form is *Only Partly Useful/Program Specific Forms, Revised Categories, or More Frequent Administration* to be made relevant to their population.

When reviewing these responses in total, it appears that the current RNA is considered to be a useful, relevant instrument only by Regular Supervision officers and not those working with Special populations. The highest approval rating for officers working with special populations came from Community Corrections officers, only 13.5% of whom felt the form was useful in determining supervision levels while only 13% in Intensive Supervision deemed it relevant and no officers from Drug Court found it to be useful. In light of this data, it will be important for the Division to initiate further inquiry into the deficits of the RNA instrument for special populations. An effective strategy may entail ascertaining what officers feel could be omitted from the form and what they feel would need to be added or amended to increase the form’s relevance. Certain of these issues will be addressed in the upcoming status report which breaks the form into sections and requests clarification from officers regarding which questions or aspects of the form are most appropriate for risk, needs and successful outcomes.

Table 5

Q 25 Relevance &Utility of RNA for Special Populations-By Officer Type								
Type of Officer	Regular Supervision		Intensive Supervision		Community Corrections		Drug Court	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Not Relevant, Redundant, Too General, Not Used or Other Criteria are Used	7	35%	7	47%	7	30%	7	67%
Relevant for Establishing Supervision Levels and Evaluating Offenders Needs or Success at Reassessment	9	45%	2	13%	3	13.5%	0	0
All Clients are Classified Maximum and More Specific Instruments are Used	0	0	4	27%	10	43%	3	33%
Partly useful, Program Specific, Revised Categories, More Frequent Administration	4	20%	2	13%	3	13.5%	0	0

Missing=11

Conclusions and Future Tasks

This report has provided an overview of how the use of computer equipment may be used to facilitate PPO officer workload and the adequacy of the current level of training in computers PPO officers have received in the past. In addition, we have asked those officers working with special populations to reflect on the relevance of the current RNA in terms as related to supervision duties/ case management. Answers to these questions relate directly back to the officers sense of effectiveness, perception of their roles and responsibilities and overall job satisfaction. The answers we received from survey respondents demonstrate that most officers use the computers they have access to on a daily basis to facilitate case management duties and that they are hindered by lack of proper equipment and inadequate training. Officers told us that they could increase their effectiveness and professionalism in fulfilling daily job responsibilities if Division computer equipment were improved and they had access to relevant training. They state that the automation of forms through computers

would lead to reduced paperwork which would allow them more time for tracking offender progress and improve their efficiency in managing offender progress. Most officers working with special populations do not feel that the current risk needs is useful or relevant in determining or carrying out supervision plans for offenders. Many officers working with special populations told us that offenders enter the program already classified as maximum supervision. Any classification of offenders prior to administration of the Risk/Needs Assessment defeats the established purpose of the instrument. This particular issues will be addressed further in the upcoming status report which will deal with each aspect of the current RNA instrument and its perceived usefulness and relevance in relationship to other aspects of PPO case management duties.