

NCJRS

SEP 30 1977

ACQUISITIONS

Second Year Refunding Report on the  
Offender Participation Advisory Committee  
The Division of Corrections  
State of Wisconsin  
76-03-12-S-2898-6

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Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice  
Program Evaluation Section  
January 1977

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Offender Participation Advisory Committee  
Division of Corrections  
State of Wisconsin

Subgrant #76-03-12-S-2898-6  
Second Year Refunding Report

Antoinette Brinkman, Charles Sasulich  
January 1977

PES reviewed the history, organization, and progress of the Offender Participation Advisory Committee (OPAC) project. It was found that the various committees at the institutions had generated a number of project ideas but none had yet been operationalized. The committees have not had input into Division of Corrections programming plans, and no procedure has been established to implement this function.

Responses to a participant survey were analyzed. The major findings were that the goals of the project were understood; respondents were generally satisfied with the level of progress towards goal attainment and with project support staff. Access to the inmate constituency appears problematic at WCI. All of the staff respondents but only one-third of the inmate respondents felt that committee meetings were frequent enough.

Major PES recommendations were that a mechanism for facilitating OPAC review of DOC program planning should be developed and utilized and that emphasis should be directed towards the implementation of proposals generated in the first five months of the project. It was also recommended that progress in these areas be accomplished before efforts are made to extend the OPAC concept to juvenile institutions and to the Bureau of Probation and Parole. Several procedural recommendations were also made.



State of Wisconsin \ OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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Frank J. Lucey  
Governor

CHARLES M. HILL, SR.  
DIRECTOR

DATE: January 28, 1977

TO: Executive Committee Members

FROM: Antoinette Brinkman and Charles M. Hill

RE: DOC Comments on Draft of the OPAC Report

The following comments were made by a DOC official with respect to a draft of the following report. The time span between the issuing of the draft report and the final report did not allow for the incorporation of these comments. Points two and four are particularly useful and would have been incorporated in some form in the final report.

1. Whenever you use "inmate," please use "resident." I suggested that in my response to your survey questionnaire.
2. In your section on OPAC Progress, you may want to consider mentioning the September 20, 1976 all-OPAC meeting at WSP. That was a historic get-together. Probably, that event could not be equaled anywhere in the United States at any time in its history. On that date, offender representatives from all major Wisconsin state corrections institutions, for males and females, convened with Division of Corrections staff members to engage in joint planning for the conduct of resident-staff institution program planning committees.
3. The credit union idea currently being discussed at WCI and KMCJ is not quite the same as the one reported in the state of Oregon. In Oregon the CU was organized by ex-offenders (i.e., those no longer under state supervision). CU privileges were apparently extended to institution residents. Thus, legal concerns were minimized.
4. You noted that the Division of Corrections Administrator needed to become directly involved in OPAC requests to encourage program development activities. Since no involvement has occurred to date, you noted: "The authors have not been able to establish the reason for this situation." You may have overlooked the following:

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- a. As you noted on Page 2, OPAC has been operational for but four to five months. Time is therefore a factor.
  - b. The OPAC Supervisor terminated employment in November 1976, as you noted on Page 2. The short tenure, which included time for orientation and committee acclimation, reduced capacity for action.
  - c. Allyn Siegfried, as Division Administrator in August 1976, drew to his immediate attention the subject matter of OPAC in relation to the level of being termed "in writing" is to overcome anticipated organizational limitations.
  - d. Proposal development, according to my understanding, is still in formative stages. Time is needed to review ideas, develop full concepts, explore reports of similar undertakings, discuss strategies, etc.
5. You headed one section as "Confusion Regarding the Goals of OPAC." When I read your analysis, I thought the word "Confusion" should be replaced with "Understanding." Your analysis showed that 11 out of 11 staff respondents were seen by you to have grasped essentially the basic OPAC goals; 8 out of 11 resident respondents were coded "...as embracing the basic goals of OPAC." Of the three resident respondents whose "...answers were coded as inaccurate..." one was reported to be a new OPAC member. Your analysis certainly did not point toward "confusion."

## I. History

The Offender Participation Advisory Committees (OPACs) started

The IPACs were created in each of Wisconsin's medium and maximum security correctional institutions. The initial mission of the IPACs was to provide "consumer input" into funding proposals to the Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice (WCCJ) by the Wisconsin Division of Corrections (DOC). Subsequent to their formation, the IPACs were utilized to provide input to such WCCJ funded projects as the Inmate Complaint Review System (ICRS), the Mutual Agreement Program (MAP) and the Training and Placement Program (TAPP). Following this initial activity, the IPACs were left to develop on their own. In the absence of administrative direction, the five existing IPACs continued with varying success.

The metamorphosis of IPACs into OPACs started in the spring/summer of 1975 and culminated in the granting of LEAA funds (\$45,847) in the late fall of 1975. The purpose of the grant was to establish a full-time professional staff capable of coordinating the activities of and providing technical assistance to the individual IPACs (now OPACs). In addition to the increase in capability, the OPAC grant provided for an expanded charge. Whereas IPACs responded to WCCJ funding proposals, OPACs were to respond to more general DOC programming plans as well. In addition, although IPACs were exclusively reactive, OPACs were to be active, i.e., they were to be responsible for the initiation, planning, and implementation of innovative programming that would facilitate the reintegration of the inmate into the larger community.

## II. OPAC Organization

An OPAC committee is in operation at each of Wisconsin's medium and maximum security facilities. The individual committees are chaired by a non-voting Bureau of Clinical Services staff member from the particular institution. The committees are made up of four inmate representatives and four institutional staff members. The inmate representatives are elected for terms of twelve months. During an election, panels of inmate representatives are selected; hence, when a vacancy occurs, it is filled by a panel member. Staff members are appointed to the OPAC committees by the superintendent of the institution (i.e., the warden) for a twelve-month term. Certain committee members are paid for

their participation in OPAC meetings. Security staff members receive five dollars per hour, inmate members receive fifty-five cents per meeting.<sup>1</sup>

An OPAC support unit is housed in Madison in the Bureau of Clinical Services. The support unit consists of a Supervisor who has a Ph.D. in Social Psychology, two Psychological Services Associates who have bachelor's degrees in Behavioral Sciences and a secretary. The WCCJ grant provides the resources for this support unit. An OPAC Advisory Committee provides administrative and policy direction to the project. The Advisory Committee is made up of nine DOC staff members, a staff member from the Department of Health and Social Services, and a DOC program staff member.

### III. OPAC Progress

Staffing the OPAC support unit was not completed until July, 1976. The inmate representative elections were held in July, 1976, and initial meetings of the OPACs took place during August, 1976. Hence, the OPAC committees have been operational for four to five months. Three of the five committees have conducted and analyzed institution-wide surveys of the inmate bodies.

The OPAC support unit has undergone a change in the supervisor position. The individual initially hired for the job resigned in November, 1976. Since this time the two Psychological Services Associates have performed the support function under the general supervision of the Director and Assistant Director of the Bureau of Clinical Services. The supervisor position is presently open and the Division of Corrections is involved in the recruitment process.

#### A. OPACs Productive Function

As mentioned earlier, one aspect of the OPACs was to develop innovative programs that would facilitate the reintegration of the incarcerated individual into the larger society. Review of materials provided to the Program Evaluation Section (PES) staff, interviews with key OPAC actors and questionnaires received from OPAC participants indicate that this has been the principle and perhaps exclusive focus of the OPACs. Exhibit I (pages 3 and 4) contains short descriptions of the projects or ideas entertained and pursued by the various OPAC groups. To date, none of the projects have been implemented.

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<sup>1</sup>Compensation for inmates is limited by state statute. Security staff members must be paid for any overtime work; if they participate during regular duty hours, they must be replaced by another security officer.

EXHIBIT I<sup>2</sup>

Job Resume Service - The Job Resume Service is a project which would be run by institution residents, under the joint supervision of Clinical Services and Social Services staff. The project has received support from Superintendent Cady, and efforts are being made to locate adequate office space for the project. A representative from the UW-Green Bay Placement Center has agreed to train selected residents in resume writing once resident counselors have been recruited. These residents would then assist members of the general population in preparing a resume which would help in securing employment upon release.

Credit Union - The TCI staff solicited and adopted the idea of a credit union for residents and ex-offenders in Wisconsin. A group of residents in the State of Oregon. Project staff is in the process of investigating the feasibility of this idea.

Communication Skills for Officers - Committee members at WCI are preparing a preliminary proposal describing a communication skills course for officers. This project would require a grant to provide officers with training in the areas of communication skills, cultural awareness, sensitivity and personality. Input for such a curriculum would be provided by the security staff, residents, and the education and social services departments.

Project Aware - A proposal for Project Aware was submitted by a resident to the WSP OPAC committee. The project would involve "rap" sessions between residents at WSP and "problem youngsters" from various communities. The committee has voted to accept this project with certain modifications. The project will soon be sent to central office for a feasibility study.

Forensics Proposal - The OPAC committee at TCI spent several meetings discussing a proposal for a debate team or forensics group, which would serve as a means of developing speaking ability, leadership and self-discipline. Based on the limited number of residents who would be affected by such a project, the committee referred the proposal to the education department for their consideration.

Photography Course - The possibility of a photography course, taught by a resident volunteer, was discussed by OPAC members at TCI. The proposal was later deemed unfeasible by the committee.

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<sup>2</sup>WSR is the Wisconsin State Reformatory - Green Bay  
WSP is the Wisconsin State Prison - Waupun  
KMCI is the Kettle Moraine Correctional Institute  
TCI is the Taycheedah Correctional Institute  
WCI is the Wisconsin Correctional Institute - Fox Lake

Exhibit I Continued

Start Inc. - START is a self-help project, created by and for the prisoners and ex-convicts in Stillwater, Minnesota. It is a cooperative effort involving prisoners, ex-convicts, the Department of Corrections and the outside community. One objective of the project is to provide counseling and referral services necessary to assist prisoners in the development of legally acceptable "life plans." START is in the beginning stages of providing community support.



## B. OPACs Reactive Function

Perhaps the best way to describe progress in this area is to state that "nobody has asked." The mechanics of just how a program proposal would be directed to the OPAC committees for review and how their feedback would become incorporated into program development are unclear. General consensus from DOC officials is that such questions would have to be initiated by the Administrator of the Division of Corrections. To date such reports have not been made. The authors have not been able to establish the reason for this situation. Nonetheless, a prerequisite for the fulfillment and reinforcement of the function is that a structure be established for the participation.

## IV. Participant Survey

A survey instrument was distributed to all past and present OPAC committee participants. The instrument covered issues that had arisen from PES observations of OPAC and from discussions with OPAC participants, DOC officials, OPAC support staff and WCCJ program staff. The instrument is presented in Appendix I of this paper.

All responses received by January 25, 1977, were included in this report. PES received responses from 13 of 23 eligible staff participants (57%), 4 of 5 OPAC chairpersons (80%), and 15 of 32 inmate representatives (47%). The low inmate return is explained largely by our inability to contact inmate representatives who are no longer institutionalized. From the 20 active inmate representatives, PES received responses from 13 or 65%. We received responses from only 2 of 12 non-active inmate representatives (16%).

### A. Membership Changes

The total number of voting OPAC participants at any one time is 40 persons (20 inmates and 20 staff members). From August 18, 1976 until January 6, 1977, three staff members and twelve inmates have resigned their OPAC memberships. Eight of the resignations came from the male medium security facilities at Kettle Moraine and Fox Lake. Resignations would appear to be due to competing demands for time or geographical changes within the correctional system for both staff and inmate representatives. The survey respondents included one staff member and two inmates who were former OPAC participants. These individuals indicated that the reason for their resignations involved schedule changes or conflicting time demands, none indicated negative reactions to OPAC. Most of the former participants (particularly inmates) could not be located for one reason or another (usually because they had transferred institutions or had left the institutional

system altogether). In summary, although the inmate representation at medium security institutions is rather unstable, the condition would appear chronic and not amenable to modification due to the rather short stays of persons in medium security facilities. Perhaps the most reasonable approach would be to arrange for informal participation (non-voting status) for the inmate representatives next in line for active status. Such an arrangement could hopefully ameliorate the disruptive nature of inmate representative turnover.

#### B. Appropriateness of the Goals of OPAC

In view of the fact that the OPAC was a goal of initial efforts to improve inmate representation, the basic goals of the project were to provide a mechanism for policy and rules review, to provide a mechanism for inmate self-government, and to provide a mechanism for inmate representation. The basic goals of OPAC, as stated in the grant, were to provide a mechanism for policy and rules review, to provide a mechanism for inmate self-government, and to provide a mechanism for inmate representation. This additional goal is not stated in the OPAC grant and is one that is generally not embraced by the DOC. Of 15 inmate respondents, PES coded the responses of 12 as embracing the basic goals of OPAC. One respondent (a new committee member) was not cognizant of OPAC's goals, two respondents' answers were coded as inaccurate. One respondent felt that the purpose of OPAC was to provide a mechanism for policy and rules review. This inaccuracy is problematic because such a misconception can lead to unfulfilled expectations and resultant disillusionment. In general, there is remarkable unanimity and clarity among OPAC participants regarding the goals of the project.

#### C. Frequency and Duration of OPAC Meetings

Individual OPAC committees meet twice a month or every other week; meetings last approximately two hours. PES initially felt that this was not frequent enough to engage in the complex activities the OPACs were being asked to undertake. Of eleven staff representatives responding to the survey questionnaire, all eleven felt that the present frequency of meetings was adequate. One individual felt the meetings were too long, the remainder felt the meetings were of appropriate length. Of 15 inmates responding to the questionnaire, ten desired to meet more frequently and five felt that the frequency of meetings was appropriate. Eight of the inmate respondents wanted to meet once a week; two respondents wanted to meet twice a week. Two inmate representatives felt the meetings should be longer; the remainder felt the length of meetings were adequate. A staff/inmate difference regarding frequency of meetings is apparent.

Resolution of these differences will be difficult. Security staff members frequently attend OPAC meetings during their "off work" hours. This means that they must leave home, attend a two-hour meeting and then return home. Attendance at OPAC meetings by treatment and educational staff members must come at the expense of their other responsibilities. From an institution staff perspective, the costs of increasing the frequency of meetings may be prohibitive. On the other hand, as the OPACs continue to develop, there will be a growing strain toward increased time demands. A strategy that might be utilized is for the OPAC committees to delegate certain responsibilities to subcommittees. Persons with fewer numbers involved in the subcommittees, more frequent and convenient meetings could be arranged. The subcommittee system could also provide the inmates with a greater sense of responsibility.

#### Item 2. Mobility

An initial concern of the OPAC committees was that the representatives have sufficient mobility/opportunity to contact the individuals who elected them. It was thought that special problems would be encountered at the two maximum security facilities, where inmate mobility is constrained. Of the 13 active inmate representatives responding, four maintained that they had insufficient access to other inmates. One inmate from the maximum security facility at Waupun felt that an "office space/scheduled hours" arrangement would be desirable, another Waupun inmate felt that a bulletin board system would be useful. Arrangements to provide inmates additional access to their representatives at Waupun are being made along the "office hours" model. In addition, OPAC suggestion boxes have been placed throughout the institution. Two inmates at Fox Lake, a medium security facility, felt that there was insufficient opportunity to talk to members of the inmate body. This was also a problem identified by the OPAC chairperson from Fox Lake. It is imperative that this lack of inmate mobility be rectified at Fox Lake. Steps should be taken at the institution level to eliminate this problem. DOC central office members should intercede if local efforts are unsuccessful.

Two additional respondents stated that they did not have sufficient access although from the responses provided, it was apparent that these respondents wanted to speak to groups such as the Legislature.

#### E. Satisfaction with the Support Unit

Although the respondents were not directly asked to express satisfaction with the performance of the OPAC support unit, most respondents to the survey addressed this issue. As

indicated in the grant proposal, the OPAC support staff are serving coordination and technical assistance functions and according to the OPAC participants, they serve these functions in an admirable fashion. One inmate felt the support unit staff person took the side of the staff too often. One staff participant thought the support unit was a waste of money (this individual also felt that OPAC in general was a waste of money). Three individuals expressed a desire to have support unit staff spend more time at the institutions in getting projects implemented.

F. Participant Estimation of Progress Toward Goal Attainment

A problem with groups in general and a problem with the OPACs in particular was the lack of communication. In that participants became dissatisfied with progress made and staff did not feel that progress was being made. In addition, when asked if the OPAC was achieving its goals, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they felt it was. (Although most respondents tended to qualify their answer by saying that OPACs are "making progress" or that OPACs are "starting" to achieve the project's goals.) Two staff participants felt that OPAC was not achieving its goals and was unlikely ever to achieve its goals, two other staff persons maintained that it was too soon to tell, one other felt that goals had not been made but that progress was being made. Two inmate representatives felt that OPAC was not achieving its goals, one felt that it never would, the other was hopeful and encouraged by recent progress.

G. The Authors Go Beyond the Data

In going through the questionnaires, the authors came to notice a trend that coincides with some anecdotal information the authors have received. It would appear that OPAC is more popular with inmate participants than with staff participants and that at some institutions a staff/inmate schism may be developing. It is not possible for us to point to direct evidence of such a trend; it was a number of little things that led to this conclusion, e.g. comments explaining answers to this survey questions were more negative by the staff respondents. Perhaps staff resentment is developing in reaction to an early emphasis on inmate, e.g. the inmate bodies have been surveyed for ideas but the institution staffs have not; inmates elected representatives but staff representatives were appointed; the name of the project is the Offender Participation Advisory Committee, a misnomer since one-half of each committee is comprised of institution staff. The authors are cognizant of the "fragility" of this "finding" and it is an "intuitive finding", but the feelings are strong enough that we felt obligated to present them.

## V. Recommendations<sup>3</sup>

Although OPAC is still in its infancy, it is gaining credibility as a viable means of receiving "consumer" input in correctional planning.

The authors believe that in the second year of funding, attention should be directed to the following:

- A. The development and utilization of a mechanism by which correctional programming being planned by DOC can be reviewed by the OPAC committee. The intent of this recommendation is to place the OPAC in an advisory role not only with respect to DOC funded projects, but also with respect to more general DOC correctional planning. It is not the intent of this recommendation to make a review a mandatory requirement of DOC planning.
- B. Emphasis should be directed toward the documentation of projects that have been initiated in the first five months of the project. The reinforcement effect of having an idea implemented would be extremely beneficial to the morale of the OPAC project.
- C. Substantial progress in the above areas should be accomplished prior to any effort to expand the OPAC concept to juvenile institutions and the Bureau of Probation and Parole.

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<sup>3</sup>Specific recommendations regarding issues identified in the participant survey are embodied in that discussion. The three recommendations that follow are more general in scope.



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APPENDIX I

OPAC QUESTIONNAIRE

INTRODUCTION

The Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice provides the major financial support of the OPAC program in which you were or are a participant. OPAC is requesting funds for a second year of operations. As part of the funding process, the Program Evaluation Section of the Wisconsin Council on Criminal Justice is asking OPAC participants to complete the attached questionnaire.

Please complete the following questionnaire and place it in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Return the questionnaire as soon as possible to ensure that your input will be available for the refunding report. Copies of the final refunding report will be forwarded to each OPAC chairperson.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Antoinette Brinkman

Charles E. Susmilch

PROGRAM EVALUATION SECTION

AB,CES/klg

A. Identification Section

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_ (Optional, but if you have any particularly good ideas about OPAC we would like to talk to you in person. None of the respondents will be identified by name in our report, nor will anyone other than the Program Evaluation Staff see these questionnaires.)

2. Are (were) you an

OPAC Chair \_\_\_\_\_

Staff Representative \_\_\_\_\_

Resident Representative \_\_\_\_\_

3. At What Institution are (were) you involved with OPAC?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If you are no longer serving on OPAC, why aren't you? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

B. OPAC Operation Section

1. Do you know what the goal(s) or purpose(s) of OPAC are?

\_\_\_\_ Yes (Use the space below to briefly describe the goals of OPAC as you understand them)

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\_\_\_\_ No (Use the space below to comment on your answer if you wish to do so)

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2. Do you feel OPAC is accomplishing its goals?

\_\_\_\_ Yes (Use the space below to comment on your answer if you wish to do so)

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\_\_\_\_ Don't know what OPAC's goals are.

\_\_\_\_ No (Use the space below to explain why you believe OPAC is not accomplishing its goals)

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3. Does OPAC serve any other functions or roles other than those specified or implied by OPAC goals?

\_\_\_\_ Yes (Briefly describe these in the space below)

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\_\_\_\_ No (Use the space below to comment on your answer if you wish to do so)

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4. Which of the following statements best describes your feelings with regard to the frequency of OPAC meetings?

\_\_\_\_ OPAC meets too frequently; it would be better if we met

\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in how often you feel OPAC should meet)

\_\_\_\_ OPAC meets frequently enough.

\_\_\_\_ OPAC does not meet frequently enough; it would be better if we met

\_\_\_\_  
(Fill in how often you feel OPAC should meet)

5. Which of the following statements best describes your feelings regarding the length of OPAC meetings?

\_\_\_\_ OPAC meetings are too long; it would be better if we met for  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours at a time.

\_\_\_\_ OPAC meetings are long enough.

\_\_\_\_ OPAC meetings are too short; it would be better if we met for  
\_\_\_\_\_ hours at a time.

6. Which of the following statements best describes the level of participation in most of your OPAC meetings?

☐ All members tend to be actively involved in the discussions that take place.

☐ Several members tend to dominate the discussions that take place. These individuals are (check all that apply):

☐ Residents

☐ Institution Staff

☐ Chairperson

☐ Subject Staff (Nurse, Doctor, Pharmacist)

☐ Other Who?

☐ No one seems to be involved in the discussions that take place.

7. What activity(ies) has your institution been doing in the past year?

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8. Which of the following statements most accurately describes your own participation (discuss ideas, give suggestions, ask questions, etc.) in OPAC meetings?

☐ I never participate, except to vote

☐ I participate occasionally. (Once or twice per meeting)

☐ I participate quite frequently. (Three or four times per meeting)

☐ I participate very frequently. (Five or more times per meeting)

(Use the space below to comment on your answer if you wish to do so)

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9. What do you feel are your responsibilities as an OPAC participant?

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10. As a resident or staff representative, do you feel that it is part of your OPAC responsibility to obtain the views of other residents or staff?

\_\_\_\_ Yes

a. Who?

\_\_\_\_ Residents

\_\_\_\_ Institution Staff

\_\_\_\_ Probation/Parole Staff

\_\_\_\_ Other Who?

b. Do you feel that you have sufficient opportunity to obtain the views of these persons on OPAC issues?

\_\_\_\_ Yes. How do you do this?

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\_\_\_\_ No. What modifications would need to be made to change this situation?

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\_\_\_\_ No (Use the space below to comment on your answer if you wish to do so)

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11. What are the strong points of OPAC?

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12. What are the weak points of OPAC?

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What could be done to improve these?

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13. What role has Project Staff (Kathy, Karen, Ronnie) performed with regard to your OPAC? Are there any changes in their role and activities which should be made?

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**END**