

“Environmental Evaluation and Accountability: Using Citizen Input in Designing Performance Measurements”

Tomas M. Koontz

Associate Professor

School of Environment and Natural Resources

The Ohio State University

koontz.31@osu.edu

Craig W. Thomas

Associate Professor

Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs

University of Washington

thomasc@u.washington.edu

Public Participation: Front-Loaded or Back-Loaded?

Accountability to citizens for performance is important, and environmental evaluation can foster this

Including citizens in the design of performance measures can make evaluation more meaningful and relevant to the stakeholders

But should governments request input on performance measures before gathering data (front-loaded participation)?

Or only after the data is reported to citizens (back-loaded participation)?

Prior Studies Suggest

- Local governments have developed better performance mgt systems than state or federal agencies
 - More easily measurable services
 - International City / County Mgt Assoc fosters
- But rarely involve citizens in designing performance measures
- Internal factors (leadership, culture, org. structure) more important than external factors (public input) in adoption & design

Research Question



How does public participation (front-loaded and back-loaded) affect the design and use of performance measures?

Methods

Case Selection:

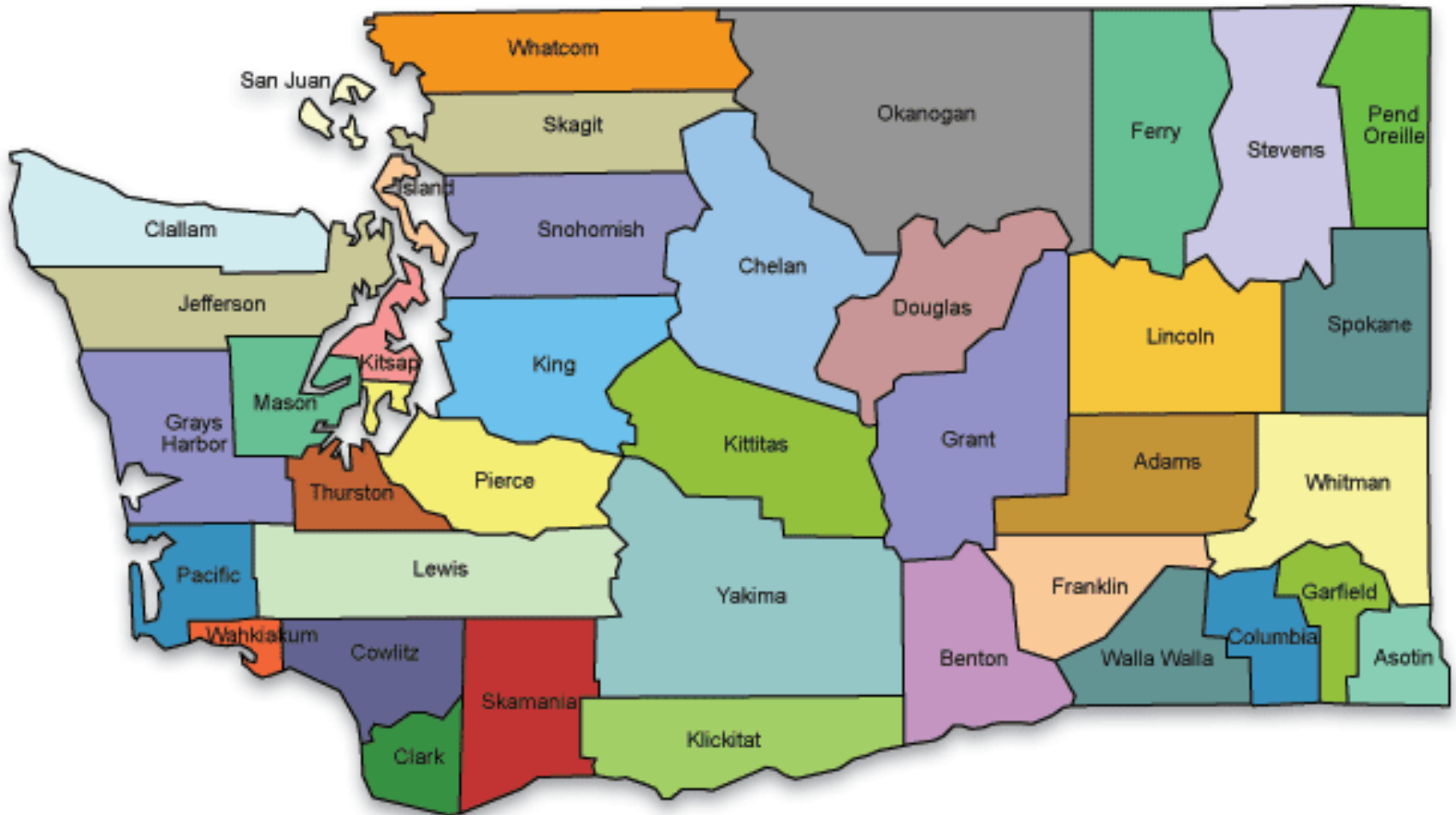
Two cases of local governments in Greater Seattle Area

- Both high-performing, award-winning, with substantial tax base
 - E.g., Association of Government Accountants
- Hence findings not necessarily generalizable; these are leaders with substantial resources available

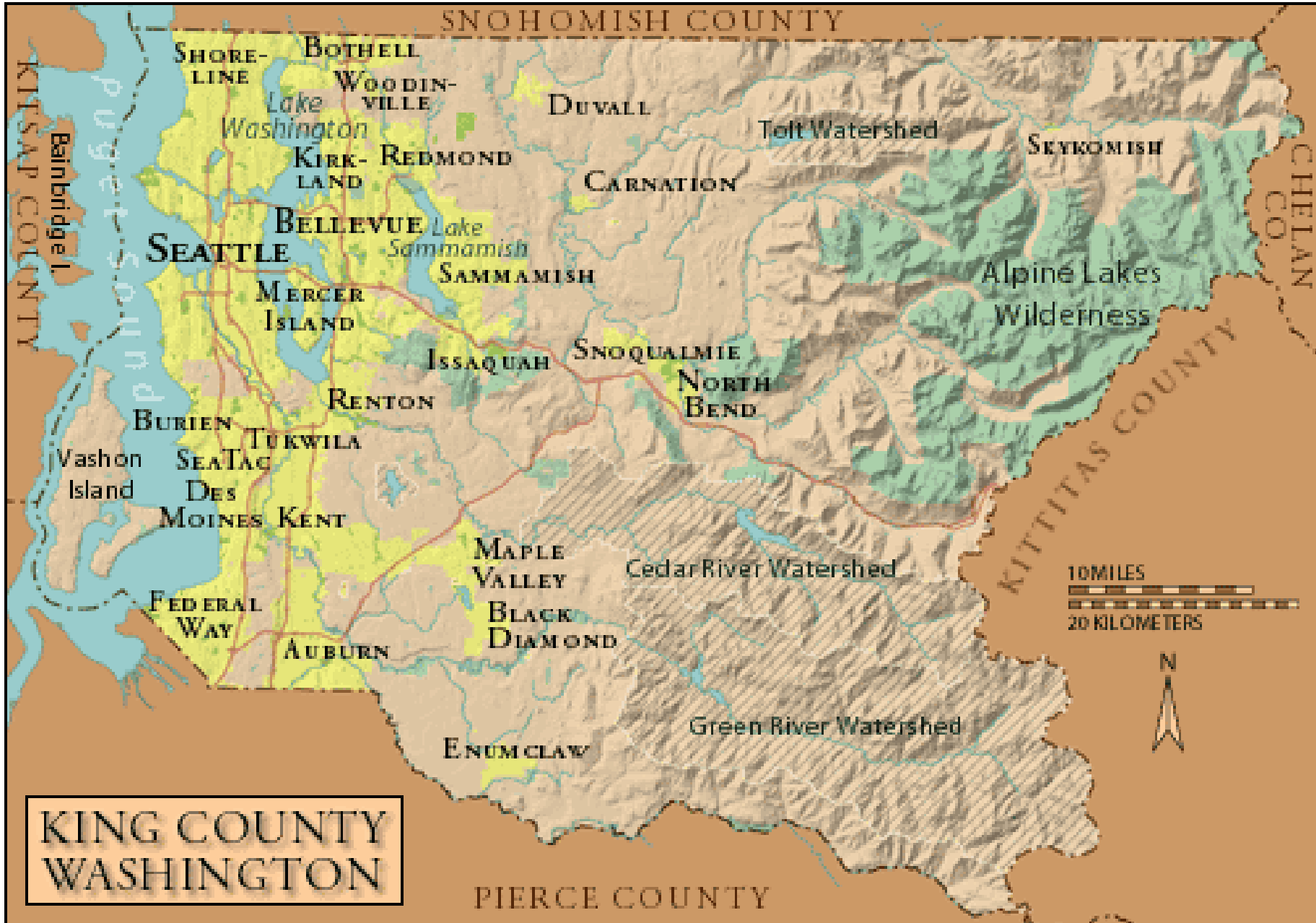
Most-similar case comparison

- Varying public participation
- Holding most other explanatory variables constant
 - Geography, tax base, political culture

Washington State Counties



SNOHOMISH COUNTY



KING COUNTY
WASHINGTON

Methods

Data for the Study:

Open-ended interviews

- 3 in Bellevue, 5 in King County (the latter having more staff)
- Matched for hierarchical level and function

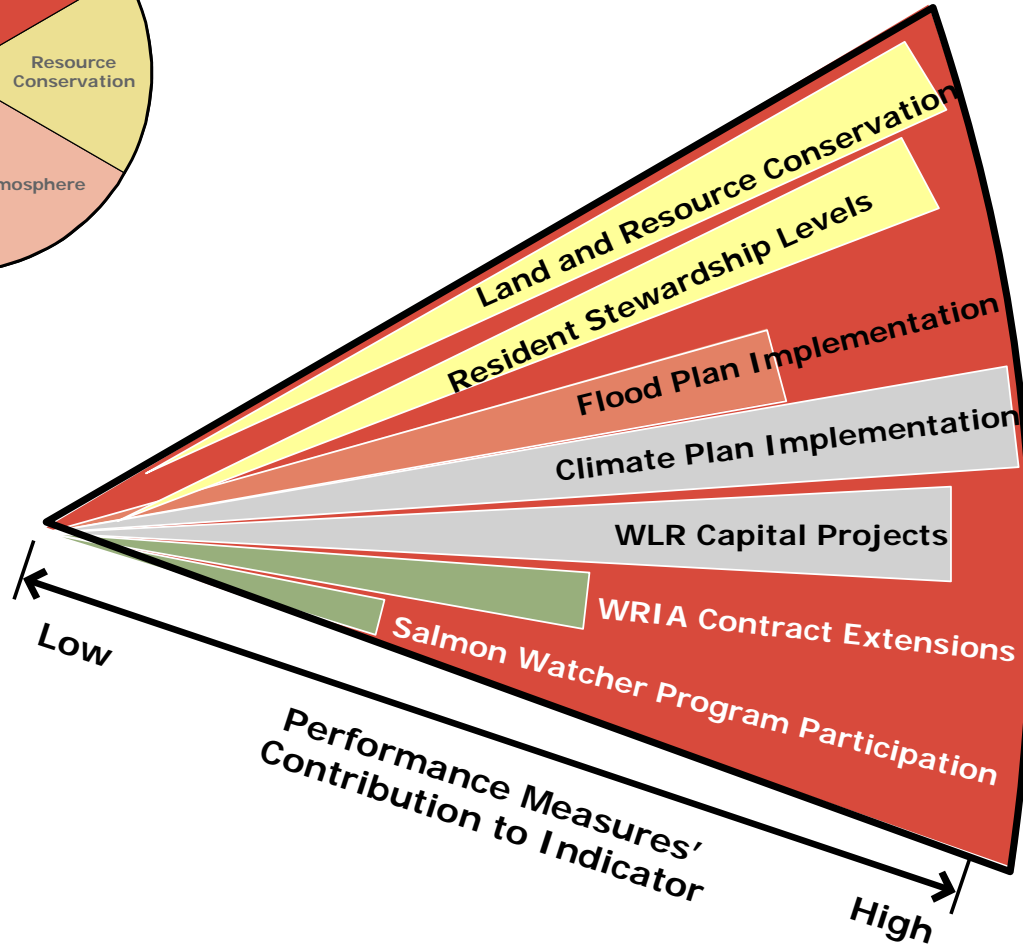
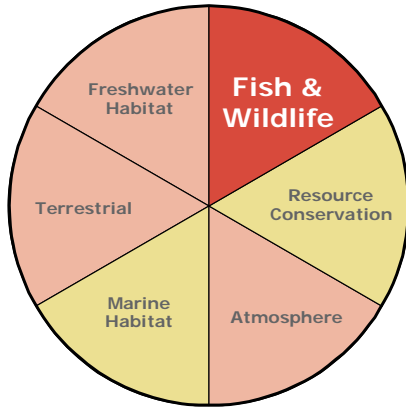
Archival documents (reports, raw data, logic models, etc.)

Public Participation in Development of Performance Measures

King County

- Did not seek public input in developing or refining performance measures
- Relied on professional staff (scientists & managers)
- Focused on attribution; linking outputs to outcomes
 - Performance measures link to indicators
- Last year, asked citizens how they want data presented to them
- Desire an integrative framework to work across jurisdictions, but one interviewee said lack of stakeholder involvement led to less use of the County's data by stakeholders in other jurisdictions

Performance measures relating to **Fish & Wildlife Indicator**



Public Participation in Development of Performance Measures

City of Bellevue

- Sought public input via two focus group meetings with citizens (chosen to ensure diversity)
- Participants were asked to review City-developed list of 16 “vital sign” measures
- Groups edited this list, and returned with 29 measures
- Disconnect between managers’ best practices and what citizens wanted to know (e.g. police response time)
- Result = combined longer list of performance measures; citizens’ measures used for external reporting, managers’ for internal decision making

Summary of Findings

- Back-loaded (King County)
 - Managers developed scientifically based measures that meaningfully link outputs to outcomes
 - Useful in-house to managers, but not widely used by external stakeholders
- Front-loaded (City of Bellevue)
 - Managers developed dual system of performance measures; one useful for in-house and the other for items that citizens preferred
- In both cases, participation had no effect on how performance measures are used internally in management systems. (Organizational leaders and culture were more important)
- Yet managers are interested in providing measures that external stakeholders find meaningful

Policy/Management Implications

- Agency staff prefer to design agency measures in-house to better reflect agency tasks, goals, and missions.
 - Good for attribution; outputs → outcomes
- Agency staff should develop additional measures that respond to citizen preferences, and report these measures along with those developed internally.
- Doing so balances the classic trade-off between professional autonomy and public participation by allowing professionals to implement best-practices for internal management purposes, while satisfying citizen desires for other types of measures.