

Measuring Environmental Performance to Encourage Collaboration:

Lessons for Watershed Partnerships

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Two Common Strategies For Improving Watershed Governance

- **Collaboration** - Two or more organizations work together to deliver services and produce more public value than could be produced when organizations act alone
- **Performance management** - Includes goals, performance measures, monitoring, and reporting processes designed to improve service delivery and enhance network accountability.



Why Measure Performance?

Performance management systems (PMS) help public managers, politicians, and the public to gauge the effectiveness of service delivery by documenting:

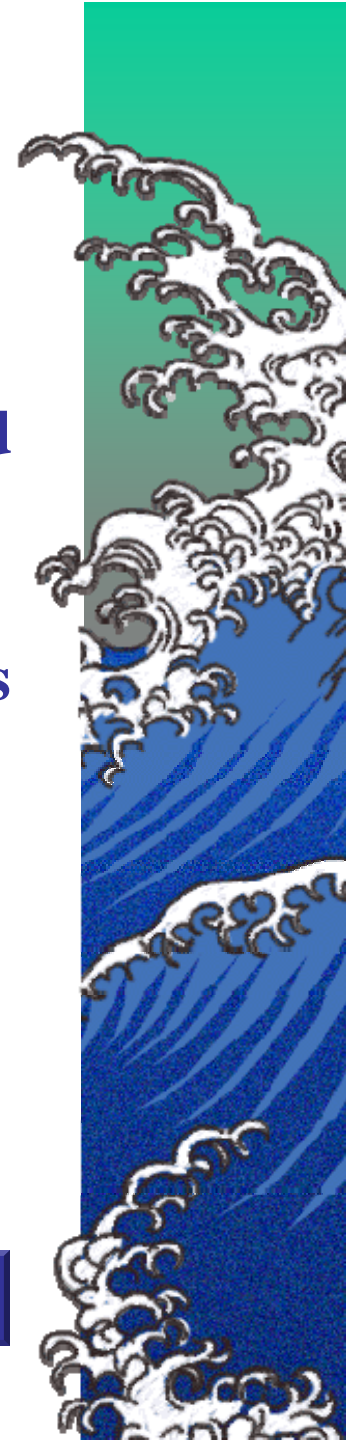
- What was done?
- How well was it done?
- What difference do these activities make?

“What’s measured gets done”



Why Measure Performance in a Watershed Partnership?

- It is required by a funding agency like EPA (i.e., GPRA, 303b reports, etc.) or a grant provider to find out what was done (outputs)
- To monitor progress towards some individual or shared policy or goal in hopes of learning whether its working (input, outputs, or outcomes)
- To provide baseline scientific information on environmental conditions that can be used by researchers (outcomes)



Clients for Performance Information

- **Legislators:** want to demonstrate that programs are working or that tax dollars are being wisely used.
- **Funders:** want to know how their funds were spent and what was accomplished. It helps hold grant recipients accountable.
- **Managers:** Want information about how their program is working but fear recriminations for poor performance
- **External Stakeholders:** want measures to hold agencies accountable for their performance – or lack thereof.
- **Journalists:** like stories that compare performance of various jurisdictions on such things as test scores or crime statistics.



Lake Tahoe



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Example ETCC's:

Thresholds & Indicators	1991	1996	2001	Trend
Water Quality				
Turbidity (shallow)	A	A	A	=
Clarity	N	N	N	+
Phytoplankton	N	N	N	-
Tributary water quality	N	N	N	+
Recreation				
High quality recreation experience	U	U	N	+
Capacity available to General Public	A	A	A	+

Positive Trend (+), Negative Trend (-), No Trend (=)

Nonattainment (N), Unknown (U), Attainment (A)



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What are the rationales for creating performance management systems (PMS)?



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Evaluation & Accountability

- **Common for managers to resist performance measurement and making information available even though politicians, journalists, stakeholders and citizens want it**
- **Resistance is amplified in network settings associated with a watershed partnership if the organizations have competing values or objectives**
- **Network participants may be more willing to accept performance management when they are one of many organizations responsible for achieving outcomes**



Steering, Coordinating, & Priority Setting

- In watershed settings, performance management is typically more about steering, coordinating, and priority setting than control
- Steering occurs by integrating policies, setting shared goals and priorities
- Shared indicators/measures provide the means to coordinate action in the absence of a central coordinator
- Performance management also helps avoid “random acts of environmental kindness” by encouraging systematic efforts to address specific problems of a long period of time



Motivational Tool

- **Establishing performance measures that are specific and difficult but also realistic and achievable helps**
 - Focus attention
 - Encourage action
 - Mobilize effort
 - Increase persistence
 - Motivate the search for effective strategies
- **Performance management grabs the attention of staff, managers, potential collaborators, and citizens**
- **Helps sustain momentum and generates peer pressure to fulfill commitments**



Promoting & Celebrating

- Collaboration research is replete with advice to “celebrate success” and “promote accomplishments”
- Performance management aids in these efforts
 - Releasing performance reports provides photo opportunities, media coverage, and an opportunity to highlight other accomplishments
 - Demonstrating success can attract new resources and partners
 - Marking accomplishments and promoting success promotes “band wagon effects”



Learning & Enhanced Governance

- Learn *why* programs are working (not working)
- Learning occurs at different levels
 - *Managers/staff*: Learn about how individual policies/programs work by looking at disaggregated data
 - *Organizational*: Learn how to collaborate and work together – collaborative know how
 - *Network/societal level*: performance management demonstrates can stimulate the diffusion of innovation and other forms of policy-oriented learning
- Encourages policy changes to improve performance



Developing a Performance Management System (PMS) that Lasts is Challenging

- Establishing useful performance management systems isn't easy
 - Measures raise questions of competing interests and values
 - Longitudinal data is lacking and it can be expensive to monitor environmental conditions accurately
 - Who is the client for the data?
 - Who is paying for it?
 - Who is collecting it and analyzing it?
 - How will the data be used?
 - What scale will the data be measured at?



Developing a Performance Management System (PMS) that Lasts is Challenging

- **Wide range of operational problems can hinder their usefulness**
 - Conflicting and changing priorities at different levels of government, changing political leadership, and changing economic environment can make it hard to sustain a PMS overtime
 - \$ for collecting data but not for synthesis or analysis
 - Maintaining monitoring protocol over time as \$ varies
 - Data is collected by multiple entities at different scales, monitoring protocols, timeframes, etc.



Developing a Performance Management System (PMS) that Lasts is Challenging

- Complexity and variability combined with time lags make it difficult to establish cause and effect relationships
 - Long time lags between data collection and when it is reported (not unusual that data is 3 – 5 years old)
 - Long time lags between action and environmental changes (these can be even longer)
 - Complexity and variability of natural processes and time lags complicates the identification of trends or establishing cause and effect relationships



Developing a Performance Management System (PMS) that Lasts is Challenging

- **Accountability is a ‘two-edged’ sword**
 - Constant tension between autonomy and accountability in a network setting
 - Too much accountability can be a disincentive for organizations to participate in monitoring system
 - Results are often politicized in obvious ways that diminish their credibility
 - Results of performance management system can be challenged as data often fail to provide clear trends or cause and effect relationships



Developing a Performance Management System (PMS) that Lasts is Challenging

- **Leadership is critical to create and sustain a PMS**
 - A useful PMS is often an optional and expensive endeavor that runs the risk of producing data that makes partners look bad
 - Need a champion who will
 - Push for performance management and encourage other partners to embrace the system
 - Explain to partner agencies why it can be a powerful management tool used to motivate collective action and attract \$ for implementation
 - Help initiate the collaboration needed to collect, analyze, and report data in a watershed partnership



Lessons for Watershed Partnerships

- **Design the system to produce information needed by the watershed partnership**
 - Often requires data that is different than ongoing efforts like GPRA, annual reporting, or environmental monitoring (outcome related)
 - Produce information so partners are clients: if they are information consumers they are more likely to provide resources to generate information
 - Focus PMS on problems/issues of shared interest
 - Design indicators that connect output and outcome information in meaningful ways to promote learning



Lessons for Watershed Partnerships

- **Need to find a focal measure(s) that is the heart of the performance management system (PMS)**
 - Measure represents motivation for collective action
 - Measure is easy to understand or possibly visualize
 - Politicians, external stakeholders, and the public cares about the problem symbolized by the measure
 - Linkage between action and outcomes must be clearly established and above criticism
 - It is possible to measure progress in a meaningful way so that progress can be celebrated or lack of progress motivates additional action



Lessons for Watershed Partnerships

- **KISS: Keep It Simple Stupid**
 - Avoid the tendency to measure everything. Each measure has a cost to collect, analyze, and maintain
 - Don't measure anything you don't care about
 - Resources for PMS are unlikely to grow: assume the worst and operate within existing resource constraints
 - Simple, cheap systems are easier to maintain as resource levels fluctuate
 - Be careful about any “state of the art” PMS: simple, cheap systems are often easier to use and maintain as resource levels fluctuate



Lessons for Watershed Partnerships

- **Build the PMS in a way that promotes collaboration**
 - Structure goals and measures to create a shared sense of purpose
 - PMS should create regular and repeated interactions to develop peer pressure and trust
 - Design PMS to steer and coordinate partnership towards shared goals
 - Celebrate success, promote accomplishments, and use lack of progress to generate support for additional action
 - Report on collective progress and avoid singling out individual agencies for poor performance



Questions?



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