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Defined Adequacy:
Developing a Standards-Based Framework for Evaluation of Municipalities
and Municipal Services

A Dissertation Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Steven Terry Thompson

May 2019

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my wonderful family – Christine, Darryl and Ryan. You have given me the ability to take the risks so often required for effective public service today, and no words can express how much I appreciate your support and encouragement. With your love, I have everything that I need.

Acknowledgements

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Despite the barbs and challenges that accompany city management, I have also been inspired by and grateful to the many outstanding professionals that I have had the honor of calling friends and colleagues in my career with cities across the southeast. These friends are too many to name here, but I appreciate both the memories and the scars. I have truly enjoyed every moment and every challenge in your company. Mark Watson in Oak Ridge is a good friend among the many, and I appreciate Mark showing me the way to the doctoral program.

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Abstract

The services of municipalities have been subject to the same methods of comparison in use in business in America and, in the absence of the clarity that profit brings to business, cities and towns compare services with dissimilar competitors. This research examines present methods of municipal service evaluation and available professional standards to determine if these standards would enhance existing measures with a comprehensive means of comparison. Through a review of public administration theory, the research discusses the role of bureaucrats in both the development of services and the standards established for comparison.

Current methods of comparison of municipal services meet niche requirements but are not comprehensive nor do they offer the ability to serve as a “single indicator” for service comparisons. The addition of professional standards does create a powerful tool for effective cross-jurisdictional comparisons and service improvements. The use of professional standards calls for early engagement of bureaucrats and experts and a firm foundation in theory. Beyond simple participation, advocacy by the bureaucracy in the public policy process can exist under the control of legislators. Further, bureaucratic advocacy can play a critical role in providing competent comparisons on core services.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Overview and Introduction.....	1
Municipalities Improve to Compete.....	2
The Evolution of Services and the Need for Service Comparison.....	5
Services and service comparison evolved with early America	5
A questioning of measurement and quantification	7
Evaluation of services is now an accepted practice.....	8
Comparing and improving services – the research approach	9
This Work - Linking Methods of Comparison with Expert Proficiency.....	10
Evaluation and a single measure of performance	11
The Organization of This Study, With Three Broad Topics	12
Chapter 2 – Existing Service Evaluation Methods	17
Methods and the Four Conditions Required for Effective Comparison.....	17
Output measures	19
Benchmarking.....	23
Narratives, including best practices and case studies	25
Customer satisfaction	26
Each method of comparison meets a specific niche or need	34
Broad Challenges to the Use of Performance Measures and Comparison.....	35
Present Tools of Comparison are Narrow in Scope	38
Chapter 3 – Theory, Concepts and the Call for Assessment.....	40
Measurement Requires Theory	40
Theory is of value and accepted	41
Ideas and concepts also shape the use of standards and comparison	41
The Foundation of Measurement in Theory.....	42
Reconciliation of Theories and Ideas	43
The obstacles of facts, knowledge and language bias	44
Service Evaluation – Methods and Theory	46
Rational choice in public administration and management.....	47
Transactional relationships and rational choice theory	48

The Role of the Bureaucracy - Competition, Complementarity and Pushback	52
Questioning the role of experts.....	53
Normative neutrality is an ongoing concern.....	54
Tension is unnecessary	56
Effective engagement is early engagement	58
Theory is Important to the Applied Sciences	58
Chapter 4 – Data, Services, and Standards	61
Data and Methods.....	62
Why These Cities? The Study of Full-Service Municipalities.....	63
Why These Services, and Why These Standards?	63
The services designed and delivered are unique	64
Performance standards gauge efficiency and effectiveness	65
Standards must be acceptable, defensible and achieve scope	66
Standards measure service effectiveness.....	69
Professional Competence, Case Studies, and a Single Measure of Service.....	69
Fire services and the ISO rating	71
Police services	76
Finance – General Obligation (GO) bond or debt rating.....	81
Utilities and revenue debt rating.....	89
Solid waste.....	93
Comparison based on both services and standards is powerful.....	95
Chapter 5 – Lessons and Case Studies.....	97
Bringing Data and Research Together	98
Existing methods of comparison are effective for niche needs	99
Advocacy and heroic participation by experts are necessary for change	102
The public interest and assertive leadership in the bureaucracy	103
The use of a single broad measure for service comparison	103
Professional standards help to gauge service competency	104
Comparison Requires Accepted Measures and Skillful Communication	115
Chapter 6 – Conclusions and the Value of Professional Standards	117

Evaluation Leading to Service Improvement Has Value	117
Comparison is Necessary	119
Peer-reviewed standards require input of experts.....	119
Effective Bureaucracy Requires Heroic Participation and Communication	120
National Standards Do Effectively Compare Tennessee Municipalities	122
Challenges and the Conditions of Comparison	122
Defined Adequacies Support Service Improvement	124
The data support the use of professional standards	125
Data and Case Studies - Defined Adequacies with Stories to Tell	125
References	128
Vita	139

List of Tables

<u>Table</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Page</u>
1	Tennessee ISO Ratings	72
2	Top ISO Ratings	75
3	CALEA Accredited Agencies in Tennessee	78
4	Police Accreditation in Tennessee	79
5	Debt Ratings for Full-Service Tennessee Municipalities	85

Chapter 1 – Overview and Introduction

In *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* Jane Jacobs (1961) describes cities as laboratories of failure and success in services, design and democracy. This description certainly holds true today. Billions and, in terms of today's dollars, trillions have been spent developing, linking and redeveloping today's complex centers of economic and cultural success and failure. Given the opportunity, many would change the design of each and the services that these population centers receive. This redesign is clearly taking place incrementally every day around the world. The constant interplay of economic forces and the renegotiation of energy and strategic position often requires changes in public services to support the aggregation of residents into the density of a municipality. Economic and cultural success are the product of a number of different factors and ingredients, but the quality of public services undergirds a city's efforts to promote development, security, efficiency and democracy.

This study reviews the existing methods by which stakeholders compare and evaluate municipal services and the expectation that service evaluations and services will improve with comparison across diverse services and municipalities. Performance measurement and comparison requires the use of performance metrics to explain failure and to market success in support of both governance and accountability (Ingraham, 2005). This work contributes to the study of municipal services and comparative evaluation in two ways. The literature review considers what has come before, with an extensive review of scholarly and applied research. The study also provides original research specific to Tennessee. The research delves into the experience with municipal services and professional standards of municipalities, as evidenced in the analysis of data developed by the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service. This research addresses the use of service

metrics and comparison, and focuses on the insertion of professional standards as one important component in the process of cross-jurisdictional service evaluation.

This research on the use and acceptance of professional standards in evaluations that may guide service funding and delivery opens a follow-up discussion on the role of the bureaucracy – the experts most familiar with service delivery – to deliver standardized services in the public interest. These difficult public discussions on acceptable minimum service standards require communication and facilitation skills not typically included with the technical aspects of service, and require culture change and adaptable municipalities. Many of these same issues and the consequences of this culture change are highlighted in the case studies of Chapter 5. Further, tested and acceptable standards are not available on all municipal services, and this research briefly touches on the need to invite service professionals to consider enhanced evaluation for services lacking comprehensive measures of comparison.

The literature is rich with reasons why evaluation is important to municipalities competing in the attraction and retention of businesses and residents, and this first chapter references many of these works. With this review I find that comparison is important and, as the subject of this dissertation, that a foundation of evaluation constructed on professional standards allows municipalities to both compete and to improve.

Municipalities Improve to Compete

Municipalities compete for economic development, for mobile investment, for residents, and for image, both with other municipalities and with areas outside of incorporated centers (Lever & Turok, 1999; Begg, 1999). To say that municipalities compete is almost, as stated by Ian Begg, a “glib notion,” but that does not mean that the concept of competition is incorrect (Begg, 1999, p. 796). The concept of competition assumes that community, location, and

services are choices and decisions available to the public and business (Boyne, 1996), and that the performance and services of a municipality have bearing on economic success (Begg, 1999). This need for competitive costs and services answers at least part of the riddle of why the use of an effective means of service measurement and comparison is important. Comparison of services between providers leads to improved performance (Boyne, 1996). Comparison aids in service improvement as the effort of evaluation identifies weaknesses in efficiency and effectiveness and allows potential customers, residents, employers and other stakeholders to make decisions in favor of one community over another. In light of the ongoing nature of this competition and the decisions that improve a municipality's competitive position, municipalities constantly face a myriad of service needs.

Janet and Robert Denhardt (2007) take this emphasis on comparison beyond simple operational improvement, and suggest that service evaluation should be inspirational to those advocating for service improvements under the belief that municipalities deliver democracy, more so than service (as noted in England et al., 2012). Effective comparisons, delivered without bias or an agenda, help to provide an accurate portrayal of consistency and reliability to support better service and better government. Perhaps even more importantly, the delivery and the evaluation of services create small opportunities to establish and to change the goals of the organization. This impact contributes to a larger need for measurement and comparison – public services support greater organizational and societal goals, and these goals rely upon legitimacy and consistency across borders and platforms.

Public services certainly support goals both big and small, and service effectiveness is influenced by location and other factors often beyond the control of the community. Any objective resident or business would probably say that they know poor quality service and

communities “when I see them” (Begg, 1999), but the mix and comparisons of services changes with location and target populations of the municipalities. Competition between municipalities can therefore be brutal, with measures of success difficult to identify. The variables that indicate that a municipality is a poor competitor are also often undefined. As one such example, the inability of a municipality to successfully adjust to and compete on service and economic performance can be obvious in the visible poverty and decline in the rustbelt manufacturing and mining communities in the United States (Begg, 1999). Competition in the areas of service effectiveness and quality reflect complex problems and may not be as obvious as these indicators of poverty and poor economic performance, however. Over time and in the absence of clear and controllable measures, the customer input and productivity outputs measured by business have become – for good or ill – the indicators measuring competition and the effectiveness of public services.

Stakeholders are therefore constantly evaluating services and communities based on the same standards applied to voluntary, commercially available goods and products, and forcing municipalities and other service providers to adjust services using partial or inappropriate proxies for performance. The subject of this research is whether there are standards available to allow communities to evaluate and improve service quality and costs to meet the needs of these stakeholders. Changing demands and the changing service environment require attention to the distinguishable differences between services and service improvements, and to comparison methodology to help stakeholders to differentiate between service providers and the quality of municipal services.

The Evolution of Services and the Need for Service Comparison

Service assessment has long been central to the literature and research of public service improvement. The use of assessment and measures reflects the evolution of the field and of the expectations of governance in America. A review of the literature on service evaluation and comparison provides insight into the evolution of methods of assessment for public service accountability and measurable value.

Services and service comparison evolved with early America. Robert Dahl (1961) sketches an image of early America with researched examples that define class and racial divisions. These divisions highlight the need for objective service assessment and help to create an environment that fostered changes to professional public administration and the underlying system of governance. Dahl brings this governance issue forward in the discussion on who specifically governed during the early years of the country and noted that during that time and era public administrators served elites. The election of President Jackson and the growth of a populist movement transformed the bureaucracy into an instrument of the people, with a growing perception that patronage and reward politics was appropriate and necessary to reflect the public will (Rosenbloom, Kravchuk, & Clerkin, 2011). Following the Civil War the industrial revolution was well underway and business was concerned that the inefficiencies and corruption of the spoils system resulted in a government unable to address the problems of the country. A next expectation of the public was, therefore, to administer public services to the standards of businesses, with a role for elected officials without politicizing services. Over the next 30 years, this model changed to include Frederick Taylor's industrial focus on time and management studies to increase efficiency and measurement, continuing the effort to find the one best way to perform work (Ricucci, 2010). The issues facing business and society required scientific

analysis, hierarchical structure, and top-down decision-making and control – concepts grounded in and supported by business. This also included the business-like reliance on the transactional principal-agent relationship of the public to the bureaucracy. Period theorists, including Woodrow Wilson (1887) and Frederick Taylor (1914), emphasized models of practice with the same core values expected today – that government should model private-sector practices, public services should support the private sector, and the public should control the bureaucracy. The resultant complex and cumbersome hierarchical structure pushed back against the systems of patronage and spoils with a system of accountability and control.

By the middle of the 20th century, the image of government had also changed and the government designed for elites and populists was unable to offer solutions to the complex problems of society. This issue is explored at greater length in the theory discussion of Chapter 3 but clearly, the underlying theories of public administration were shifting with the change in the country. The image of government as big and ineffective helped to foster a belief that government had grown to be too complex, too impersonal and too unwieldy. The concern that public services should reflect the will of the people, and that public services should positively compare to the expectations of consumer-driven business, led to the era of public choice. The fundamental concept that governments compete for businesses and residents and that service is voluntary requires that providers have the ability to shape services and methods of service evaluation.

Analysis of the empirical data collected from Tennessee municipalities allows comparison of core services across diverse municipalities. This comparison, and the subsequent case studies of Chapter 5, allows comparison and evaluation using qualitative analysis.

A questioning of measurement and quantification. The emphasis on methodology and accountability, greater now than in the past but present in business comparisons and efforts of early public administration, requires measurement and comparability of public services. While the current norm is with a quantitative approach to research, there are concerns with the use of quantitative analysis for evaluation of public services. Quantitative analysis offers the ability to consider correlation and probability. However, it may incorrectly match services and expectations, or describe an inaccurate but defensible impact of the service and service costs on the social, economic or living environment in the municipality. The effectiveness and positive impact of quantifiable service measurement has also been questioned. Although services have been measured and performance data accumulated for decades, some argue that despite the need for transformation, performance measurement has been neither effective nor transformative for complex services and organizations (Radin, 2006). The studies reviewed note that while the assessment of specific simple services and tasks can be forced into a quantitative structure, many services and efforts, including services and policy decisions, pose an uncomfortable fit for quantitative analysis (Fisk & Winnie, 1974). The concern has been that a quantitative focus may result in neglect of the qualitative aspects of service output in municipal research.

Studies often reject the quantitative approach because of concerns that important characteristics of public service output are not easily reducible to concrete and measurable terms (Shin, 1977). There are many opportunities to incorporate quantitative analysis in this dissertation but I resist the appeal of a quantitative approach. Much like comparing services by counting outputs, any effort to compare services and municipalities with an emphasis on effectiveness requires normative considerations of what a municipality or service should be or should do. This normative consideration stymies scholars and practitioners interested in

objectivity in evaluation. The focus of this work is therefore qualitative, as I look to insert normative influences into service and municipal comparison with advocacy by service professionals.

Many municipal services and decisions are contextual, based on time, population, needs and other considerations. The methodological approach to this study is exploratory, using a qualitative and descriptive approach to support the use of established professional standards in the evaluation of municipal services. The research topic is the comparison of services with professional standards for performance, and the discussion necessarily includes how to measure and compare instead of whether to measure and compare.

Evaluation of services is now an accepted practice. The emphasis on competition and customer choice noted above is a market-based concept. By the 1990s, the customer-oriented and business-like approach was presented as the New Public Management (NPM), with a focus on the customer, the employee, customer choice, performance measurement and the influence of the open market. Under the NPM the role of government is to support business and to serve as a form of the private market (Newman 2015; Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). This role includes components intended to give choice of service providers, fund services through user-fees, empower employees and allow private business to compete to provide governmental services.

This very broad summary of privatization and choice illustrates the evolution of public administration from the bureaucratic emphasis on accountability and control to one of market-based incentives and measurement under a transactional or principal-agent relationship. Performance measurement for public services had the same staying power as the support for privatization and business practices. Journal publications and public discussion continue to reflect the expectation that the business of the public should operate under the same methods of

measurement and the standards of accountability expected of business, despite the differences between private goods and public services. Identifying ways to adjust for the changing nature of public services in the comparison of services has therefore become critically important to practitioners and researchers. Finding agreement on acceptable measures both allows the development of performance data to support service competition and allows evaluation of third party services that develop from service choice. Measurement also permits improved communication with the public if the results of measurement are publicly distributed (Wood, 1998).

Comparing and improving services – the research approach. Robert Behn answers the question on how best to evaluate services with research that indicates that measures of service comparison also allow comparison of service effectiveness. Behn contributes to this research with the suggestion that public sector managers address seven different goals with the use of performance measures and adds an eighth focused on creating opportunities for service improvements (2003). In addition to improving service evaluation measures, this study explores whether adding professional service standards, or service adequacies, to the evaluation of municipalities and municipal services in Tennessee meets this eighth objective. This use of service adequacies is posited as an opportunity to enhance inter-city comparison. A rating or scale demonstrating effective services will also appeal to mayors and managers who may not otherwise have access, staff expertise or time for comprehensive evaluations of municipal services (Downs & Larkey, 1986, as quoted in Poister & Streib, 1999).

The research approach is to compare data collected by consultants of the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service and service levels recommended by these same consultants, with the expectation that the use of

professional standards will improve service comparison and municipalities in Tennessee. This research defines and gives particular attention to full service municipalities in the state offering core services critical for comparison. Municipal services are presently evaluated with four different methods of comparison common to comparison for services and products of business, and these methods are reviewed for strengths and shortcomings. The addition or substitution of professional standards as a basis for comparison is researched and reviewed, and considered as a single measure to address the shortcomings of the present methods of comparison.

Municipalities subject to comparison with the use of professional standards find that financial incentives are in place for the municipality to improve services to the standards noted, and are attractive for the purposes of competition and accountability. This research therefore also explores why many municipalities do not stretch to reach these minimums on the clearest of these, as noted in the case studies on fire and police standards of Chapter 5.

This Work - Linking Methods of Comparison with Expert Proficiency

Public service evaluation does have a deep history in both theory and use, and throughout this history, methods of comparison have been effective at obtaining information for specific purposes. The puzzling gap in current research is that the body of literature does not consider and link the contributions of technical experts and professional standards – the peer-reviewed, normative standards of service design and delivery – to service effectiveness. The use of professional or industry standards may add to the effectiveness of the other methods of comparison and improve the effectiveness of comparisons. This use of accepted standards would bridge the differences between diverse municipalities and services (Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Glaser & Bardo, 1994).

Evaluation and a single measure of performance. The emphasis of this research is to enhance the evaluation of services for diverse municipalities with the application of professional standards. An emphasis on standards that dictate planning and resources and require reliance on specified service delivery methods has the potential to improve services by increasing the technical proficiency of service providers. Traditional measures of outputs, efficiency, productivity and customer satisfaction do support accountability, but accountability alone is insufficient and untested as an incentive for service improvement. Effective comparison requires consideration of performance methods that emphasize service improvements and increase the capability of service providers to compete as performers (Dubnick, 2005.) Comparison therefore requires measures that report both accountability and performance in an effort to increase service productivity (Ammons, 2007; Chan & Gao, 2009.)

With the understanding that service measurement and evaluation is dependent on issues to be addressed, performance measurement for cross-jurisdictional service comparison requires accepted metrics that consider service requirements of each service or program. As will be discussed at length later in Chapter 2, measuring outputs and the use of other more traditional methods of service evaluation are limited to comparison of services of similar municipalities. This use of limited methods does not necessarily provide service comparison applicable across diverse jurisdictions. The current methods of comparison also do not inherently lead to improvements in technical performance or achievement.

In Chapter 4, I also consider the ability of professional standards to serve as an effective single broad measure of comparison, important to ease of comparison and analysis (Ammons, 2012, p. 121.) The ability to measure and compare services, with the use of clear and accepted criteria, is central to the oversight and improvement aspects of public administration. Both the

database and the input of consultants considered for this research support rely on the use of professional standards for evaluation and oversight of municipalities in Tennessee. This research considers the use of a single, comprehensive measure as a gauge of service effectiveness, and considers the match of five specific municipal services with one or more available service standards proposed by a professional association, industry or non-governmental organization. This use of a single broad indicator for the purposes of comparison for each service is considered and reviewed under each professional standard.

The critical questions considered in this section of the research are whether present methods result in accurate measures of services and whether the data generated provides a comparative measure adequate for the evaluation of services. The effectiveness of standards for performance evaluation receives further consideration under the discussion of each tool later in this chapter.

The Organization of This Study, With Three Broad Topics

The sequencing of chapters brings forward the logical progression of services and standards to meet the need for a better means of evaluating services and municipalities. Three broad topics are of most interest with this research. They include the use of standards developed by professionals as part of the process of service comparison, theory concerning both service evaluation and the engagement of professionals, and expectations of normative neutrality and advocacy by professionals. This research considers the theory and methodology supporting evaluation, and links theory to the comparison of municipal services, advocacy by experts, and the use of specific standards for comparison:

- This first chapter examines the reasons why service evaluation is important and notes an existing gap in the present methods of evaluation and comparison. The

relatively recent emphasis on evaluation and measurement in public administration is considered and the discussions concerning the use of qualitative and quantitative measures very briefly introduced, in anticipation of greater elaboration later in this work.

- Chapters 2 and 3 serve as the literature review for this research with specifics on existing methods of service comparison and on theory addressing service measurement. Chapter 2 evaluates and contrasts the different current service performance methods of comparison, including the use of outputs, benchmarks, customer surveys, and the use of narratives in service comparison. Chapter 2 also considers whether the accepted methods of comparison support performance evaluation and public accountability.
- Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical basis of performance measurement, with a review of the theories of public administration that support and encourage service evaluation. Attention is given to the role of bureaucrats and the arguments concerning participation and advocacy by the bureaucracy in the policy development process. The discussion exhumes age-old theories on normative neutrality and evaluates the insertion of normative values with the development of aspirational levels of services.

Concerns with and support for the ideas supporting effective governance and the engagement of experts are considered, and the governance concepts supporting active engagement of the bureaucracy help to dispel the popular resistance to input by experts in the design of goals and delivery of services.

- Chapter 4 is the summary of data available on Tennessee municipalities, with the tables and methodology employed for the study of services. The discussion of Chapter 4 on professional standards considers whether existing methods of evaluation lead to service improvement, and whether these standards lead to the use of an acceptable rating conveyed with a single broad measure (Ammons, 2012.) This includes an analysis of the services and standards common to full-service municipalities in the state and the use of a database developed from a wide variety of experts and sources for Tennessee municipalities, with applicable professional standards of service changes and trends. The discussion on municipal utilities also includes a brief review of utility districts as a means of providing water service, based on the competitive and substantial impact that *ala carte* government has on municipal services in Tennessee and other states. The analysis of the database, in combination with the use of professional standards, provides insight into factors that influence the comparability of services in these municipalities.
- Chapter 5 brings the results of the earlier chapters together for consideration of the effectiveness of existing methods of comparison. The analysis leads to the development of case studies providing insights into specific services and municipalities in Tennessee. The case studies provide clarity on why municipalities choose to compare services against and strive towards these standards. The particular focus of these studies is on police and fire standards as, unlike other standards, much of the data that influences ratings for public safety services are subject to manipulation by municipalities. The case studies provide

insight into how and why service levels are both appropriate and important to service evaluation and comparison.

- Chapter 6 provides the results of the research, with a conclusion that present methods of comparison of services and municipalities benefit from the combination of different measures of perception, narratives and outputs. The research builds a compelling argument for municipalities to adopt peer-reviewed professional standards as a benchmarked indicator – perhaps the sought-for single indicator – of service effectiveness and performance.

The research also supports an expectation that active or heroic advocacy by professionals is consistent with acceptable behavior and offers latitude in the engagement of professionals and the use of professional standards. The professionalization of public service and the encouragement of bureaucrats to participate in service and policy development requires a change in the role of bureaucrats from that of neutral observer to advocate and change agent, as outlined in the discussion of theory in Chapter 3. This role change requires the development of services and information with the interaction of policy-makers, citizen-customers and bureaucrats in a lively process of service and service ownership. The development of service evaluation and comparison standards, with input by and through the professionals delivering the service, improves the ability to compare and evaluate diverse municipalities across variances of size, location and demographics.

Discussing the use of experts as active advocates expected to bring forward informed courageous recommendations raises the question of who, in or

out of the organization, is responsible as change agents with an active role of advocacy. This issue gets to the heart of heroic participation and the need for clear, unambiguous recommendations on necessary topics and service questions. The expectation of clear communication obviates the use of intentionally complex language provided to reduce risk to the expert and to limit understanding of those searching for information and understanding on a service issue.

Recommendations for and the use of professional standards, or defined adequacies, bring together the diverse tools of evaluation, combining theory and practice for municipal service comparison. The methods and systems in present use offer strengths but are of limited value for cross-jurisdictional comparison of diverse organizations. Defined adequacy – meeting the minimums of professional standards – offers an opportunity for the development of an evaluative tool incorporating technical proficiency with municipal services, a measure not otherwise available under present practices.

Chapter 2 – Existing Service Evaluation Methods

A search for better methods of comparison, including a search for a single indicator of comparison as called for in Chapter 1, is a search for a method to compare diverse services and municipalities. Chapter 2 summarizes an extensive literature review on the early and present methods of comparison of public services. This review briefly looks to the “state of the art” of service comparison and examines whether present methods of evaluation and comparison allow cross-jurisdictional comparisons as a means of delivering the organizational and societal goals referenced by Denhardt and Denhardt (2007), accompanied by opportunities for improvement in services. This search for better methods of comparison leads to consideration of the theoretical foundation for measurement in the next chapter, Chapter 3, and the support of theory and organizational management concepts for the use of comparison indicators and evaluation.

Tools supportive of evaluation and performance have played an important role in public service improvements since well before Frederick Taylor shaped the use of scientific measures to fit organizations (Taylor, 1914). These tools were also in use before the interest in measurement – both to satisfy management and to engage the public in discussions about the worth and funding of public services – became so widely popular with the trend towards the New Public Management (NPM). This interest in performance measures and in the tools of evaluation is increasing (Kelly & Swindell, 2002), and measures of success presently exist in a wide variety of forms and methodologies.

Methods and the Four Conditions Required for Effective Comparison

Scholars and practitioners recognize that service quality is important to meet demand as cities and towns compete to retain and attract residents and businesses. Any comparison of

municipal services must therefore require some definable means by which municipalities can differentiate service and community quality with effective measures and indicators. There are single- and multiple-indicator systems currently in use with benchmarked outputs and other output measures. Comparison also includes the results of citizen or stakeholder surveys, and the use of narratives and storytelling to consider best practices for similar services and communities. The information gleaned from each service, each standard, and each method of service evaluation is important to this study and to the development of an additional form of comparison. Any system of service evaluation and comparison, including the standards researched, requires attention to at least the following three conditions for effective comparison and evaluation, with a fourth condition implied by the inherent competition outlined on the second page of this work. These conditions are presented as foundational to this research for the comparison of municipalities and municipal services.

1. Defined and adequate measures by which municipal services can be objectively weighed and considered;
2. Independent variables that influence or correlate to municipalities can be clearly identified;
3. The use of objective measures to allow cross-jurisdictional comparisons; and
4. The use of an acceptable and comparable rating conveyed with a single broad measure (Ammons, 2012, p. 121.)

The need to identify objective and trusted measures of evaluation that will lead in turn to service improvement requires a linkage between services and both present and potential methods of comparison. The approach selected starts with this summary of the evaluative tools presently available. The summary includes the equally important review of how these tools meet the needs

of stakeholders and service providers. The study then moves into a qualitative analysis on services and available service standards to support a system for service comparison, with specific consideration for municipal services in Tennessee.

Each tool of performance measurement has advantages and meets the needs of a specific target audience. The first of four such methods includes the collection of output data and reflects a relatively simple but limited means of service evaluation.

Output measures. The literature review demonstrates quite clearly that there is no paucity of studies on municipal service measurement based on outputs. Output data are often easy to collect, allow concrete comparisons between service providers and serve as a common method of service evaluation with local governments. Outputs also serve as a foundation for benchmarking and other tools of performance evaluation. There are weaknesses, however, with the use of outputs, and these weaknesses merit caution for the evaluation of services based on this data.

The use of data in service comparison has received extensive scholarly scrutiny over the past several decades (Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Brudney & England, 1982). Output measures show the measurable and comparative productivity of an organization and allow comparison through the analysis of products and events. These data, including the use of response times, call volumes, customers served, and similar information available through time-and-motion studies can be invaluable to service assessment and comparison to indicate organizational productivity. Single indicator outputs are often easy to collect but provide limited utility in the evaluation of service. Municipal governments typically measure efficiency with simple ratios or linear regression analysis on single performance measures.

Measures of outputs allow comparison on efficiency or productivity. Output measures tend to focus on single and multiple productivity measures and define services in terms of one or more tasks or product. While many scholars recognize that single output indicator systems are generally inadequate to the task of measuring services, for the sake of focus and simplicity most do suggest a dominant single indicator for use. From Ostrum's use of output measures (1973) to Shin's focus on the subjective judgment of customers and customer satisfaction (1977), these measures and measurement methods do contribute to the understanding of municipal service performance. There are also examples of multiple indicator systems that enhance the discussion, and these typically focus on broader categories for comparison, such as intercity comparisons of productivity. A productivity comparison, for example, would include comparisons based on multiple output measures. This model may include a stated comparison of efficiency, based on resource consumption, and effectiveness, or quality with services delivered at an acceptable cost (Folz & Lyons, 1986). This specific model suggests that a comparison of outputs, or expenditures, becomes an important aspect of this approach. The use of expenditures as a single output variable understandably raises questions about scale and context facing the municipalities under study, and researchers making comparisons based on resources and expenditures recognize and adjust for community size and raw resource availability.

The use of an output variable as a method of comparing services does require consideration of organizational context and scale (Folz & Lyons, 1986). Customer satisfaction surveys and the use of narrative tools, including benchmarking and best practices, similarly require an understanding of the scale and scope of different municipalities in order to allow adjustment for comparisons to be effective and useful. Each

narrative and each method of comparison therefore has a specific use as outlined below and, combined with narratives, creates limited opportunities for service improvement.

There are inherent opportunities and problems with the development of service comparison based on output measures. Simple and one-variable comparisons can produce a relatively simple analysis of productivity and efficiency but can also produce unclear results subject to easy manipulation and misinterpretation (Moore, Nolan & Segal, 2005). The use of multiple indicator output measures provides complexity and greater abilities to explain service differences but, on the other hand, can also result in uncertain results and an interpretation that may be easy to misconstrue outside of context for the services provided. These weaknesses and the potential for interpretation error may result in a decision to limit the collection of raw output data to relatively simple indicators and comparisons (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2015).

Comparisons based on single or multiple indicators do require attention to factors that vary between organizations and influence the interpretation of data. As noted in the criticisms of present methods of comparison, context, topography, and demographics influence data and data collection. Effective comparisons require that these differences are recognized and noted in the comparisons (Dubnick & Frederickson, 2015, p. 16). Beyond these factors, there are also problems and weaknesses with measurement and comparison inherent with the use of outputs. The weaknesses in the use of raw data available from output measures are apparent as the methods of collecting and reporting data vary between jurisdictions. Differences in collecting and organizing data limits the usefulness of the data in the comparison of services between similar municipalities and organizations. Data inconsistency can be eliminated with the use of specific guidelines and procedures, but the collection of data can be a weakness as well. Data

collected can be voluminous and depend on the size or reach of the organization instead of actual performance.

Comparison based on outputs can be particularly misleading if the analysis provides little consideration for size or scale of an organization. An excellent example of this problem is evident with the services under discussion. The response times for police, fire and garbage services, for example, can be lower than similar times for other municipalities depending on the density and development patterns of the municipality. Costs are often lower and output higher for large municipalities spreading expenses over a customer base with more customers and a higher number of households sharing the expense. The same holds true for water services – utility services are density dependent, and benefits accrue as the size of the operation increases (Coe, 2009; Foster, 1997; Biggs, 1990).

The collection of output data also does not necessarily improve the ability to measure effectiveness nor assist in this quest for accountability and performance. Raw output data is of limited use in performance measurement as the use of output data can be both imprecise and misleading. Output data often provides an imprecise measure of effectiveness, and comparison shifts to measures based on proxy variables. The use of proxy variables, such as the percentage of students accepting free school lunches to gauge poverty rates, may improve the limited appeal of raw data, but without context, output measures are often inadequate to explain outcomes and service effectiveness. In addition, the use of outputs without an emphasis on outcomes allows organizations to justify the delivery of outmoded or unwanted services without considering desired outcomes (Radin, 2006; Kopczynski & Lombardo, 1999).

Output data does allow the comparison of internal activity and can be of interest to an audience focused on simple productivity and efficiency measures. Under specific and defined

circumstances, a comparison based on outputs may therefore be effective as an empirical measure of internal productivity and efficiency. Output can also be compared or benchmarked against output of other organizations and standards, and this use of benchmarked outputs does allow the development of a different performance measure and standard.

Benchmarking. Benchmarking, or the use of output levels compared against peers or other organizations, is most often a simple collection of output data for comparison of the work and productivity between service providers. Benchmarking of municipal services is typically developed in coordination with other municipalities for the express purpose of creating aspirational performance goals. The use of benchmarks as a tool of comparison allows organizations to identify performance strengths and weaknesses, and in so doing to serve as a catalyst for achieving specific service improvements (Ammons, Coe & Lombardo, 2001).

Comparison against a performance benchmark is certainly a tool that has received tremendous study and support. Benchmarks include established definitions of data and practices and allow reasonable performance comparisons. The use of benchmarking for service evaluation also offers insight into management practices and allows comparison of service productivity, or outputs, between municipalities and with the same municipality or service over time (Folz & Lyons, 1986). Benchmarking has been the underlying concept of comparison against a successful level of service and allows service improvements to boldly advance instead of following incremental change. These service comparisons are also important for revealing funding problems and service differences, and for highlighting contextual and quality trade-offs with service access and design.

Service comparisons often serve a target audience of practitioners and stakeholders interested in productivity comparisons and benchmarking, therefore, offers insight into the

fundamental design of major services through intercity comparison. As with the use of other methods of evaluation, this comparison carries an underlying message that service improvements are possible. Benchmarking also promotes internal comparison, with longitudinal comparisons for municipalities of all sizes (Moore, Nolan, & Segal, 2005; Ammons, 1995a). The use of benchmarks allows comparisons of municipalities of similar size, resources and challenges and can be greater than that of simple evaluation. Benchmarking and comparisons can also yield solutions to management problems and influence efficiency and effectiveness (Ammons, 1997). The collection of performance and workload data may also improve the reliance on data in the decision-making process and encourage service assessment to support greater attention on developing local priorities and plans (Ammons, 1995b).

As with the other tools, there are weaknesses and concerns with benchmarking. There are difficulties with the comparison of like and unlike jurisdictions, including differences in terrain, service expectations, and funding. Benchmarking also depends on cooperation and close attention to reliable and consistent information shared between organizations. The results from a comparison of single and multiple indicators established as benchmarks allows interpretation. Interpretation therefore can be manipulated to suggest conclusions to serve agendas different from those available with an otherwise objective comparison of service possibilities (Folz, 2004). The indicators identified as benchmarks do not necessarily resolve process questions or provide solutions to problems, as often provided with best practices (Ammons, Coe, & Lombardo, 2001). Benchmarked services and indicators do, however, allow educated productivity comparisons against known service leaders and levels of output. Benchmarking also allows comparison of policy options against outcomes delivered. This allows customers to determine the success of decisions and options (Osborne & Gaebler, 1993). The results are therefore strongest for

informed comparisons with other efforts and organizations but require deliberation and informed application.

Unlike the collection of outputs and benchmarking, the use of best practices and other narratives does have an emphasis on problem and solution identification. In combination with or as an alternative to outputs and benchmarking, the use of narratives supports informed applications of the lessons of other service providers. Narratives do play an important role in service evaluations and improvements.

Narratives, including best practices and case studies. Best practices and case studies, important examples of narratives for comparison and improvement of services, support efforts to inform and help people and organizations to leapfrog forward with service improvements. The use of best practices as a measure of service comparison and improvement typically includes an evaluation of different methods or processes, with the resultant emergence of an acceptable practice in comparison to other efforts attempted. Case studies and stories of how a specific service or practice is developed conveys information necessary for the improvement of services for a specific location, service or problem. Even so, the diversity of needs and populations makes problematic the acceptance of a single best service approach or practice of serving the public. These practices are conveyed through both formal and informal stories, experiential learning and service recognition, and rely on the recognition of improvements in a service or practice. While there are demonstrably better ways to deliver services, inarguably there is no such thing as a truly “best practice” in social (and perhaps any) science. Neither case studies nor the publication of findings from best practices results in a true best practice, as there are always methods and practices yet to be developed. The hope and expectation are that other municipalities, facing the same or similar problems or circumstances, will learn from the work of

others to improve service quality and agility. Underlying this belief is an expectation that through replication of practices and techniques, services are capable of quality improvements to meet specific needs without tentative or incremental advancement. This expectation of bold change has a foundation in storytelling and a belief in the potential of constant improvement.

The use of output measures, benchmarks and best practices, as outlined above, benefit efforts to improve and compare services. Output measures, however, have weaknesses as a means of assessing and comparing services. The use of benchmarks can suggest agendas and alternatives not supported by the data in an otherwise objective comparison of service possibilities. Narratives and best practices can be invaluable as a means of improving services and practices but offer little assistance in the evaluation and comparison of services between jurisdictions.

An effective evaluation of services can also focus simply on the customer and a determination of whether services, as designed and delivered, receive customer approval. The use of customer satisfaction surveys allows only tangential consideration of productivity measures and practices, and allows market assessment of public sector services based on customer acceptance and perception.

Customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction surveys provide an additional method by which studies assess and compare municipal services and performance through gauging of customer perception and satisfaction. Services are provided to a degree of quality and productivity expected by the service provider, but surveys serve to determine if the quality and delivery of service can be quantified to a degree that matters to the citizen-customers (Kelly, 2003). The use of customer satisfaction surveys has historically emphasized showing responsiveness of the public workforce to public needs, supporting an organization's public or

customer relations, and providing valuable input on the need and design of services. Public support for public services is fundamental to the creation of municipalities and city services, as funding and regulatory adherence rely on the resources and will of the public. These needs and objectives identify a broad niche for the use of customer satisfaction surveys to measure and compare public support and services.

This use of customer surveys provides the next interesting discussion into tools that allow service assessment and comparison between communities. The many facets of this issue require a review of the historic weaknesses and controversies with the use of surveys.

The use of surveys remains strong. A review of the recent history with satisfaction surveys helps to highlight the need for as well as the weaknesses of surveys. This review indicates that customer surveys and public input have a background that stretches from before the professionalization of public administration through today, and over the past five decades surveys have gained popularity in the rush to quantify service effectiveness. In the 1970s and 1980s supporters of accountable government worked to deflect the Ronald Reagan administration's criticism of an ineffective and unwieldy government with surveys and analysis of results (Kelly & Swindell, 2002). The use of surveys has continued in recent years as the demand for public accountability grew.

The popularity of the New Public Management and similar works, with an emphasis on accountability and responsiveness of public services, have also contributed to the increase in the use of surveys. This emphasis on customer satisfaction and input reflects a private sector expectation that the customer is always right and should have the ability to shape services to meet customer needs (Osbourne & Gaebler, 1992). The assumption with market theory and service choice is that private sector services are selected in a free market, services are tailored to

the needs of the customer, and the customer makes a deliberate choice to buy the services.

Service evaluation for public services will vary from private service evaluation, for in the public sector and with public services the customers are not always willing, services are rarely tailored to the needs of a specific customer, services are often unclear or unmeasurable, and customers/citizens receive varying benefits from the services provided.

A discussion on the benefits and differences of each of these is important to an analysis on the use of customer surveys. The impact of unwilling customers particularly merits elaboration and is a foundational problem on the use of surveys as customer input.

Polling of unwilling customers can lower survey satisfaction scores. Many of the recipients of municipal services are unwilling customers or customers dissatisfied with receiving the same level of service as other customers. Municipalities are population hubs that band together to make possible a concentration and higher level of service not otherwise available or sought in a more rural area. This aspect of municipalities, with the delivery of a required level of service to an at-times unwilling audience, may result in lower levels of customer satisfaction despite the quality of service delivered. The same applies to customized services. Public services levels are established in the budget or through legislation, and are also rarely unique or customized. Staffing and financial limitations therefore require municipal services to be provided in a one-size-fits-all model. This broad application of services can be a particular problem if the customer surveyed has no understanding of acceptable service levels or the public services received, or if the customer places little value on the service.

The issue of service value also comes into consideration in any discussion of customer satisfaction, as the direct value to a specific customer is often unclear or unmeasurable. The value of crime or fire avoidance, or the value of garbage collection to health and safety, require a

level of trust that the services are worth the investment. Compounding these issues of worth are the problems of measuring services to all residents. Customers/citizens receive varying benefits from services provided and, unless the service is fee-based or transactional, the concept of equitable distribution of municipal services is rarely possible.

These problems and perceptions of value and service equity all play into the concept of customer satisfaction, and highlight the complexities associated with comparing public services to fee-based private services. This emphasis on perception of quality, value, and equity adds difficulty to a comparison of services and increases the necessity of customer surveys.

Surveys reflect customer expectations. Changes in public perception are the ultimate nugget sought with public surveys, and satisfaction and the inability to shop for public services in a market environment complicates the interpretation of customer support for public services. Customer satisfaction depends on issues both internal and external to the service, including expectations and knowledge of the citizen-customers. The salient questions concerning service perception are whether surveys provide an accurate reflection of customer satisfaction with a service and whether service improvements in turn result in improved customer satisfaction scores. Research indicates that the answers to these questions regarding surveys are unclear and always complex.

Surveys results reflect and can be effective marketing. The answer to whether surveys accurately reflect customer satisfaction bears elaboration, but in summary surveys may not provide an accurate understanding of either customer satisfaction or perception. There may be public relations benefits from the simple act of consulting with customers about services delivered, but the use of citizen feedback is rarely an indicator of the quality of service a government actually provides (Stipak, 1978). Brian Stipak further suggests that changing

services and service quality does not necessarily influence the results of customer satisfaction surveys. Surveys administered for the purpose of informing the service provider of customer perception can, however, be a useful marketing tool if the municipality emphasizes that surveys are employed as part of an effort to improve service. Customer feedback may or may not lead to service improvement but the simple act of asking for customer input may result in improved satisfaction scores.

The diversity of groups and populations served also influences customer satisfaction survey scores. Race, age, income gender, political attitudes, home ownership and other demographics beyond the control of the municipality clearly influence customer satisfaction with public services. This relationship of demographics with survey results may also increase the difficulty of influencing customer satisfaction scores (DeHoog, Lowery & Lyons, 1990).

Surveys therefore may not provide an accurate or clear reflection of customer satisfaction with a service. The additional question to be resolved with surveys is whether service improvements produce improved customer satisfaction scores.

Positive survey results may not equal service improvement. Surveys may roughly capture customer perceptions of service quality but the obvious follow-up is whether quality services, as existing or with improvements, result in positive survey scores. In addition to the problem of measuring satisfaction for unwanted services or unacceptable service levels, a survey may indicate low satisfaction levels if the customer is ignorant of service particulars or lacks recent experience with the service or service quality. Although well-publicized service improvements provide opportunities for positive news for a service provider, low survey scores derived from a perception of poor service performance may not necessarily result in service improvements (Moore, Nolan, & Segal, 2005; Kelly, 2003; Ammons, 1997). The use of

satisfaction surveys can be, however, an important tool in the search for public funding and support.

The need for public funding and support establishes a need for satisfaction surveys but abundant research indicates that, with the exception of the positive public relations impact, researchers have been unable to link service improvements with higher survey scores. This inability to identify ways to improve scores reduces the ability of service providers to address low scores with specific service improvements. Facing low satisfaction scores but believing in the quality of the services, public service providers instead criticize customers with an argument that customers would better appreciate the service if they understood quality or service nuances (Kelly & Swindell, 2002; Glaser & Bardo, 1994).

Service providers also may minimize low satisfaction scores as perception or assessment error, and take advantage of the survey as an opportunity to educate the resident with better and more information. Responding to low scores with an increased focus on education, however, may drive survey responses toward greater dissatisfaction. Follow-up information exposes the resident to an increase in negative news without the benefit of context. Using police services as one such example, survey questions about crime and police responses may influence responses even if the resident has no knowledge of the service or service quality. In this instance, the survey instrument influences the survey to a negative response (Kelly & Swindell, 2002).

While surveys are often dismissed as shallow and manipulative public relations efforts, the act of requesting customer input does bring positive benefits if measurable service improvements are actively incorporated into a marketing or public information process (Stipak, 1978; Osbourne & Gaebler, 1992). The use of survey results for this purpose is subject to interpretation, however, as service providers may simply conclude that low scores simply require

educating and training citizens on services and the municipality. The criticism that surveys are simply public relations tools is deflected if scholars and practitioners rely on a combination of customer satisfaction and other tools, such as workload or output measures, to educate customers and to influence survey results (Poister & Streib, 1999; Ostrum, 1973).

Any response to surveys administered for the purpose of allowing service comparison creates a particularly difficult scenario for public service providers. The use of a survey can be comparable to the practice of counting coup by native Americans on the Great Plains, with a warrior insulting an enemy by striking with a feather or hand without causing actual damage (McGinnis, 1990). Administering a survey biased towards a specific agenda, as one example, allows critics of public services to ridicule a service or action without appearing self-serving. This can be of importance if the objective is to increase private competition for public service delivery with the municipality or the public. If the survey results are more positive than hoped for, the results can be undermined with a statement that the results reflect the municipality's marketing and communications efforts instead of public satisfaction. While the benefits of an effective advertising campaign is accepted (Kelly, 2003), this positioning compliments the marketing efforts but denigrates otherwise successful public services (Miller & Miller, 1992). Poor survey results, on the other hand, reinforce a popular position that the public sector is incapable of providing satisfactory services. Perception guides the argument absent of objective verification, and this conflict between competition for and public support of delivery of public services remains an active and unresolved debate (Teske, Schneider, Mintrom & Best; 1993).

Concerns about customer perception and satisfaction surveys may also raise the potential that standards established by service providers have little meaning for citizens. This is a serious concern indeed for the use of surveys and, clearly, surveys are most effective with specific uses

and with broad conclusions possible as one of a multiple-factor evaluation (Kelley & Swindell, 2002). Public support often correlates with funding, and clearly, customer satisfaction feedback is an important aspect of service assessment. The conclusion is that service improvements, therefore, do not necessarily result in higher survey scores. Low survey scores may instead result in a greater focus by a municipality on customer education and increased use of marketing tools.

The translation of surveys can be useful and put to a variety of uses. Depending, of course, on who translates the information, positive scores from customer satisfaction surveys are widely touted as evidence of the good work of a municipality, but low scores are not necessarily evidence of poor work or service. The debate about the effectiveness of customer satisfaction surveys as a means of comparison is without end, but survey information does provide a real-time glimpse into customer perception and service knowledge. Surveys provide operational value with the comparison of changing perceptions of public services for a target audience. While reliance on the use of customer satisfaction surveys has limited benefit to cross-jurisdictional comparisons, surveys remain popular as municipalities argue service effectiveness and responsiveness. The need for public support for continued funding for municipal services helps to explain why service assessment is necessary. This need for public support also indicates that customer perception is a meaningful if difficult indicator of service support.

Customer satisfaction surveys provide an additional method by which public support is measured and compared. Surveys, outputs and narratives therefore all offer advantages and answers to narrowly phrased questions, and meet specific needs for the interested competitor, customer or citizen.

Each method of comparison meets a specific niche or need. Each method of service comparison and evaluation described above is extremely valuable in context and in the right setting, and the need for a specific measure depends on the unique requirements of each municipality. Without question, comparison based on output provides an invaluable sketch of internal organizational productivity. In combination with the use of data envelopment analysis and other statistical tools, the quantification of outputs helps with the comparison of organizational capacity (Moore, Nolan, & Segal, 2005; Folz, 2004; Nyhan and Martin, 1999). The measurement of outputs considers productivity but does not provide an effective comparison of outcomes or effectiveness.

Each of the other measures shares a similar weakness. The use of narratives, including the use of best practices and case studies, allows comparison and improvements but does not necessarily identify a peer- or professionally-approved method of service delivery. Best practices identify skills and methods in use and the stories by which organizations educate and learn by. However, best practices do not necessarily represent an objective and widespread view by an expert of a truly best practice. Case studies similarly help to identify successful practices and educate organizations on the how and why of service improvement, but do not inherently convey an informed best practice.

The use of benchmarks provides the same type of comparison – as most commonly developed, benchmarks help organizations to establish aspirational goals based on the work of other organizations. Organizations and services highlighted as performing at a benchmarked level may not be perfect at the task at hand but can be demonstrably better than the norm. The use of customer surveys, however, provides an imprecise but very useful glimpse into changes in customer perception and a level of acceptance for marketing and public relations material. Each

of the methods of comparison and evaluation therefore provides information to the service provider but the narrow focus of each presents challenges to a comprehensive comparison and evaluation of service quality and effectiveness.

Output measures, benchmarks, best practices and customer satisfaction surveys all help to establish and identify niche needs for acceptable service levels (Strong, Lee, & Wang, 1997). All also have weaknesses and are therefore generally dependent on success in combination with other measures and tools. This recognition of the advantages and disadvantages of each performance measure forces at least a passing recognition that existing measures of comparison are not always appropriate. There are also broad criticisms of the use of performance measures and service comparison, and any effort to measure or compare services carries inherent problems and shortcomings.

Broad Challenges to the Use of Performance Measures and Comparison

In addition to the gaps and omissions with each method of comparison, there are broad, even philosophical challenges to the use of service comparisons and evaluation. Scholars recognize problems inherent in the cross-jurisdictional comparisons of public services, including inconsistencies of competing local service objectives, lack of a performance measure comparable to the bottom line of profit in the private sector, and lack of uniform service measures. Comparison can be considered difficult or unfair, because services typically vary by locale and government and reflect differences of policies and jurisdictions.

The four broad concerns of inconsistency, distrust, limited application and technocracy are present with all research involving service measurement and evaluation of

public services. These challenges are presented and receive elaboration below, and reconsidered in the findings of Chapter 5:

1. *Inconsistencies of Objectives and Data* - Are the data and the reason for measurement reliable? Both the data and the use of the data can be suspect. Inadequate and inconsistent data, in combination with inactive active citizen oversight, limits the effectiveness of comparison (Kelly, 2003). The data available for research into municipal services and performance is rarely collected into or compared against a central database or repository (Folz & Lyons, 1986). Jurisdictions also face inconsistencies of competing local service objectives, lack of a performance measure comparable to the bottom line of profit in the private sector, and lack of uniform service measures.
2. *Distrust* - Does the method of comparison provide broad measures of services, or instead promote a false rationale for services and investment? Distrust is a major issue with many of the tools of service evaluation with a concern that evaluation is simply a subjective tool intended for use to support a specific agenda unrelated to serious service evaluation.

As one example of this concern, customer satisfaction surveys are often received with distrust, and have received exceptionally harsh criticism as neither evaluative nor authentic but as simply tools of public relations (Miller & Miller, 1992). The implication is that all performance measures may be used to promote a unstated agenda, and that the use of output measures and customer surveys are most often employed in support of budget and other ancillary requests. The concern with existing methods of comparison is that these and other tools are nothing more than

systemic steps intentionally inserted to support manipulation of resources and time (Poister & Streib, 1999).

3. *Limited application* - Do existing standards and methods of comparison just meet the goal of some municipalities, some services, some of the time? The concern with this question is that while measures and standards typically are sensitive to context and setting, interpretation of results applies to broad categories of municipalities and situations. The reality is that all of the present methods of comparison are contextual, and the information sought and discussed depends on specific conditions and settings.
4. *Technocracy over Democracy* - Does reliance on the involvement and service of bureaucrat/administrators, including the use of outputs, case studies, benchmarks and professional standards, support Max Weber's concerns of rule by a technocracy, and thereby undercut democracy? The argument is indeed the age-old concern that democracy is undermined if goals and levels of achievement are established, not by the public, but by bureaucrats and other experts. A theoretical concern likewise emerges based on the early fear of technocracy over democracy, and is examined at length in Chapter 3. This concern voices a position that an unelected professional workforce, instead of the public, will define and hence guide success with public services (Mosher, 1987; Hodges & Durant, 1989). These concerns with professional guidance differ from the New Public Management trend of relying upon professional groups and other technical experts (Moore, Nolan & Segal, 2005; Osbourne & Gaebler, 1992) but may reflect the populist view of distrust of government and experts so evident today.

Certainly, the use of unreliable data does undermine the acceptance of studies and research and there is a concern about a competitive role of the bureaucracy; data can be presented to support a hidden agenda and purpose; performance comparisons can be contextual, and limited to time and place; and technical issues sometimes do require intensive involvement of technical experts. These questions articulate important research challenges and suggest conditions that may undermine the use of performance measures. Each of these questions represents an obstacle to the use of service comparisons and performance measurement and is reconsidered in the findings of Chapter 5.

Evaluative measures need to change but, just as clearly, measures depend on context and circumstances and no single existing measure may be adequate. The challenges to effectiveness of the present tools of comparison opens the process to consideration of other alternatives for comparison.

Present Tools of Comparison are Narrow in Scope

The review of existing measures earlier in this chapter summarizes both the strengths and the needs met by each method of comparison. The shortcomings for each, particularly when administered as an independent method of comparison, are clear and almost without redress. The use of outputs provides researchers with a narrow comparison of productivity and processes without a direct elaboration on why the comparisons differ. Narrative summaries, including the use of best practices and case studies, give insight into specific practices that have improved services under specific circumstances and conditions. The lessons conveyed are often replicable with similar organizations, but the use of narratives as a stand-alone measure may not incorporate output comparisons nor data to indicate that a municipality's efforts are comparable with dissimilar municipalities or organizations. The

incorporation of outputs benchmarked to other municipalities and services, offered as a third category of existing tools, provides context in the comparison of outputs based on the relative success of other organizations – similar or dissimilar – in the comparison. Customer satisfaction surveys, the fourth measure of comparison, measure changes to perceptions over time and, in combination with other methods, can be a valuable component of a multiple indicator evaluation.

Clearly many different methods are available for the measure and comparison of service performance and effectiveness. All have value in the appropriate time and place, or in response to a specific question or need. These tools primarily encourage productivity comparison between organizations in similar circumstances and provide public relations support for or against an organization. The premise of this dissertation is that existing tools are not comprehensive and that a measure of professional competence is required for cross-jurisdictional comparison.

Chapter 3 considers theory supporting the use of performance measures and the ability to describe, explain or predict effective cross-jurisdictional comparisons and opportunities for service change. The importance of an effective measure of service evaluation as considered in Chapter 2 is bolstered with the theories of Chapter 3. This starts with a discussion on the use and value of theory in the applied social sciences, followed by a review of ideas and concepts concerning the use of standards developed by and through experts in the bureaucracy.

Chapter 3 – Theory, Concepts and the Call for Assessment

The previous chapters established that comparison of municipal services is important to both stakeholders and municipalities, and that existing methods of performance evaluation have value for limited comparisons. The importance of an effective measure of service evaluation is clear from the Chapter 2 discussion on the delivery of effective services. The next issue for consideration and addressed in this chapter is whether established theory, ideas and concepts for public administration support comparison and evaluation of public services. The discussion on theory of this chapter also includes a necessary discussion on the role of the bureaucracy, with consideration of whether theory supports a change in the role of the bureaucracy from input and participation to advocacy. The discussion exhumes age-old theories on normative neutrality and evaluates the impact of change with the insertion of normative values and the development of aspirational levels of services with the bureaucracy as a participating stakeholder.

Measurement Requires Theory

Some of the early public administration theorists were change managers, with an emphasis on changing the patronage practices of the time. These theorists sought to introduce a businesslike approach to public administration and service using a top-down or hierarchical structural model to control the bureaucracy and increase accountability through oversight within the organization. The discussion of theory and the theoretical base applicable to this research is therefore concerned primarily with theories of public administration in general and specifically with public management and its emphasis on performance measurement and evaluation. This research considers the evolution of ideas regarding the proper focus of public administration and management.

The variety of comparative methods for services and municipalities previously considered in Chapter 2 offers important options to meet a variety of circumstances. These methods include comparison based on outputs and benchmarks to achieve measures of efficiency and effectiveness, narratives of best practices for specific tasks for comparable organizations, and on the use of customer surveys (Ostrum, 1973; Folz & Lyons, 1986). Chapter 3 adds to the understanding of service evaluation with an outline of theories and the circumstances in which each is necessary and applicable, and briefly introduces a limited argument that the bias and baggage inherent with language influences the usefulness of theory. This discussion examines context and variability for services and service design, and returns to the position that theory is of value and supports the design of services.

Theory is of value and accepted. While the historic concern with theory in the social sciences has been that a lack of rigor and precision limits the use and development of theory, the lack of precision has become far less important to practitioners than the usefulness of theory in explaining and predicting political behavior (Frederickson, Smith, Larimer & Licari, 2015). Theories predict and explain the impact of services on both targeted and unintended audiences, and this need for the explanatory power of theory has resulted in the growth of public administration as a field rich in theory. Public administration theories have therefore gained acceptance and are of increasing importance to the understanding and proscription of service design and delivery.

Ideas and concepts also shape the use of standards and comparison. Margaret Stout (2006) concluded that all theory, including past and present, is of value in the work of public administration, but much of the work in the field of public administration blurs the lines of formal theory in favor of ideas and concepts. Luther Gulick, Woodrow Wilson and

other scholars and practitioners provide equally valid contributions to the applied field of public administration with ideas and concepts that consider not only “how things are but how things might be” (Meier, 2010). Gulick focused on the ideas and the science of administration and governance, but in the absence of theory faced a vicious onslaught by Herbert Simon into the theoretical value of Gulick’s ideas (Simon, 1946). Simon questioned and introduced controversy into Gulick’s articulation of ideas on the need for a governance orientation (Meier, 2010, p. S284), but clearly Gulick extended order and rationality to the practices of public management. Gulick’s governance and attention to applied standards – including measurement – has value to previous and current discussions on public administration.

While theories of public administration are as varied as the field itself, no single theory can explain the complexities and all decisions of the field. Even so, theories do contribute to an understanding of both public administration and public service evaluation. These contributions do not require a full review of the components of public administration theory but a brief tour of the evolution and use of service measurement does provide insight into the present methods of assessment and comparison.

The Foundation of Measurement in Theory

Early theorists emphasized a common-sense approach to efficiency through structure, with the use of a top-down hierarchy reliant on performance measurement to support supervisory oversight in the organization. This reliance on organizational structure for service oversight has fallen out of favor in support of governance systems that promote humanistic practices and ownership (Frederickson et al., 2015), but performance measurement has been and remains an important expectation for oversight and control.

The effort to measure and to quantify public services advanced dramatically during the Progressive Era as scholars and practitioners attempted to address the perceived lack of precision in the field and to achieve the legitimacy of the physical sciences (Houston, Freeman & Feldman, 2008; Larson, 1979). A concern for theory building has led to today's environment of the relatively ubiquitous assessment of services, with accountability and a visible assurance of service cost and value. Theories that emphasize public choice in service delivery provide linkages to effective methods for inter-city comparisons and service improvements, as do concepts of governance.

Reconciliation of Theories and Ideas

Service performance and methods of evaluation are best explained with the use of theories and with the management concepts supporting different organizational objectives and agendas (Frederickson et al., 2015, p. 247; Hood, 1991). Much of the early discussion on public administration is presented as a series of ideas and concepts, and may not rise to the level of theory to describe, explain and predict public policy or services. Ideas and concepts do bring value to the discussion of services and governance, however, and advance the discussion on public service evaluation, measurement and design. Frederick Taylor and Luther Gulick brought the thoughtful use of deductive logic to the examination and resolution of the problems and vagaries of public services, while Chester Barnard, Douglas McGregor and early behaviorists emphasized field research and observation (Frederickson et al., 2015). The application of these concepts changed public administration to a field reliant on both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and support the development of governance principles and structure.

Woodrow Wilson's early outline (1887) on efficiency and effectiveness is an important example of the explanatory power of a concept or idea on performance. Wilson advocates for bureaucratic effectiveness with a hierarchical organization structure, a focus on intent and values, and a recognition of the democratic role of elected representatives. The model uses rationality and reason to argue for control, authority and empowerment through the organizational structure (Farmer, 1995). Wilson's model emphasizes the use of a professional bureaucracy and the importance of service measurement and assessment. Based on a largely idealized model of business, the expectation follows the Weberian model of administrative structures, with hierarchical control in a rule-bound but agenda-neutral organization. Control through the structure, with a top-down orientation, puts a focus on empirical information, reason and rationality. It is expected that quantitative and qualitative analysis will recognize the intangible aspects of management (Gray & Jenkins, 2006). The lens through which information can be accepted and viewed thereby allows analysis through both quantitative or qualitative consideration, and consideration of the obstacle to comparisons.

The obstacles of facts, knowledge and language bias. There are and have been obstacles to the use of performance measures with the treatment of facts, the bias of language, and acceptance of knowledge. Reliance only on concrete and measurable facts has been the subject of controversy with the science of public administration.

Reliance on facts is questioned. Herbert Simon's now-dated argument that values and ethics are untestable and therefore have no place in science (Simon, 1997) is an example of the changes that have occurred to the acceptance of data and facts. The rigid insistence on measurable and observable facts differed from positions of the early theorists but

fundamentally supported the structure of early bureaucratic public administration for a classic view of the organization. The differences ultimately evolved into compatible views with the acceptance of testable facts and proxies, and a shift towards empirically based theories in public administration. By the start of the 20th century, theorists recognized the differences and moved forward with the understanding that the differences were reasonable and acceptable for theories of public administration (Frederickson et al., 2015).

Theory supports the need to measure, predict and explain applied services but the relationship of theory to language is also important to this discussion of performance measurement and assessment. Public administration bridges formal theory with expectations of action based on language, and the need for knowledge and the bias and baggage of language requires discernment in consideration of theory and service comparisons of public administration (Frederickson et al., 2015).

Bias and the baggage of language. The expectation that ideas are modified and exchanged through discussion is important in discussions of public administration theory (Frederickson et al., 2015), as words have different meanings and biases. This view that language-based theory is biased and therefore untrustworthy raises concerns on the value of effective output and other measures of comparison among services and municipalities.

This concern about language is also apparent and relevant to service comparison and the acceptance of facts. The messenger and the receiver shape facts in a two-way discussion (Farmer in Frederickson et al., 2015, 144). The discussion and articulation by participants at any particular moment therefore shapes the perception of reality using biased language. This bias can be important in the comparison of services and data, and has served as an argument against the ability of theory to predict and to explain actions and decisions. If language is of

questionable use, theory in public administration can only help with hermeneutics, providing understanding through interpretation. This discussion and the rejection of theory is championed repeatedly in the interpretive studies of David Farmer (1995), and has been important to Farmer's recognition that the language of public administration is the socially constructed theories of public administration. Farmer and Margaret Stout (2006) promote a position that theory is contextual and contingent on language and understanding. Traditional theorists take the opposite position, with a position that facts and services are relatively constant and require evaluation and comparison. The empirical aspects of facts and the importance of theory to public administration continues to carry the day with the prediction of service measurement and comparability.

Service Evaluation – Methods and Theory

While the bias and baggage of language can be indisputable, theory supporting the development of a bureaucracy holds that there are empirical aspects to public administration and that the lack of rigor and precision noted has proven less important to practitioners than the usefulness of theory in explaining and predicting political behavior (Frederickson et al., 2015). Language bias is worth noting in the evaluation of services and methods of comparison, but any view that this disqualifies the use of theory has not been widely accepted. The literature reviews of Chapters 2 consider and evaluate the present methods of evaluation and comparison, ranging from the use of output measures to comparisons based on efficiency and effectiveness (Ostrum, 1973; Folz & Lyons, 1986). This discussion in Chapter 3 links the methods of performance evaluation and comparison with the early and evolving theories of public administration.

Formal theories and various methods of performance comparison for municipalities are employed to assess changing and often invisible public services and the intent behind actions and decisions. The appropriate method of service measurement is therefore dependent on what and why a service is measured (Frederickson, 1983; March & Olsen, 1989). The acceptability of data and the underlying theories and concepts of public administration have therefore shifted with change in the United States and with the management concepts that often substitute for theory in the applied sciences. This change in the acceptance of theory and management concepts becomes clear in the discussion of entrepreneurial concepts of market theory and choice, and with the application of rational choice and market-based theory to the problems of public administration and management.

Rational choice in public administration and management. While clearly there is no core or single theory of public administration commonly accepted today, the evolution of rational choice and the early bureaucratic theories of accountability and control do serve as a broad theoretical foundation for service assessment and comparison. Integration of theory under rational choice allows consideration of physical, emotional and value-driven facts for quantitative and qualitative analysis. The measurement and comparison of services through qualitative and quantitative means remains critical to the use of rational choice theory.

The addition of rational choice to public administration theory also introduced the ability for both public and private service providers to compete for customers and service areas with market-driven outcomes and services, and added another important component to bureaucratic theory. Rational choice offers advantages over other theories of public administration with simplicity, ease and elegance of understanding and replicability (Frederickson et al., 2015, p. 247). There is disagreement with whether rational choice is

“the central paradigm of public administration” (Frederickson et al., 2015, p. 214; Farmer, 1995), but the preponderance of literature certainly emphasizes rational choice as the current challenger for the top theoretical spot. The theory of rational choice offers particular salience for this discussion of service and community comparison as the choice of services is not strictly limited to a monopoly of public or private service providers.

The theory of competitive choice considers the ability to develop a competitive market for public services delivered by public agencies, and to serve as a foundation for the choice options of the reinventing government and new public management movements (Tiebout, 1956). Market-based theory, including rational choice, continues to move forward in support of measurement and empirical analysis, and quantification is now well-established (Frederickson et al., 2015, p. 247.) Today, following the general outline of organization outlined by Nicholas Henry (Henry, 2017, p. 48), the rational choice theory of public administration both recognizes that individuals may act in their own interest and incorporates the bureaucratic, scientific management and administrative management theories. Rational choice therefore addresses applied problems with the tools and measures of comparison outlined in Chapter 2 for evaluation and thereby control. Choice however, may also treat public services and decisions as transactional in nature, with a this-for-that exchange.

Transactional relationships and rational choice theory. Rational choice emphasizes performance through a transactional relationship, with the public and legislators receiving services and the best efforts of bureaucrats in exchange for compensation, involvement and input. Theories of public administration, including entrepreneurial and choice theories, therefore do require performance indicators and assume top down management as a condition of oversight and control. An obvious concern is that this control

of the bureaucracy relies on a principal-agent transactional relationship, and as such swaps this for that – exchanges the benefits and compensation of the principal for the hard work and contributions of the bureaucrat or agent. A principal-agent relationship brings both positive and negative attributes to comparison of services and municipalities. The principals/elected officials desire the service and control staff compensation; the agent has a preference or value to do a good job; and the team members work hard to avoid disappointing the rest of the team (Waterman, Rouse, & Wright, 2004). To the detriment of the model, the principal-agent relationship emphasizes a negative view of the public workforce and explains shirking, subverting and stealing rather than explaining why or how bureaucrats adapt to change with services and delivery modifications (Dilulio, 1994). Transactional theory and relationships largely ignore the impact of public service motivation and attribute service to a relationship based on self-interest. Under this view, the public and policy makers delegate action to the bureaucracy and assume that bureaucrats use their positions to subvert the will of elected policymakers. The primary consideration for service evaluation and response is therefore through sanctions and rewards of the compensation system.

This reliance on the negative aspects of compensation and rewards may not be the final answer in a transactional relationship, however. Elinor Ostrom (1973, p. 49) determined that with attention to efforts to increase trust and communication, a rational choice (transactional) model does not necessarily create the problems of the principal-agent model. This indicates that municipalities and municipal stakeholders may successfully integrate professional standards in the evaluation of services and organizations, and may also include the engagement of professionals early and often in the design process. With the

growing reliance on contracted public services, this view of engagement is also fundamental to the use of a contracted workforce and to this research.

Measurement and comparison of contracts. Contractual services are also characterized by a focus on market-based incentives and sanctions. The challenges for contractual relationships are many, however, and control develops through well-written contracts outlining performance expectations and gauging success for outsourced services. A well-written contract anticipates issues and problems without dictating or micromanaging the specifics on service delivery. Contracts are expected to both protect the government and to allow the contractor latitude in providing service (Rosenbloom et al., 2011; Folz & Lyons, 1986). A measurable outsourcing arrangement therefore requires performance or output indicators to represent outcomes sought for the service and relies on the use of methods of comparison, including outputs, benchmarks and customer satisfaction (Rosenbloom et al., 2011). These indicators and the rewards and sanctions resulting from the contract again emphasize reliance on a transactional relationship, and the use of service comparison and measurement is intended to minimize problems of the transactional or principal-agent relationship.

The result of each of these is that adjustment in management styles and techniques, and the ability to measure performance, are required to correct the loss of employee empowerment and reliance on a principal-agent relationship under theories based on a transactional relationship. Performance measures – output counts, customer satisfaction scores and other quantifiable results – are necessary and embedded in the practices of public management for both public and private providers as a means of comparison and control

(Rosenbloom et al., 2011). Effective services under traditional and rational choice theories also require attention to trust and communication (Ostrum, 1973).

This becomes particularly important with the comparison and evaluation of services and municipalities. The view that the world is predictable lends support to the use of tools based on measurable outputs and on the use of replicable surveys and narratives. The outputs measured, and the surveys delivered, often serve as proxies to a question of whether services and a municipality are effective are meeting the needs of the community as presently understood, and serve to support theories of administration and service effectiveness.

Formal theories of public administration are not the sole support for service measurement and evaluation, and indeed, any service requiring oversight or justification requires evaluation and the assistance of service professionals. As previously noted, the field of public administration is rich in theory, and critical theory supports an active role in performance measurement. Critical theory explains the use of service evaluation and the engagement of experts with the development of effective service comparisons (Ostrum, 1973). Max Horkheimer (Berenzen, 2017) argues that critical theory allows advocacy and the insertion of normative beliefs towards informed change and calls for an expansion in the role and engagement of bureaucrats in policy and service delivery. Critical theory therefore encourages professionals to serve as advocates early and throughout the service design process, and allows technical proficiency to be delivered with normative beliefs. Critical theory ignores the common belief in neutrality and objectivity and allows public administration to become effective and transformative (King & Zanetti, 2005). The theory posits that experts can and should suggest answers and evaluations based on what should be and anticipate the need to evaluate and compare a variety of services and municipalities

(Schneider & Ingram, 1997). Widespread acceptance of these and related theories calling for service assessment and measurement results in a reliance on effective implementation to minimize problems with service assessment and measurement.

Theories supporting comparison also require attention to implementation. Public administration theory has been well served with the evolution and use of rational choice theory with public services, and choice always requires an ability for service measurement and comparison. Recognizing that the structure defines the roles of bureaucrats, supervisors and politicians (Meier & O'Toole, 2006), knowledgeable supervisors watch, control and assess the work of the organization with the use of goals and performance indicators. Stakeholders also need this ability to assess between services and service options during the process of selecting service or municipality choices. Rational choice theory therefore supports the use of measures of performance comparison but the implementation of service measurement raises concerns with organizational motivation and the role of the bureaucracy.

The relationship of theory and the role of the bureaucracy presents an obvious and necessary issue for this discussion. The last half of this chapter is devoted to consideration of the competitive and complementary nature of legislators, the public and the bureaucracy.

The Role of the Bureaucracy - Competition, Complementarity and Pushback

The trend towards professionalization of the delivery of municipal services emphasizes the importance of measurable aspects of services and the need for experts in or advising the bureaucracy. The effective engagement of a professional staff is central to the strength of a bureaucracy and the hierarchical structure, with the division of labor and specialization described by Wilson. The involvement of experts and professionals in service delivery and evaluation complicates the services and relationships within the organization,

however. Two concerns important to this discussion include the pushback or rejection of expert input with technical services and the outsized impact by the bureaucracy on democratic controls on public services.

Questioning the role of experts. The need for job specialization and expertise is fundamental to the bureaucratic model of organization and governance, but a recurring theme presently enjoying support with the public is concern about input and guidance by experts. The erosion of trust recorded for government, news media, courts and other institutions is a direct result of mistrust by the public and by legislators (Nichols, 2017). Questions about the accuracy and agenda of scientists, bureaucrats and other experts, coupled with easy access to extensive information on the internet, have led to increasing distrust of governmental and institutional information. Some doubt official information based on a history of poor experiences with these institutions, while others suffer from confirmation bias, and doubt the findings of experts when the official opinion differs from their own deeply held beliefs. Support for the courts and the subsequent actions of government suffer from this same confirmation bias, with judicial rulings in favor of a secular interpretation of the Constitution and human rights. Interpretations of science by the courts and by the bureaucracy that differ from widely held opinions of the public create reasonable doubt in official governmental information.

One current example of this is with the conflict between religious views and science. The strong belief by a segment of the public in the biblical interpretation of evolution conflicts with the concept of science-based evolution. The consistent focus in the courts, in the schools and in the public discussion in support of the science of evolution weakens the trust of this segment by the public in the accuracy of science, and creates a public discussion

that may confuse or cause questioning of the accuracy of science by the population at large. This gap or variance between beliefs and science has increased the paranoia and suspicion of the public, and manifests in a mistrust of all science, including the science of climate change. Steve Fuller (2017) documents the intentional and unintentional misinformation distributed by both governmental and non-governmental sources on this and other issues in the United States and in Europe, and the doubt and distrust by the public of official information. The 2016 presidential campaign reflected an opportunity to take advantage of this climate of distrust and this lack of belief in the accuracy of experts and government officials (Fuller, 2017).

Distrust in the work of experts creates a problem for municipal governments that rely on public trust for compliance with technical issues or service evaluations. A second and related problem can be a belief that bureaucrats are expected to bring forward information without judgement, and a fear that the bureaucracy resists independent oversight by legislators. This distrust conflicts with the expectation of advocacy and participation by experts under both critical and traditional theory, and the reliance on strong and heroic leaders instead of neutrally competent technocrats (Frederickson et al., (2015, p. 129). Clearly, assertive administrative leaders do pose problems for the ideal of democratic responsiveness and bureaucratic effectiveness, and risk triggering the accountability responsibilities of legislators (Svara, 2001). Changing the role to accept advocacy and involvement requires a balance for administrators and legislators alike.

Normative neutrality is an ongoing concern. A second and historic concern with a greater role for bureaucrat-experts is with democratic oversight of a bureaucracy in an environment that is increasingly technical, with understanding available only to the

knowledgeable. These experts are expected to understand the technical and the normative demands on services (Guy & Rubin, 2015) while relying on the political process to develop aspirational goals and solutions. Effective engagement of experts and professionals can be a key to effective service design and evaluation but there has long been a concern that the relationship between administrators and legislators is competitive. Competition requires a separation of roles under the often-misunderstood administration-politics dichotomy. The bureaucrat-expert provides constrained involvement, and public and elected officials continue to set the agenda and control policy decisions. Support for the dichotomy requires that professionals and bureaucrat-experts should be neutral observers of the policy process and contribute to the decision-making process in response to requests by the public and elected leadership.

While this concept of normative neutrality emphasizes limited advocacy by public administrators and specialists, theorists have previously recognized a policy role for administrators that over the past half-century or more has often been ignored (Svara, 2001). James Svara credits Wallace Sayre with the opinion that there is a true distinction between politics and administration. Sayre ascribed this strict separation to Woodrow Wilson's earlier work of 1887. This separation was not an early position of public administration, however, and while early theorists and scholars acknowledged discomfort with the strong influence of administrators over policy discussions they did not advocate for a strict dichotomy (Waldo, 1948; Svara, 2001). These theorists, Wilson included, recognized the need for professional insulation, input and engagement but skirted Sayre's consideration of a separation requirement. The belief in a strict separation results in exclusion of experts from critical discussions and in an intentional or unintentional maintenance of the status quo (King

& Zanetti, 2005). This belief in normative neutrality is a conundrum if the goal is to engage both experts and stakeholders in a process considering change through service design and comparison.

Clearly, there is discomfort in a relationship that does not require neutrality between an inherently powerful staff and the oversight and control expected by elected policymakers. This tension is often considered an unavoidable by-product of creating an informed and competent administration in a democracy (Garvey, 1995, as quoted in Lynn, 2001), and reflects problems inherent with this relationship. The question is therefore how to balance the need for bureaucratic engagement, flexibility and empowerment (Long, 1952; Meier & O'Toole, 2006).

Tension is unnecessary. Effective governance does not necessarily require this tension and the belief that administrators and legislators compete for power and influence. Svava (2001), building on the work of Michael Harmon (1995), suggests that complementarity is an alternative to the view of a dichotomy with the potential to reconcile the belief in competing roles. Under complementarity, elected officials and administrators maintain distinct roles and perspectives with the perceived differences in their positions but recognize that administrative and policy functions do overlap. A succinct summary of the abilities of administrators and elected officials, noting the strength of elected officials to provide dominant control over the administrators, highlights this relationship with Figure 1.

Figure 1 Understanding the Interaction between Politicians and Administrators

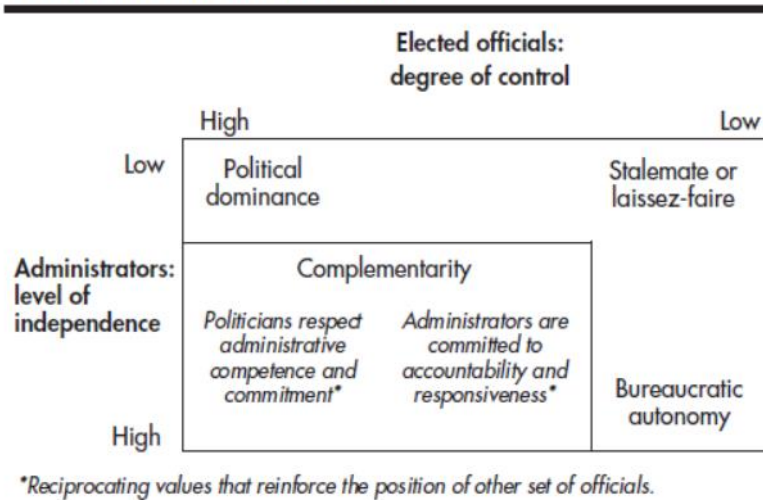


Figure 1 - The relationship of control and dependence between administrators and elected officials (Svara, 2001.)

The concern that the bureaucracy will encroach into the role of legislators and the public is based on solid examples of overlap and competition for control. However, elected officials do need the technical competence of the bureaucrat (Svara, 2001, 179). The bureaucracy in turn relies on the political buffer provided by the legislators to both achieve political acceptance and legitimacy and to provide services that may not always receive public acceptance. Administrators could exercise exceptional influence on the policy-making process but are and remain accountable under the relationship. Administrators, the public, and legislators are part of the democratic and governance process, and complementarity has the potential to reconcile the tensions of competition under the dichotomy of roles and responsibilities.

Effective engagement is early engagement. A second argument related to the use of experts is whether groups have access to expertise if experts are not included and valued early in the process. If expert input is muted or discounted knowledgeable experts will either voluntarily step away from the discussion or withhold their contribution (Walker & Bonner, 2018). This leads to bias and omission of salient information in important policy decisions, including decisions concerning service evaluations and community comparisons.

The belief that bureaucrats and policy professionals should be actively involved in and advocate, even for normative positions, is not a radical departure from but instead advances the original position of the early public administration theorists, practicing professionals and academics as they searched for useful and practical theory (Bolton & Stolcis, 2003). The early engagement of knowledgeable bureaucrats in the design and selection of policy encourages all types of input, including a normative perspective, from experts and professionals. A theoretical base is therefore necessary to support and control the bureaucracy while recognizing that service evaluation and comparison is necessary for scholars and practitioners alike.

Theory is Important to the Applied Sciences.

This research considers public administration and the services developed in support of the shared ownership of public services and municipalities. The first chapter of this dissertation noted four conditions necessary for effective comparison, with the fourth condition the development of a single indicator for informed comparison. This identification of a single indicator for any specific public service is important but difficult, however, as public services often require different designs in response to different situations (Kelly, 2003). Chapter 1 also summarizes why service comparison is necessary and establishes the importance of performance evaluation and measurement. Chapter 2 considered the optimal

methods and measures for service comparison, and recognizes the practical effort of measuring outputs and observable tasks. Present methods of measurement are to a large degree dictated by ease and simplicity of implementation, but provide value for limited questions, context and applicability.

Chapter 3 recognizes that comparison is supported by theory and addresses the theoretical foundations supporting service comparison. This chapter also considers the evolution of theory and the less formal ideas and concepts that undergird the comparison of public services and the public discussion. The literature review considers the obstacles to the acceptance of theory, including the ability to rely on and to accept facts and the bias of language. The review questions the historic accuracy and support for normative neutrality, and the impact of neutrality of opinion and judgement on both research effectiveness and the process of evaluating and comparing services. Chapter 3 further reviews the need for service comparison and assessment under the theories of public administration and examines transactional motivation with rational choice theory. While there is no single theory for service comparison or evaluation, theories associated with rational choice offer the potential for service comparison in a competitive market-based environment. Market-based theories and theories supporting the use of service comparison and evaluation for public and private services both require comparison and are positioned to support different service providers in changing contexts.

Theory supports the use of methods to measure and compare service performance. In combination with the research and literature reviews on professional standards and theory of the previous chapters, Chapter 4 builds on the previous work of Chapters 2 and 3 and

considers the data presently available in Tennessee on municipal services and standards.

This work recognizes the framework provided in the discussion on theory of Chapter 3:

1. Theory is of value and applicable, and
2. Less formal ideas and concepts also shape comparison and the use of professional standards.

The potential for a single indicator to allow cross-jurisdictional service comparisons, as outlined by David Ammons in Chapter 2 (Ammons, 2012) is explored in Chapter 4, with research into professional and technical standards recommended by the consultants of MTAS and by other experts and sources.

Chapter 4 – Data, Services, and Standards

The literature review of Chapters 2 and 3 provides an analysis of existing methods of comparison and the theories and concepts supporting service comparison and evaluation. Very clearly, the existing methods of comparison are effective for narrow or niche needs, and theory supports and requires the ability to measure and compare services. This next chapter relies on the data collected in Tennessee and summarizes both the services of full-service municipalities and the technical or professional standards available for comparison.

Early chapters in this work considered the use of customer surveys and the collection of outputs, benchmarking and case studies as proxies for measures of service evaluations and comparisons. Each of these is in use today with the intended purpose of allowing a specific analysis of service performance and, with surveys, measurement of public acceptance and perception. All leave an unmet gap with their inability to measure service effectiveness and to create opportunities for service improvements. The review of theory in Chapter 3 considers the need for the development of a technically competent bureaucracy for service design and policy development, and the literature highlights the present concerns of and distrust of professionals in the policy process. The distrust in an expanded role for experts tends to focus on the extraordinary influence of specialists and the fear that policy goals and decisions are guided by the normative beliefs of professionals rather than public opinion and legislators.

This chapter, Chapter 4, considers the services provided and standards for service, with a focus on the data collected by MTAS consultants on Tennessee municipalities. The professional standards evaluated with the services in this chapter are those developed and recommended by these professionals and by professional associations within specific fields

of municipal services. These standards are supplemented by further research, as cited, into options available on performance standards. The information considered in Chapter 5 considers the services offered, the service standards, and change in services through the case studies of municipalities in Tennessee. This passage from services to data starts with a summary of the database collected and the methodology in use for this research.

Data and Methods

The question of how best to measure and compare municipal performance in Tennessee is answered through this analysis of data collected for a study on the needs and shortcomings of municipalities in the state. In 2012, the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service inventoried and compared the services and achievement levels of cities and towns in the state. The intended purpose of the study was to adjust services of MTAS to help municipalities to improve services offered. The information developed under this project, termed the Building Better Cities program, ultimately included 28 different criteria or performance standards for the 345 cities and towns in Tennessee. In 2017, the data was updated to reflect changes in performance against the criteria for the first five-year period. Reports prepared by the staff at MTAS summarize the results of this process and present a valuable database available for service comparisons for diverse municipalities across the state, using a broad array of factors and variables. The data provide insight into service practices and efforts of Tennessee municipalities and, in concert with the professional standards presented under the discussion with each service, allow the cross-jurisdictional comparisons sought with this research.

Data are available on cities, counties and states across the country, so the obvious question is why focus on these municipalities? This and similar questions of why these specific municipalities and services are considered below.

Why These Cities? The Study of Full-Service Municipalities

The U.S. Census shares the same definition of municipalities offered by Neil McFeeley (1978), with municipalities defined as general-purpose governments with the legal ability to provide multiple services across a limited area within counties, states and regions. These municipalities are distinct from special purpose districts based on incorporation and offer a platform of services to all residents. In the absence of a generally accepted definition, I consider full-service municipalities as those providing a platform of the services crucial to dense or municipal development. These services include fire, police, water, garbage and financial operations. Thus, for the purposes of this research, full-service municipalities fund and include these five critical municipal services in the financial statements of the municipality.

Less than a third, or 104 of the 345 municipalities in Tennessee, meet this definition. In this section, I consider data on these full-service municipalities to determine the extent to which they meet available technical and service standards.

Why These Services, and Why These Standards?

Municipalities are general-purpose governments but, and as previously noted, there is no consensus to the definition of a full-service municipal government and no agreement on which and how many services a municipality can or should deliver to qualify as a city or municipality. Evaluation and comparison does require, however, clear and acceptable definitions of the municipal services to be evaluated and the use of an accepted or acceptable definition of service

effectiveness. This section outlines the services specifically considered in this analysis and the professional standards proposed to define service effectiveness.

The services designed and delivered are unique. Services are selected and adjusted based on the needs of a specific municipality, in response to a variety of unique demands. Diane Strong, Yang Lee and Richard Wang (1997) point to the gaps in services created by specific problems. Mark Glaser and John Bardo (1994) take an approach more in line with economic analysis. They find that a key determinant in a decision to offer a municipal service comes from a cost-benefit analysis on the value of the service for the community served. Services also vary with demand and circumstances. Aimee Franklin and Brandi Carberry-George (1999) consider the gamut of service and policy decisions and conclude that many service decisions address incremental growth with existing services and service packages. David Folz and Edward French (2005) highlight the importance of this platform of services to small to medium-sized communities, while Mack Ott (1980) addresses the issue of selection of services based on market selection and affordability. The reasons supporting why services are selected for any single municipality and how these services are designed by each are almost certainly as different and as numerous as the cities and towns providing the service. Common to the selection process for different services, however, is the conclusion that the services for full-service municipalities eventually coalesce into a system in which measurable service quality supports and defends management decisions, budgets and customer or public relations. This reliance on measurable results is highlighted in the case studies and data considered in this chapter.

Services are also designed around the benchmarks and best practices of nearby communities and incorporate findings developed through research shared by other professionals in the field. Professional standards help in this effort by identifying practices crucial to effective

service delivery. The implementation of standards will also typically suggest or dictate criteria by which effective services are to be delivered.

Performance standards gauge efficiency and effectiveness. The services of municipalities are, almost without exception, measurable through either direct means or by proxy, and lead to the development of service indicators and gauges. The standards of performance are often comparisons of the same municipality over time or with other municipalities or organizations with rational connections to each other. The focus of this research is with the external comparison among municipalities, and develops from the data compiled on municipalities in Tennessee.

This chapter opens with a discussion on the source of the data for this research and the reliance on data collected by consultants of the Municipal Technical Advisor Service (MTAS) of the University of Tennessee Institute for Public Service. MTAS consultants represent generalists (former city managers and mayors) and specialists, including service specialists for fire, police, water and sewer utilities, solid waste and finance. The standards suggested for the database were identified by these same consultants as generally accepted standards in municipal service.

In addition to input based on the training and experience of MTAS consultants, I researched and considered the broad array of other standards developed by various organizations. The result of this inventory reinforced the recommendations of the consultants with the use of public safety accreditation, bond ratings and the use of technical standards and ratings for water and sewer services for comparison. Further, professional associations and non-governmental organizations play a central role in the development of evaluations and ratings (Bingham, Hawkins, Frensdreis and Le Blanc, 1981). The assumption of Bingham et al. is that specific groups have stepped forward to promote innovations and control costs through comparative

measures that highlight positive innovation and stress accountability (1981, p. 4-5). I used the private sector and non-governmental sources, including the Insurance Services Organization for the fire rating, bond agencies for credit ratings and the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) for aggregate financial standards for information on the four primary services discussed later in this same chapter.

Standards are based on the work of these organizations and align with the standards and criteria offered by MTAS consultants. Understanding of these standards requires consideration of how and why standards develop. Standards in use in this research meet three criteria for common acceptance and broad use.

Standards must be acceptable, defensible and achieve scope. Professional standards as used in this work have been organic and developed for a specific purpose by professionals inside and outside of local government to solve a specific problem. Each standard is included later in this chapter with each service, and the service for which a standard is available meets at least the following criteria:

- The work performed requires autonomy and judgement, with accountability difficult to establish,
- Service effectiveness is difficult to directly measure for stakeholders,
- The obligation of resources requires service design validation, and
- The standard should substantiate or provide accountability for actions and decisions.

The first step for development or recognition of a standard as applicable for service evaluation includes recognition of the problem and acceptance of a solution by a group, company or organization to develop the solution. An organization or profession impacted by the problem

and benefitting in some way from the solution developed all of the standards included in this research. As one example, the fire service industry needed a defensible rate structure that would effect change and the ability of fire departments to protect property through the rate structure. Fire services are technical in nature but require the use of autonomous judgment in the field. The establishment of the Insurance Service Office (ISO) rating system to be discussed later in this chapter encouraged and incentivized steps to improve capacity and response with the early fire service companies and the public agencies that followed.

Accreditation has been suggested as a means for response improvements of police services, and police patrol can be extremely technical and exercised away from supervision at the street level (Lipsky, 1980; Riccucci, 2005; Hupe & Hill, 2007.) In response to increasingly sophisticated problems and criticisms, the officers and experts of the International Association of Chiefs of Police established the police accreditation program. Accreditation serves as a template for effective law enforcement and provides defensible standards in the face of informed questions and criticisms. These same needs are not usually necessary for financial services, but the judgement required for financial analysis and capacity is measured through the investigative tools required for bond ratings.

Bond agencies and financial institutions issue debt to match revenue and expense streams for operating and capital projects. The investors backing the debt need assurance that governments borrowing the funds received a comprehensive investigation by the bond agencies on financial capacity and performance. The solution adopted was to turn to the Financial Accounting Foundation, a private sector not-for-profit foundation that oversees the Financial Standards Advisory Board (FASB) for the private sector. The FAF created the Governmental

Accounting Standards Board (GASB) to establish uniform accounting standards for governments and public agencies (<https://www.accountingfoundation.org>, December 2, 2018).

Financial standards, much like the FASB for companies and the fire rating standards for the insurance industry, protect the financial investment for loans and debt for capital infrastructure. This need has resulted in a complex industry of services and companies conducting comprehensive investigations of credit worthiness of governments and groups, and the bond ratings effectively serve as a comprehensive investigation into the financial and management systems of each agency.

This leads to three conditions met by the standards considered in this research and suggested as minimum requirements for similar future service standards:

- Acceptance. Do the requirements make sense, and are they technically defensible? To the extent possible, the use of professional standards convey professional agreement and deliver an unimpeachable conclusion on service design and autonomous decisions.
- Necessity. Are there measures that presently adequately allow comparison? If a service allows accountability and does not allow great discretion, is a professional standard necessary?
- Are the standards applicable state- or nation-wide? Standards resolve problems of identical technical services, and the scope of the standard must resolve differences of locale and demographics.

The discussion for each service and each standards considered in this research applies these questions and this discussion to fire, police, financial and water services. First and

foremost, however, professional standards help to define or to establish parameters for service effectiveness.

Standards measure service effectiveness. As with the discussion on full service municipalities, the search for service effectiveness requires definition. Effectiveness is often a subjective judgment that services delivered produce the intended result (Epstein, 1984; Henry, 2010; Chen, 2010). A service is therefore expected to accomplish its goals. However, given the scope and complexity of public problems, services are usually assessed using interim or smaller goals. No one expects residential house fires, for example, to be 100% eliminated. The identification of smaller property-specific goals, including response times, fatalities and property protection rates, can indicate progress towards an overall public goal. The definition of effectiveness therefore depends on the definition of the service and the problem. Solid waste services, as one such example, have relative clarity if the measure of effectiveness is the frequency of collection. A measure of effectiveness could then be the number of households receiving 2 collections per week (Epstein, 1984). The need for clarity is notable with police services as well – if crime is not the real problem but if instead conditions that create criminals are determined to be the true problem, the changes to the problem definition will alter the definition of effectiveness for these services.

The database supporting this research provides measurable aspects of municipal services in Tennessee. The data discussed highlights the variance across Tennessee in the provision of these services, with only some meeting the professional standards summarized in this research.

Professional Competence, Case Studies, and a Single Measure of Service

The ability to measure and compare services is central to the oversight and improvement aspects of public administration. This research supports measurement with the

match of five specific municipal services with one or more available service standards proposed by a professional association, industry or non-governmental organization as a single, comprehensive gauge of service effectiveness. Typically, and as discussed with each standard, effectiveness is measured through data maintained on staff training, funding, facilities, equipment, and other assets or attributes that are relatively easy to obtain. Financial capacity, as a measure of general and revenue fund capacity and management, also offers a transparent measure, and are easily linked between the factors influencing the rating and the municipality. The standards are clear and provide a rational nexus for practitioners to the service. I consider the various standards and the effectiveness of each with the specific municipal service below.

Municipalities and municipal capacities change as the size and circumstances of the municipality change, and this search for an effective method of comparison requires consideration of department size, population density and income, and the expectations of residents. Development of a single accreditation process or variable for comparison of municipal services requires considerable analysis. The development of an effective instrument to allow inter-municipality service comparison requires an understanding of the services offered by and standards expected of municipalities.

In this chapter, I consider applicable professional standards for municipal services as a primary tool for inter-city comparison. Major services readily rated with the use of professional standards include fire, police, finance and utilities. Fire services are readily evaluated based on two distinct service standards or rating systems, and the comparison of fire services with these standards highlights challenges and advantages of service comparison based on industry standards.

Fire services and the ISO rating. Evaluation of the quality of a fire department's response capability requires comparison against two national standards reflecting infrastructure and resources. The first considered, with the rating system established by the Insurance Services Office (ISO), aggregates scores based on resources. This resource evaluation includes an analysis of staff, both in operations and command; the age, condition and capabilities of equipment; and access to an established water distribution system serving the fire coverage area.

Fire services, measures and alternatives. There are variations in the ways municipalities provide fire service. Many smaller towns and cities rely on volunteers or a mix of volunteers and sworn paid personnel for fire response (Kelly, 2003). Others contract with private or non-governmental organizations and several of the municipalities in Tennessee contract with neighboring municipalities and localities for service. For this research the data collected is defined as fire protection and response delivered by municipal or contract staff, with expenses reflected in the municipality's budget and financial audit.

Traditional methods of comparison are inadequate to determining whether the service is superior and competently delivered. The use of output measures, a traditional measure of fire service efficiency, provides little help with analysis of fire service effectiveness. Customer satisfaction surveys are also of little reliable assistance in fire service evaluation. Customer surveys, as one of several measures of effectiveness, measures the perception of service effectiveness by the customer (Epstein, 1984). Satisfaction ratings do not, however, significantly improve with better fire services or with increases in expenditures for fire service. Further, the rate of fire-related injuries and fire losses alone do not adequately reflect the size, shape or diversity of the community. Citizens in municipalities with higher taxes tend to be less satisfied with fire and police services, but customer satisfaction does increase with fire service as per-

capita income increases (Kelly, 2003). Historically these and similar findings indicated that common methods of service evaluation are inadequate for fire service. Recognizing this problem of and the need for effective fire service comparison, the insurance companies filled this void in 1971 with standards that aggregate the different performance metrics of fire service.

These standards include the development of a rating system to allow service comparison between municipalities with different levels of resources with the creation of the Insurance Services Office (ISO) Public Protection Classification rating system (Table 1). The ISO system provides a rating for the majority of the fire departments in the United States. The rating system is based around a scale of effectiveness, with a scale of between 1 (best possible) and 10 (unprotected or without an available public water supply). The ISO scale assesses a community’s ability to fight fires using categories important to the fire attack, including fire detection through alarms, fire response with equipment and staffing, and the water supply

Table 1 - Tennessee ISO Ratings

Class	Full-Service Municipalities	All Municipalities
1	2	3
2	15	15
3	22	26
4	26	43
5	17	58
6	17	63
7	4	31
10	0	2
8	1	12
9	0	14
Unrated	0	78
	104	345

available for the response. This system measures the quality of resources and inputs, and there is an established relationship between the ratings and fire protection.

The insurance industry has successfully argued that the rating system reflects relative loss among communities (Coe, 1983). This linkage with fire loss supports use of the ISO system as a tool for comparison, as rated communities with lower (better) classification levels often experience lower fire losses. The ratings may have a measurable impact on property and insurance costs, with owners paying lower fire insurance rates on property covered through insurance companies that subscribe to the system. According to the ISO, a community can expect potential savings on residential property insurance premiums in the 2% to 9% range for a single change in classification in Classes 1 through 4, and between 5% and 10% for a single classification change in Classes 5 through 8. In addition, in Tennessee the municipality receives a negotiated savings on liability insurance through the Tennessee Municipal League Pool. These savings and the widespread availability of the ratings leads to acceptance of the use of the ISO classification system as a method of gauging overall fire protection (personal communication with Dennis Wolf, MTAS Fire Consultant, 05/17/2018).

There is some disagreement over whether the ISO rating system is an effective measure of the fire department's performance (Folz & French, 2005), and at the insistence of fire chiefs the rating system has been adjusted to focus only on response capabilities instead of response and prevention. As an alternative or in addition to the ISO rating system many fire departments have therefore taken steps to achieve accreditation through a practitioner-based system under the Commission on Fire Accreditation International (CFAI). The International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) and the International City and County Management Association (ICMA) banded

**CFAI Credentialed Municipal
Departments in Tennessee**

1. Brentwood Fire Department
2. Alcoa Fire Department
3. Bristol Fire Department
4. Kingsport Fire Department
5. Maryville Fire Department

together in 1988 to create the CFAI. The accreditation process is similar to that of the police accreditation process considered below. Although the accreditation process and the ISO rating system are complementary (West, 2006), each meets a specific need. The CFAI allows comprehensive opportunities for benchmarking of fire services and the accreditation process helps to identify needed improvements. The widespread use of the ISO system for property insurance rates, however, has resulted in acceptance of the ISO system as a standard of fire service, and in Tennessee CFAI accreditation is in limited use.

Ratings provided under the ISO system reflect the willingness of a municipality to invest in staffing and infrastructure for fire service, and a department with an ISO rating of 5 accepts – knowingly or not – a greater risk of fire than does a department with a rating between 1 and 5. The ISO scale therefore is both an aggregate standard and a scale of risk assessment available to inform the property owners of that comparative risk. The use of the ISO system service allows providers to identify the improvements and specific investments necessary to reduce the risk of fire emergencies.

Rating effectiveness. The ISO system for fire service is a well-established point system incorporating levels of equipment, staffing, training and the written technical standards necessary for evaluation of fire services and infrastructure. In comparison with CFAI accreditation, the

Table 2 - Top ISO Ratings

By Area of State	Full-Service Municipalities
East	9
Middle	3
West	5
	17
By Form of Government	
Council Administrator	3
Council-Manager	11
Weak Mayor	3
	17

ISO system provides the convenience of a graduated scale with a listing of specifics required to achieve the better ratings. Most qualified departments in Tennessee have the ability to receive an ISO rating, and seventeen of the departments in Tennessee have achieved the top tier of the system, with ISO ratings of 1 and 2 (Table 2). The ISO system allows fire departments to receive an easily understood rating for quick comparisons, and public celebrations are common with departments receiving top tier ratings for both the professional recognition and the reduction in fire insurance rates for the community.

The ISO and CFAI systems meet the expressed needs of this research with effective service evaluations and opportunities for improvement, but the simple ISO rating system has both commercial acceptance and widespread use. All of the full-service cities considered in Tennessee have a relatively recent rating with these standards. In addition, the database demonstrates that there is variation in the ratings. The only departments in Tennessee in the top tier of ISO ratings are full-service municipalities, and therefore the subject of this research.

The ISO ratings, as a system of comparison, emphasize resources, staff and preparation, and are based on reports and information gathered by the insurance industry on every department in the country. Police services, however, do not have a similar basis of measurement, and an effective tool of comparison can be crafted from either comparison of specific statistics or with the aggregate standards of accreditation.

Police services. Police services share many of the same problems of data comparison and collection associated with fire service comparison, but the comprehensive private-sector data and aggregate standard collected for fire services has no equal in police services. The evaluation of police effectiveness is often based on crime statistics and specific data collected within the crime index of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Unlike the ISO rating system for fire services, private sector and commercial providers have not stepped forward with a rating system receiving widespread acceptance. Comparison of police services relies instead on the collection of statistics under the FBI's Urban Crime Report (UCR) and the use of professional standards incorporated into police credentialing.

The Urban Crime Report. One strength with comparing municipal police services based on crime data and statistics is that data are both uniform and abundant. The crime index of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) offers individualized crime statistics based on crime reports from local agencies.

Police departments have provided relatively consistent data on crime to the FBI under the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) required nationwide since 1930. Crime rates are therefore available for comparison across most of the country, including fully 97% of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, 91% of cities outside metropolitan areas and 93% of nonmetropolitan counties

reporting crimes and crime rates (FBI Website 2018, https://www2.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2009/about/about_ucr.html).

The weakness with using this output data for comparison develops from the historic methods of comparing services and the nature of the information. Police services are easily compared on staffing levels, crime clearance rates and crime rates to indicate the performance of patrol, community policing, investigations, documentation and agency leadership. Police services require flexibility and the use of judgement by the responding officer, however, and the exercise of technical and legal considerations influences arrest statistics and crime reporting. The use of customer satisfaction surveys is also unreliable, as police departments have the unusual distinction of receiving lower satisfaction ratings if the respondent is an actual customer of the police department as criminal or a victim of crime. Neither crime clearance rates nor other reported statistics have been adequate measures for comparison of police effectiveness (Kelly, 2003). Public perception of police effectiveness overall is based instead on observations of poverty, land use, and other visible components that reflect policies of zoning, development control and economic prosperity.

Table 3 - CALEA Accredited Agencies in Tennessee (2018)

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Alcoa Police Department2. Brentwood Police Department3. Bristol Police Department4. Chattanooga Police Department5. Clarksville Police Department6. Cleveland Police Department7. Collierville Police Department8. Columbia Police Department9. Cookeville Police Department10. Dyersburg Police Department11. Franklin Police Department12. Gallatin Police Department13. Johnson City Police Department14. Kingsport Police Department15. Knoxville Police Department16. Maryville Police Department17. McMinnville Police Department18. Memphis Police Department19. Nashville Metropolitan Police Department

The use of an aggregate measure may provide an easily understood alternative to the use of crime statistics with a thorough comparison of police services. Accreditation through either the Commission on Accreditation for Law-Enforcement Agencies (CALEA) or the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (TLEA) provides an aggregate standard for police effectiveness with the advantages of a comprehensive review of services. Accreditation also allows an easy comparison with a simple yes or no for accreditation (Table 3).

CALEA/TLEA Accreditation. Comparison of police services based on crime statistics available through the FBI and reliance on accreditation have both become common in the effort to replace the visual cues and customer surveys discussed above and so often employed in

gauging police effectiveness. Accreditation for police services is primarily available through the Commission on Accreditation for Law-Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), created in the early 1980s (Carter & Sapp, 1994). Accreditation requires a comprehensive review of all aspects of the agency's law enforcement activities and includes a review of policy manuals, procedures, and records. Police accreditation is an expensive and time-consuming process, and the criticism is often that only the larger and/or better-funded departments have the resources for accreditation. In response to this complaint, several states have also adopted statewide programs, such as the Tennessee Association of Chiefs of Police Law Enforcement Accreditation Program (TLEA), to help smaller departments receive the benefits without the expense and commitment required for CALEA accreditation.

Accreditation through either CALEA or TLEA requires police departments to have quality and up-to-date policies and procedures addressing timely and broad issues such as hot pursuit and deadly force policies. A total of 45, or 14%, of the 345 municipalities in Tennessee have earned accreditation. This includes 19 municipalities under the national CALEA and 37 municipalities with the state TLEA, with an overlap of 11 municipalities accredited under both processes (Table 4).

Table 4 - Police Accreditation in Tennessee

Class	Full-Service Municipalities	All Municipalities
CALEA	18	19
TLEA	30	37
Total *	37	45
* 11 municipalities have both accreditations.		

There are concerns with the cost and commitment required for accreditation for evaluation and comparison of police services. The case studies on police services of Chapter 5 provide insight into the reasons why municipalities pursue accreditation as an aggregate standards for police preparation and effectiveness, but the link of the accreditation to service effectiveness is an important consideration.

Rating effectiveness of accreditation. Very clearly, and as noted above, police services have not been effectively compared using the traditional measures of outputs, benchmarks and public perception. Testing and correlation of the relationship between police performance and customer satisfaction is not established, and many stakeholders have indirect knowledge of the effectiveness of police services. Police services require the use of judgement and, as noted above, public perception and variation between communities and individual crimes indicates that crime and police statistics may not accurately portray police services and effectiveness. Police accreditation, with an emphasis on increasing capacity for prevention, preparation and apprehension, does offer a comprehensive view of police services based on norms generated through experience and training by police officers and consultants in these professional associations.

As with fire service accreditation, police accreditation offers an opportunity for benchmarking based on the experience and training of peer officers. Under the CALEA and TLEA processes, accreditation requires a comprehensive review of procedures and other steps necessary to support service improvements. Accreditation is an absolute – either a department is accredited or it is not. The use of accreditation as the standard for comparison of police services depends on the municipality's preparation for and anticipation of problems and emergencies, and

removed from the confounding circumstances of criminals and the emotional experiences of victims of crime (Kelly, 2003).

The use of accreditation, and therefore the use of professional standards, is well established for fire and police services but the data collected for evaluation of financial services is not as readily rolled into either accreditation or statistical analysis. Financial services are an umbrella of tasks and skills so diverse as to stifle almost any attempt at accreditation and definition. Even so, there are mechanisms that allow both the efficiency measurement of outputs and the effectiveness of outcomes, and offer true opportunities for cross-jurisdictional comparison of financial services.

Finance – General Obligation (GO) bond or debt rating. Public financial services are broad in definition and scope, and specific financial indicators are often collected to indicate changes to a municipality's status and stress. These indicators usually include debt load, audit findings, availability of reserves and an organizational history of responding to internal and external forces that influence financial status. There are professional associations and non-governmental organizations leading the efforts to assess financial condition between organizations.

Influential non-governmental groups, including the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), with input from the Governmental Finance Officers Association (GFOA) and related professional associations, promulgate a variety of financial technical standards. These standards typically influence the annual budget and audit and the development of the Comprehensive Financial Report (CAFR). Importantly, this is a reciprocal relationship, as the CAFR also incorporates recommendations of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) in the financial review and plays a role in debt financing.

The issuance of general obligation debt typically requires the government to pledge the full faith and credit of the government – to raise taxes and to take all steps necessary to guarantee repayment. The CAFR, the GASB and the private bond-issuance companies therefore all play important roles in the development of bond or debt ratings for this general debt. GASB establishes financial standards and formats for governmental financial information, and auditors evaluate the presentation and accuracy of the governments to report on and to meet these standards. The bond agencies use CAFRs developed to these standards to evaluate municipalities for credit worthiness, and the bond rating influences the interest on the debt.

Bonds and bond ratings. Municipalities borrow for the financing of operational shortfalls or infrastructure projects with the use of GO bonds or tax anticipation notes (TANs). Later in this chapter I consider the effects on public rating agencies with the recession of 2007, but the three agencies of Moody's, Standard and Poor's and Fitch continue to rate most of the public debt issued in the United States. Each of the rating companies has a slight variation with the assignment of credit risk for municipal debt, but consistency in ratings is important to the banks and bond investment firms that package and issue the debt. Despite minor variations, the rating system for public debt is therefore relatively standard across the three. Moody's is generally considered one of the more conservative rating companies and the debt rated for Moody's is typically highest at Aaa, typically followed by a number that indicates where that municipality is within that rating. Tier 1 indicates the highest tier at Aaa1, a 2 indicates that the rating is in the middle of the three-tiered Aaa scale, with 3 in the lowest tier. A rating of Aaa2 is a high and safe rating for investors but is therefore a middle-of-the-road rating for organizations in that Aaa rating. After Aaa, ratings decline to Aa and A. The ratings then pick up with Baa, Ba, and B, and repeat the structure for C. Anything less than C3 is probably (but not always)

considered below investment grade (Moody's Corporation, <https://www.moodys.com/Pages/amr002002.aspx>). As ratings decline, investors have an expectation to receive higher interest rates on bonds sold. Lower ratings therefore result in higher costs to the municipality, and these higher costs serve as an incentive to the municipality to maintain an acceptable credit rating.

The use of bond ratings as a performance measurement device raises an important observation to this discussion concerning professional standards. Ratings and other financial data reflect the decisions of a municipal council to choose whether to issue debt or to pursue repairs or capital investments, all for a variety of reasons, including but not limited to affordability. With this understanding, a bond rating of Baa conveys information instead of judgement. The negative financial aspects of the rating are important primarily to the municipality repaying the bonds or to investors interested in a positive return on their investment.

The use of bond ratings for comparison and evaluation of municipalities and municipal services has also received support through research. Ratings allow stakeholders and professionals to determine the credit condition of the municipality with greater accuracy than with analysis of financial or accounting variables (Loviscek & Crowley, 1988). The use of bond ratings as a performance measure or tool of comparison is effective and the structure and impact of the bond rating incentivizes private investors to perform adequate due diligence in the analysis of the municipality's financial prowess.

The effectiveness of bond ratings. Each of the professional ratings and standards considered in this study are evaluated for effectiveness, but the use of the bond rating as a single measure of financial capability and capacity has no peer with widespread acceptance. While

there are many specific methods available to allow comparisons, few allow comprehensive comparison of financial competence across municipalities to the extent allowed with the bond rating system. Investors expect a thorough analysis of the municipalities issuing the debt, and this analysis typically explores many of the factors that explain or drive financial success for these municipalities. The use of the rating system for general purpose or obligation debt has historically served as the appropriate comprehensive measure of financial capacity and effectiveness (Loviscek & Crowley, 1988).

The bond rating provides an aggregate standard, incorporating and summarizing cash reserves (fund balance); annual budget, audit and financial statements; and bi-annual local option sales tax situs reports of municipalities. Rating agencies evaluate the financial issues and reports of any municipality issuing bonds to finance capital and operating expenses.

Table 5 - Debt Ratings for Full-Service Tennessee Municipalities

Class	GO Debt Ratings	Revenue Debt Ratings
Baa1	0	1
Baa3	0	0
A	0	2
A+	6	3
A1	7	10
A2	10	12
A3	1	2
AA-	0	2
AA	15	0
Aa1	3	3
Aa2	10	3
Aa3	6	5
AAA	4	3
Unrated	42	58
	104	104

A review of the bond ratings in Tennessee (Table 5) provides insight into financial capacity and succinctly shows the weaknesses with the use of bond ratings as well. The nature of bond issues, when applied to capital investments, is that the issues are infrequent for smaller and less active municipalities. Ratings are infrequently conducted unless debt is issued, and some of the ratings listed are 20 years or more after the issue and certainly do not reflect current financial capacity. Rating agencies also withdraw the rating if local conditions change. Many of the municipalities in Tennessee do not have a recent rating due to withdrawal or to time between bond issues.

The limited number of ratings reflects evolving issues and concerns in Tennessee and across the country. These concerns make the use of the bond rating system an interesting basis for cross-jurisdictional comparison:

- a. While any decision to fund projects and services is unique to each municipality, Tennessee governments are anecdotally recognized as both low tax and low debt. This reluctance to issue debt and to invest in capital may at least partially explain the 42 municipalities lacking a rating in Table 5. Municipalities may request and fund a rating review, but typically time the review around a need for credit and the issuance of debt. Rating agencies do not rate municipalities that do not issue debt and therefore require a rating.
- b. Nationally, downgrades reflect the state of the area economy, and the poor economy results in less debt issued (Palumbo & Zaporowski, 2012). A decision of whether to issue debt therefore reflects the changing economy of the state and raises concerns that municipalities are unable to repay new debt.

Other rating applicants simply withdraw the application for bond funding after the rating agency provides feedback. Based on this feedback the municipality may decide against issuing debt. A quick review of the Moody's website indicates that many municipalities in the state follow this last model. In 2010 the Tennessee city of Hohenwald followed this process. The city started the application process for bond issuance at a rating of Baa1 but withdrew the application after receiving an indication that the rating would be downgraded to Baa2 and, ultimately, Baa3 (Moody's.com/hohenwald). The language of the rating agency very specifically reports on the trends facing the municipality and the steps that should have been

- taken by the municipality to adjust to a changing forecast. The example with Hohenwald points to the seriousness in which municipal officials take the bond ratings. This suggests that the ratings, as administered by the ratings agencies and process, serve as an effective standard in comparisons and service evaluation.
- c. General obligation debt offers a number of work-arounds that allow a municipality to improve or avoid a rating entirely. Many municipalities in Tennessee borrow through loan pools such as the Bond Fund of the Tennessee Municipal League (The Fund). The Fund combines or groups future borrowings of cities and counties in the state, and then prepares a single issuance for this combined amount. The Fund gains the buying power or interest advantage of a large issue and avoids the need for individual ratings of the municipalities. This and the establishment of similar state revolving loan funds is common in Tennessee and other states for both general purpose and revenue debt.
 - d. In Tennessee, debt may also be issued by other authorities, including the state or by the TML Bond Fund. The purchase of bond insurance allows manipulation of the credit worthiness of the municipality and hides findings that would be revealed by a credit agency review. The purchase of insurance enhances the credit of the municipality and results in a lower interest rate (Joffe, 2015).

In addition to these issues and concerns, in the past the purchase of bond insurance has reduced the effectiveness of bond ratings as a method of comparison with other municipalities. The bond market has changed, however, and these changes require reconsideration of the use of bond ratings to reflect financial and economic capacity.

The Impact of Bond Insurance. Municipalities do have the ability to “buy up” or to improve the rating through the purchase of bond or rating insurance. The market for bond insurance changed somewhat dramatically, however, with the destabilization of the bond and bond insurance markets between 2007 and 2010. Prior to these changes bond insurance assured investors that the investment was sound and little attention was given to the credit worthiness of the local government. Investors have again started to demand a thorough review as a condition for a bond rating, with or without insurance, which triggers a comprehensive evaluation of the municipality’s financial capabilities.

The use of bond insurance no longer guarantees a high rating with Moody’s and many of the bond issues now backed by insurance receive ratings below the investment grade of Baa. Bond insurance also has less of an impact on ratings as a tool of comparison under a rigorous review.

Ratings Measure Financial and Economic Factors. The key issues for a better bond rating primarily include income and diversity of the municipality’s economic base. Income, or the revenue variables of a government, reflect economic variables and open the analysis to a focus on stability and sustainability. Further, national data suggest that management practices, including active manipulation of financial expenditures and other constraints, also lead to higher ratings. Active management of debt and expenditures can be positive if these adjustments demonstrate that the municipality is actively in charge of and altering practices as necessary in anticipation of financial changes (Palumbo & Zaporowski, 2012).

This discussion and the research of the rating agencies highlighted in the Hohenwald example above argues that despite and almost because of these concerns the use of the bond rating remains the single most effective means of evaluating financial capacity and condition

across jurisdictions. The same issues and argument holds true for the evaluation of utility systems with the ratings for revenue debt.

As noted in the earlier discussions, fire services are rated by the insurance industry, police services are eligible for professional accreditation, and financial services receive analysis by credit agencies for bond issues. Utility system operations, however, do not offer clear or technical standards for comparison. The important health aspects of water utility services requires a critical eye to licensing requirements for staff, technical requirements for treatment, and customer demand, but a method of comparison has not been simple or clear. In the absence of an overall standard for water service production and distribution, I fall back on the compensated review of bond agencies searching for credit-worthy opportunities for investors. The ability of public utilities to maintain water services is based less on the need for the emergency response required of police and fire departments and more on the ability to fund, staff and maintain continuous operations. I next consider opportunities underlying these efforts to compare and contrast utility systems and to focus on financial operations and measures that do allow comparison.

Utilities and revenue debt rating. Water systems address critical needs of health, safety and economic development, and the control of utilities has shown to be very important to the control of growth and development of areas in and adjacent to municipalities. Services and providers vary across Tennessee. Water service is provided by a variety of municipalities, utility districts, and at least one county.

The primary focus of this review rests with water services supplied by a municipality and included in the municipality's annual audit or comprehensive annual financial report (CAFR). This discussion on municipal utilities, however, requires an important if brief review of utility

districts as a means of providing water services. This discussion is central to understanding the complex relationship that area utilities and ala carte government have on Tennessee and Tennessee municipalities.

Utility services are diverse. There are presently 466 separate utility systems licensed to operate in Tennessee and chartered under a wide array of arrangements and authorities. Central and west Tennessee provide the largest systems, with the Nashville water system largest based on the number of connections, with 264,000. This emphasis on connections may reflect a greater use of multi-family housing in the municipality or instead the use of water meters that serve a number of apartments or homes. The largest system by population served is that of Memphis, with 671,000 connections. At least four of the systems show zero connections and six have only a single connection. In most of these, and in several of the other small systems, the utility serves only a trailer park, apartment community or penitentiary (Office of the Tennessee Secretary of State, 2016). Many of these are private systems or public service districts created for a limited purpose or development.

Consideration of utility services and special purpose districts has received comprehensive review in the works of Kathryn Foster (1996, 1997), Susan MacManus (1981) and John Mitchell (1968), with each focused on the services and the challenges facing these districts. These challenges include the competitive environment and need for coordination with municipal and other public and private systems. Julie Biggs (1990) reviews what she terms as the weaponization of water and sewer utilities. Water and sewer utilities can be used to control growth outside of the municipality, to force annexation, and to achieve other municipal objectives. This is a particularly important issue facing the areas outside of municipalities in Tennessee in the interim absence of sophisticated county services. Michael Shelton and Troy

Albee (2000) summarize the finances of these utilities and discuss financial monitoring. These works add up to a powerful argument that water and sewer services are both important to public health and economic development but also to a municipality's ability to support and control growth within a conceivable zone of growth for that same municipality.

The diversity of providers and arrangements also makes the selection of a single rating system difficult for municipal utilities. Utility systems are held to technical requirements across the United States and employ professionals with state and national licenses and ratings. A few quick common observations are important to this effort to create a cross-jurisdictional system of comparison:

- a. Water and sewer systems are density-dependent, with greater efficiency typically possible as population density increases (Foster, 2007).
- b. Water and sewer utilities are weather-dependent and require a funding or financing structure capable of adjustments.
- c. Utility systems are typically fee-driven and rely not on tax revenues but on revenues from the sales of water and sewer services. This reliance on revenues creates a system with financial independence from the services and departments competing for tax revenues.
- d. Utility systems are capital-intensive and require access to debt financing.
- e. Water systems also impact other major municipal services:
 - i. The system typically provides fire hydrants placed at specific intervals to support and influence fire service and the ISO rating reviewed above.
 - ii. The availability of water and sewer is key to economic development for many communities and to the ability of the community to grow in density

and beyond existing boundaries. This dual-purpose issue of economic development and growth creates a tension between the municipal government and the major customers of the system, including county government, business and industry (particularly manufacturing) and the residential public.

The operation and expansion of the utility rely on the commercial analysis of credit-worthy debt for cross-jurisdictional comparisons. The seasonal and capital-intensive nature of the utility compounds this reliance and adds weight to the use of private analysis and reviews. As with the use of GO bonds for evaluation of financial performance for the tax-supported components of a municipality, the availability of the revenue bond rating system provides the most effective means of comparison across municipalities and other water utilities.

Effectiveness of revenue bond ratings for comparison. Investors and rating agencies provide an effective means of evaluating water utility debt, or debt backed by specific revenues of the water system. The ratings for revenue debt provides a research-based measure of service capacity and responsiveness. As with GO debt ratings, this aggregate incorporates and serves to incentivize systems with a positive utilities rate structure and a distribution system that controls and accounts for loss. Ratings depend primarily on the municipality's past experience managing debt and the confidence of investors in the revenue stream forecasted to result from a system expansion or other improvements.

A rating for revenue debt is not necessarily positive or negative but instead reflects changing markets, product sources, and the infrastructure investment philosophy of the municipality's governing board. Rating agencies consider a wealth of data to portray the ability of the utility service provider to prepare for changes in market and customers. Bond ratings for

revenue-backed debt for water utility systems bring together audits and financial data with a wide range of service and operational measures and indicators for water utilities (Hildreth & Miller, 2002). Some municipalities only expand utility systems as funding or customers commit to funding infrastructure changes, and rarely issue debt. This unwillingness to issue debt also limits this measure's effectiveness for comparisons. Governance decisions against investing in utility system upgrades and expansions makes this measure inconsistent across Tennessee, but revenue bond ratings do continue to present the best aggregate score for rating of utility services. Revenue debt also offers a number of work-arounds, and today a bond rating typically requires a comprehensive evaluation of the municipality's financial capabilities. The use of a bond rating as the aggregate measure for a utility system includes the crucial consideration of water source, customer trends and growth, and regional development issues. Unlike water quality and output measures that improve with scale of a utility operation, the revenue bond rating provides a focus on these management and technical trends.

Again, despite these restrictions and limits, the use of the revenue debt rating as a method of comparison provides an effective standard for cross-jurisdictional comparison for active municipalities growing, investing and issuing debt despite the limited availability of timely ratings (Hildreth & Miller, 2002). Solid waste services, however, are also critically important but have no similar standard or tool of comparison.

Solid waste. Solid waste collection, or collection of garbage and refuse, supports public health and safety in the populated centers of municipalities. By all measures, garbage collection therefore is a critically important basic service of municipalities and bears mentioning as one of the services defining full-service municipalities. This service also offers an important distinction from the other services considered – there is no state or

national standard on refuse collection. The consultants of MTAS suggested that the existence of garbage service, bolstered by frequent curbside collection, is a common standard. The services of solid waste remain measured by efficiency and productivity measures and weekly or bi-weekly garbage collection service is the yardstick against which municipalities are accepted or rejected for the purposes of comparison with other municipalities.

The technology of collecting solid waste for many municipalities has changed, primarily with the use of 1- or 2-person automated trucks and piston-driven compacting. Garbage services improve through efficiency standards, such as through the redesign of collection routes to reduce route times and fuel consumption. There are opportunities for other service improvements and efficiencies, including method of collection, route design, reduced employee injuries, and landfill or recycling options. There is no argument, however, that the service itself has become more effective, or that the outcome of clean streets and safe neighborhoods has changed or been significantly advanced. The heart of the service is typically the fundamental decision of whether the service is provided for all citizen-customers.

Solid waste rating effectiveness. In the absence of national or professional standards, scholars rely upon efficiency or capacity standards, including data envelopment analysis (DEA) considered in Chapter 2. The efficiency, best practices and capacity comparisons of DEA are generally unrelated to the professional standards discussed and typically compare efficiency to predict the highest outputs that can delivered with the fewest or least inputs. Efficiency is beyond the scope of this work and within the scope of customer comparisons for only a narrow niche of studies.

The efficiency of garbage collection routes, the number of households served, tonnage collected and collection of recyclable materials are all outputs often considered with comparisons of garbage system productivity. This research considers garbage or solid waste collection as one of five services required to meet the health and safety needs of full-service municipalities, as outlined in the discussion of the selection of services earlier in this chapter. A single acceptable standard is not available for solid waste collection, however. Data available on frequency and volume of solid waste collection measures productivity but is contingent on a municipality's development pattern, topography and service needs. The use of productivity and efficiency outputs can be an effective means of comparing volumes served and efficiency, but a professional standard has yet to be developed.

Each of the services outlined in this section is critical to the safe delivery of services in a congested or municipal environment. The marriage of critical services and professional service standards provides an opportunity for a clear comparison to this platform of municipal services.

Comparison based on both services and standards is powerful. The MTAS database matches the achievements of full service municipalities in Tennessee with the framework of professional standards discussed in Chapter 2, and serves as the foundation for effective cross-jurisdictional comparisons of services and municipalities. The standards have been developed by those who understand how services are delivered, why service standards are important, and how these standards are appropriate for these services. The data, municipalities and services therefore allow comparison based on peer-reviewed standards established by the industries and professionals supporting the services. This comparability is important as a tool of business and residential attraction, and for gauging service proficiency and success.

Chapter 5 brings focus to the question of how the various service standards can be used and addresses the gap in service evaluation. This chapter considers the experience of Tennessee municipalities with professional minimums or adequacies to improve service comparison and evaluation across diverse jurisdictions. I also analyze the industry or professional standards available for the evaluation and comparison of specific services, including the use of common standards applicable to municipalities of any size. These standards often encourage improvement with specific steps necessary to meet the standard and to improve services.

Chapter 5 – Lessons and Case Studies

The literature review of Chapters 2 and 3 establishes that existing methods of comparison are of narrow use, with limited information on services provided by experts in either the private or public sectors. Because the knowledge gained from each method of evaluation does not necessarily incorporate the needs for technical competency envisioned in the initial bureaucratic theories calling for specialization (or later, heroic participation), I consider the value of professional standards for service comparison and with evaluation of technical competency.

This chapter compares the data gathered by MTAS with the services, standards and methods of comparison discussed in earlier chapters. The review of the literature presented in the first chapters of this work provides for use of existing measures of comparison for niche purposes and needs. This chapter, through a series of case studies, illustrates how the use of evaluation based on professional competence encourages service development and improvement. The case studies present the sometimes difficult but necessary message that critical standards are available and in use in Tennessee. These studies also present the argument that service decisions do have consequences. They further highlight the need for professional staff – and advisory agencies similar to MTAS at the University of Tennessee – to inform and advocate for better services and the engagement of experts in service decisions and evaluation. These studies indicate that the core services considered in this research are identical across diverse municipalities and the service expectations are both necessary and readily available through professional standards. I also continue the discussion on the feasibility of using existing professional standards as a single indicator for cross-jurisdictional comparisons for specific services.

Chapters 1 and 2 establish the need for evaluation of municipal services and review existing methods that allow cross-jurisdictional comparison of services across diverse municipalities. The theoretical foundation for service comparison is presented in Chapter 3, and theory on the proper role of experts in policy development and implementation is discussed. Chapter 4 examines the services provided by full-service municipalities and the professional standards available and applicable for each. This chapter, Chapter 5, presents the results of the research and a discussion of service variance across Tennessee and subsequent case studies illustrating the fundamentals of service changes in Tennessee.

While my initial hope was to identify a single indicator that will allow the evaluation and comparison of each service, the research indicates that the best comparison is one involving a combination with the use of present comparative methods and the use of professional standards. The use of professional standards as defined minimums does not preclude the present methods of comparison, but instead recognizes the niche uses of these methods and advocates for a combination of traditional comparison with defined minimums to allow service design to be both effective and efficient.

Bringing Data and Research Together

The data and the subsequent discussions with municipal and other officials involved in service design decisions provide clues to why municipalities elect to reach a particular level of the professional service level for each service.

Municipalities focus on service improvements to accomplish three general objectives, including the following:

1. Meeting niche needs. Existing methods of comparison are effective for niche needs, and are strongest in combination;

2. Forcing change. Advocacy and what scholars have termed “heroic participation” by experts in the bureaucracy are necessary for effective change; and
3. Service evaluation and improvement. Peer-reviewed benchmarks, or professional standards, introduce the ability to gauge whether services are delivered in an effective or competent manner.

These are best illustrated in the case studies developed from the data developed by the consultants of MTAS and presented below in the brief policy box format adopted by England et al. (2012). These studies focus on police and fire services as the services and standards under the greatest control of the municipality. Each contributes to a better understanding of the value of service comparison.

Existing methods of comparison are effective for niche needs. The extensive research highlighted in Chapter 2 found that present methods of comparison rely on service perceptions, narratives and output measures. These methods also typically omit or ignore measures that would establish whether a service meets technical standards or effectiveness expectations of services. The use of outputs, customer satisfaction, benchmarking and best practices can be effective in meeting niche needs but fail to provide a comprehensive method for municipal cross-jurisdictional comparison.

Outputs measure efficiency and productivity. Folz and Lyons (1986) demonstrate that output measures are important for quantifying work levels and service demand. In Chapter 2, I examined existing methods of comparison and found that while measurement of outputs can help to recognize comparative efficiency, the use of outputs for comparison lessens the ability to develop inter-municipality comparisons. Outputs can be and usually are sensitive to size and scale of an organization, and impact of size and scale of an operation can

be demonstrated with 4 of the services under discussion. Response times for police, fire and garbage services are common outputs influenced by the density and development patterns of the municipality, and certainly costs per output are related to the number of people and households sharing the expense. The same holds true for water services – utility services are density dependent, and benefits accrue as the size of the operation increases. Outputs can also serve as proxies for outcomes and other data and contribute to a visual representation of service performance. The use of proxies is common to assist with a visualization of service performance and effectiveness, but the research indicates that the available data on outputs are often inadequate or unreliable measures of effectiveness.

The results of comparison based on outputs does not deliver a broad method of comparison and continues to focus almost exclusively on productivity with comparable municipalities or as a measure of efficiency. Outputs provide productivity data for comparison with other similar and dissimilar organizations, but the use of narratives – benchmarking and best practices – as methods of comparison emphasize service improvement.

Benchmarking allows rapid improvement. Benchmarking with peer organizations sets the stage for comparison and rapid improvement if the peer is better, faster or less expensive, but as discussed in Chapter 2 the weakness is that benchmarking with peers does not necessarily improve the service or practice to the best industry or professional standard.

Narratives create opportunities. The research cited in this dissertation demonstrates that narrative methods, including case studies and the use of best practices, allow municipalities recognized as excellent with a service or practice by peers to provide examples and narratives on how municipalities can improve. Narratives provide a setting for storytelling to relay answers to

service improvement questions or problems. Both expose the municipality to potentially new and better information but, as with benchmarks, the new information may not reach the level of the best industry or professional standard unless there is comprehensive research that includes professional and technical standards.

Citizen perception may equal customer satisfaction. Although customer input and satisfaction surveys should not be considered measures of performance, both are important to the understanding of customer views and perceptions. Customer satisfaction surveys follow a market-based strategy and assume that the customer is a voluntary recipient of the services and both understands and supports the impact of the services. The discussion on police and fire services in Chapter 4 of this work considered the search for public service effectiveness, and introduced research indicating that perceptions are not always linked to actual service levels and performance. A measurement of customer perception can be useful, however, with decisions and efforts in support of service changes, funding requests and marketing strategies.

A combination strengthens comparison. A combination of methods of comparison, such as with the experiential learning of narratives in combination with outputs measuring productivity, can be particularly powerful. Narratives and output measures are not the only useful tools. Municipalities also can follow the lead of business by attempting to deliver services and service levels wanted and expected with the use of customer satisfaction surveys. The importance of a combination of methods becomes particularly clear in the case studies on police and fire services highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 2 outlines the specific weaknesses inherent with counting outputs, establishing benchmarks, learning by narratives and measuring of customer perception flow,

all of which receive support as tools of business and from theories of public administration. The key shortcoming of these tools is that, during a process aimed at change and improvement, these instead emphasize maintenance of the status quo (King & Zanetti, 2005).

A strengthening or expansion of evaluation and comparisons to focus on consistent and comparable service improvement includes the use of professional standards. The use of standards as a basis for comparison will not require a different theoretical foundation, but requires acceptance that bureaucrat/experts have a role in policy design as active advocates for normative positions.

Advocacy and heroic participation by experts are necessary for change. The discussion on theory, with an emphasis on having and advocating for a professional agenda – the opposite of normative neutrality by bureaucrat/experts – is covered at length in the discussion on theory. Chapter 3 supports the use of service evaluation and comparison as necessary components of the system of oversight and control. As noted, this control has grown to include an expectation of normative neutrality, distancing professionals from active advocacy and unsolicited input. Reliance on experts to maintain a neutral stance will almost certainly result in the development of suboptimal measures and comparisons. The concern for control and oversight under a perceived need for separation of politics and administration may also strengthen reliance on the principal-servant relationship and exclude the passionate professional involvement anticipated by early theorists.

The belief in a strict separation excludes experts from critical discussions and is a problem if the goal is to engage experts and stakeholders in a process considering change through service design and comparison. While the belief in normative neutrality and the politics-administration dichotomy remains popular, further research has moved forward with

a different position and finding. The works of Svara (2001), Waldo (1948) and King and Zanetti (2005) conclude that, at least at the scholarly level, the tide has changed on the theory of the dichotomy. The emphasis on having and advocating for a professional agenda and services – the opposite of normative neutrality by bureaucrat/experts – requires this activism, this engagement, and the peer-reviewed process.

The public interest and assertive leadership in the bureaucracy. There certainly are dangers with the visibility of assertive administrative leadership in a political environment but “the modern emphasis is on strong, heroic, muscular leaders rather than neutrally competent technocrats.” (Frederickson, et al., 2015, p. 129.) This describes heroic leaders as those that recognize the problems that bring clear answers to difficult or unpopular issues, and that act in the public interest despite this peril. Instead of minimizing or confusing recommendations and guidance with overly technical or bureaucratic language, the heroic leader articulates recommendations that clearly and accurately provide the information needed for optimal decision-making. The heroic leader is active and engaged in support of the public, not a personal, agenda.

Acceptance that theory encourages engagement and advocacy by bureaucrat/experts provides a foundation for change for administrators and legislators to complementary instead of competitive roles. Theories supporting a role change for bureaucrats and experts establish a firm footing for engagement by experts in the decision process and a platform of support for the use of professional standards in service evaluation.

The use of a single broad measure for service comparison. Chapter 1 introduced the concept of a single measure or indicator to allow a simple but comprehensive comparison of each municipal service considered in this study. The last chapter, Chapter 4, considered one or

more professional standards for each service, and directed comparison through these existing standards.

Based on the widespread use and acceptance of standards I conclude that the use of professional standards for evaluation of municipal services for fire, finance and water utilities offer substantial financial incentives for performance at certain levels of the ratings, with tangible benefits for municipalities interested in improving services. The use of professional standards is also, as with the traditional methods of comparison, limited in scope. The use of standards does not answer questions about productivity or customer perception, and standards are not the source for detailed service improvements at all levels of the service as can be possible with best practices and other narratives. The use of professional or industry standards provides a measure of service preparation and competence, but measures of output, customer satisfaction and best practices are important if the goal is compare the services on more than just professional preparation and competence.

Professional standards help to gauge service competency. The use of professional standards therefore supplements and enhances comparison incorporating best practices, output measurement and benchmarks, with the understanding that acknowledged experts have researched and identified a single best way or standard for the delivery of services. This requires acceptance of the engagement and input of experts and professionals. Chapter 4 demonstrates that this engagement is necessary with comparison of core services provided by full-service cities against four different professional standards. The findings in this research indicate that there are specific standards that do bring the salient aspects of service together and do reflect a standard comparable across diverse municipalities. The case studies included in the policy boxes of this chapter were developed from a review of the data

collected in the 2017 update of the MTAS reports with additional information obtained in personal communications with consultants and practitioners. These case studies provide examples of individual variations on how the standards are of use, the obstacles to each, and the use of the standards as a means of municipal or service comparison.

The case for the use of ISO ratings. The rating system under the Insurance Services Office (ISO) offers an established relationship between ratings and fire protection, and classifies a community's ability to fight fire (West, 2006). ISO ratings also have a financial impact on fire insurance rates in the municipality, and these incentives add to the attraction of using the ISO rating system as a method of comparison. Declines and improvements to ISO ratings best illustrate the use and importance of ratings to municipalities in Tennessee.

Spencer, Tennessee, provides an effective illustration of a rating reduction, and highlights the importance of the rating system to the department and the municipality (Policy Box 1). The ratings changed during turnover in the department's chief. Volunteers staff the

Policy Box 1 – Declining ISO Ratings

Spencer, Tennessee (pop. 1,601) received a rating of 10 (unprotected with no water service) by ISO in 2015 due to deficiencies with training records, access to the county 911 system, the water system and the equipment on the response trucks. A community must wait a year or more between ratings to develop a 12-month improvement record. Spencer is an all-volunteer department and the volunteers are developing a plan for the next rating to address deficits. The primary focus is with creating a records system for training and fire call-outs, and an open inventory of trucks and equipment. A rating of 9 is not unusual for a volunteer department but the businesses in the town were upset with the increase in fire insurance rates with the decline to a rating of 10.

Support of business owners and other stakeholders for improved ratings resulted in a concentrated effort by staff and the inspectors of ISO. Spencer is adjusting service to receive the better ISO rating for savings on insurance for both businesses and residents.

department, and a new firefighter accepted the chief's role. The new chief lacked understanding of the ISO system, and the conflicts of the chief with an ISO rating official resulted in the department's change to unprotected, with the lowest ISO rating of 10. Inconsistent communication of the rating importance and changes initiated by the department resulted in controversy. Because of the decrease in the fire service rating, fire insurance rates for properties served by the municipality increased. This increase in insurance rates created a difficult position for the department with the stakeholders for the fire service, and resulted in turnover in the chief's position and the need for corrections to the deficiencies noted in the rating inspection.

Municipalities learn from controversy and a ratings loss, but they also learn from success with the ISO system as well. The Germantown fire department was already well regarded with an ISO rating of 3, but sought a better rating to benefit the property owners in

Policy Box 2 – Improving Ratings and Fire Accreditation

At the other end of the spectrum are Tennessee cities with good ISO ratings, seeking CFAI accreditation as well. Germantown is one example and received an ISO rating of 1 in 2017. The city specifically targeted the higher rating and historically enjoyed a strong fire prevention program and good records maintenance, both conditions of the better ISO ratings. The coverage area from fixed stations is a problem for any department, and in Germantown station coverage and response is a factor in placement and replacement of stations and equipment. Germantown received a boost in this effort when the city assumed operations for the ambulance service, and cross-training ambulance drivers and technicians as firefighters.

The city developed an action plan, with assigned responsibilities for accreditation and ISO rating improvements, and addressed fire capability in policy as well. The department supported an apartment moratorium and requiring internal suppression sprinklers on multi-story apartments in the coverage area, both important issues for fire suppression and attack.

Officials with Germantown have purchased equipment and improved service to reach the better rating, and is also seeking the CFAI rating for potential cost savings for businesses and for image enhancement.

the city (Policy Box 2). With the involvement of staff and other stakeholders, the city planned for and changed to meet ISO standards, and in 2017 received the top ISO rating.

A criticism that the ISO rating does not provide an effective measure of performance certainly has merit, and this concern helped Germantown reach the decision to pursue CFAI accreditation in addition to an improved ISO rating. The ISO rating does not address practices or calculate outputs and other measures, but the graduated scale of the system does allow comparison of attention to and preparation and resources for communities and services. The system also lacks clarity, and definitions of coverage and response times incorporated into the ISO system require frequent clarification to active departments and communities.

The financial aspects of the ISO rating system are important to residents and businesses and explain both the reasons to improve, as outlined for the municipalities of Spencer and Germantown. The lack of a financial incentive for CFAI accreditation can drive

Policy Box 3 – Rerated and Improving

In 2018, based on a 2017 review, Morristown, Tennessee, moved from an ISO Class 3 to a Class 2 rating with an intentional focus on strengthening the community-risk reduction points. The city focused on expanding public education and prevention efforts, and addressed the records management requirements of ISO through a software package specifically designed to track training and training hours. The city’s water department also expanded main capacity testing for buildings with higher water use and continued hydrant testing.

The city has considered pursuing accreditation as well, but fire accreditation may not offer the financial incentives of the ISO system and Morristown calculates that this may require the expense of designating a lieutenant or other higher-ranking officer to monitor related activities.

Morristown actively sought a better rating for the savings on insurance for businesses and residents, and is considering the CFAI rating for image enhancement.

a decision to focus on the ISO rating instead of CFAI accreditation, as illustrated in the decision by Morristown in Policy Box 3. Coverage area and other point components of the rating system are constantly revised and improved, and this attention to improvement has resulted in a rating system recognized as the national standard for training, infrastructure, and effectiveness with effective measures of capacity, planning and readiness (Coe, 1983). The ISO rating system is almost universally available across the country and provides a measure of fire service preparation accepted by professionals and stakeholders. The CFAI and ISO systems work well together, and CFAI accreditation includes a self-assessment component that often leads to ISO rating improvements as well (West, 2006). Accreditation focuses on technical skills and training, but the insurance companies offering fire insurance focus instead on capability with preparation, planning and resources.

The incentives and the widespread use of the ISO rating system has been most attractive to residents and businesses considering investments in fire protection. Police services, however, rely on accreditation and do not have the same private sector support.

Accreditation – Critical to evaluation of police services. Unlike fire accreditation, accreditation for police service provides financial incentives to Tennessee municipalities but requires an intentional and substantive effort by a police department. CALEA and TLEA accreditation are both time- and resource-consuming efforts but build on established foundations – accreditation requires development and review of policy manuals, practices and procedures, and the documentation of all aspects of police service. The city of Waverly

has found that accreditation is of benefit to and reduces liability for municipalities of all sizes (Policy Box 4).

Policy Box 4 – Police Accreditation

With accreditation in 2011 under the state TLEA and a population of 4,105 (2010, U.S. Census), the City of Waverly is both a relatively recent accreditation recipient and the smallest accredited municipal police department in Tennessee. The city came into the accreditation process with an active communication plan involving staff and the community on the benefits and costs with accreditation. Although the municipality was confident of quick approval, the recommended procedural changes and policies expected of accredited departments required a two-year approval timeline. The focus on policies and procedures in the accreditation process outlined specific needs for the city's practices. Waverly chose to fill this need with policies already developed by larger municipalities already accredited in Tennessee for guidance and assistance. The department supports accreditation and suggests that similar departments lacking accreditation look to accredited departments for reasonable and effective policies.

Waverly's situation is that, unlike larger cities, smaller communities require the command staff to patrol and to respond to requests from dispatch. Prior to accreditation Waverly was inconsistent in training on specific policies. Policies adopted were also poorly distributed through the ranks of officers with the municipality. The use-of-force policy developed by Waverly is one such example of a policy adopted from larger accredited municipalities and distributed across the ranks. With TLEA accreditation the city risks losing accreditation if every officer does not follow the city's own policies, and the municipality adopted both a use-of-force policy and a process by which every officer receives and acknowledges receipt of the training. The city continues to rely on the accreditation process for policy development and often refers to the standards to guarantee compliance.

The department recommends the TLEA process as the standard for reducing liability with improved and standardized police services for municipalities. The city is not pursuing CALEA accreditation because of their perception that CALEA is more appropriate to larger departments with dedicated training staff.

Waverly sought accreditation for the service and image improvement benefits.

Concerns about accreditation for police services are the same concerns about accreditation with fire and other services. Both critics and supporters want to be assured that accreditation demonstrates or results in better police performance and an increase in customer satisfaction. Correlation has been difficult to establish, and this may be specific and attributed to the customers of police services. The customers are typically either criminals investigated (and arrested) by the department or the victims of crime, expecting and needing a response faster than possible. Police services require judgement and extraordinary latitude by the officer, and this complexity and latitude result in a service that is both difficult to measure and poorly rated through customer polling (personal communication with present and former city managers of Athens, TN). The complexity of police services also requires a massive infrastructure of training and support. The city of Athens, Tennessee, has wavered on accreditation for exactly these reasons, but is now considering accreditation as a pathway to further professionalization and pride in the police department and for greater acceptance and support with the community (Policy Box 5).

Policy Box 5 – A New Police Accreditation Effort

The state insurance pool in Tennessee offers a discount for liability insurance for municipalities achieving accreditation for the police department, but in the past Athens, Tennessee (pop. 13,458) has chosen against accreditation. The city is again evaluating accreditation despite concerns of cost and other considerations.

This research suggests that for some municipalities there are reasons not to pursue accreditation but that constant communication with staff and stakeholders is necessary. According to Rex Barton, police consultant with the Municipal Technical Advisory Service of the Institute for Public Service of University of Tennessee, cities and towns are wary of accreditation. Municipalities are concerned about the cost of accreditation, including the ongoing costs of staff salaries to keep the department in line with the standards. Municipal officials fear a loss of policy control, and are hesitant to pursue a process that will uncover previous missteps of the department (personal communication, May 31, 2018.) In Athens, officials hesitated primarily because of the expenses and staff resources required with accreditation. The insurance discount was insufficient to cover these costs. The city opted to copy police policies in use in nearby accredited cities in lieu of accreditation. With the retirement of the city manager and police chief, the new manager and chief reconsidered accreditation. Although costs and resources continue as barriers, the new city manager was also concerned about staff morale and turnover among employees that considered the current policies inefficient in law enforcement. The manager viewed accreditation as a means of demonstrating that the city follows best practices and is taking the steps that municipalities should take. The new police chief was familiar with and advised that the city pursue the CALEA process. The city accepted accreditation as a priority and committed time available from a lieutenant in the department of 34 employees to guide the effort. The city manager was not focused on whether the accreditation process would highlight problems, but instead considered the process a tool to address concerns, to acknowledge previous missteps, and to build departmental and professional excitement. The city is now in the initial stages of an anticipated three-year CALEA accreditation process.

Athens has previously not pursued accreditation due to cost, but is now considering accreditation to improve service, community and staff pride, and image.

Police accreditation is therefore focused on equipping, training and support for officers and departments. The effort to obtain accreditation is expensive under any measure but requires the department to meet the planning and performance required of state and national standards. This can be a very visible issue when costs to the public increase or service levels change, and every professional knowledgeable about a specific standard understands the consequences and expense for unmet standards (Policy Box 6).

Policy Box 6 – Returning to Accreditation

Accreditation has advantages with the professionalization of a department and the image of professionalization for the community, but image brings accountability and performance expectations. In Tennessee, the city of Dyersburg (pop. 17,145) has earned accreditation through state and national accreditation (TLEA and CALEA) and in 2014 returned for a re-rating by CALEA following a change in police chiefs.

As the city notes, CALEA provides a blueprint for what effective police departments do, with the department developing its own policy of how to implement. In 2014, the city failed to follow a Dyersburg promotion policy and withdrew from the CALEA process on notification that the city was in danger of losing accreditation. The city promoted the next chief from within the department. The new chief communicated to staff and the community his support for again pursuing accreditation for increased officer accountability and service. The CALEA process and submittals have been streamlined and this ease of use made the return to accreditation easier on the staff. He believes in TLEA accreditation as well, particularly for smaller cities and towns, but felt that the added requirements and prestige of CALEA contribute to professionalism and pride in the department and by the community.

Dyersburg shared the concerns of other municipalities that the financial and time demands of accreditation are difficult but the leadership sees accreditation, including CALEA accreditation, as necessary for the city and the officers in the department.

Dyersburg sought accreditation as a measure to improve both service and image.

Accreditation is expensive and the discount on insurance available to qualified departments may be inadequate to cover the increases in expenses. Even so, there are benefits beyond any cost savings with professional recognition, public support, and the other non-financial reasons noted in the Athens case study. Financial services of a municipality, on the other hand, do not have access to a process of accreditation but do have support of the financial community through the bond rating system.

Assessing financial competence and the role of rating agencies. The question with the use of bond ratings to assess and compare municipalities is whether cities with better bond ratings provide better financial services. The answer is not simple, but bond ratings combine a number of factors in the rating process, including financial and debt indicators, prediction and adjustment to changing economic conditions, financial reporting through the budget and the Comprehensive Annual Financial Report (CAFR), and the overall management and controversies of the city. Ratings also consider changing economies and economics, financial sophistication of the municipality's staff and the willingness and ability of the governing council to change and adjust as financial indicators change, and local and national trends and needs. Many of these factors are beyond the control of the financial staff or of the city, and the rating process does not offer a comprehensive straightforward or certain process as provided under police and fire accreditation. Despite this lack of a straightforward process, the aggregation of factors and influences in the bond rating process does support the ratings as a comprehensive tool available for comparison of a municipality's financial capacity and effectiveness.

The bond rating system reliably considers and allows cross-jurisdictional comparisons on economic, demographic, and financial variables. While ratings for smaller

and less active municipalities are not always timely, very clearly the use of bond ratings for comparative purposes allows insight into financial management and competence of a municipality.

The number of municipalities in Tennessee lacking a recent bond rating does pose a problem for this use for evaluation and comparison. Even so, the specificity of the language of the rating agency is generally of tremendous management use for any municipality, and the reliance of the rating on income or wealth and the diversity of the municipality's economic base are key to healthy municipal finances. Despite the limited availability of ratings in Tennessee, the use of the bond rating system provides an effective standard for cross-jurisdictional comparison of financial services for municipalities in the state.

Water utilities – Bond ratings are comprehensive. Comparison of water utility systems requires unique comparison points for customers, including water pressure, quality and cost, but the use of the bond rating for revenue debt shows that again the same systems that protect the investors purchasing the bonds protects the comparative needs of those requiring comparisons.

The review of services and standards demonstrates that the use of the revenue debt rating as a method of comparison provides an effective standard for cross-jurisdictional comparison for active municipalities growing, investing and issuing debt. Despite the limited availability of timely ratings, the findings support the use bond ratings for comparison and evaluation.

Garbage service – Measuring outputs and efficiency. An acceptable state or national standard has yet to be developed for waste collection, disposal or recycling, but there are measures of efficiency available. In the absence of a standard the platform of solid waste

or garbage services relies on efficiency and capacity standards, including data envelopment analysis (DEA). Efficiency can be an acceptable means of comparison but is beyond the scope of this work and within the scope of customer comparisons for only a narrow niche of studies.

For the purposes of this research, therefore, the availability of garbage collection service in the municipality is a key factor in the determination of full-service municipalities. Garbage service is, however, a service adequately compared based on the use of more inputs, outputs, benchmarking, and customer surveys without the introduction of professional standards.

Comparison Requires Accepted Measures and Skillful Communication.

Comparisons that are sustainable across diverse jurisdictions require common terms, common measures and an understanding of the technical aspects that in turn support efficiency and effective delivery. The combined focus on technical proficiency, or defined adequacies, and the active involvement of service professionals with the use of professional or industry standards meet these needs. Perhaps and even more importantly, the use and introduction of industry or professional standards improve and enhance the ability of communities and stakeholders to compare and to be comparable across diverse services and municipalities. Decision makers need access to all technical information critical to service decisions, objectively and skillfully delivered, with clear recommendations weighing the advantages and disadvantages of different courses of action (Baker, 1972.) Adding technical standards, or defined adequacies, and changing the role of the bureaucrat/experts is the focus of this research. The case studies and data considered in Chapter 5 support broad findings applicable to service comparison:

- Existing methods of comparison bring value to limited service comparison;
- Advocacy and what has been termed as heroic participation by the bureaucracy is necessary for service change and improvement; and
- The use of professional standards as a means to measure professional competency requires the bureaucracy to operate under Svava's concept of complementarity (2001), instead of a perception of role overlap or completion.

Chapter 6 presents the conclusions for this research established with these findings, and considers the value of professional standards as a mechanism for the comparison of diverse municipalities in the state. Clearly national standards are in common application in Tennessee and support comparison for the full-service municipalities considered.

Chapter 6 – Conclusions and the Value of Professional Standards

The initial goal of this research was to evaluate the use of professional standards, developed by and through experts in public services, as a comprehensive but simple tool of comparison of the services of diverse municipalities in Tennessee. The intent was to develop a measure of service competency to serve as an effective single indicator of comparison, substituting for or enhancing present measures of comparison. This summary addresses my conclusions.

The overview of theories of service evaluation and the engagement of professionals in public services suggests the following:

- Comparison of services is necessary;
- The public is best served when the bureaucracy assumes a role of “heroic participation”, or active participation and advocacy, and
- The use of standards developed by professionals are integral to the process of service comparison. National standards effectively compare Tennessee municipalities.

Each contributes to an understanding of how present methods of comparison are narrow in scope and why this insertion of peer-reviewed standards is so important today. The fundamental question of service comparison addressed in this work of how services are to be both evaluated and improved is answered through the analysis of historic and national standards.

Evaluation Leading to Service Improvement Has Value.

Clearly the existing methods of comparison have value for specific circumstances and the competitive needs of these municipalities. Performance and services of a municipality

have bearing on economic success, and ultimately comparison of services leads to improved performance, the elimination of unproductive practices, and has a positive influence on democracy. The primary topic of research for this work considers the value of professional standards as an enhancement to present methods of comparison. Common benchmarking involves comparison against service providers and municipalities considered successful in a particular service, and the benchmarking of a combination of outputs, benchmarks and best practices becomes a powerful tool for comparison among providers. The expansion of benchmarks to include peer-reviewed benchmarks or standards for service delivery and performance brings professional input into the comparison. In this research, professional standards in the comparison process are treated as benchmarked standards, or the establishment of defined performance minimums (or adequacies). All convey the important concept that there are professional minimums that can or could serve as minimum standards for effective public services.

The case studies further tell the story that competitive municipalities pursue better ratings and service recognition with at least three goals in mind – to achieve cost savings for residents, to improve service, and to enhance the municipality's image. The research and data support the need by municipalities to provide demonstrably better and more competitive services.

This research starts with a review and discussion on the importance of competitive municipalities and services, and with stated assumptions about the use of professional standards and the role of experts in comparison of municipalities and municipal services. The data and case studies indicate that in Tennessee full service municipalities, with a

reliance on professional standards as the measure of success, compete in cross-jurisdictional comparisons for economic development, status and cost or performance benefits.

Comparison is Necessary

Comparison for competitive services requires peer-reviewed measures of accuracy and delivery, and the use of standardized terms and acceptable measures. Comparisons that are sustainable across diverse jurisdictions require common terms, common measures and an understanding of the technical aspects that in turn support efficiency and effective delivery. The combined focus on technical proficiency, or defined adequacies, and the active involvement of service professionals with the use of professional or industry standards meet these needs. Perhaps and even more importantly, the use and introduction of industry or professional standards improve and enhance the ability of communities and stakeholders to compare and to be comparable across diverse services and municipalities. Adding technical standards, or defined adequacies, and changing the role of the bureaucrat/experts concludes this research. This use of peer- or industry-reviewed standards provides clear metrics and a definable better or best way to compare services for Tennessee municipalities.

Peer-reviewed standards require input of experts. The research does show that the use of benchmarking against peer-reviewed professional standards in lieu of or in addition to existing measures and tools, the subject of this research, does allow consideration of technical competence as a basis for evaluation. The use of technical standards improves cross-jurisdictional comparison of municipal services with municipalities that meet the conditions outlined in this research. With this change and the introduction of needed service improvements, experts inside and outside of the bureaucracy serve as change agents for services and cultures that are otherwise resistant to change. The findings indicate that

comparison based on professional standards also encourages municipalities to compete and to improve.

A secondary question based on the findings of this research may be whether theory and the concepts of governance considered in public administration support the development of standards by service professionals and bureaucrats, without conflicting with the model of legislative control on which modern public administration is constructed. The research supports an expectation that active or heroic advocacy by professionals is consistent with acceptable behavior and offers latitude in the engagement of professionals and the use of professional standards.

Effective Bureaucracy Requires Heroic Participation and Communication

The role of experts in both the development of services and the standards for comparison is an important aspect of this research. The professionalization of public service and the encouragement of bureaucrats to participate in service and policy development requires a change in the role of bureaucrats from that of neutral observer to active advocate, change agent and participant. This role change requires the development of services and information with the interaction of policy-makers, citizen-customers and bureaucrats in a lively process of service and service ownership. Interaction of these stakeholders with the development of service evaluation and comparison standards guides difficult decisions on the obligation of resources for governing bodies and stakeholders. The experiences of Spenser and Germantown, Tennessee, serve as examples to illustrate the importance of engaging the community in difficult discussions on the importance of quality services. Professionals trained on the skills for delivering information to an unreceptive audience can improve the decision-making process and the ability to evaluate diverse municipalities across variances of

size, location and demographics. Training and the expectation of quality services, as considered in Chapter 4, also provide institutional and personal courage for experts delivering difficult or unpopular information. Standards and tools of comparison are effective when, as considered under the conditions required of standards, the quality services and standards are accepted, necessary, and addressing services across a wide area or scope.

Changing from the use of the present tools of comparison to tools forcing both measurement and improvement of performance can be complex. The use of clear and standardized professional standards to meet the criteria for comparison does add to and enhance this comparison. Participation by the bureaucracy in the design and the evaluation of municipal services, however, raises the concern that strong bureaucrat/experts will dominate the public policy process with the advantage of technical knowledge and understanding. The review of theory strongly supports the understanding that the politics-administration dichotomy is not required for bureaucratic control and that effective relationships of politics and administration require complementarity instead of competition. The dichotomy was not supported by early theorists and reduces the effectiveness of the bureaucrats. Legislators and bureaucrats alike are at risk if assertive administrative leaders create problems of democratic responsiveness and bureaucratic effectiveness. Control of the bureaucracy is not necessary through separation but instead is organizational and structural, as the legislature is expected to exercise the reins of control as necessary (Svara, 2001).

The conclusion is that despite concerns about the impact on democratic control that active, heroic participation and advocacy is under the control of legislators and necessary to provide competent comparisons on core services. Evaluation of services based on technical competency does require an active role by experts in the bureaucracy with an understanding

of the services delivered and the goals to be achieved by these services. The communication skills on difficult issues required of the bureaucracy may require additional training and expertise beyond the relatively simple skills required for measurement with output, performance benchmarks and surveys. If the evaluation is to step beyond objective data-gathering and limited recommendations, an expectation that experts step forward on difficult discussions of quality services with unambiguous language and skilled communication is necessary.

National Standards Do Effectively Compare Tennessee Municipalities.

The use of accepted standards will help with this communication. Earlier chapters of this work compared the use of outputs, benchmarks, best practices and customer surveys for service comparison, and noted the simplicity of both the methods and results of the comparison. The case studies and data outline the wide variance of services across Tennessee, and the findings and data with this work lead to a series of major conclusions, with some of these more obvious than others. Comparison is clearly important and, while the present tools meet niche requirements, performance based on the measurement of outputs, the use of traditional benchmarked outputs, best practices, and customer surveys do not support a comprehensive response to this variance and do not consider technical competency in the design or delivery of services. In the evaluation of services, the inability to gauge technical competence is a critical missing component.

Challenges and the Conditions of Comparison

The conditions necessary for effective comparison include the need for defined and objective measures, independent variables, and the development of a single indicator. Each of these is demonstrable with the use of peer-reviewed professional standards. Recognizing that

accurate data is necessary to any research, the challenges presented by inconsistency, distrust, narrow application and concerns about dominance of the bureaucracy with the comparison of public services (Poister and Streib, 1999) are salient to this discussion. A number of questions should be asked of a method of evaluation.

A first is whether the data and the reason for measurement are reliable. The results from the research do not support the use of any of the present tools for a comprehensive comparison of services or municipalities. Outputs, benchmarks, and surveys often serve as proxies for unmeasurable results for invisible or complex services. Best practices and narratives can be excellent opportunities for service improvement but do not offer opportunities for true comparison.

A second is whether the effort provides a broad measure of the service, or instead promotes a false rationale for services and investment. The literature review clearly revealed that the traditional tools of comparison are productive for niche requirements, with value to certain studies and research objectives. The results gathered from customer surveys, output measures and benchmarks are also easily manipulated to serve a specific or hidden agenda. The research established that traditional theories of public administration reinforce the use of present methods of comparison, thereby resisting change and maintaining the status quo.

A third question is whether existing methods of evaluation and comparison are adequate for all municipalities, all of the same services, all of the time? The answer, as indicated under the first question, is that existing methods are worthwhile for narrow needs and expectations. The industry or professional standards, however, are intentionally crafted to apply to all municipalities offering police or fire services, or for municipalities investing in infrastructure through debt and bond issuance.

Next, does reliance on the involvement and service of bureaucrat/administrators, including the proffered use of outputs, case studies, benchmarks, and professional standards undercut democracy? The information gained with Chapter 3 indicates that open advocacy and active engagement by professionals and the subsequent use of professional standards can be an area of concern only if the role of administrators and elected officials is competitive. If the relationship is complementary, with an acceptable level of role overlap, there should be little concern. Elected officials need the technical competence of the bureaucrat, and administrators remain accountable under Svava's (2001) concept of complementarity.

Full-service municipalities, providing active investment in services and financial support through capital expenditures, are readily and effectively comparable based on the use of these professional standards. The standards were designed to consider effectiveness with the targeted services, and therefore and by definition are comprehensive standards of comparison across diverse municipalities. In the absence of comprehensive output and productivity measures that truly reflect effectiveness, professional standards reflect an on-going effort to improve and perfect services. The addition of professional standards creates a powerful tool for cross-jurisdictional comparisons and service improvements and, as demonstrated in the case studies, these peer-reviewed performance benchmarks do allow comprehensive comparison for service levels.

Defined Adequacies Support Service Improvement

Professional standards identify criteria, levels of service, and service preparation that are aspirational or normative levels of service. The use of defined minimums or adequacies developed by professional associations and appropriate private providers provides a clear articulation of professional expectations and specifies service levels that each community may

then consider for funding and support. The use of professional standards also creates an environment in which municipal services are improved as a consequence of reaching the first level of accreditation or the lowest level of accepted service. The identification of defined adequacies or performance minimums allows development of an evaluative tool for effective comparison. The result is service improvements of municipalities of all sizes and different levels of sophistication.

The data support the use of professional standards. The need for effective comparisons of municipalities and services is increasing as the population shifts from rural to urban areas. While the drivers of migration from rural areas to municipalities are generally centered on population age, access to education, and economic factors, the competitiveness of municipalities remains a concern of municipal officials and legislators (Molloy, Smith and Wozniak, 2011; Hoxby, 2009; Pissarides and Wadsworth, 1989). New and potential residents are interested in varying but specific attractions and services, including confidence in safety with police and fire departments, effective services, high performing education centers, and economic vitality.

Traditional theories of bureaucracy support and expect service oversight, measurement, and evaluation. The need for better standards as a means of improving comparisons, and for the active engagement of the bureaucracy in a complementary relationship with legislators and the public, is supported in both prior research noted in this work and in the analysis of data available for this study.

Data and Case Studies - Defined Adequacies with Stories to Tell

This research compares municipalities in Tennessee with state and national service standards to determine if the use of professional standards provide a basis for service and cross-

jurisdictional comparison. The premise that technical standards are adequate depends on the availability of standards and on acceptance of the premise that there is a specific right way to develop, design, and deliver services. This research addresses each in a linear analysis, starting with the importance of service evaluation and comparison.

Existing tools are not comprehensive and, without context and analysis, do not provide broad comparisons for services or municipalities. The addition, however, of peer-reviewed professional standards to the methods of comparison allows professional input into the delivery of services. In the truest sense this use of professional standards brings together best practices, output measurement, and benchmarks with the simple understanding that the best practice or most useful benchmark may require acceptance that experts have identified a single best way or standard for the delivery of services, as identified by peers and professionals in the field.

The discussion of theory and the application of experience noted in the case studies advances the conclusion that comparison based on professional standards does not limit service comparison or evaluation for cities of any population size, demographics, or location across the state. This type of evaluation does require, however, theoretical and discerning acceptance of the engagement and input of experts and professionals, and requires that experts operate from a complementary instead of competitive position to minimize concerns of technical dominance of public policy.

Present methods of evaluation provide a weak evaluation of services and equate outputs and customer perception with effective performance results. While my initial hope was to identify a single indicator that will allow the evaluation and comparison of each service, the research indicates that the best comparison is one involving a combination with the use of

present comparative methods and the use of professional standards. The use of professional standards as defined minimums does not preclude the present methods of comparison, but instead recognizes the niche uses of these methods and advocates for a combination of traditional comparison with defined minimums to allow service design to be both effective and efficient. The use of professional standards enhances and augments the use of customer surveys, narratives and output measures for comparison of services, and provide a broad and comprehensive indicator for comparison.

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Vita

Steven Thompson was born in Delhi, New York to Broadus and Martha Thompson. He attended school in Irmo, South Carolina, graduating in 1973. Following high school, he attended the College of Charleston in Charleston, SC, graduating in 1977 with a Bachelors of Arts degree in Political Science. Thompson entered graduate school at the University of South Carolina in 1978, working as a graduate research assistant at the Bureau of Governmental Research and Service at USC until he received a Master's in Public Administration in 1980. He applied to and was accepted into the doctoral program at the University of Tennessee in 2012.

While in the doctoral program, Thompson concentrated in the fields of public administration and American government. During his study, his research interests included state and local government, special purpose districts, ethics and values in public service, local government policy and intergovernmental relations.

Professionally, Thompson focused on local government service throughout the southeast United States during the first years of his career, with extensive experience in medium to large full service cities. He developed and managed active cities and partnerships; supervised cities through physical and financial emergencies; assisted cities through economic growth and downturn, and developed and redeveloped downtown and resort areas. He joined the Institute for Public Service (IPS) at the University of Tennessee in 2010 as Executive Director of the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS), the largest public consulting service for cities and towns in the country. In 2012, the University promoted Thompson to Assistant Vice President with IPS, with expanded responsibilities in IPS and the university system.

During his service, Thompson has received an extensive variety of professional and community awards and recognitions. He has served as the President of the national Consortium of University Public

Service Organizations; as a member on the Governmental Accounting Standards Advisory Council, the national advisory board to GASB; and as a member on the Blueprint Commission for the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. In 2008, Thompson was selected as City Manager of the Year for Volusia County, Florida, a metropolitan county with 16 active municipalities. In addition, Thompson has been recognized by several Chambers of Commerce, United Ways, and community partnerships for his service to these communities.