



A PLAIN-LANGUAGE GUIDE

Monitoring vs. Evaluation

Two different questions about your program — routinely treated as one, and they aren't.

These two words get used interchangeably, but they do different jobs. **Monitoring** watches whether a program is running as intended. **Evaluation** asks whether it's actually working. A program can pass every monitoring check — full caseloads, services delivered on time, data entered — and still not be changing the outcome it exists to change. That's why you need both questions: one tells you the program is running, the other tells you it's worth running.

TWO QUESTIONS, SIDE BY SIDE

MONITORING	EVALUATION
Is it running as intended?	Is it actually working?
Asks: are we doing what we said we'd do?	Asks: is the program producing the change it's meant to?
Watches: activity, throughput, timeliness, compliance	Examines: outcomes, impact, whether the theory holds
Cadence: continuous — dashboards, monthly reports	Cadence: periodic — a deliberate study or review
Answers: where is the process breaking down right now?	Answers: is this worth doing, and for whom?
Example: 92% of intakes completed within 3 days	Example: did those quick intakes lead to more people housed?

Monitoring tells you the machine is running. Evaluation tells you the machine is doing something worth doing.

WHY THE CONFUSION COSTS YOU

Most systems are rich in monitoring and thin on evaluation — because monitoring is continuous, required, and easier. The risk is mistaking one for the other: a program with excellent monitoring numbers *looks* healthy, and it's easy to assume that means it's working. But **a well-run program can still be the wrong program**, or the right program delivered to the wrong people. Monitoring will never catch that, because it isn't asking. Only evaluation is.

The reverse matters too. Evaluation without monitoring is fragile — if you don't know whether a program was actually delivered as designed, a disappointing result tells you nothing, because you can't tell whether the model failed or the delivery did. **Each answers a question the other can't.**

Why You Need Both

Monitoring keeps the program honest day to day. It catches drift, bottlenecks, and delivery gaps while there's still time to fix them.

Evaluation keeps the program pointed at the right thing. It asks whether all that well-monitored activity is actually producing the outcome — and tells you when it's time to change course.

Run only the first and you optimize a program you never confirmed was working. Run only the second and you can't trust the result. Together, they let you improve the work *and* know it's worth improving.

Monitoring asks "are we doing it right?" Evaluation asks "are we doing the right thing?" A healthy program never stops asking both.

To build evaluation into a system that's already good at monitoring, visit homelessresponselab.com.