



Monitoring

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Monitoring

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Synonyms

[Auditing](#); [Tracking](#)

Definition

Monitoring is the ongoing assessment of policy, program, or intervention activities and is operationalized during implementation, typically by an oversight or funding agency, to assess whether activities are being delivered as planned (Weiss, [1998](#)). Monitoring is typically employed (a) to establish the efficiency of the policy, program, or intervention in reaching and/or involving the target population, (b) to determine its fidelity to the original design for activities, and (c) to establish whether the policy, program, or intervention is using resources appropriately (Rossi & Freeman, [1993](#)).

Description

When a policy, program, or intervention is devised and implemented, the monitoring process will usually be underpinned by a standard view of the population that should be served and/or encouraged to participate in the conception and delivery of the exercise, a view of the activities that should be carried out, and a consideration of how financial and other resources should be allocated. It is against these standards, which are typically set by an oversight or funding agency, that the progress of the policy, program, or intervention is measured (Weiss, [1998](#)). Crawford & Bryce ([2003](#), p. 366) comment that the "...mainstream position is that monitoring is an ongoing process of data capture and analysis for the purpose of control" and that monitoring "...has an internally focussed, management-driven emphasis on efficiency." Certainly, control and the delivery of efficiency are features of the monitoring process. However, as Weiss ([1998](#)) notes, if implemented in an appropriate and well-conceptualized framework, monitoring can deliver many more benefits than simply providing a standard against which to assess whether rules are being followed. Monitoring has the potential to play a key role in institutional and policy learning by revealing the shortcomings of particular policies, programs, or interventions due to exogenous challenges or due to original design deficiencies. The advantage of developing and adopting a robust monitoring framework is that it can be used to provide the evidence and knowledge base needed to inform the refinement of existing policies, programs, or interventions or more substantively to inform the development of new policies, programs, or interventions as emerging opportunities, challenges, and necessities dictate.

The vogue of monitoring quality of life emerged in the USA in the 1980s through the publication of the Places Rated Almanac studies. Using synthetic composite indices, these early studies attempted to measure the quality of the shared living environment through the measurement of objective indicators such as house prices, income, health care, and climate to name but a few. However, the studies were criticized for not measuring or monitoring quality of life per se but rather for measuring and monitoring quality of place. They were also criticized for failing to measure or monitor underlying drivers of change in quality of life (Wong, [2006](#)). Nevertheless, these early approaches illustrated the value of developing a robust framework for monitoring quality of life over time.

However, due to the difficulties associated with monitoring outcomes and disentangling the interrelations of factors that contribute to quality of life, monitoring has tended to rely on overly descriptive approaches. This was recognized by Fahey, Nolan, and Whelan, ([2003](#), p. 72) who suggest that the monitoring of quality of life should take explicit account of two factors. The first is the importance of recognizing the need for a normative base to underpin the monitoring of quality of life. Drawing on an example of [European Union \(EU\) Social Policy](#), which has explicit goals relating to raising living standards and improving living and working conditions, Fahey et al. ([2003](#), p. 72) argue that the monitoring of quality of life at EU level "...can only be seen in the light of such goals; the more explicit they are, the more focused the monitoring activity can be." As societal goals evolve, so too must the monitoring activity which means that the monitoring process also needs to be dynamic rather than static (Fahey et al.).

The second is that it is necessary to carefully establish the analytical objectives of the monitoring exercise. Given that monitoring is fundamentally concerned with tracking change over time for a specific policy, program, or intervention, so there is a need to develop a robust framework that allows repeated measures to take place using valid analytical tools. However, as Fahey et al. ([2003](#)) rightly note in their example, the concept of quality of life that underpins the monitoring process has an overarching character that requires more than the collection of descriptive indicators. Rather, developing an understanding of the complex factors that interact and contribute to quality of life in different places requires analysts to "...go well beyond the mere assembly of indicators to intensive analysis of the interrelationships between the dimensions in the quality of life concept" (Fahey et al., p. 72).

Cross-References

[Composite Indicator\(s\)](#)
[Indicators, Quality of Life](#)
[Institutions](#)
[Knowledge](#)
[Learning](#)
[Quality of Life](#)
[Quality of Place](#)
[Social Policy](#)

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