

EXTERNAL EVALUATION FOR MISSION EFFECTIVENESS

In high-performance organizations:

- Leaders **complement internal monitoring with external evaluations conducted by highly skilled, independent experts.**
- Leaders commission external assessments to **learn more about how well their programs are being run, what these programs are or are not accomplishing, who is or is not benefiting, and how the programs can be strengthened.** Leaders do not use external assessments as a one-time, up-or-down verdict on the organization's effectiveness.
- Leaders recognize that there are many different types of external assessments, and **no one type is right for every organization or for every stage of an organization's development.** Independent evaluators who understand how different methodologies fit different contexts can help leaders **match the tool to the task.**
- Leaders draw a clear distinction between outputs (e.g., meals delivered, youth tutored) and outcomes (meaningful changes in knowledge, skills, behavior, or status).

Those who are working to improve outcomes **commission evaluations to assess whether they are having a positive net impact.** In other words, they want to know to what extent, and for whom, they're making a meaningful difference *beyond what would have happened anyway.*

- Leaders who plan to expand significantly any programs aimed at improving outcomes have a **special obligation to commission a rigorous evaluation that can assess net impact.**
- Even those leaders who commission the most rigorous of impact evaluations do not stop there. They **commission additional assessments to gauge their impact in new settings** (or for new populations) and achieve greater positive impact for the money they spend.
- Leaders **share the methodology and results of their external assessments** to help others learn and avoid mistakes.

Note: We crafted this pillar with a special focus on organizations that provide services, but we believe the core concepts are relevant for other types of nonprofits as well—from those that advance human rights to those that protect ecosystems.