Develop your organisational AI readiness

Need help starting your nonprofit's AI journey?

This quick-start guide builds on our webinar, Humanitarian AI: Lessons learned, trends and opportunities for 2026, hosted by the Humanitarian Leadership Academy and NetHope in January 2026.

With expert guidance from Daniela Weber, Director of NetHope's Center for the Digital Nonprofit, and resources from both organisations, this guide offers practical next steps – from establishing ethical guardrails to building capacity and scaling AI initiatives.

Agree your responsible AI framework

Set the guardrails on what you as an organisation will and will not use AI for.

NetHope's Humanitarian AI Code of Conduct is a good starting point.

Create an AI policy that enables staff to try out AI tools

Be very clear about what AI can and cannot be used for. You need to protect your data and your organisation.

Avoid the spread of unofficial ('shadow AI') tools across your organisation.
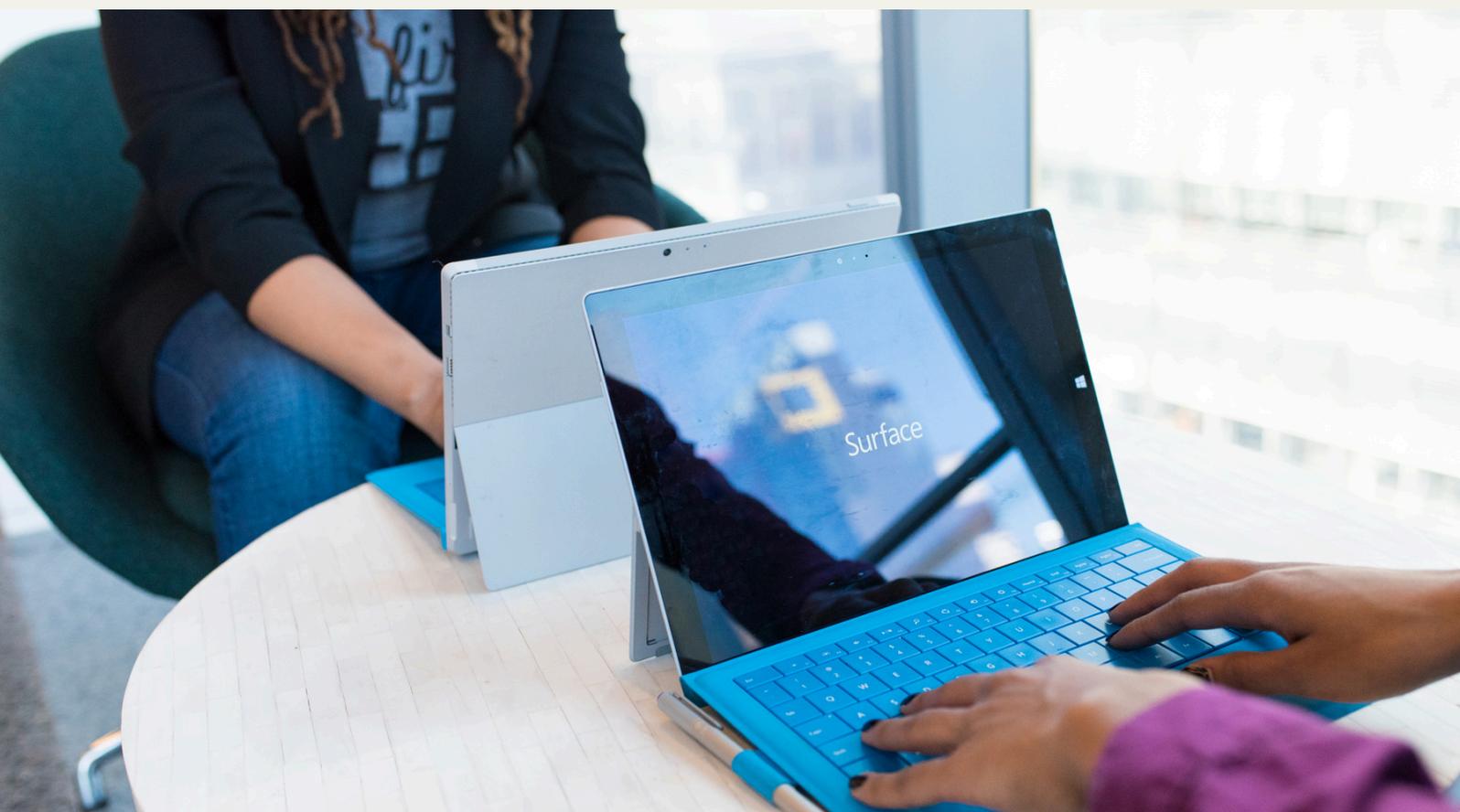
- Provide a list of recommended tools that you consider to be appropriate and safe to use
- Create a process to assess tools that users recommend
- Discourage the use of tools that are not approved

Build capacity everywhere in your organisation

Generative AI tools are widely accessible, and increasingly AI functionality is built into the software packages that you are using.

Ensure that everyone in your organisation knows not just how to use the tools, but also the limitations and risks, and how to mitigate those.

Many free learning resources are available, such as NetHope's Unlocking AI for NGOs course hosted on the HLA's Kaya learning platform – available in English and Spanish.

Test, learn and share

Encourage users who have gone through foundational AI skilling to try out how they can use AI tools in their day-to-day work.

Invite users to capture outcomes and learnings, and to share their use cases and prompts with others in your organisation (and beyond).

Have a mechanism to support this – whether it is a monthly AI hackathon, a chat channel, or a knowledge sharing site.

Define your AI purpose

Have a cross-departmental conversation in your organisation about what your best use cases for AI might be, and how you might prioritise and scale them.

Is your key objective to achieve more operational efficiency? Or could AI transform the way you provide humanitarian services? Use tools such as NetHope's AI Suitability Toolkit to guide you through your AI discussions.

Start small but think big

The real benefits for your organisation will only come if you manage to scale good use cases and rethink your internal processes and external service delivery – transforming how you work with AI.

Once you have built basic organisational AI capacity, start thinking about what it takes to scale.

Embed and measure

Everyone in the sector understands 'behaviour change' and 'impact measurement' – apply those terms to your AI projects.

Employ change management tools for successful adoption at scale. Measure the outcomes of AI tools you implement and compare them with the total cost of ownership for the tools. Stop projects that don't deliver value.

Look for partners

Building the in-house capabilities and capacity to build and implement AI solutions that go beyond the use of standard, built-in AI chatbots and functionality is hard and costly.

Identify partners who understand your needs and can truly support you on your journey. This could be technologists, consultants, universities, or other nonprofit organisations.

Don't lose focus on your data

If you want to implement AI applications, you must have good data governance and data management practices in place.

If you don't, now is the time to change that. Use NetHope's Data Governance Toolkit for Nonprofits to set those data foundations – they are critical to make your AI project work.

Think through agentic AI

Before you get started, ask some critical questions.

What are the processes you would want to automate? And are your underlying data, systems and infrastructure ready to use AI agents responsibly and safely?

Participate in sector collaboration on AI

We know that open conversations about what worked and what didn't are the most helpful learning opportunities for humanitarian staff and lift the overall capability of the sector.

Share your approaches and use cases with each other, collaborate to create common solutions that will serve all humanitarians.

Join forces to advocate for AI offerings that close, not widen, the digital divide. Connect on webinars including the Humanitarian Leadership Academy's Humanitarian Tech Webinar Series, and form communities of practice.

Nonprofits of all sizes can join NetHope's community to advance their use of technology and digital tools.

NetHope Members can join the AI and Emerging Technologies Working Group to share and learn. NetHope Connected enables smaller organisations to develop their AI approaches together.

Take the NetHope Digital Nonprofit AI Readiness Assessment to see how you score versus the sector benchmark on AI readiness.

Resources

Humanitarian Leadership Academy

The HLA in partnership with Data Friendly Space is leading a global study into how humanitarians are using AI. Access the research products, articles, webinars and podcasts on our Resources Hub.

kaya

Access free online learning at kayaconnect.org. Claim HPass digital badges and share them on social media to let others know about your learning in this area.

NETHOPE

Access toolkits, briefings and guides, and find out how to get involved as a NetHope Member or Connector at nethope.org

Discover the NetHope AI Lighthouse: Your Guide to Responsible, Purpose-Driven AI specifically for Nonprofits (scan the QR code to access).

This guide was produced in March 2026.
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