

Board Brief: AI Adoption + Policy

NONPROFIT TECH
GOVERNANCE CONGRESS

PREPARED BY

BOARD.DEV | Governance
for the Future

About Us

Board.Dev and the **Nonprofit Tech Governance Congress** are building tools to help nonprofit boards lead on AI with clarity, confidence, and accountability. Board.Dev is advancing responsible tech use in the nonprofit sector. We conduct research, set board governance standards, train leaders, and place tech professionals on boards to drive mission-aligned innovation. The Congress includes CEOs, CIOs, and data and digital leaders from across the nonprofit and tech sectors. Together, they're shaping board-level guidance on AI, data ethics, and digital strategy—and helping boards build the knowledge to lead in a rapidly changing landscape.



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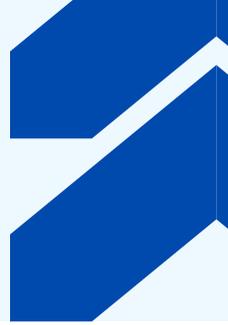


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A 3-Month Action Plan for AI & Tech Governance



PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR NONPROFIT BOARDS ON RESPONSIBLE AI ADOPTION

AI is reshaping how nonprofits deliver programs, raise funds, and communicate. Technology is no longer optional—it's mission-critical. Yet only 1 in 5 nonprofits have a tech strategy, and even fewer have policies or principles for AI.

That gap creates real risk and missed opportunity. AI promises efficiency, insight, and expanded reach, but it also introduces ethical, legal, and operational risks.

That is where the board comes in. Board members don't need to be AI experts, and most boards aren't sure how to approach AI. But they do need to lead: by asking the right questions, setting values-based guardrails, and ensuring staff have the support they need. As many in the social sector have emphasized, AI adoption for nonprofits must be human-centered, risk-informed, and mission-aligned—not driven by hype.

How AI Fits in Tech Governance

AI is not an outlier—it is part of the broader technology landscape that boards oversee. Use the four key areas of governance to structure your board's role.

BOARD ROLE	AI CONSIDERATIONS	QUESTIONS TO ASK
Vision	Long-term transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How might AI amplify our mission—not just increase efficiency?• Are we thinking about how might AI reshape our work over 3–5 years?• What are we preparing for? What kind of tech-enabled organization do we want to become?• Given how fast the AI landscape is moving, how are we ensuring our approach provides us flexibility to adapt to these changes?
Strategy	Mission alignment + real use cases	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are we testing AI where it helps our mission, not just where it's trending (or where a funder wants us to)?• How are we involving stakeholders in decisions about AI use?• What opportunities for new partnerships and funder relationships does integrating AI present?• Given our risk tolerance and capacity, are we best positioned to build new tools, pilot emerging tools, or adopt established tools that are well-tested by others in our space?• How are we learning from what peer organizations have tried?

BOARD ROLE	AI CONSIDERATIONS	QUESTIONS TO ASK
Oversight	Ethics, data use, and AI risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we using AI in line with our values and privacy expectations? • Are our AI tools introducing risk, bias, or reputational exposure? • Have we defined what's off-limits? • Do our staff feel safe to experiment and flag concerns?
Resources	Time, budget, and tech talent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where can AI reduce resource needs and costs across our organization? • Do we understand the full cost of AI implementation, including model usage costs, staff time, training, and safeguards? • What are the full costs—technical, ethical, and environmental—of our AI use? • Can we measure ROI?

WHERE BOARDS CAN HAVE THE MOST IMPACT

- **Start the conversation.** Don't wait until everything's figured out—it won't be. Dive in, even if you're not yet feeling fully tech-fluent.
- **Understand use cases.** There's so much nonprofits can be doing with AI, from programs to operations. Learning how peers or even organizations outside of social impact are using these next-gen tools can bring up great opportunities for you.
- **Align AI with mission, vision, and values.** Like any tool, it should be leveraged in service of your mission.
- **Support guardrails, not bottlenecks.** Fear keeps many organizations from engaging. Put enough structure in place that you can feel confident stepping forward.
- **Plan for the costs.** No tech solution is free, and costs could rise with scale. Make sure you have a handle on what it will take to support any solution going forward.
- **Focus on adoption, not invention.** Most nonprofits don't need to build AI; instead, they should evaluate and use existing tools. Encourage staff to pilot responsibly, learn from peers, and scale what works.

BOARD CAN ADD VALUE BY	BOARD SHOULD AVOID
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting ethical principles • Asking about AI risks or ROI • Adding tech capacity to the board • Helping decide when to innovate and when to wait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picking specific AI tools • Managing AI implementation • Replacing staff roles

PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR BOARDS

MONTH 1

- Put AI on the board agenda.
- Ask for a short staff report on AI tools in use (anonymous so people feel free to share)
- Assess your board's tech fluency and update your skills matrix to reflect AI literacy.

MONTH 2

- Draft lightweight AI principles or guidelines for use (consider Fast Forward's [Nonprofit AI Policy Generator](#)).
- Ask for a short staff report on risks and opportunities for AI use.
- Start a staff-led AI learning circle or peer forum.

MONTH 3

- Identify or recruit a tech-fluent board member, if needed.
- Launch a joint board-staff AI learning sprint using short courses or partner trainings (consider asking a funder for cohort support, or partnering with peer organizations to bring in a trainer).
- Implement a straightforward ethics checklist for AI pilots (opt-in/opt-out, human review, training level of tool users).

RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

- Fast Forward [Nonprofit AI Policy Generator](#)
- NTEN [AI for Nonprofits Resource Hub](#)
- Chronicle of Philanthropy OpEd: [Grant Makers Don't Understand Nonprofits' A.I. Needs](#)
- [TAG Responsible AI Adoption Framework](#)
- [The Tech 28](#): 28 questions for board-level tech discussions

WHAT WE'RE HEARING FROM THE FIELD

“There is a huge opportunity to transform board-level discussions around the appropriate and effective application of AI that a tech-focused board member can help realize.” **Jim Fruchterman, Tech Matters**

“Wait for products you can test, and compare notes with your peers. Very few nonprofits have the tech capacity (or funding) to launch a major AI tech development effort.” **Jim Fruchterman, Tech Matters**

“There’s a big difference between generative AI and backend automations. Boards need to ask the right questions based on the tool.” **Amy Sample Ward, NTEN**

“If you wouldn’t want to publicly disclose that AI helped generate it, consider: do you want to use it?” **Amy Sample Ward, NTEN**

“Focus first on low-risk use cases that don’t handle sensitive data.” **Sajit Joseph, Tides**

“Bias and resource consumption are real concerns—what’s your ethical framework?” **Kristen Swanson, Okta**

“Board members are essential to moving AI and tech forward. Their primary job in governance is to support the strategic direction. They aren’t setting it, but they are making sure it’s moving, and AI strategy is no different.” **Shannon Farley, Fast Forward**

“If you want to do social change with AI, worry about—really try to understand—the social change piece first.” **Peter Gault, Quill.org**

“We had to delay deploying ChatGPT 3.5 for nearly 5–6 months... These models need to work 99% of the time. A tech leader on the board helped us think through: what are the risks? What could go wrong?” **Peter Gault, Quill.org**

“AI is hugely helpful—but these are not cheap projects. It helps when you have in-house tech talent. But if you can also have tech leadership on your board, that’s even better.” **Bartlomiej Skorupa, Mobile Pathways**

“Create an AI policy based on your risk tolerance, not a one-size-fits-all approach.” **Sajit Joseph, Tides**

“Ensure there are human checks and balances for AI-driven content or decisions.” **Kristen Swanson, Okta**

“Sometimes AI experimentation is a solution looking for a problem. Align on the problem first.” **Kristen Swanson, Okta**