So… AI: What do we do with it?

From Hadassah Damien · femmetech.org

Ways AI tools might support the work of nonprofit, funder, or civic organization staff

AI is not one fixed thing, so the possible uses are wide — and still growing. Start from a real human need, not a flashy feature.

Donor & Community Comms | **Grant Research, Writing, Reporting** | **Operations**

Programs & Grantmaking | **Planning, Research & Analysis** | **Internal & Cross-Org Documentation**

Considering Using AI tools

There's no requirement for any organization to use AI - though it's getting harder to avoid given its prevalence across digital ecosystems, and there are reasonable use cases, though not without risk. **A good AI governance program: both an AI Use Policy *and* organizational practices** to define use, guardrails, human oversight, documentation, and issue mitigation, can reduce risk and allow staff to use AI tools to increase their capacity in parts of their jobs, freeing them to do more of the work only people can do.

Donor & Community Comms

Fundraising & donor analysis

Generative AI writing tools (ChatGPT, Claude, Microsoft Copilot) help draft donor letters and thank-you notes. Some donor databases (Salesforce Nonprofit Cloud with Einstein, or Bloomerang's newer AI features) use built-in predictive AI to flag which donors are likely to lapse or give more, helping staff decide who to call first.

Risk: Scoring donors by likelihood to give can deprioritize people who don't fit historical patterns, encoding bias and deprioritizing newer donors who might become major supporters over time.

Communications & marketing

AI writing and design tools (Canva, Midjourney) help draft newsletters, social posts, and website copy, so a small comms team can produce more.

Risk: Content can start to sound generic and lose the organization's voice, and relying on AI for drafts can mean less original thinking.

Accessibility in comms

Writing image descriptions (alt text) and checking that websites, documents, and social content meet digital accessibility standards.

Risk: AI accessibility checks can miss issues only a real screen-reader catches.

Language access & translation

AI translation tools can turn program materials, flyers, and website content into multiple languages quickly, and some chatbots can hold basic conversations in multiple languages.

Risk: Machine translation can miss cultural nuance or community-specific phrasing, and getting it wrong on sensitive topics (legal rights, healthcare, benefits) can cause real harm; high-stakes material still needs a human fluent speaker to check it.

Public engagement & constituent response

AI tools can help analyze large volumes of public comments on policy proposals for common themes, or draft first-pass responses to constituent inquiries at scale.

Risk: Summarizing public comment can ignore minority viewpoints by filtering less-frequent input as "noise," and automated responses to constituents can feel impersonal or dismissive if not reviewed before sending.

Grant Research, Writing, Reporting

Grant matching

Platforms (like Zeffy or Instrumentl) use AI to match an organization's profile against open funding opportunities, helping narrow down which grants are worth applying for.

Risk: Leaning on automated matches can weaken the personal relationships between grantees and grantmakers that often matter as much as fit on paper.

Grant writing & reporting

Generative AI writing tools help draft grant proposals, check that application or reporting requirements are addressed, and organize narrative sections; analytic tools (NotebookLM, Claude) can turn outcomes data into report-ready language.

Risk: AI drafts can smooth over nuance or hallucinate specifics that sound plausible but aren't accurate; every figure and story needs a human check before it reaches a funder. And some funders disallow the use of AI for writing.

Operations

HR & volunteer management

AI tools help screen resumes, generate interview questions, and match volunteers to opportunities based on their skills and availability. They can also help build volunteer schedules.

Risk: People tend to react badly to AI involved in hiring decisions; use it to support staff judgment, not replace it, on who gets brought on.

Training & development

Using AI-based learning platforms, nonprofits can offer tailored training to volunteers, staff, and even the people they serve.

Risk: Bias built into an AI tool can carry into the training it generates, so content should be reviewed regularly rather than left on autopilot.

Financial analysis & projections

AI features in accounting software (QuickBooks, Bill.com) can sort expenses and flag unusual transactions, supporting the board's financial oversight. Some foundations also use AI to help analyze budget variances.

Risk: Automated flags can create false alarms or miss real problems outside the patterns the tool was trained on; a board still needs a human reviewing numbers.

Legal & contract review

AI tools can do a first pass on grant agreements, MOUs, or vendor contracts and flag unusual terms or clauses worth a closer look, especially useful for organizations without in-house legal support.

Risk: AI review can miss issues specific to your jurisdiction or sector, and should never be the final word on a contract with real financial or legal consequences. A lawyer still needs to review anything binding.

Programs & Grantmaking

Program evaluation & impact

AI-assisted survey tools (in Gemini or platforms like Qualtrics or SurveyMonkey) can summarize feedback from the people you serve and surface common themes, feeding into decisions about what's working and what needs to change.

Risk: Theme-spotting can miss small patterns, context, or nuance in people's own words, flattening feedback into categories that don't fully reflect the insights.

Grantmaking application review

Some larger foundations are piloting AI to pre-screen or summarize grant applications for program officers, helping decide which ones merit a full review.

Risk: One of the more governance-sensitive uses on this list: bias in an early screening step can shape who gets funded; always have a human review option.

Direct service & case management

AI tools can help intake staff triage incoming requests, suggest which services or benefits someone might qualify for, and route people to the right program faster.

Risk: An AI suggestion that's biased, wrong, inflexible, or incomplete can mean someone misses out on help they're eligible for — these tools work best as a first pass that a staff person builds on, not a final answer.

Planning, Research & Analysis

Strategic planning

AI tools can help boards and leadership think through scenario planning, risk assessment, and long-term strategy by pulling together financial, program, and demographic data to model how different decisions might play out.

Risk: Modeled scenarios are only as good as the data and assumptions behind them, and can create false confidence in what's just one possible story.

Monitoring news & sentiment

AI tools can automate scans of social media, news, and policy documents to gauge public sentiment and spot emerging trends, helping shape advocacy strategy and messaging and anticipate policy shifts.

Risk: These tools can misread sarcasm, context, or community-specific language, and may overweight loud or online-heavy voices over the people actually affected. They may also introduce bias drift if not monitored.

Advocacy & legislative tracking

AI tools can monitor bill status, summarize regulatory changes, and flag relevant policy movement across jurisdictions, cutting down manual hours.

Risk: Summaries can miss procedural nuance that changes a bill's impact, and over-trusting an automated tracker can mean missing something a human watching closely would have caught.

Data analytics

AI tools (Databricks, Genie Code, Gemini, Claude) can help build charts and dashboards from raw data without needing specialized data-analyst skills.

Risk: Auto-generated visualizations can misinterpret data if no one checks the underlying assumptions or crafts informed hypotheses; a chart can look authoritative but be inaccurate.

Report drafting & editing

Tools like Gemini, Claude, and ChatGPT help edit, organize, and polish writing, or draft it from scratch, and can simplify language to a more accessible reading level.

Risk: Over-relying on AI for first drafts can flatten an organization's distinct voice and make reports read like everyone else's.

Internal & Cross-Org Documentation

Coalition & cross-org coordination

AI tools can summarize updates across partner organizations and help keep shared knowledge current when work spans multiple orgs without one shared system.

Risk: Summaries can smooth over important disagreements or differences in each org's position, making a coalition look more aligned than it actually is.

Meeting documentation

Transcription and summary tools (Otter.ai, Fireflies, Zoom AI Companion, Granola) can turn meetings into minutes and follow-up notes automatically.

Risk: Automated summaries can misattribute quotes or miss what mattered most in a conversation; they need a quick human read before sharing widely, especially from sensitive meetings.

Knowledge transfer & documentation

Cloud tools (Copilot or Gemini) or internal chatbots trained on your organization's own documents can answer "what's our policy on X" questions that used to mean tracking down a specific staff member.

Risk: These tools are only as accurate as the documents they're trained on; outdated or conflicting source material can produce confident-sounding wrong answers.

Further resources

This 2025 summary from Reddit's /nonprofitai community does a good job laying out benefits and risks for several of these use cases and more.

Use of AI disclosure

This document was written by a human, based on both conversations and online research that used Google AI search; it was edited with assistance from Claude and designed by Claude. It was fully reviewed by a human before sharing.