

Using Artificial Intelligence: A Primer for AIDS Service Organizations

Prepared by: Vibhuti Mehra

Edited by: Jasbir Sunner and Dionne Falconer

March 2025

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is everywhere. There are highly differing views about its potential wonders or dangers for humankind. One way or the other, AI is here to stay and will continue to grow. It will impact our lives for years to come.

Non-profit organizations, including AIDS Service Organizations (ASOs), are slowly adopting AI technology in different ways.

This resource is a short, introductory primer on AI. It does not make recommendations on whether or how ASOs should adopt AI. Instead, this resource offers:

- Information on the various types of AI and how it can be used by ASOs;
- The potential benefits and challenges of using AI;
- Considerations related to usage, risk, transparency, privacy, training and change management; and
- Resources for further information and learning.

2. What is AI and How Does it Work?

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the technology that gives a computer system “synthetic intelligence” that mimics human “thinking” and “acting” in order to make decisions and solve problems efficiently.¹

AI processes large amounts of data and creates rules for computer systems on how a specific task can be completed. AI “**learns**” from all the data it takes in and then helps the computer system choose the correct rule to achieve the desired outcome. And just as humans change their behaviour through experience, AI programming continually “**self-corrects**” its rules as it gets more data to ensure accurate outcomes. AI is “**creative**” by generating new content, just like the human brain. AI has been gaining popularity in recent years through platforms such as ChatGPT, Scribe and Bard.²

¹ <https://www.iberdrola.com/innovation/history-artificial-intelligence>

² <https://www.techtarget.com/searchenterpriseai/definition/AI-Artificial-Intelligence>

3. General Uses of AI

Whether we know it or not, AI shows up in our daily life in many ways, for example:

- Real-time traffic updates when we use GPS navigation systems;
- Personalized feeds on our social media accounts;
- Digital assistants such as Alexa and Siri that answer our questions or follow our directions to complete a task;
- Shopping websites that give us recommendations based on our past purchases; and
- Chatbots on customer service websites that offer real-time answers to our questions.

AI is revolutionizing our world in profound ways. See [Appendix 1](#) for other areas where AI is being used.

4. Using AI in Ontario's HIV Sector: How and Why

AI does not require a heavy upfront investment of money. Most AI tools are cloud-based, many are free, and the tools can be used on a range of devices from cellphones to laptops to tablets. Here are some ways ASOs in Ontario can utilize AI:^{3,4}

USE OF AI	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES OF TOOLS ⁵
Automate Operational Functions	Automate routine administrative tasks like responding to communications, scheduling meetings and sending reminders so staff can focus on other priorities	Google Assistant , Otter.ai
	Help with record-keeping and filing documents to ease workflow processes related to staff and volunteer management	Simplifai
	Establish internal controls for authorization of financial transactions to prevent errors and fraud as well as ensure transparency in record-keeping	SafeBooks
Enhance Communications, Content Creation and	Help implement effective communication and outreach strategies for increased community engagement through tailored content for: • Multi-channel marketing campaigns;	ChatGPT , Gemini , Bing and Llama

³ <https://www.unite.ai/ai-for-nonprofits-how-to-boost-effectiveness/>

⁴ <https://www.donorsearch.net/resources/ai-for-nonprofits/>

⁵ Please note these are examples of AI tools and platforms only. There are many to choose from – researching what AI works best for you is essential!

USE OF AI	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES OF TOOLS ⁵
Community Engagement	• Social media posts and captions; and • Newsletters, blogs, press releases and website pages	
	Generate meetings agendas and objectives, sample policies and training plans	ChatGPT
	Use social media management tools to help analyze trends, recommend content, schedule posts, and monitor engagement	FeedHive and Flick
	Use event planning tools to: • Analyze location, capacity, facilities, and costs associated with event venues; and • Clarify attendee preferences and scheduling conflicts to help maximize attendance	Bizzabo and Momentum
	Use volunteer management tools to match volunteers with available opportunities based on their skills, create volunteer schedules and generate personalized volunteer appreciation communications	Golden
Collect, Analyze and Manage Data	Streamline community needs assessment processes by sifting through large volumes of data to identify patterns and trends ⁶	HelpSeeker
	Take research or transcripts of meetings and ask AI to summarize the most relevant points	ChatGPT
	Generate program logic models and outcome evaluation tools	ChatGPT (Visual Logic Modeler)
	Clean and organize datasets, integrate data from multiple sources and generate data visualizations (e.g., for program evaluation)	Piktochart
	Support job analysis and learn about workforce trends	Workday
Fundraising and Grant Writing	Support donor prospecting and screening processes by: • Analyzing donor databases and matching with data from sources like websites and social media to build donor profiles; and • Using AI-generated insights to strategically engage with donors and build tailored approaches to relationship development	FundraisingKit
	Assist in analyzing current or past donor data to create personalized communications strategies based on donor preferences, giving history, and specific interests	DonorSearch

⁶ <https://www.helpseeker.org/blog-posts/harnessing-ai-for-effective-needs-assessments-a-new-era-in-social-infrastructure-planning>

USE OF AI	EXAMPLES	EXAMPLES OF TOOLS ⁵
	Analyze and summarize criteria and requirements for grant applications as well as create outlines or collect statistical data to support grant writing efforts	Grantable

5. AI Drawbacks and Criticisms

As with all new technologies, there are some concerns about AI that ASOs should be aware of:

AI is based on data that can reflect societal biases, which means that AI algorithms can have those biases as well. This could then perpetuate racism and other forms of discrimination in activities such as hiring. A specific example is the use of facial recognition technology, which multiple studies have shown makes more errors on Black faces , creating significant concerns in terms of police and criminal justice use of AI without appropriate legal and organizational oversight (especially given the problem of racial profiling)
AI can sometimes perform well on known data but poorly on new, emerging data. Ensuring AI can generalize well to different or changing environments is a major challenge.
There are some ethical concerns around the use of AI, particularly in areas like privacy and autonomy . AI tools can be used for mass surveillance or spreading misinformation thus raising questions about responsible usage and regulation.
There are emerging conversations about the damage that the use of AI technology is creating on the environment (e.g., the amount of electricity needed to power AI). The link to the impact of environmental damage (e.g., climate change and biodiversity loss) on Black communities is mostly missing from this conversation.
The adoption of AI can lead to automation in various industries, potentially displacing workers , particularly in routine or manual jobs. While AI can create new job opportunities, it may also reduce them for some sectors.

6. Success Factors for Using AI

Successfully using AI involves several considerations related to usage, risk, transparency, privacy, training and change management. The table below offers some key questions to consider (note these questions are not exhaustive). You may find that people inside your organization know some of the answers to these questions, and that you may need to get outside help for some of the other questions.

Success Factors	Key Questions
Get Informed	• What is the level of knowledge of AI among the staff, management and Board right now? • Who can we bring in to help us learn more about AI? • Who did others in the sector learn from?
Be Clear About Use	• What information would help us to be more strategic in our work that AI can help us get? • In which areas of our work do we want to be more efficient or have more reach? • Where do we lack human or other resources that would help our work?
Risk Management	• What kind of risks come with using AI (e.g., security breaches due to hacking, reputation harm due to unmonitored, fake or erroneous AI content)? • How would we plan for any risks? • What supports do we need for risk mitigation?
Transparency and Accountability	• What would we say our goals of using AI are to our stakeholders, including service users?⁷ • How will service users have a voice in the process of using AI? • How would we ensure our AI content does not repeat systemic inequities and oppression? What should our data practices be so they are equitable? What would having ethical oversight look like for us?
Privacy and Security	• If we use AI for donor prospecting or for any aspect of service delivery, how would we safeguard information?⁸ • How would we adhere to relevant data privacy laws, obtaining consent from donors to use their data? • Do our current policies for confidentiality and ethics cover use of AI?

⁷ Adapted from <https://www.bwf.com/ai-for-nonprofits/>

⁸ <https://www.techsoup.ca/content/using-ai-nonprofit-work-3-ethical-considerations>

Success Factors	Key Questions
Training and Development	• What kind of training does everyone at our organization need? Who needs specialized training? • How can we budget for ongoing training and development? • Who else is providing training in the sector that we can collaborate with?
Change Management	• Who is ultimately responsible for the use of AI in the organization? • Who will be responsible for change management related to AI? • What is the best approach to support people if they have anxiety about using AI and/or what it means for their work and their job?

7. How to Get Started

Get started now – the future is AI. Here are five steps to get started on the AI exploration journey within your organization:

1	Consider your organization's strategic goals and current programs to identify any areas where AI can help make improvements or impact change.
2	Find out if any AI applications or tools are already being used within your organization, for what purpose, and how these have supported the organization's work. Explore if and how they approach AI equitably.
3	Explore free AI tools to build familiarity and gauge interest and ability of team members in using AI effectively. Access free AI learning and skills development opportunities including online resources, webinars, and trainings to gain more knowledge about integrating new technology into the organization. ⁹
4	Consider how to write a good AI policy for your ASO. (some help is offered here: Qlic IT for Charities)
5	Try a few small pilots to see what the experience of using AI is like!

⁹ <https://techcommunity.microsoft.com/t5/nonprofit-community-blog/ai-for-nonprofits-taking-the-first-steps/ba-p/4064045>

8. Resources to Learn More

AI for Nonprofits: Everything Your Organization Needs to Know

<https://www.donorsearch.net/resources/ai-for-nonprofits/>

The Microsoft Digital Skills Center for Nonprofits

<https://page.techsoup.org/digital-skills-center#resourcesection>

The AI Advantage: How Nonprofits Can Rise to the Top Using AI

<https://charityvillage.com/the-ai-advantage-how-nonprofits-can-rise-to-the-top-using-ai/>

What Volunteer Boards Need to Know About AI

<https://www.boardeffect.com/blog/nonprofit-boards-ai>

Office of the Privacy Commissioner - *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA) In Brief

https://www.priv.gc.ca/en/privacy-topics/privacy-laws-in-canada/the-personal-information-protection-and-electronic-documents-act-pipeda/pipeda_brief/

Health Privacy Rights in Ontario

<https://www.ipc.on.ca/en/health-individuals/file-a-health-privacy-complaint/your-health-privacy-rights-in-ontario>

AI Policy Guide for Not-for-profit Organisations

<https://www.qlicnfp.com/ai-policy-guide/>

AI and Racial Justice: Navigating the Dual Impact on Marginalized Communities

https://nonprofitquarterly.org/ai-and-racial-justice-navigating-the-dual-impact-on-marginalized-communities/?utm_source=NPQ+Newsletters&utm_campaign=4d636873fa-1_18_EC&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_94063a1d17-4d636873fa-13529294&mc_cid=4d636873fa&mc_eid=e4f3f94da2

AI used by police cannot tell Black people apart and other reasons Canada's AI laws need urgent attention

<https://theconversation.com/ai-used-by-police-cannot-tell-black-people-apart-and-other-reasons-canadas-ai-laws-need-urgent-attention-236752>

AI is bad for the environment, and the problem is bigger than energy consumption

<https://theconversation.com/ai-is-bad-for-the-environment-and-the-problem-is-bigger-than-energy-consumption-247842>

Appendix 1 – Areas Where AI is Being Used (outside of non-profits)

Some other areas where AI is being used are:¹⁰

- **Machine Learning (ML)** based software:
 - Tools used by banks to detect fraud;
 - Tools used by healthcare providers to diagnose medical conditions;
 - Image recognition software used by social media platforms to recommend “tagging”; and
 - Rideshare apps that locate passengers and estimate time of arrival.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):**
 - To understand, interpret, and generate human language through text translation and speech recognition applications; and
 - Providing real-time communications technology such as chatbots.
- **Computer Vision (CV)** technology used in:
 - Self-driving cars;
 - Facial recognition software;
 - Ball-tracking cameras in sports; and
 - Medical imaging for cancer detection.
- **Robotics:**
 - Machines utilized in manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics industries for tasks that are either difficult for humans to perform or need to be performed repeatedly and consistently.
- **Expert Systems (ES):**
 - Commonly utilized in the fields of finance to offer advice related to financial planning and investments.

¹⁰ <https://www.theknowledgeacademy.com/blog/domains-of-artificial-intelligence/>