ICF International Coaching Federation

ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Standards:

A Practical Guide to Integrating AI and Coaching

coachingfederation.org

Introduction to AI in Coaching

The coaching profession has evolved from a one-to-one in-person or telephone conversation to the use of coaching skills in all conversations. Coaching is an accepted and effective modality to help teams perform better, learn in groups, develop communities and much more. Our society is now entering yet another age, the age of artificial intelligence (AI).

AI is revolutionizing how we approach coaching, bringing a powerful blend of innovation and support to clients and coaches alike. But with this potential comes a responsibility: to ensure AI tools are not only effective but also ethical, transparent, and aligned with trusted coaching principles.

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has developed the **AI Coaching Framework and Standards** to help shape how AI and coaching can be safely and effectively integrated. These standards guide the development and use of AI in coaching, ensuring that AI-driven tools respect client privacy, promote trust, and minimize bias. By establishing clear ethical boundaries and quality benchmarks, the standards help clients, coaches, and organizations embrace AI confidently and responsibly.

Whether you're a coach looking to implement AI into your practice, a software developer working on AI coaching solutions, or a client exploring new ways to reach your goals, these standards offer a roadmap for meaningful, ethical, and effective AI-enabled coaching. In this guide, we'll take you through everything from key principles to real-world applications, making it easy to see how AI can enhance growth, improve client relationships, and maintain the highest standards of quality and trust.

Dive in and discover how AI, when paired with human expertise, can elevate coaching to new heights.

Working Group

The ICF AI Coaching Framework and Standards was created by the Artificial Intelligence Coaching Standards Working Group. This group brings together experts in technology, coaching, and standards to shape the application of AI in the profession of coaching.

Members of the working group include:

- Matt Barney (XLNC and TruMind.ai)
- Joel DiGirolamo (International Coaching Federation)
- David Drake (The Moment Institute)
- Olivier Malafronte (Université Côte d'Azur and Rypple.ai)
- Harry Novic (Rocky.ai)
- Jonathan Reitz (FLUXIFY)
- Nicky Terblanche (University of Stellenbosch Business School and coachvici.com)

The working group, with the assistance of an expert on professional standard-setting, finalized the ICF AI Standards in 2024.

Why AI Coaching Standards Matter

Privacy. Trust. Bias Mitigation. These aren't just buzzwords — they're real concerns that people have about AI. And that's where AI coaching standards come in, safeguarding these values in every AI interaction.

ICF's AI Coaching Standards are here to guide coaches and developers in building high-quality, ethical systems. These standards ensure responsible data use, help reduce bias, integrate proven coaching principles, and clearly draw the line between coaching and therapy. These standards also help coaching clients make informed choices, knowing that the AI technology meets ethical and quality benchmarks.

The ICF AI Coaching Standards were created with a broad audience in mind, supporting:

- Coaches who want to use technology responsibly.
- Coaching clients.
- Organizations purchasing coaching.
- Coaching supervisors.
- Software developers (Providers).
- Coaching education and training organizations.

In short, these standards make sure that AI coaching is not only powerful but also ethical, transparent, and trusted by everyone involved.

Key Benefits at a Glance

Ethics and Transparency

Imagine AI you can trust. These standards ensure that AI systems in coaching are fair, accountable, and upfront about their limitations (like not handling mental health issues). They also make AI's decision-making clear, giving clients and organizations confidence in how their data is used and why the AI responds as it does. Developers benefit, too — by following these guidelines, they create systems that avoid bias and increase reliability, ensuring responsible data handling every step of the way.

Client Relationship and Trust

AI in coaching works best when it's honest and respectful. Standards require transparency about the AI's role and secure client consent up front, setting the stage for trust. Open, culturally sensitive communication is key, and clients can always connect with a human coach when needed. This approach not only enhances support and safety but also aligns AI practices with traditional coaching, creating a familiar, client-centered experience.

Effective Communication

Great coaching means truly "listening" to clients, and these standards help AI do just that. By building in active listening features, AI can personalize responses and foster client awareness through reflective questions and insightful feedback. For clients, this means conversations that feel meaningful and help them deepen their self-understanding. Training organizations can count on these standards to shape AI that aligns seamlessly with effective communication principles.

Client Growth

Standards focus on making client progress a priority. AI tools that meet these guidelines help clients set, track, and adjust goals, giving them ownership over their growth journey. With features that validate achievements and encourage accountability, AI-supported coaching becomes a powerful tool for continuous improvement. Coaches, supervisors, and clients alike benefit from tools designed to motivate and support consistent progress.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is peace of mind. Standards guide developers to ensure that AI systems are effective, user-friendly, and adaptable. Rigorous testing ensures reliable outcomes, and expert review aligns AI coaching results with human coaching outcomes. For clients and organizations, this means confidence in AI tools that have been thoroughly vetted to deliver quality results.

Security and Privacy

Clients deserve to know their data is safe, and standards ensure it. Security measures like encryption, secure logins, and strict access controls keep sensitive information protected. By aligning with privacy laws like General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), these standards build trust, safeguard confidentiality, and promote responsible data handling, reassuring clients that their personal information is in good hands.

Understanding the Framework

The ICF AI Coaching Standards framework is your go-to guide for building and evaluating ethical, effective, and trustworthy AI coaching tools. It's designed to help everyone — from developers to coaches to clients — get a solid grasp on the roles, responsibilities, and quality standards expected from AI in coaching.

Alongside the framework, there are two additional resources to make things even clearer: *Examples* and *Questions Stakeholders Should Ask*.

Together, these documents give you the full picture of AI coaching's unique strengths and challenges. With standards that focus on ethical, transparent, and impactful interactions, the framework serves as a roadmap for what to expect and how to assess different AI coaching solutions.

Overview of the 3 Core Resources

ICF Artificial Intelligence (AI) Coaching Framework and Standards: This main document lays out the standards for developing and evaluating AI coaching systems, offering clear guidance on ethical and practical requirements for AI coaching applications.

Examples: This companion guide provides real-world examples of AI in action, showing how the standards apply across different coaching scenarios. It's a practical tool for developers and coaches to see how the framework works in everyday situations.

Questions Stakeholders Should Ask: This resource helps clients, developers, and other stakeholders make smart choices by highlighting key questions to consider when selecting or creating AI coaching systems.

Explanation of the Framework and Standards

The ICF AI Coaching Standards framework is organized into six domains, largely based on the ICF Core Competencies, a trusted foundation for effective coaching. But it goes further — adding specific guidelines tailored to AI and software, ensuring these tools are a natural fit for coaching.

Each domain sets clear standards that AI systems need to meet to stay reliable, ethical, and responsive to coaching needs. This setup gives developers a structured path for integrating essential coaching skills and ethical guidelines, whether AI is assisting a human coach or working independently in an automated coaching role.

The Domains

Foundation: Includes standards for AI ethics and coaching mindset, setting the ethical base for AI in coaching.

Co-Creating the Relationship: Establishes standards for trust, safety, and client agreements.

Communicating Effectively: Focuses on active listening and evoking client awareness.

Cultivating Learning and Growth: Includes standards for facilitating and reinforcing client growth.

Assurance and Testing: Ensures the reliability, usability, and effectiveness of the AI system.

Technical Factors: Covers security, privacy, and resilience requirements for AI systems.
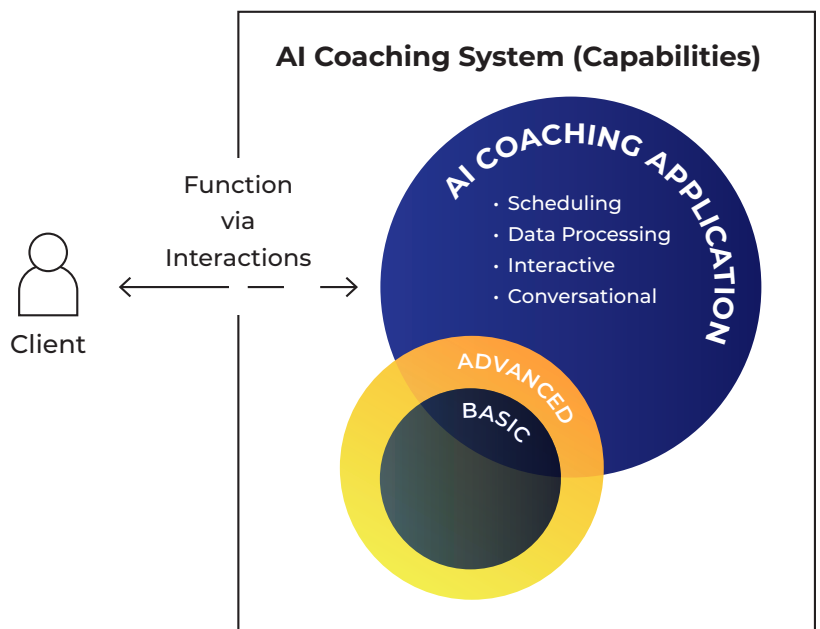
Relationship of Framework Elements

Figure 1: The Relationship of AI Coaching Framework and Standards Elements

To get a quick grasp of the framework, let's dive into Figure 1, which visually connects the core components of the ICF AI Coaching Standards. This figure highlights how each part of the framework, from Applications to Interactions, works together to support a seamless, ethical, and effective AI coaching experience.

In short, AI Coaching Systems comprise four main elements: Applications, Capabilities, Functions, and Interactions. Together, these elements create a comprehensive coaching experience that aligns with ICF's principles, designed to prioritize the client's goals and engagement.

AI Coaching System (Capabilities)

AI COACHING APPLICATION
- Scheduling
- Data Processing
- Interactive
- Conversational

ADVANCED
BASIC

Client

Function via Interactions

Exploring Core Elements Through Figure 1

The figure illustrates how **Core AI Coaching Capabilities** — such as active listening and goal tracking — map to specific standards within the framework. These capabilities are then organized by domain (like Communicating Effectively or Data Processing) and complexity (basic or advanced).

Each capability links directly to **Application Types**, which fall into two main categories:

1. **Coach Assisting Applications:** Tools that support human coaches, such as scheduling aids.
1. **Coaching Service Applications:** Tools that directly engage clients, like interactive chatbots or feedback mechanisms.

For example, an **Interactive AI Coaching Service** might use reflective questioning to foster better communication, while a **Coach Assisting Tool** could include practical features, like session reminders. By connecting these dots, stakeholders can better understand which standards apply to different AI tools and how each component enhances a supportive, ethical coaching experience.

Key Terms to Guide You Through the Framework

Understanding Roles

Client: The end-user who engages with the AI system for their own growth.

Coach: The human or group of humans who provide coaching services to the client, potentially in partnership with the AI Coaching System.

Exploring AI Coaching System and Application Types

The **AI Coaching System** is the full coaching platform, providing everything from backend support to client-facing applications used to deliver coaching services.

Application Types are different ways AI can be implemented to serve both support functions for human coaches (**Coach Assisting Applications**) and direct coaching services (**Coaching Service Applications** for client-facing coaching interactions). Coaching Service Applications are designed to align closely with traditional coaching competencies, such as building trust, active listening, and fostering growth. Because these applications can reach clients independently of a human coach, they must undergo extensive testing and validation to ensure reliable, quality outcomes.

Coach Assisting Applications	Coaching Service Applications
Scheduling: Assist with time-related activities such as meeting planning, following up with clients, and other reminders. While these applications are not necessarily specific to coaching, they may utilize AI.	**Interactive:** Directly engage clients through inputs like feedback and planning, shaping behavior, and supporting coaching goals. Examples include habit-building quizzes and goal-related email prompts.
Data Processing: Analyze accessible data (e.g., emails, feedback) to generate insights for coaching, such as sentiment analysis, FAQ generation, or assessment scoring, requiring a coach's interpretation for meaningful application.	**Conversational:** Interpret and learn from user data to support goals via text, voice, or video interactions. Examples include coaching chatbots, voicebots, or avatars for individual and group coaching conversations.

Breaking Down Capabilities, Functions, and Interactions

Capabilities: The features that allow the AI system to interact meaningfully with clients, such as conversational abilities, notifications, or real-time feedback.

Functions: This is the main purpose served by the AI Coaching System. For example, a coaching session might use interactive capabilities to keep clients engaged, while a data-processing tool might generate insights for coaches to interpret.

Interactions: These refer to the ways the system communicates with clients, ranging from simple notifications to in-depth conversations. Applications with conversational capabilities often drive higher engagement, personalizing the client experience.

Knowing the Requirements

Figure 1 also maps out essential requirements across various domains, such as transparency, privacy, and usability. These standards ensure AI applications are ethical, reliable, and effective.

Requirements include:

- **Content:** Pertains to the creation and accessibility of information for clients, such as service details, ethical practices, and data management policies.
- **Functionality:** Defines system capabilities, like goal setting, progress tracking, or assessments.
- **Action:** Is the task an AI system must execute, such as notifying clients about their data or providing reminders for goal-setting sessions.
- **Validation:** Ensures the AI system meets quality and performance standards — including testing for usability, reliability, and bias — to effectively helps clients reach their goals.

Each of these requirements builds accountability, helping clients make informed decisions about their interactions with the AI Coaching System.

Checklist for Evaluating AI-Driven Coaching Tools

Selecting an AI-driven coaching tool that meets ICF standards ensures not only ethical compliance but also a high-quality coaching experience that is secure, trustworthy, and effective. By following this checklist, buyers and users can feel confident in their choice, knowing the AI tool is aligned with best practices in coaching. The checklist is also handy for software developers to ensure their AI Coaching System complies with the standards.

Transparency and Ethics

☐ Clearly identifies itself as an AI tool (vs. a human coach).

☐ Discloses any limitations (e.g., not for mental health support).

☐ Provides accessible information on how it makes decisions.

☐ Demonstrates commitment to reducing biases in its responses.

☐ Has a robust consent process and clearly outlines data handling practice.

Client Relationship and Trust

☐ Provides options for coaching agreements and includes explicit user consent for AI-based interactions.

☐ Offers clarity on AI capabilities and limitations.

☐ Includes access to human coaches when needed for additional support like complex or sensitive issues.

Effective Communication

☐ Adapts responses based on user interactions (active listening).

☐ Provides feedback, reflection, and self-assessment prompts regularly.

☐ Uses respectful and culturally sensitive language.

Fostering Growth

☐ Includes tools for setting and tracking client goals.

☐ Offers reminders and reinforcement for goal progress.

☐ Provides insights that adapt to the client's unique needs and inputs.

Quality Assurance and Usability

☐ Conducts ongoing testing, validation, and improvement.

☐ Offers content that is reviewed or developed by language and coaching experts.

☐ Includes mechanisms for user feedback and continuous improvement.

Security and Privacy

☐ Uses encryption for data storage and transmission.

☐ Adheres to privacy laws like GDPR.

☐ Requires secure sign-on like multi-factor authentication.

☐ Only collects necessary data and provides clear data policies.

☐ Offers users with control over their data access and sharing preferences.

In addition to this checklist, you can also download a self-scoring spreadsheet to assist you in evaluating your progress toward meeting the AI Coaching Standards. This spreadsheet can be used by developers to see how well they're doing, by purchasing organizations to compare platforms, and by coaches and clients to assess the platforms.

Dive into AI Coaching Standards

Ready to elevate your coaching game? Dive in and download our three essential documents to unlock the secrets of integrating AI into your coaching journey!

ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Framework and Standards

ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Framework and Standards: Examples

ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Framework and Standards: Questions Stakeholders Should Ask

Plus: Articles, webinars, and more! Find additional content to help you deepen your understanding of AI and coaching on the ICF website.