

# Acceptable Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Client Protection Guidelines



rev. 09.23.2025

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The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into coaching practices represents both an exciting opportunity and a significant decision that deserves careful consideration. This document is designed to provide you with clear, practical information to help you make informed decisions about when and how to introduce AI tools into your coaching practice. Whether you're curious about AI's potential, concerned about its implications, or ready to explore implementation, this guide will walk you through the essential considerations without overwhelming technical jargon. It is intended to equip you with the knowledge needed to engage in ethical reasoning and ethical decision-making that align to the [ICF Code of Ethics](#) and [ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Framework and Standards](#).

## Understanding Acceptable Use

AI tools can enhance your coaching practice when used appropriately, but it's crucial to establish clear boundaries and ethical guidelines. Acceptable use means leveraging AI to support your coaching work while maintaining the integrity of the client-coach relationship and protecting sensitive information.

### Appropriate Application of AI

- Session preparation and research on coaching topics.
- Creating frameworks, worksheets, and educational materials.
- Generating ideas for exercises and interventions.
- Administrative tasks like scheduling and workflow automation.
- Professional development and learning about new coaching techniques.
- Analyzing patterns in anonymized, aggregated data.

### Inappropriate Application of AI

- Sharing identifiable client information, names, or case details.
- Using AI to make clinical diagnoses or provide therapy.
- Replacing human judgment in critical coaching decisions.
- Generating content that you present as your own original work without disclosure.
- Using AI to communicate directly with clients without their knowledge that it is AI that is communicating with them.

## Understanding Open vs. Sequestered AI Models

### Open AI Models

These are AI tools hosted on external platforms (like ChatGPT, Claude, or Google Gemini) where your data may be processed on the provider's servers, potentially alongside other users' data.

Key characteristics:

- Your inputs and conversations may be stored or used to improve the AI system.
- Data typically travels outside your organization's network.
- Usually free or low-cost with broad public access.
- Limited control over data handling and security measures.

### Sequestered AI Models

These are AI systems deployed within your organization's controlled environment, either on your own servers or in a dedicated cloud instance that only your organization uses.

Key characteristics:

- Your data stays within your organization's security perimeter.
- You control data retention, access, and processing policies.
- Typically requires enterprise contracts and higher costs.
- Greater alignment with organizational security and compliance requirements.

### When to Use Each Type

#### Use Open Models for:

- General research and learning.
- Non-sensitive brainstorming and ideation.
- Public information analysis.
- Personal productivity tasks.

**Never enter personally identifiable information (PII) into open AI models** — this includes names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, social security numbers, or any data that could identify specific individuals.

#### Use Sequestered Models for:

- Client data or confidential information.
- Regulated industries (health care, finance, legal).

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- Proprietary business strategy or competitive information.
- Any content subject to privacy laws or contractual obligations.

**Remember:** Avoid personally identifiable information (PII) in both environments unless explicitly authorized by organizational policy and legal review. Many organizations take a conservative stance and prohibit PII in any AI system until they can establish comprehensive governance frameworks.

Always check your organization's data classification policies before using any AI tool, and when in doubt, assume sensitive data requires a sequestered environment.

## Protecting Your Clients

### Data Privacy Fundamentals

Never input any personally identifiable information (PII) into AI systems. This includes names, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, employment details, or any other information that could identify a specific individual. When seeking AI assistance with client scenarios, use generic descriptions and change all identifying details.

### Confidentiality Safeguards

Maintain the same confidentiality standards with AI that you would in any professional setting. If you need to explore a coaching challenge with AI assistance, describe situations in hypothetical terms such as "a client who struggles with work-life balance" rather than sharing specific details about actual clients.

### Informed Consent

Be transparent with clients about your use of AI tools. Consider adding a clause to your coaching agreement that explains how you may use AI to enhance your preparation and professional development, while reassuring clients that their personal information will never be shared with AI systems.

## Protecting Yourself

### Professional Liability

Understand that you remain fully responsible for all coaching decisions and advice, regardless of AI input. AI should inform your thinking, not replace your professional judgment. Ensure your professional liability insurance covers AI-assisted coaching practices and consult with your insurance provider if you are uncertain about your coverage.

### Intellectual Property

When using AI to create materials, be aware of potential intellectual property considerations.

If you use AI tools to create or assist with content, always disclose this — especially when sharing externally — to ensure transparency, uphold ethical standards, and clarify authorship.

### Quality Assurance

Always review, validate, and if necessary, edit AI-generated content before using it with clients. AI can produce inaccurate information or suggestions that may not be appropriate for your specific client or situation. Your judgment and expertise are essential in determining what AI recommendations to implement. Read the AI service provider agreement to ensure they have clear safeguards and accountability processes to minimize the risk of bias or incorrect outputs.

## Best Practices for Safe AI Integration

### Document Your Approach

Create a written policy for your AI use that you can reference and share with clients if needed. This demonstrates professionalism and helps you maintain consistent standards.

## Regular Review

Periodically assess your AI usage to ensure it continues to align with ethical coaching standards and client needs. Stay informed about updates to service provider agreements, AI capabilities and potential risks.

## Professional Development

All ICF credentialed coaches are required to have continuous ethical education and training. ICF accredited coaching education programs are required to provide ethics training as ICF considers ethics to be a foundational element of the coaching profession. Invest time in understanding the AI tools you use. Know their limitations, biases, and recommended use cases.

## Data Security

Use only reputable AI platforms with strong security measures. Avoid free or unverified AI tools for any coaching-related work.

## Compliance with Data Protection Legislation

Every AI provider has documented service agreements and terms of service that outline their data handling practices and compliance certifications. Read these thoroughly to verify their adherence to appropriate legislation such as General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), Service Organization Control 2 (SOC 2), and other relevant data protection frameworks.

Look for certifications like ISO 27001, which indicate robust security management systems.

Pay particular attention to how providers handle data retention, processing locations, user rights, and breach of notification procedures. If you operate internationally or serve clients in different jurisdictions, ensure your chosen AI tools comply with the most stringent applicable regulations for the locations where you and your client are located.

When in doubt, consult with a legal professional who specializes in data protection law, as non-compliance can result in significant penalties and damage to your professional reputation.

Remember that your responsibility for client data protection doesn't diminish when using third-party AI services — you remain accountable for ensuring compliance throughout your entire coaching practice.

## Client-Centered Approach

Always prioritize your client's needs and preferences over the convenience of AI tools. If a client expresses discomfort with your AI usage, be prepared to adjust your approach or discontinue use for that client relationship.

Remember: AI is a tool to enhance your coaching capabilities, not to replace your professional expertise and human connection with clients.

## ICF Volunteer Leaders: Leading Ethically in the Age of AI

As ICF volunteer leaders, you play a critical role in bridging the gap between ICF Global and our members worldwide, managing local activities in our global network of boards and chapters. Your position as leaders and advocates means you are pivotal in modeling behavior and fostering the ethical and responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) within the coaching community.

While the *Acceptable Use of AI and Client Protection Guidelines* applies to everyone, we have specific expectations for our volunteer leaders given your unique influence and responsibility.

### 1. Championing Ethical AI Integration

- **Model Responsible Use:** We expect volunteer leaders to be exemplary in their personal and professional use of AI tools, adhering strictly to the *Acceptable Use of AI and Client Protection Guidelines*. This includes, but is not limited to, never sharing identifiable client information, avoiding the use of AI for clinical diagnoses or replacing human judgment, and always disclosing when AI has been used to generate content.



- **Advocate for Transparency:** Just as coaches are expected to be transparent with their clients about AI use, volunteer leaders should champion transparency within their leadership activities. If AI tools are used to support board or chapter operations or communications, ensure members are aware.
- **Prioritize Client (Member) Well-Being:** Remember that the "client-centered approach" extends to our members. If a member expresses discomfort with AI usage in a board or chapter context, be prepared to adjust the approach.

## 2. Educating and Showcasing Practical AI Skills

- **Facilitate Informed Discussions:** Volunteer leaders are encouraged to initiate and facilitate discussions within their board or chapter about the ethical implications and practical applications of AI in coaching, drawing upon the *Acceptable Use of AI and Client Protection Guidelines* as a foundational resource in addition to the [ICF Code of Ethics](#) and [ICF Artificial Intelligence Coaching Framework and Standards](#).
- **Showcase Appropriate AI Applications:** Highlight and demonstrate appropriate uses of AI as outlined in the guidelines, such as using AI for session preparation and research, creating educational materials, generating ideas for exercises, and administrative tasks. This helps to demystify AI and illustrate its potential benefits when used responsibly.
- **Promote Continuous Learning:** Encourage members to engage in professional development related to AI, just as volunteer leaders themselves are expected to invest time in understanding the AI tools they use, including their limitations and biases. Emphasize the importance of staying informed about updates to AI capabilities and potential risks.
- **Guide on Data Security and Compliance:** As volunteer leaders, you can help raise awareness among members about the importance of using reputable AI platforms with strong security measures and understanding compliance with data protection legislation like GDPR and CCPA. Reinforce that individual coaches remain accountable for client data protection, even when using third-party AI services.

By embracing these expectations, ICF volunteer leaders will not only ensure the ethical and responsible integration of AI within our global community but also empower our members to confidently and competently navigate the evolving landscape of AI in

coaching. Your leadership is vital in shaping a future where AI enhances, rather than diminishes, the integrity and effectiveness of our profession.