



# Creating an AI framework for your accounting firm

A how-to guide  
for accounting firms

Brought to you by:



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## Introduction

Whether you're already familiar with generative AI (GenAI) tools like ChatGPT, Google Gemini or Microsoft Copilot, or just starting to explore these tools, you may have concerns that are holding you back. While you want to elevate efficiency, you also want to apply AI tools safely and responsibly. The problem is, you may not know how or have the time to figure it all out.

You may be thinking...

This technology is fundamentally different than anything else we use. We don't know how to explain its capabilities and use-cases to our staff, or educate on the risks and best practices regarding data security and privacy.



You're not alone. In the 2024 Rightworks Accounting Firm Technology [survey](#) of tax, accounting and bookkeeping firms, 73% of respondents indicated that they're not currently using AI in any way. A notable 35% reported having no plans to incorporate AI. Within this group, the most popular reason provided for avoiding AI altogether was an admitted lack of understanding about it and how it would benefit their businesses.

At the same time, a study conducted by [OpenAI and the University of Pennsylvania](#) found that close to 50% of all tasks U.S. based workers perform could be completed faster by GenAI without a degradation in quality. The bottom line is that GenAI tools can help accountants work more effectively and efficiently in delivering value to clients.

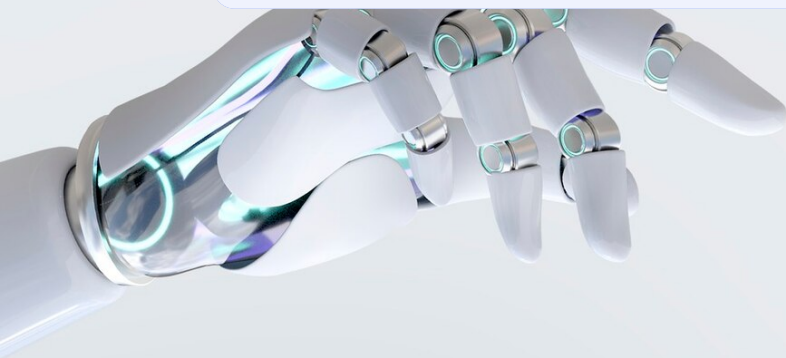
**Don't let your fear keep you from embracing the enormous value of these tools.**

This guide offers practical advice on how to build an AI framework for your firm and use GenAI in a way that is easy, effective, helps improve client offerings, and mitigates risks.

Our framework for deploying GenAI tools safely and responsibly is based on the below checklist:



- ☐ Designate an AI champion.
- ☐ Understand the benefits.
- ☐ Understand the risks.
- ☐ Select the right tools for your firm.
- ☐ Determine what types of data are permitted.
- ☐ Develop an AI policy.
- ☐ Communicate often and train your team frequently.





## Designate an AI champion

Start by identifying an AI champion (or champions) at your firm. The primary role and responsibility of the AI champion is to lead implementation of tools, in a responsible manner, across your firm with both a clear understanding of the technology and enthusiasm toward its capabilities. The champion will participate in all of the subsequent steps.

**The perfect person for this role is someone who meets most, if not all, of the following criteria:**



- Has a deep understanding of your firm—the operations and the people.
- Has interest in generative AI tools and an appreciation for the benefits these tools provide.
- Has the respect of peers and colleagues.
- Can manage change throughout the organization.
- Can inspire and excite others towards achieving a goal.

Depending on firm size, you may want to designate more than one champion or a small cross-functional team. An AI champion or team can help build a culture that educates on clear and appropriate guardrails—while reinforcing the benefits of GenAI tools and empowering employees to apply the power of AI to elevate their work.

## Understand the benefits

As you look to launch AI in your firm, be sure to develop a strong understanding and excitement about the benefits of GenAI tools.

Consider some pertinent ways AI tools can give your firm an advantage:



### **Boost your productivity**

Summarize client meetings, identify action items from staff meetings, and draft communications like emails in a fraction of the time it would normally take. Productivity gains can free you up to focus on higher-value work—such as client advisory work.



### **Elevate your staff**

Create specialized virtual assistants to augment team expertise across a host of topics. With GenAI, you can empower your team members to automate routine tasks, freeing them to work with clients on more substantive, complex, and significant activities, enhancing both their professional development and team satisfaction.



### **Conduct research**

From quick answers to common questions and conversational chat to industry-specific inquiries such as updates to the tax code, GenAI is a fast and powerful way to search exhaustive information and get relevant answers.

As you spend more time using GenAI tools, you'll find more ways that AI can benefit and ready your firm for the future.

## Understand the risks

Use of any tool carries with it some amount of risk. GenAI tools are no different. Therefore, it's important for you to understand how GenAI tools work and how to use them safely. Some of the key risks involved in using these technologies are:



### **Confidentiality and privacy**

Sharing confidential information with a GenAI tool is akin to sharing information with any third party. When you submit information into an AI prompt, the tool may retain rights to use that information or publish the output. There is a risk that information shared will become part of a training set for the language model—possibly making it accessible to users of the same tool at other companies. This may be at odds with confidentiality requirements in your client contracts or other obligations.



### **Inaccuracy**

While generative AI outputs can be extraordinarily helpful, the tools are far from perfect. Outputs may contain errors, be misleading, biased or trained on data that is inaccurate. What are widely termed “Hallucinations” may occur where the GenAI tool invents information and presents it as a fact.



### **Ownership of outputs**

You may not effectively own the results/outputs of your GenAI prompts. While there are a number of pending lawsuits in this area, and the final word on ownership remains unsettled, you may not be able to stop others from copying or reusing outputs resulting from your inputs—or stop the GenAI platform from disclosing identical outputs.

Breaching ethical and/or contractual duties to client privacy and confidentiality tend to be the biggest concerns holding firms back from using AI. So, how do firms get the value out of GenAI tools while keeping your clients' data secure, avoiding legal liability and mitigating reputation damage?

## Select the right tools

What GenAI tools should you permit at your firm? The best practice is to have at least an initial list of firm-sanctioned tools. Some firms may want to restrict all business use of non-sanctioned tools, while others may just request that employees notify the AI champion when using alternative AI tools for business purposes. This allows the champion to create an index of generative AI platforms in use at your firm.

How should you select the right GenAI tools for your firm? Think of an AI provider as any other vendor you'd evaluate from a value and security perspective. Your use of any generative AI tool will be subject to an agreement with the provider of the tool. Review the provider's terms of use and public statements regarding data, security and associated practices. Note: If the provider doesn't offer any terms of use, that is a big red flag.

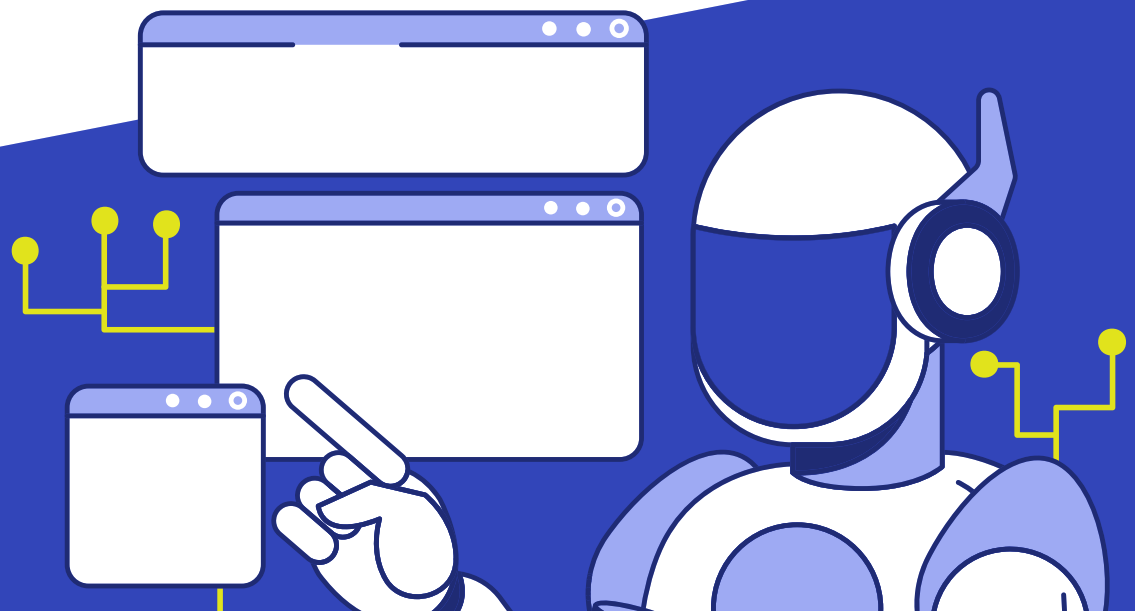
**Review the terms of use. In particular, seek answers to these questions:**



- Who can view information input by a user, and can data be shared with anyone else?
- Can inputs be used to train the model or accessed by other users of the model?
- Are there restrictions on use?
- Are there confidentiality protections in place for data entered?
- How does the provider handle intellectual property rights? Is there any clarity regarding ownership of outputs generated by the tool?

Ensure you use the business/enterprise version of tools. Avoid free versions. Enterprise terms of use should provide greater protections for your firm around confidentiality of inputs and the rights to use prompts and outputs, warranties, and other legal protections.

Make sure you have implemented available and appropriate opt-outs related to rights to use prompts and outputs. For example, ChatGPT has an [opt-out](#) for a user's inputs training the LLM for its personal plans.



## Determine what data you're comfortable authorizing for input

Let's categorize the different types of data that can be input into a GenAI tool:



### 1. Public data

This information is available to the public. For example, public data includes contents of a public website, or other pieces of information in the public domain not subject to confidentiality restrictions.

### 2. Non-confidential data

Non-confidential data can be public data, but also includes non-public information that doesn't require special protection. It could include information you receive from a client that is not considered confidential or sensitive—or subject to access controls. Non-confidential data should not contain any sensitive information or any personally identifiable information. For example, general business data and anonymous data would be non-confidential. If you redact confidential information out of a data set, the remaining data should be non-confidential.

### 3. Confidential information

This includes client information covered by contractual confidentiality restrictions or information licensed from a third party.

### 4. Personal identifiable information (PII)

PII is information that, when used alone or with other relevant data, can identify an individual. This includes information such as names, addresses, phone numbers, and SSNs.

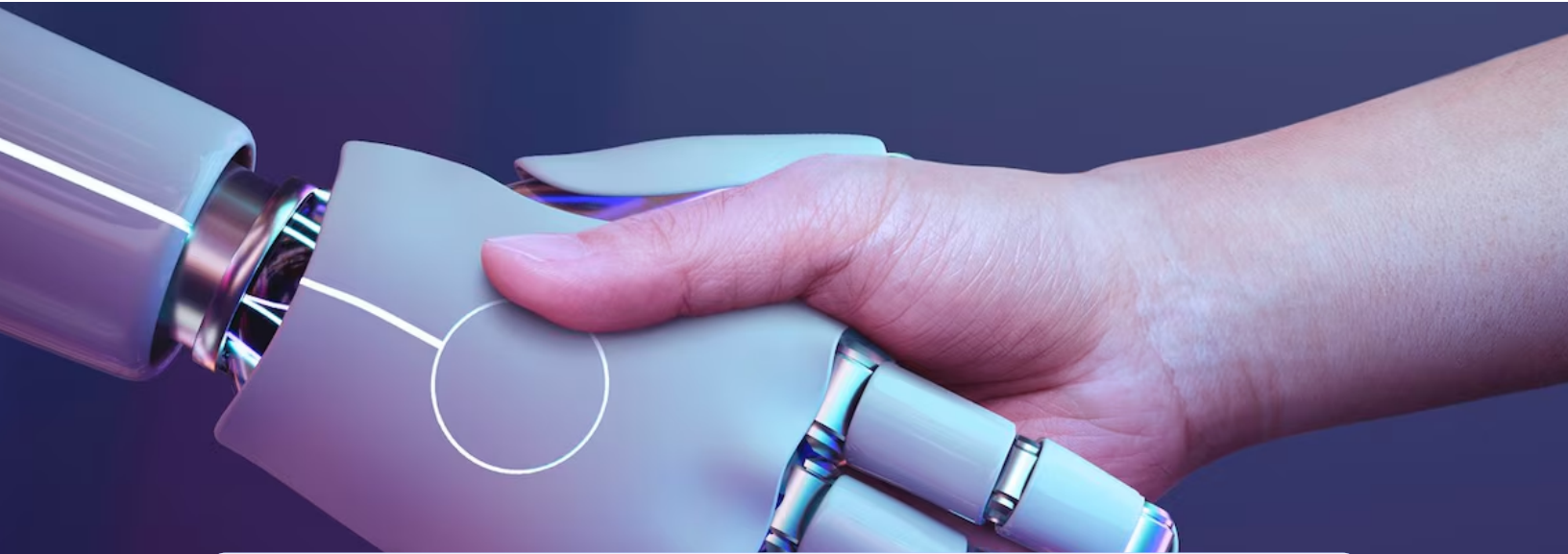


Review the following table for suggestions on how to categorize which data types may be permitted for use with GenAI tools. You should assess this based on your firm's own risk tolerance and include in your firm's AI Policy.

Types of data	Risk level	Tools available for use
Public data	Low	Generally safe to use in any generative AI tools.
Non-confidential data	Low	Generally safe to use in any generative AI tools.
Confidential information	Moderate	Only firm-sanctioned tools that have data protections.
Personal identifiable information (PII)	High	Only firm-sanctioned tools that have data protections (e.g., no data training) .



## Develop an AI policy that captures the “rules of the road” for your firm



The next step is to develop a clear policy around the use of GenAI tools at your firm. Consider the following:

- What tools are OK to use for business purposes?
- What company information is OK to input?
- What type of review/quality control is required for AI generated outputs?
- What use cases are OK?
- Where should employees go for help?
- Which types of data can be used with which apps?



A sample policy you can consider as a starting point is included at the end of this guide.

## Ongoing communications and training

Whether you choose to set aside a specific meeting time or roll out communications over time, we recommend covering the following items:

### Introduce AI champion and council

- Briefly describe the work these individuals have performed and the roles they will assume moving forward.
- Energize staff about the future of AI within the firm and highlight the investment and commitment being made to explore and understand the technology.

### AI policy overview

- It's important to share your AI policy and guidelines with your internal staff and provide appropriate training.
- Allow space for conversation and questions. Some items may be new concepts that require deeper explanation.

### Highlight best practices

- Understand the importance of personal responsibility when using AI.
- Validate and verify important information before sharing with clients or others.
- Be aware of submitting sensitive data to AI tools.

### AI training

- Educate users about the key features and functionality of AI products and tools.

In addition, consider working with staff to build an index of AI tools and use cases. Encourage individuals to share examples of positive and negative experiences with this technology. In particular, there should be a place to capture and share notable use cases.

# AI policy template

Click here to download our customizable Word document template:

<https://spark.rightworks.com/assets/AI-Policy-Template.docx>

## NOTE

The following is a draft policy for use of generative AI tools that may not be appropriate for all companies or may require updates to meet unique needs. Modify the template to meet your firm's legal, security and operational needs before implementing.

Policy on generative AI platforms for [Firm Name]\_\_\_\_\_

## Introduction and purpose

This policy governs the use of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) tools or platforms by any person in the performance of services for or on behalf of [Firm Name].

Any questions about this policy should be directed to [Insert name and contact details].

### 1. What is GenAI?

Generative artificial intelligence refers to technology that creates new content such as text, audio, data, images and video that is often referred to as "output." The output is created by leveraging materials the technology was trained on. For example: through machine learning in response to prompts submitted by a user.

The following are examples of generative AI platforms ("GenAI Platforms"): [Note this chart can be modified, as desired.]

Types of GenAI	Examples
Text-to-text	Chat-GPT, Copilot, Bard
Text-to-images	DALL-E 2, Stable Diffusion, Midjourney
Text-to-source code	Chat-GPT, GitHub CoPilot, OpenAI Codex
Text-to-video	Synthesia, Runway
Text-to-sound	Amper
Text-to-voice	UberDuck

## Appropriate use

Some appropriate business uses for generative AI include:

- Sparking creativity across projects and tasks.
- Research on topics not well known.
- Automating or assisting with repetitive tasks.
- Generating content for social media and marketing.
- Rapid messaging and correspondence.
- Summarizing meetings or conversations.
- Generating product and business ideas or strategies.

## 2. Generative AI tool selection

GenAI refers to artificial intelligence technology that creates new content (such as text, audio, data, images, video—also known as output— by leveraging content that the technology was trained on (e.g., machine learning) based on user prompts.

The following are examples of GenAI platforms. [Note this chart can be modified, as desired.]

### Option 1: [Note: If your firm will only be permitted to use certain platforms]

Until we, as an organization, better understand the capabilities and risks of the various emerging and generally available AI tools and products, we ask that you limit your work-related interactions with GenAI platforms to the tools listed below.

Types of data	Approved apps	Examples
Public data		
Non-confidential Data		
Confidential information		
Personal identifiable information (PII)		

Note: If you have GenAI needs that are not being met by the tools listed, please contact [\[insert AI Champion name and contact info here\]](#) to discuss options. Your specialized use case may provide an opportunity to participate in early-release, beta, pilot or as-needed software trials.

**Option 2:**

Employees are encouraged to explore and experiment with generative AI tools for professional development, research and other business purposes. The firm recommends that employees use a GenAI Platform listed below. If you would like to use a different GenAI Platform for business purposes, please notify [\[insert person and method here\]](#).

Types of data	Approved apps	Examples
Public data		
Non-confidential data		
Confidential information		
Personal identifiable information (PII)		

**3. Policy enforcement**

- The Company takes the use of generative AI seriously and has developed a multidisciplinary team to be responsible for governance and oversight of the AI policy. If you are unclear how to proceed in a particular scenario, please reach out to [\[insert name and contact info\]](#).
- Failure to comply with this policy could result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination. If you become aware of any potential violations, please report these to [\[insert name and contact info\]](#).

## 4. General guidance

As a [Firm Name] employee, you are charged with the responsible and appropriate use of the generative AI tools that have been made available to you.

We will only use GenAI platforms in ways that are lawful, transparent and fair.

### Permitted behavior

The following activities are permitted provided you: (A) do not engage in any prohibited behaviors described above, and (B) follow all required behaviors described below.

1. YOU MAY use generative AI platforms as a starting point for ideas or inspiration.
2. YOU MAY use generative AI platforms as a replacement for a search engine, and for information gathering.
3. YOU MAY use generative AI platforms for summarizing or analyzing non-sensitive content (such as news articles).
4. YOU MAY use generative AI for other use cases which are not prohibited by this policy or any of our other policies.



## **Prohibited behavior**

The following uses of GenAI platforms are prohibited:

1. DO NOT use prompts or outputs that are harmful, inappropriate or violate the firm's standards and policies concerning appropriate workplace conduct.
2. DO NOT use outputs for any fact-based use cases where accuracy is important without additional verification.
3. [Note: List any uses that you would like to restrict. This list will vary by firm. Include diverse perspectives in an internal discussion about your standards and risk tolerance. Example: use cases could (but don't have to) include: performance evaluations, legal contracts, specific report analysis.]

## **Required behavior**

Any employee that uses a GenAI platform for business purposes must adhere to the following requirements:

### **Accuracy**

1. DO review any output to identify errors, security vulnerabilities, plagiarism and other infringement risks.

### **Records**

2. DO keep records of outputs that are intended for external use cases.
3. DO keep records of any GenAI platforms used for business purposes.

## Transparency

4. DO NOT mislead any third party regarding the use of artificial intelligence in any outputs—particularly to the extent the outputs involve automated decision-making or suggestions.
5. When using GenAI platforms in work for a client, ALWAYS confirm that such uses are permitted under the client relationship.

## GenAI platform guidelines

6. DO comply with any usage policies and other terms of the applicable GenAI platform. For questions on any such policies, please contact [insert name and contact information].

## Decision making

[Firm name] employs artificial intelligence technology in the creation and development of content and other materials. We're committed to transparent and responsible use, following stringent guidelines to ensure proper utilization of AI tools. These guidelines are designed to protect against bias, ensure data security and mandate ethical use. AI is used to assist—not replace or fully automate our processes. All deliverables are reviewed by individuals who understand our clients, their needs and the limitations of AI.

The raw output of generative AI tools must never be used as a deciding factor in making decisions that may have material or legal effects upon natural persons, including [Firm name] employees or clients and/or the broad organization.



# Ready to take the next step?

Use Spark to create your AI policy in minutes.

Build your own AI policy with Spark. Start with our template that applies best practices from this guide. Then use Spark's conversational generative AI chat to easily customize the policy for your firm.

Visit [ai.rightworks.com](https://ai.rightworks.com) to get started today.