

How the GCF Secretariat Approaches Responsible AI

This article describes how the GCF Secretariat is approaching the use of artificial intelligence. It reflects where we are today. A formal Administrative Instruction on AI Use is in development and will set out binding obligations for all Secretariat personnel. In the meantime, the working principles described here guide how we work with AI across the organization. We expect these to evolve as we learn, as the technology matures, and as the broader policy landscape takes shape.

Why We're Doing This

The Secretariat handles complex, high-volume work. Staff review lengthy funding proposals, manage growing portfolios, coordinate across time zones, and produce detailed Board documentation, often under tight deadlines. AI can help with some of that. It can speed up document review, surface patterns across large datasets, draft initial summaries, and free up time for the work that requires human judgment and institutional knowledge.

This fits within the direction set by GCF's Board-approved Strategic Plan: get resources to where they're needed faster, with simpler and more transparent processes along the way. We started exploring AI tools because we saw practical opportunities to deliver on that. But we also recognized early on that for an institution entrusted with public climate finance, how we use these tools matters. That's why we've been deliberate about building in guardrails from the start, rather than figuring it out after the fact.

Where This Sits

Our approach doesn't exist in a vacuum. The question of AI and climate is already established within the UNFCCC system. Since COP28 in 2023, the UNFCCC Technology Executive Committee has had an explicit mandate on AI for climate action, with a work plan that examines both the potential and the risks, with particular attention to least developed countries and small island states. In March 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for safe, secure, and trustworthy AI, backed by over 120 member states.

As an operating entity of the UNFCCC financial mechanism, GCF takes its cues from these frameworks. Our working principles are grounded in this emerging international consensus, and we expect them to continue to evolve alongside it.

Our Working Principles for Responsible AI

We've established six working principles to guide AI use across GCF operations. These reflect what we're already putting into practice. They will be formalized through the forthcoming Administrative Instruction on AI Use, but they're shaping how we work right now.

1. Human Oversight and Accountability

All AI outputs are reviewed by a designated individual before use in any decision, publication, or communication. AI is never the sole basis for high-stakes decisions, including funding allocations, project assessments, procurement, or anything affecting the rights and welfare of communities. Users bear full responsibility for AI-assisted work.

2. Environmental Sustainability

GCF's mission and its operations should be coherent. We consider the environmental footprint of AI tools when evaluating, procuring, and scaling them. The Department of Information Technology conducts periodic reviews of the Secretariat's AI use and its environmental impact, and uses the findings to inform procurement decisions and usage guidance. This is an institutional discipline, not a burden placed on individual staff for every interaction.

3. Transparency and Disclosure

When AI plays a role in producing content or informing a decision, that involvement is disclosed, particularly where the origin of information matters to stakeholders. Transparency builds trust—with developing and developed countries alike, and with the Fund's other stakeholders, including Accredited Entities, civil society organizations, and the communities GCF serves.

4. Fairness and Non-Discrimination

Climate finance must serve all developing countries equitably. We are committed to identifying and preventing bias in AI-assisted processes. Before deploying any major AI tool or workflow across the Secretariat, our technical teams assess it for potential bias and discriminatory effects.

5. Privacy, Confidentiality, and Legal Compliance

Only data necessary for a given task is used. Sensitive or personal information is never shared with tools that have not been expressly approved. All AI use adheres to applicable licensing requirements and intellectual property rules, and respects the confidentiality of information shared by GCF's partners and stakeholders.

6. Security, Reliability, and Quality

AI outputs are not taken at face value. For consequential work, outputs are independently validated before use. For lower-stakes or exploratory work, outputs may be used where they are clearly marked as AI-generated and unverified. Facts, calculations, citations, and AI-generated code are always subject to review before being treated as authoritative.

These working principles will be formalized through the forthcoming Administrative Instruction on AI Use, which will set out detailed obligations and governance structures for all Secretariat personnel.

How This Works in Practice

Governance. A formal Administrative Instruction on AI Use is in development. It will translate these principles into enforceable guidance for all staff. Until it's finalized, the working principles above serve as the Secretariat's operating framework.

Approved tools. We make AI tools available to all staff through a curated internal catalogue. Tools are reviewed against GCF's security, privacy, and compliance standards before being included, so staff have access to capable and vetted options.

Training. GCF is investing in AI literacy across the Secretariat—not only how to use tools, but their limitations, risks, and the ethical considerations specific to a climate finance context.

Coordination and expertise. The Department of Information Technology and its AI Center of Excellence leads strategy, implementation, and training on AI across the Secretariat, working closely with departments to identify high-value use cases and maintain standards of responsible use. This is a cross-organizational effort—decisions about how AI is applied involve the teams closest to the work.

Right-sizing. Not every task needs the most powerful model available. When evaluating or approving AI tools and workflows, we apply a right-sizing framework that balances capability against energy use and cost. This is a decision made at the point of adoption, not a calculation left to individual staff.

AI as an Enabler

Our approach rests on a simple premise: AI augments what GCF's people do. It does not replace their judgment. The Fund's value lies in the expertise of its staff, the trust of its partners, and the integrity of its processes. AI supports all three.

These tools are powerful but imperfect. They can produce plausible-sounding errors and carry biases from their training data. They require oversight. We take that seriously—not as a reason to hold back, but as a reason to use AI with clear guardrails and a culture of critical review.

Looking Ahead

This is a work in progress. The principles here will evolve as the Administrative Instruction is finalized, as AI capabilities develop, and as governance frameworks at the international level continue to take shape. If relevant guidance emerges from the broader international climate finance community, we will incorporate it.

What stays constant is the commitment to using every tool at our disposal, AI included, in service of GCF's mandate: accelerating climate action for developing countries, with integrity.

References

The following sources informed this article:

1. [GCF 2024–2027 Strategic Plan](#)

2. [UNFCCC Technology Mechanism: AI for Climate Action](#)

3. [UN General Assembly Resolution on AI \(March 2024\)](#)

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