

AI Assistants for Everyday NGO Work

Practical ways to use AI for reports, data, and presentations, with whatever tool you already have

The tools you already have

Most humanitarian and development organizations already have access to at least one AI assistant. They come in two forms:

- **Built into the tools you use daily.** Microsoft 365 (Copilot) and Google Workspace (Gemini) now include an assistant inside the documents, spreadsheets, and slides your team already works in.
- **Standalone assistants** like ChatGPT and Claude, which work in any browser and often have a free tier.

This guide is deliberately tool-agnostic. The value is not in any one product, it is in knowing which tasks these assistants actually help with, and how to ask well. The examples below work with any of them.

Reports and writing

Draft faster from a blank page. Instead of staring at an empty document, give the assistant the facts and let it produce a first structure.

"Draft a quarterly donor report for our water and sanitation project in South Sudan. Include: 500 beneficiaries reached, 3 boreholes completed, 2 months delay due to flooding, need US\$50K additional funding. Target audience: ECHO donor officials."

Then you add the field insights and specific detail. The assistant handles structure, you handle substance.

Improve existing text. Select what you have written and ask for a targeted revision.

- "Make this more concise"
- "Rewrite for a non-technical audience"
- "Add a more professional tone while keeping the warmth"

Quick policy or procedure updates.

"Update this emergency response protocol to include considerations for a low-connectivity environment."

Data and spreadsheets

Get answers without formula knowledge. Describe what you want in plain language.

- "Calculate the percentage of female beneficiaries by district"
- "Find the average monthly distribution across all sites"
- "Highlight cells where actual spending exceeds budget by more than 10 percent"

Clean and organize messy data.

- "Remove duplicate entries in this beneficiary list"
- "Split this address column into separate columns"
- "Organize this spending data by category, calculate monthly totals, and flag which categories are over budget"

Turn numbers into a picture.

- "Create a chart showing monthly progress toward targets"
- "Show budget vs. actual spending by category"

Slides and presentations

Generate a slide outline from a brief.

"Create a 10-slide outline for a briefing on our emergency response in Haiti. Include: situation overview, our response, key achievements, challenges, funding needs, next steps. Audience: donor briefing."

Tighten and adapt existing slides.

- "Suggest a clearer layout for this data"
- "Make these slides work well when shared in a video call"

Real humanitarian use cases

Emergency response coordination.

"Track daily beneficiary numbers across 5 distribution sites and flag any site serving fewer than 50 people per day."

Donor communications.

"Convert these field notes into a professional donor update, highlighting achievements and addressing delays diplomatically."

Programme monitoring.

"Compare actual vs. planned activities for each project component and identify areas falling behind schedule."

Proposal writing.

"Draft the project-background section for an education proposal in Somalia, incorporating these statistics: [paste data]."

Getting started

Week 1: set up. Confirm which assistant your organization already has access to. Try one small task in each tool you use daily.

Week 2: build the habit. Use it for one real document and one data task. Notice where it saves time and where it does not.

Week 3: go further. Establish simple team prompting standards. Save the prompts that work as reusable templates.

Pro tips for humanitarian context

Context is key

Always mention the geographic location, the type of crisis or programme, the target audience (donors, communities, government), and any organizational constraints.

Iterate for better results

Start broad ("Help me organize this beneficiary data"), then get specific ("Now create a monthly trend analysis"), then refine ("Make this suitable for a board presentation").

Combine with field knowledge

Use the assistant for structure and formatting. Add your field insight and cultural context. Always fact-check the output against your programme data.

Mind security and privacy

Do not paste sensitive beneficiary or personal data into public AI tools. Use generic examples where possible, and check your organization's data-protection and AI-use policy first.

Common mistakes to avoid

✗ **Copying output directly** → always review and add your expertise ✗ **Being too vague** → "Help with this spreadsheet" vs. "Calculate monthly distribution efficiency by site" ✗ **Ignoring context** → remember to specify the humanitarian setting ✗ **Not iterating** → follow-up questions are where the quality comes from

Remember

An AI assistant is a thinking partner, not a replacement for your humanitarian expertise. It helps you draft, explore, and organize faster. Your experience in the field is irreplaceable, and the judgment about what is right stays with you.

Need more help? Connect with Impact Node for AI training tailored to humanitarian contexts.

