



Case Study - AI Governance Framework for a NGO Data Platform

Snapshot

- **Client:** The DEEP (hosted by the Danish Refugee Council, powered by Data Friendly Space)
- **Industry:** Humanitarian data and crisis analytics
- **Engagement Lead:** Scott Turnbull, Founder & Principal, Tech Tavern
- **Timeline:** 8 months (discovery to board ratification)
- **Focus:** AI governance, cross-border data compliance, ethical risk management
- **Highlights:** Harmonic compliance across EU, MENA, and multilateral mandates; rapid board alignment; future-proofed AI safeguards

"In crises, poorly governed data can delay response or harm populations. DEEP's structured tagging and role-based access were designed to make unstructured data usable—fast and safely." — DEEP Board Member

Client Context

The DEEP platform is an open-source, AI-powered environment that helps humanitarian responders transform unstructured reports, assessments, and social posts into structured situational intelligence. More than 7,000 analysts across NGOs, UN agencies, and academic partners rely on DEEP during emergencies ranging from the Ukraine war to the Pakistan floods. The initiative operates under a multidisciplinary board that includes the Danish Refugee Council, IFRC, USAID, and UN bodies.

Despite its global footprint, DEEP lacked a formally published data governance plan for nearly a decade. As large language models entered the humanitarian workflow, board members demanded codified guardrails to preserve funding eligibility, comply with emerging AI regulations, and protect vulnerable populations from data misuse.

The Challenge

Three converging pressures forced immediate action:

- **Escalating regulatory exposure:** EU penalties for mishandled data threatened to derail funding and limit operations in high-risk regions.

- **Fragmented governance attempts:** Prior policy drafts stalled without a dedicated owner to reconcile conflicting national standards or shepherd comment cycles.
- **AI acceleration without oversight:** Agencies began experimenting with LLMs, yet lacked protocols for training permissions, provenance tracking, or sensitive information handling.

Without a unified governance framework, field teams risked denied access to crisis zones, reputational damage, or—even worse—the inadvertent exposure of vulnerable communities. The board needed a policy that balanced ethical rigor with the agility required for rapid humanitarian response.

Tech Tavern's Mandate

Scott Turnbull led the engagement end to end:

1. **Discovery & Requirements Mapping** — Reframed the “why” with board members, surfaced known/unknown risks, and cataloged high-stakes use cases with international partners.
2. **Standards Synthesis** — Researched and harmonized a cross-border compliance spine drawing on the IASC Operational Guidance on Data Responsibility, the UN 2.0 Data Charter, NIST Privacy and Cybersecurity frameworks, and country-specific laws (UAE Federal Decree-Law No. 45/2021, Egypt Law No. 151/2020).
3. **AI-Specific Governance Design** — Added explicit modules covering AI training permissions, attribution and citation provenance, expanded PII reviews, and technical safeguards such as ai.txt, llm.txt, and metadata tagging.
4. **Stakeholder Stewardship** — Facilitated iterative comment cycles, managed board review sessions, and versioned policy updates using the governance tooling already embedded in DEEP's operating processes.

This approach anticipated national nuances (including jurisdictions that prohibit gender-based disaggregation of data), prompting the creation of localized compliance checklists layered atop a global baseline policy.

Deep Collaboration

Throughout the seven-month window, Tech Tavern partnered closely with:

- **DEEP leadership** to pressure-test assumptions, align on risk appetite, and plan phased rollout.
- **International analytics community** to validate practical implications, pilot adoption workflows, and stress-test edge cases.
- **Board representatives** during formal approvals, ensuring the policy survived scrutiny from organizations that operate under radically different legal regimes.

Tech Tavern acted as the policy author, facilitator, and project manager—driving the process from research through publication while preserving the board’s ownership and voice.

Deliverables

- **Comprehensive AI Governance Policy** covering data lifecycle management, AI/LLM usage, consent, transparency, and incident response.
- **Adoption & Audit Toolkit** embedded within the DEEP service, enabling role-based acknowledgement tracking and an auditable acceptance trail.
- **Vendor Compliance Checklist** guiding the platform’s development team through mandated safeguards, with timelines for feature implementation.
- **Ongoing Change-Management Guides** detailing how to maintain the policy, collect feedback, and version future updates without losing momentum.

Outcomes & Impact

- **Immediate board-wide adoption:** Representatives from leading humanitarian organizations ratified the framework unanimously, with 50% of active DEEP projects aligning to the new standards within the first year.
- **Regulatory resilience:** By codifying AI data permissions, provenance auditing, and metadata tagging ahead of industry norms, DEEP could implement safeguards the moment standards like ai.txt and llm.txt emerged.
- **Renewed stakeholder trust:** UN and IFRC leaders reaffirmed their confidence in DEEP, citing the policy’s Creative Commons release as a template they intend to adapt internally.
- **Operational continuity:** Clear governance pathways reduced the risk of regional shutdowns, kept funding conversations on track, and positioned Tech Tavern as a trusted advisor for future AI governance initiatives.

“We live in a vulnerable digital world... There is still one sector that, to date, we have largely overlooked while exploring the importance of bolstering cybersecurity: our own.” — Head of Data Protection, ICRC

Lessons for Mission-Driven AI Programs

- **Own the policy lifecycle:** Governance fails when it’s everyone’s job and no one’s mandate. Assign a steward who can translate between legal, technical, and field realities.
- **Design for locality:** Start with a global baseline, then layer jurisdiction-specific checklists so teams can prove compliance without redrawing the entire framework.
- **Anticipate AI evolution:** Build protocols for permissions, provenance, and model usage before standards harden—retrofits are expensive and erode trust.

- **Meet partners where they operate:** Align deliverables with existing board tools and cadences to accelerate review cycles and keep decision-makers engaged.

About Tech Tavern

Tech Tavern helps mission-driven organizations harness AI responsibly. From readiness assessments and governance frameworks to agent development and fractional CIO advisory, we turn high-stakes technology initiatives into repeatable successes.

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"Build with Intelligence. Amplify Your Impact."