AI-Generated Imagery Guidelines for Charities

What are AI-Generated visuals?

AI image generators are tools that create pictures from text descriptions. When you type in what you want, the prompt, tools like ChatGPT, Midjourney, and Adobe Firefly search through millions of images they've learned from and combine common features to create something new.

The problem is these tools don't reflect reality, they re-create stereotypes. They generate the "average" of everything they've seen before, which means they can produce images and videos with harmful patterns and biases.

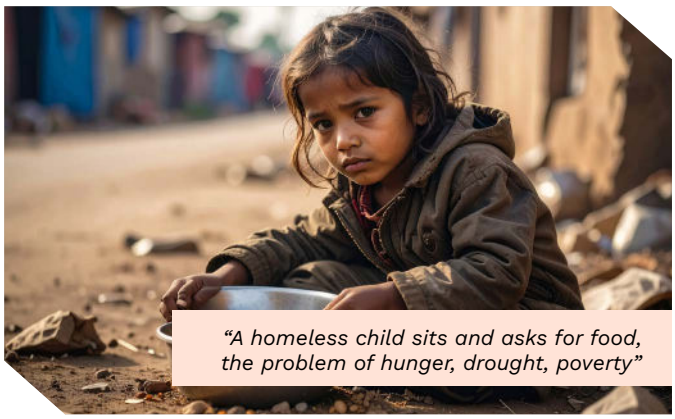
For example, if you ask for an image of "African child poverty," the AI doesn't show a real child or a real situation. Instead, it creates a composite based on thousands of stereotype-filled images it's been trained on.

Understanding AI Imagery Decisions

Some uses of AI imagery create significantly more ethical, legal, and reputational concerns than others. Before using AI imagery, consider where your intended use falls on this spectrum.

Higher Concern Uses

- → Depicting individuals in situations of poverty, distress, or vulnerability (whether AI-generated or real photographs altered by AI)
- → Using AI to manipulate or alter real photographs of real people
- → Images designed to look like real photographic documentation of events or places
- → Depicting your beneficiaries or service users, particularly in vulnerable situations
- → Creating false associations between synthetic imagery and real places, crises, or communities
- → Content requiring evidenced authority like health information or legal advice
- → Any situation where you can't clearly disclose its AI-generated
- → Images where captions would imply the scene is real
- → Content where you wouldn't be comfortable sharing your prompts publiclyImages where captions would imply the scene is real
- → Content where you wouldn't be comfortable sharing your prompts publicly



"A homeless child sits and asks for food, the problem of hunger, drought, poverty"

Lower Concern Uses

- → Illustrative concepts and symbolic imagery that are obviously not photographs of real people
- → Charts, graphics, and non-photorealistic illustrations
- → Obviously fantastical or impossible scenarios
- → Using AI to adjust backgrounds or technical elements, without altering the main subject or primary content

Even for these uses, transparency through clear disclosure remains essential.



WWF campaign using ChatGPT-generated AI imagery.

Recommended Platforms

No platform is perfect, but some have made more effort toward ethical training data than others.

More transparent options include Adobe Firefly, which claims to train only on licensed Adobe Stock content and public domain images, though this has been questioned. Microsoft Copilot is another good option (when used with a Microsoft 365 account) as it doesn't use your data to train models.

We recommend that you use business or paid accounts rather than free consumer versions where possible and check platform data policies regularly as they change frequently.

How to Prompt Responsibly to Create An Image

Step 1 Find an appropriate reference image of what you want, ensuring you have permission to use this image

Step 2 Ask AI to describe the image

Step 3 Modify the description to remove biases

Step 4 Add specific details such as age range, diverse ethnicities, clothing style, background setting, activity

Do Include

- → Specific ages: "woman in her 30s" not just "woman"
- → Mood: "Energised scene in a friendly atmosphere"
- → Diverse representation: "Black woman wearing business attire"
- → Context details: "outdoor community garden," "bright natural lighting"
- → Activity: "smiling whilst planting vegetables"

Never use

- × "In the style of [artist name]" (copyright issues)
- × "Poor," "sad," "desperate," "needy," "suffering"
- × Harmful stereotypes and clichéd depictions: "starving," "helpless," "vulnerable"
- × Generic requests: "African child" (leads to stereotypes)



Example Prompt

Bad
“Poor African child needing help”

Better
“Illustration of diverse group of children aged 8-12 of various ethnicities (Black, Asian, white, mixed race) engaged in after-school programme, bright community centre, smiling and working together on art project, modern clothing, natural lighting”

Disclosure Requirements

You **MUST DISCLOSE** when using AI-generated or AI-altered imagery

- **Minimum**
  “This image was created using AI” or “This image was enhanced using AI”
- **Better**
  “This image was created using AI. We used it because [explain reason] rather than photography.”
- **Best practice**
  Share your prompt alongside the image and what tool was used. Add alt text to all images that includes the AI prompt, making it clear in the metadata that the image was generated using You could also signpost to your AI policy.

Key Considerations

Before using any AI imagery, ask:

- [ ] Does this align with our organisational values?
- [ ] Does this image align with our brand guidelines?
- [ ] How would our beneficiaries/service users feel seeing this?
- [ ] How would our supporters react if they knew this was AI?
- [ ] Are we comfortable sharing our prompts publicly?
- [ ] Are we using this to avoid proper consent processes?
- [ ] Could we achieve this with animation, illustration, or photography instead?
- [ ] Have we clearly labelled this as AI-generated/AI-altered?
- [ ] What happens to images we upload to AI platforms?

Building on Sector Work

These guidelines build on frameworks and research from:

→ **Fair Picture.** *White paper* → **Charity Comms.** *AI Hub* → **Charity Digital.** *AI Hub*
→ **AI Playbook for Charities.** *Playbook* → **Charity Excellence.** *Framework AI Governance and Ethics*
→ **Alenichev et al. (2025).** *The Lancet Global Health* → **The Saltways research** with over 130 charities.

Questions?

Questions or feedback: hello@thesaltways.com