

Module 3: Establishing Guardrails and Guidance

As GenAI continues to grow in impact, education leaders face growing pressure to provide clarity on responsible use. In Module 3 you'll explore how formal **policies** and flexible **guidelines** work together to communicate expectations, reduce risk, and support your team. Policies create guardrails and guidelines help people build the necessary mindsets for **safe**, **ethical**, and **effective** use.

Each lesson will focus on a core area of GenAI governance, from privacy and procurement to instructional safety and classroom support. We'll draw from real-world examples that highlight what other organizations are doing well and how you can adapt those practices to your local context.

3.1 Policies vs. Guidelines

Introduction

Once your organization has assessed its GenAI readiness, the next step is to translate that readiness into action. That begins with clear communication, specifically through the development of AI policies and guidelines. These foundational tools define expectations, shape decision-making, and provide accountability as GenAI adoption accelerates. This lesson will help you identify how each document type can support your implementation goals.

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Explain the difference between AI policies and AI guidelines
- Reflect on the role of both policies and guidelines in your AI adoption plan
- Identify actionable steps for developing policies and guidelines in your context

Why It Matters

Clear policies and guidelines are among the most visible ways your organization communicates its values. They help clarify what is expected, what is supported, and what is off-limits. But in a fast-moving space like GenAI, where technologies evolve faster than traditional review cycles, relying on rigid mandates alone is not enough.

Organizations need policies to ensure safety and equity, and guidance to promote transparency, innovation, and responsible use. Together, policies and guidelines reduce ambiguity, build trust, and enable educators and leaders to make aligned decisions in real time.

Understanding the Distinction

AI Policies: Formal Rules for Legal and Operational Clarity and Protection

AI policies are formal, board-approved documents that define what is required, restricted, or prohibited in the use of GenAI. They are designed to ensure alignment with existing laws, regulatory mandates, and institutional priorities. Because they go through a formal review and approval process, these documents tend to evolve slowly and are best suited for addressing issues that remain consistent over time.

That said, the slow pace of policy development can make it challenging to keep up with the rapid evolution of GenAI tools. For this reason, policies should focus on areas where clarity and compliance are essential, regardless of how the technology changes.

Well-crafted AI policies help establish:

- Risk management protocols (e.g., student safety, academic integrity, data privacy)
- Compliance safeguards (e.g., FERPA, ADA, accessibility)
- Resource and procurement processes (e.g., vetting, budgeting, tool approval)
- Clear boundaries for liability and acceptable use

Policies vs Guidelines

	AI Policies	AI Guidelines
Purpose	Set formal, enforceable rules that define non-negotiables	Provide flexible, practical advice for day-to-day decision-making
Audience	Governing bodies, leadership, legal, compliance teams	Educators, IT staff, support personnel, administrators, students
Tone	Directive, authoritative (“must,” “shall,” “required”)	Supportive, suggestive (“should,” “may,” “recommended”)
Update Cycle	Infrequent; requires board/legal approval	Frequent; can evolve with practice and feedback

Use Case	Risk management, compliance, procurement, liability	Implementation tips, instructional supports, workflows, expectations
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acceptable use policy - FERPA/data privacy policy - Academic integrity policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidelines for AI in lesson planning - Tool selection checklist - Responding to AI misuse

Why Both Are Essential

- **Policies** provide clarity, accountability, and legal protection.
- **Guidelines** offer contextual support and encourage innovation.
- Used together, they **build trust** and **support informed, consistent action**.

Example AI Policies

New Jersey School Boards Association – Model Policy on Using Artificial Intelligence in Schools

The New Jersey School Boards Association released a model policy to help school districts navigate the use of artificial intelligence in K–12 education. Highlights include:

- Requiring policies that protect student data and align with state and federal privacy laws.
- Encouraging professional development and responsible experimentation with AI tools in classroom settings.
- Defining roles for oversight and governance, including recommending the appointment of an AI point person within districts.
- Supporting transparent communication with families and communities about AI use.

This model policy strikes a balance between innovation and responsibility, offering a clear, adaptable framework for integrating AI in ways that promote student learning while safeguarding ethical and legal standards ([New Jersey School Boards Association, 2025](#))

Lance Eaton – Sample AI Syllabus Policies

Faculty Developer Lance Eaton has crowdsourced over [100 higher education policies](#). Highlights include a focus on:

- When and how students are allowed to use GenAI (e.g., for brainstorming, outlining).
- Explicit prohibitions (e.g., no AI-generated essays or impersonation in discussion postings).
- Expectations for citation and transparency about AI involvement in assignments.
- Instructor-led oversight and scaled permission aligned with academic integrity and inclusivity.

Our Recommendation for Existing Policies

Based on recent [court cases](#), we recommend adapting existing policies that cover academic integrity and acceptable use to explicitly state Generative AI and emerging technologies. This amendment can serve to protect your organization from litigation and ensure enforceability (e.g. AI is too broad a term as most technology students use to research like Google search have AI/machine learning embedded into the systems).

AI Guidelines: Practical Guidance for Day-to-Day Decision-Making

AI guidelines translate policy into practice. They offer flexible, general and role-specific guidance for everyday situations where educators and students are looking for clarity. While guidelines may still carry an expectation of alignment, they are not necessarily mandates. Instead, they serve as decision-making companions that can be quickly updated as new tools, needs, and insights emerge.

Well-crafted guidelines are often easier to update, adopt, and, in some cases, trust. They allow organizations to respond to real-time feedback, build buy-in across roles, and support educators in applying GenAI in safe, ethical, and effective ways.

Guidelines are especially helpful when teams are asking questions like:

- How do we build a shared vision for GenAI use across our system?
- What does responsible AI use look like in lesson planning or assessment?
- How should staff respond to suspected academic integrity issues involving AI?
- What protocols are in place for tool permissioning, AI grading, and role-specific expectations?
- How will we support and scaffold teachers through AI adoption over time?

Because they are easier to revise, guidelines should evolve with tool updates, community feedback, and new use cases.

Sample AI Guidelines

Example AI Guideline Highlight: Rockhampton (AU) produced both a formal governance policy and a stakeholder-facing guidelines. The latter provides practical, approachable language for educators and staff.

Striving for Balance

AI policies and guidelines are not interchangeable, but they are interdependent. One without the other leaves gaps: either too much rigidity or too little clarity. Policies define the "what": the legal guardrails, compliance requirements, and risk protections that ensure responsible use. Guidelines explain the "how": the practical day-to-day decisions educators and leaders face as they implement those policies in real classrooms, schools, and systems.

A strong policy without guidelines can feel disconnected from the work it's meant to support. A great set of guidelines without a policy behind it can feel like a suggestion rather than a shared commitment.

Together, they form a dynamic partnership, one that fosters accountability without stifling innovation, and clarity without losing the flexibility needed in a fast-evolving space.

Workbook Reflection:

- What must be clearly defined and legally enforced across our system that should be included in an AI policy?
- Where will you plan for educators to be able to exercise professional judgment in AI adoption?
- What policies/guidelines already exist within your organization that can be updated to address GenAI?

Example AI Guideline Highlight: Singapore's [Model AI Governance Framework](#) emphasizes both internal governance (policy-level decisions) and public communication (guideline-level clarity).

Try It Out: Analyzing Real-World Examples

Choose a couple of AI policy and guideline documents from your system or public sources like our list of [state-level GenAI guidance](#). Upload them into [NotebookLM](#) or your preferred chatbot and ask:

- What are the key elements of each document?
- Which parts are particularly strong or well-crafted?
- How could I adapt this to my context?
- What potential gaps are in these documents?

Workbook Reflection

What AI-related policies (if any) has your institution already discussed or developed? What existing policies might apply to GenAI even if it is not named explicitly (e.g., acceptable use, bullying, academic integrity)?

Write your response in your workbook.

Conclusion

Understanding the difference between AI policies and guidelines is an essential first step toward thoughtful implementation. This work is not about choosing one or the other. It's about creating a system that blends structure with support. Formal rules protect. Informal guidance empowers. When built in tandem, they help your organization navigate AI use that is Safe, Ethical, and Effective.

Additional Resources

- [State AI Guidance for K-12 Schools](#) AI for Education
- [2024 EDUCAUSE Action Plan: AI Policies and Guidelines](#) EDUCAUSE

References

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